

Parshas Vayechi in a Nutshell

(Genesis 47:28–50:26)

Jacob lives the final 17 years of his life in Egypt. Before his passing, he asks Joseph to take an oath that he will bury him in the Holy Land. He blesses Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, elevating them to the status of his own sons as progenitors of tribes within the nation of Israel.

The patriarch desires to reveal the end of days to his children, but is prevented from doing so.

Jacob blesses his sons, assigning to each his role as a tribe: Judah will produce leaders, legislators and kings; priests will come from Levi, scholars from Issachar, seafarers from Zebulun, schoolteachers from Simeon, soldiers from Gad, judges from Dan, olive-growers from Asher, and so on. Reuben is rebuked for "confusing his father's marriage bed"; Simeon and Levi, for the massacre of Shechem and the plot against Joseph. Naphtali is granted the swiftness of a deer, Benjamin the ferociousness of a wolf, and Joseph is blessed with beauty and fertility.

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Joseph makes clear to his brothers that, regardless of the positive achievements one can achieve while living in exile, it is still exile. It is not one's natural place and it is not one's ultimate place. It is merely a temporary dwelling. Obviously, while there, we must use everything we encounter for a Divine purpose as stated above, but that is not who we are or where we really belong.
-- The Rebbe

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A large funeral procession consisting of Jacob's descendants, Pharaoh's ministers, the leading citizens of Egypt and the Egyptian cavalry accompanies Jacob on his final journey to the Holy Land, where he is buried in the Machpelah Cave in Hebron.

Joseph, too, dies in Egypt, at the age of 110. He, too, instructs that his bones be taken out of Egypt and buried in the Holy Land, but this would come to pass only with the Israelites' exodus from Egypt many years later. Before his passing, Joseph conveys to the Children of Israel the testament from which they will draw their hope and faith in the difficult years to come: "G-d will surely remember you, and bring you up out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." ❖

Anshei Lubavitch Congregation

Rabbi Levi and Leah Neubort

Adult education:

Rabbi Avrohom and Rivky Bergstein

Youth Outreach:

Rabbi Eli and Ruty Steinhauser

Shabbos Schedule

Erev Shabbos – Dec 17 / Teves 13

Candle Lighting 4:12 pm

Mincha 4:15 pm

Shabbos Day – Dec 18 / Teves 14

Shacharis..... 9:30 am*

Torah Reading..... 10:40 am

Kiddush 12:00 pm

Mincha 4:15 pm

Rabbi's Drasha 4:40 pm

Shabbos Ends..... 5:16 pm

**Latest morning Shema is now 9:32 AM. Be sure to recite the Shema at or before that time (even if at home).*

Weekday Schedule (not on a holiday):

Minyan

Shacharis (Mon-Fri) 6:15 am

Shacharis (Sunday) 9:00 am

Mincha (Sun-Thurs) 1:45 pm

Maariv (Sun-Thurs) 9:15 pm

Bulletin

This week's Bulletin

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Halachic Zmanim

Shabbos, Dec 18, 2021

Eastern Standard Time

Earliest Tallis..... 6:14 AM

Latest Morning Shema 9:32 AM

Earliest Mincha (Gedola) 12:17 PM

Plag Hamincha..... 3:37 PM

Earliest Evening Shema 5:02 PM

Chassidic Masters

The Three Lives of Jacob

*Based on the teachings of
the Lubavitcher Rebbe
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, notes that Jacob's 147 years can be divided into three general periods:

(1) The first 77 years of his life were spent in the Holy Land, secluded in "the tents of study" and sheltered from the entanglements of material life.

(2) These were followed by twenty years in Haran, in the employ of Laban, during which Jacob married, fathered 12 of his 13 children, and amassed much material wealth.

(3) Following a further period in the Holy Land, Jacob "descended" to Egypt, where he lived for the last 17 years of his life.

The years that Jacob dwelled in the Holy Land were years of tranquil perfection—years in which nothing alien to his soul intruded upon his life of Torah study, prayer and service of G-d.

In contrast, Jacob's sojourn in Haran was characterized by challenge and struggle. In Haran, Jacob locked horns with "Laban the Deceiver" and bested him at his own game. To marry and support his family, he worked to exhaustion, as "heat consumed me by day, and frost at night; and sleep was banished from my eyes" (Genesis 31:40).

In the words of Esau's angel to Jacob upon Jacob's return from Haran, "You have struggled with G-d and with men, and have prevailed" (ibid. 32:29).

These, however, were struggles in which Jacob held his own, and in which he eventually triumphed. But in the 17 years he lived in Egypt, Jacob experienced, for the first time in his life, a state of true galut—subjugation to an alien environment. In Egypt, Jacob was compelled to pay homage to Pharaoh, the arch-idol and demigod of the land (see Gen. 47:7–10). Upon Jacob's passing in Egypt, his body was for 40 days in the possession of the Egyptian "physicians," who embalmed it after their custom. Indeed, one of the reasons Jacob commanded Joseph to bury him in the Holy Land (a feat which required much maneuvering and manipulation to secure Pharaoh's consent) was that he feared that, in Egypt, his body and gravesite would become an object of idolatry.

After a lifetime in which he either inhabited his own sanctum of hermetic holiness or struggled against adversity, Jacob's Egyptian years were a time of subjugation to a society which the Torah calls "the depravity of the earth."

And yet, the Torah regards these 17 years as the very best years of Jacob's life! For Jacob knew to exploit his galut in Egypt to drive the strivings of his soul and further its aims. Indeed, it was in Egypt, under the rule and subsequent enslavement of the pharaohs, that Jacob's descendants were forged into the people of Israel.

"Everything that happened to the Patriarchs," writes Nachmanides in his commentary on the Book of Genesis, "is a signpost for their children. This is why the Torah elaborates its account of their journeys, their well-digging and the other events [of their lives] . . . these all come as an instruction for the future: for when something happens to one of the three Patriarchs, one understands from it what is decreed to occur to his descendants."

For we, too, experience in the course of our lifetimes the three states of being which Jacob knew: sovereignty, struggle, and subjugation.

We each harbor a vision of a transcendent self—of a soul, pure and inviolable, at the core of our being. This self, we are convinced, is not subject to the caprice of circumstance, and remains forever aloof from the shifting dictates of society and convention. And though this core self is not always accessible to us, there come moments in our lives—"moments of truth," we call them—in which it asserts its will over every and any influence save its own internal truth.

But these moments, for most of us, are few and far between. More often, we are in a state of struggle—struggles with our environment, struggles with our own habits and behavior patterns, struggles with the passions of our divided hearts.

(Continued next page)

A state of struggle indicates that we have not attained full mastery over our existence; but it is also a sign that we are free. We are resisting the forces that seek to sway us from our internal truth; we are engaging them and battling them. Indeed, this is life at its fullest and most productive—even more so, in a certain sense, than those “moments of truth” of resolute perfection.

But we also know times of powerlessness and subordination. Times when we are faced with circumstances which we have the ability neither to control nor to even resist; times when it seems that life has been stopped dead in its tracks, arrested by an impregnable wall of helplessness and despair.

“Everything that happened to the Patriarchs . . . is decreed to occur to their descendants.” Not that they occur in exactly the same manner. Our own moments of transcendence seem fleeting and inconsequential in comparison with Jacob’s decades of tranquil perfection in the Holy Land; our own struggles seem wan and inept when measured against Jacob’s Haran years; our own

lives under circumstances of subjugation and oppression seem black indeed when set against Jacob’s Egyptian period. Yet the three lives of Jacob are “signposts” that guide, inspire and enable our own.

Jacob’s life in the Holy Land empowers us to experience moments of true freedom—moments in which we assert our true will over all forces, both external and internal, that seek to quell it.

Jacob’s Haran years inspire and enable us to not only persevere in our struggles but to revel in them, to experience them as vibrant and exhilarating periods in our lives.

And Jacob’s Egyptian period teaches us how to deal with those situations in which we feel overpowered by forces beyond our control. It teaches us that these times, too, are part and parcel of our lives: that these times, too, can be negotiated with wisdom, dignity and integrity. That these times, too, can be realized as vital and productive seasons of our lives. ❖

Eternal Life

How can a mortal share in eternal life? Through clinging to G-d, as it is written: “And all of you who cling to G-d... are alive.” Otherwise, our lifetimes are fleeting shadows, brief and flickering moments.

This was our Sages’ intent when they said: “Jacob our ancestor did not die. Since his descendants are alive, he is alive.” Jacob was alive, for he was connected to G-dliness in a complete manner. He had no individual existence of his own; every element of his life was lived for G-d’s sake.

In his passing, Jacob showed the eternity of his life, how he had tapped the spark of G-d within his soul and taught his children how to perpetuate this legacy. By naming this passage Vayechi, the Torah highlights this quality, showing each of us how we can step beyond our mortality and connect with the infinite.

-- The Rebbe

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From Our Sages

Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years (Genesis 47:28)

These seventeen years were the best years of his life—years of prosperity, goodness and peace; his other 130 years were filled with toil and pain.

-- (Midrash; Baal HaTurim)

When Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (1789–1866) was a child attending cheder, his teacher taught the verse “Jacob lived for seventeen years in the land of Egypt” according to the commentary of the Baal HaTurim—that Jacob lived the best years of his life in Egypt.

When the child came home, he asked his grandfather Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi: How can it be that our father Jacob, the greatest of the Patriarchs, lived the best years of his life in pagan Egypt?

Replied Rabbi Schneur Zalman: It is written that Jacob “sent Judah ahead of him . . . to show the way to Goshen” (Genesis 46:28). The Midrash explains that this was to establish a house of learning, where the sons of Jacob would study Torah. When one studies Torah, one is brought close to G-d, so that even in Egypt one can live a true “life.”

-- (HaYom Yom)

Nevertheless, in the very next verses we read how Jacob entreats Joseph: “Carry me out of Egypt!” So great is his urgency that he is not content with an agreement or a promise on Joseph’s part, but insists that his son take a solemn oath to fulfill his request.

A Jew might find himself living a most ideal life in galut (exile)—a life of material comfort and spiritual fulfillment; a life of Torah, mitzvot and charitable works. Nevertheless, galut can never be our true home. We constantly sense that this is not our place, constantly beseech G-d to “carry us out of Egypt.”

Nor do we content ourselves with the guarantees and promises written in the holy books that the redemption will eventually come. After praying for the redemption in the morning prayers, we do so again in the afternoon prayers, and yet again in the evening prayers. We approach G-d every day, many times a day, to plead and clamor: Take us out of Egypt!

-- (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

Do me a kindness and a truth (Genesis 47:30)

A kindness done to the dead is a true kindness, for one does not expect a favor in return.

-- (Rashi)

The Midrash relates that when G-d desired to create man, Truth argued that “he should not be created, for he is full of lies.” Kindness, however, said, “He should be created, for he is full of kindness.”

To this, Truth might have replied: “But that, too, is just another of man’s lies. Yes, man does acts of kindness to his fellows, but not because he is ‘full of kindness’—only because he expects them to be kind to him in return.”

However, there is one act of kindness that proves Truth wrong: the kindness done to the dead. This “kindness and truth,” as the Torah calls it, shows that man is capable of a truly altruistic deed, thereby attesting that all our acts of kindness—even those superficially tainted by selfish motives—are in essence true, deriving from an intrinsic desire to give of ourselves to our fellows.

-- (The Lubavitcher Rebbe) ❖

Haftorah for Vayechi in a nutshell

1 Kings 2:1-12

In this week's haftorah, King David delivers his deathbed message to his son and successor, Solomon, echoing this week's Torah reading that discusses at length Jacob's parting words and instructions to his sons.

King David encourages Solomon to be strong and to remain steadfast in his belief in G-d. This will ensure his success in all his endeavors as well as the continuation of the Davidic Dynasty. David then goes on to give his son some tactical instructions pertaining to various people who deserved punishment or reward for their actions during his reign.

The haftorah concludes with David's death and his burial in the City of David. King Solomon takes his father's place and his sovereignty is firmly established. ❖

On Menashe and Ephraim

The name Menashe was given him because: "G-d has made me forget... my father's household." Implied is that a Menashe Jew is concerned about losing the link to his father's household. He realizes that he lives in Egypt, in exile, and does not have the awareness of G-d inherent to those who live in the Holy Land. That bothers him. He is concerned about his forgetting and that makes him remember. Although he lives in exile, he is looking back to the time when his ancestors lived in Eretz Yisrael. This keeps him connected to his Jewish heritage.

The name Ephraim was given him because "G-d made me fruitful in the land of my oppression." Ephraim does not look back; he looks forward. He takes exile, "the land of my oppression," and makes it fruitful, transforming it into a medium for the expression of G-d's intent. Certainly, living in exile is different from living in Eretz Yisrael. But there is a Divine purpose in that circumstance as well. While a person is in exile, he need not spend all his effort trying to recall Eretz Yisrael. Instead, he should do what he can to spread G-dliness in his surroundings, showing how there is no place and no situation in the world apart from Him.

For this reason, Ephraim is given the greater blessing. For the path of Divine service his name connotes is more comprehensive, allowing us to appreciate how His presence permeates every element of existence.

-- the Rebbe

שבת שלום גוט שבת!



Good Shabbos to all!