

LAMPLIGHTER

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Parshas
Vayechi
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LIVING WITH THE TIMES

In this week's Torah portion, Vayechi, we witness a conversation between the aged patriarch Jacob and his son, Joseph. Joseph brought his two sons to Jacob for his blessing. He placed Menashe, the first born, near Jacob's right hand and Ephraim, the younger of the two, near Jacob's left hand. However, when Jacob blessed the youngsters, he crossed his hands over and placed his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left on Menashe's head.

Joseph explained to Jacob, "It is not so, my father." Moving Jacob's hands, he continued, "for this is the first-born."

"I know, my son, I know," was Jacob's reply. "Also he [Menashe] will become a people. He, too, will be great. But his younger brother will be greater than him."

According to our Sages, neither Jacob nor Joseph made a mistake. Rather, their priorities were different.

Menashe and Ephraim symbolize two distinct aspects of a Jew's G-dly service. Joseph believed that the G-dly service represented by Menashe was more advantageous, whereas Jacob felt that Ephraim's was higher.

Joseph named his oldest son Menashe - "For G-d has caused me to forget ("nashani") all of my toil and all my father's house." This name intimates Joseph's anguish over being distanced from his father's home and his native lifestyle. His younger son, he called Ephraim - "For G-d has caused me to be fruitful ("hifrani") in the land of my affliction." Here, Joseph thanks G-d for the benefits that he reaped specifically because he was living in exile.

When Joseph brought his sons for his father's blessing, his feelings of sorrow over being separated from his family ruled. The spiritual service this parallels is the desire to cleave to G-d, even in exile. Jacob, however, viewed the exile differently, represented by the name Ephraim. He saw that there is an "advantage" of exile; in exile, one changes darkness into light. And the light which follows darkness is much brighter, much more noticeable.

The paths of Joseph and Jacob should both be manifested in our lives. We must realize that we are far away from our "father's house"; we are still in exile and the final Redemption has not yet come. Just as important, or possibly more important, is to realize that we can actually light up the darkness of exile. This comes about through studying Torah and observing the commandments.

When a Jew finds himself in a situation or surroundings which are uncomfortable, he must not only be troubled by it and think of the day when he can escape. Rather, he should work to his utmost ability to change that which is bad to good, the dark to light, for this is the entire purpose of being in exile.

He did not die, Ever!

By Yossy Goldman

Why does this week's Torah reading -- a Parshah which describes the end of Jacob's life, his death and his funeral -- carry the title Vayechi, "And He Lived"?

Let me be faithful to Jewish tradition and try to answer one question with another question. Interestingly, the Torah never actually states that Jacob died. It simply says that "he expired and was gathered unto his people." This prompted one of the Talmudic sages to expound that "our father Jacob never died." Whereupon his colleagues challenged him and asked, "Did they then bury Jacob for no reason? Did they eulogize him in vain?" To which the Talmud answers: "As his descendants live, so does he live."

Life does not end with the grave. The soul never dies and the good work men and women do on earth continues to live on long after their physical passing. More particularly, if there is regeneration, if children emulate the example of their forbears, then their parents and teachers live on through them.

When Jacob was about to breathe his last, he called his children to gather round his bedside. Our Parshah recounts what he told each of them. But the Oral Tradition gives us a behind-the-scenes account. Apparently, Jacob was anxious to know whether all his offspring were keeping the faith and he put this concern to them at that time. They replied, Shma Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad--"Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One." They were saying that the G-d of Israel their father would always be their G-d, too. Jacob was comforted and responded, Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto L'olam Vaed--"Blessed be the Name of the glory of His Kingdom forever and ever" (or in plain English, Baruch Hashem! Thank G-d!)

When all of Jacob's children remained faithful to his tradition, that was not only a tribute to Jacob's memory but the ultimate gift of eternal life bestowed upon him. His spirit lives on, his life's work continues to flourish and he is still present in this world as his soul lives on in the next.

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of attending the International Conference of Chabad-Lubavitch Emissaries in New York. At the closing banquet, there were over 2000 rabbis and hundreds of lay leaders in attendance at the New York Hilton. One of the most special moments for me in an altogether powerful event, was when the chairman, Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky did his now famous global roll call. While I was proud to rise and represent South Africa when our turn came, an even prouder and profoundly moving moment was when the rabbis were asked to indicate in which decade they went out to their respective communities as shluchim (emissaries) of the Rebbe. A handful of old men stood for the 1940's, a somewhat larger group of senior rabbis rose for the 1950's, and so it grew by the decade. But when the call was made for those who had gone out to serve communities around the world after 1994 many hundreds of young rabbis rose. At that moment, it was clear to everyone in that huge hall that Jacob never died. Just as his students are alive, carry on his teachings and still answer his call to go out and change the world, so too does the Rebbe live on. Whether it means moving to Belarus or Bangkok, Sydney or Siberia, Alaska or the bottom of Africa, the Rebbe's mission is still moving people, literally and spiritually.

In following his path, Jacob's children immortalized him. Such a Parshah is aptly entitled Vayechi, "And he lived." Ultimately, our children make us immortal. And so do our students, our spiritual children. May we each be privileged to raise families and disciples who will be true children of Israel, faithful to our father Jacob and the G-d of Israel. Amen.

Slice of LIFE

The Mordechai of Chanukah

by Tuvia Bolton

Rabbi Avraham Hershberg, until his passing, was the chief Rabbi of Mexico. Before the holocaust he was one of the most successful pupils in Yeshiva (Torah Academy) Chachmei Lublin in Poland and just as the war began he miraculously escaped from Europe to the U.S.

In America his talents didn't go unnoticed and soon after he arrived he was offered a job as Rabbi of an orthodox community in Chicago but he said he would only accept if there was a Yeshiva there where he could teach Torah.

But there was no such Yeshiva in Chicago at the time and it didn't look as though there ever would be. So he asked around and was told that the only one who could break the spiritual ice of America was Rebbi Yosef Yitzchak, the sixth Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch.

Rabbi Hershberg traveled to Brooklyn, told the Rebbe his problem and after a short pause the Rebbe declared "There will be a Yeshiva in Chicago!"

The next day ten young Chassidim traveled to Chicago, established a Yeshiva and Rabbi Hershberg had a job and a Yeshiva where he could teach Torah as well.

In 1950 Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak passed away and his son-in-law Rebbe Menachem Mendel, became the seventh Rebbe of Chabad. Rabbi Hershberg's connection to the new Rebbe was no less than to his predecessor. So when he got an offer to be the Chief Rebbe of Mexico he asked for the Rebbe's blessing and afterwards was always consulting the Rebbe for blessings and advice.

Especially when he got an offer to visit hostages in Iran.

In 1979 the secular, pro-American regime of Iran was overthrown by a radical Islam government led by Ayatollah Khomeini. In the chaos that followed, Iranian students took over the American embassy and held the fifty five staff-members as hostages there for almost a year and a half.

How is this connected to Rabbi Hershberg? Well it seems that even before the Islamic Revolution he had been very involved in a massive secret program

directed by the Lubavitcher Rebbe to smuggle thousands of Jewish children out of Persia and give them Jewish educations in America and Israel.

So when the Red Cross got permission from the Iranian government to send a group of clergymen to visit the embassy hostages, the Rebbe used his influence to get Rabbi Hershberg included in the group.

Preparations were made and just before they left, Rabbi Hershberg visited the Rebbe to ask for a blessing. He was afraid. Iran wasn't exactly a safe place for foreigners, especially Jewish ones and he and his wife were worried that he might not return!

But the Rebbe calmed him down. He told him there was nothing to worry about and blessed him with success. But he reminded him to be sure to light Chanukah candles.

Being that it was over two months before Chanukah, Rabbi Hershberg was a bit puzzled. But he began to understand when the trip was pushed off for sixty days.

They would arrive a day before Chanukah!

If it hadn't been for the Rebbe's admonition he probably would have lit his Menorah in his hotel room every night. But now, the first thing he did when they arrived was ask permission to light a Chanukah Menora in the besieged embassy. He figured that for sure there was one Jew there.

Amazingly permission was readily granted and even more amazing when they were face to face with the hostages and it didn't seem there was even one Jew there, when he took out his menorah suddenly six of them stepped forward and announced that they were Jewish!

If he hadn't brought in that Menorah many of them might have never revealed their Judaism, perhaps not even to themselves!

These poor Jews had been hostages for a long time and the tension and uncertainty had definitely taking its toll. They looked tired and miserable. But as soon as the first candle was lit the faint yellow light spread over their faces and for the first time since their captivity, they actually sang and danced!

But that was just the beginning.

The next day Khomeini invited all these clergymen to participate in a massive public prayer with an attendance of almost one million people!

Rabbi Hershberg relates, "We were standing on a platform with Khomeini and other important figures and I looked out at

the sea of humanity before us. Then, at one point in the prayers everyone, all one million people, all dropped to their knees and then put their heads to the ground. Everyone bowed down! That is, everyone except for me! I simply never even considered doing it.

"Well, after the prayers two officials approached me and told me that Khomeini wants to talk to me. I thought to myself, that's it! At least I'll die for the sake of Judaism. But then remembered the Rebbe's blessing and became calm. I followed them with the greatest optimism and when I got to Khomeini a few of his servants told me that he demands an explanation as to why I didn't bow down.

"So I calmly approached him and explained in the most positive way that I could muster up that I'm a Jew and I don't understand their prayers. Therefore I am not able to bow down without knowing what they are saying and to whom they are bowing.

"Well, he was really impressed with that answer, I think he liked my simple straightforwardness and when I saw that, I asked him if I could meet with him privately at some time.

"Miracle of miracles... he agreed! The next day we met in his room and, after a short friendly conversation I asked him to please be more kind to the Jews in his kingdom and he promised to consider it.

"It was hard to believe how the Rebbe's blessing turned everything around. I don't know why Khomeini put me on that stage with him but it was a miracle! It comes out that there were either a lot of Jews in that huge crowd or the prayer had been televised but my appearance on that stage made a tremendous impression on all the Jews who saw it, and the next day I heard that thousands of Jews packed the synagogues, many for the first time in their lives!

"Not only that, but Khomeini kept his promise! That next Elul (the last month in the Jewish year) he passed an edict saying that for the entire month Jews were allowed to break the curfew and walk in the streets at 4 a.m. to their Synagogues for 'Slichot' (a series of early morning prayers said before Rosh HaShanna)."

On the plane returning home Rabbi Hershberg began to understand the greatness of the Rebbe. Not only did his blessings come miraculously true above all expectations but even more, the Rebbe demonstrated a love and care for others that was even more miraculous:

When the Rebbe told him to light the Chanukah Menorah it put him in a positive state of mind that he could actually illuminate the darkness of Iran. That is what gave him the ability to speak to Khomeini with such certainty.

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WEEKLY VIDEO



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INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

On Investing in Stocks

By the Grace of G-d
5726 [1966]
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Greeting and Blessing:

Regarding your question about investing in stocks, generally I am not in favor of it, since this is largely a matter of speculation. Indeed, a prominent businessman once said to me that he did not wish to engage in the kind of business where he and an ignoramus have the same chance. It is particularly objectionable because of the anxiety and nervous strain that it creates in some people. Moreover, in these unsettled days, there is too great an element of speculation involved in the Stock Exchange. It is surely possible to find some more fitting investment opportunities, if an investment is contemplated, than the kind of thing which sends the investor scurrying for the first edition of the Stock Exchange report in the morning newspaper.

With blessing,

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QUESTIONS FOR THE RABBI

With Rabbi Aron Moss

All My Heart to G-d, What's With The Others?

Question: Dear Rabbi,

Here's my problem: Every single day we read about the obligation to love G-d with our entire being. But that leaves no room to love people. Does love of G-d have to lessen our love of humanity?

Answer: I once knew a man who thought he was a great husband. His wife disagreed.

He did absolutely nothing for her. He never took her out, never bought her anything, never helped around the house, and never did what she asked him to do.

Finally, she confronted him. He explained himself: "I love you dearly, more than anything in the world. That's why I don't do anything for you. I'm so busy loving you I can't possibly do anything else."

Such a husband wouldn't last too long. He says he loves her, but really he loves himself, and he loves the feeling he gets from having someone to love. If he truly loved her, then he would want to please her. He can't claim to love her if he never does what she wants.

Nothing pleases G-d more than when His children love each other. So if your heart is full of love for G-d, then that love will translate into loving your fellow, for that is exactly what G-d wants from you.

On the other hand, if someone claims that they love G-d so much that they have no space for loving others, this is a sure sign that their love of G-d is really just a form of self-indulgence. If you love Him so much, why are you not doing what He wants? The same Judaism that tells you to love G-d tells you to love the stranger, to love your fellow as yourself, to help the needy and to care for the broken-hearted.

You can't be a good husband in your heart; your love must lead to action. And you can't love G-d without doing what He wants from you – starting with loving your neighbor.

A WORD

from the Director

In this week's Torah portion, our ancestor Jacob tells all of his children to gather together so that he can tell them "what will happen to you at the end of days."

The Talmud relates that Jacob wished to reveal the end of the exile but it was concealed from him. The literal meaning, however, is that Jacob wished to "reveal, i.e., bring about, the end."

Jewish teachings explain that the actions of the ancestors are a guiding light for the Jewish people throughout all the generations. Herein lies an important lesson for each one of us. We are to follow in the footsteps of Jacob, and hope and pray for the manifestation of the ultimate end - the final Redemption. Contemplating this will of itself assist our service of G-d, inspiring us to attain our ultimate goal of the revelation of Moshiach.

Hoping and yearning for Moshaiach actually hastens Moshiach's coming. This is clearly seen in the translator/commentator Onkelos' rendering of the verse in Isaiah (64:3) "G-d will act for him who waits for Him." As Onkelos paraphrases, "for those who hope and wait for Your Redemption."

How does our yearning hasten the Redemption?

If we hope and pray for the Redemption, sincerely and earnestly, we live more ethical, moral, G-dly lives. By virtue of each individual's good actions and deeds, the Jewish people as a whole are found to be increasingly worthy, and the long-awaited Redemption is hastened.

J. I. Gutnick

IT HAPPENED *Once...*

The Snake in the Wall

Rabbi Akiva had a daughter. But astrologers said to him, "On the day she enters the bridal chamber, a snake will bite her and she will die."

On the night of her marriage, she removed a brooch and stuck it into the wall. When she pulled it out the following morning, a poisonous snake came trailing after it; the pin had penetrated into the eye of the serpent.

"Was there anything special that you did yesterday?" her father asked her.

"A poor man came to our door in the evening," she replied. "Everybody was busy at the banquet, and there was none to attend to him. So I took the portion of food which was given to me, and gave it to him."

Thereupon Rabbi Akiva went out and declared: "Charity delivers from death. And not just from an unnatural death, but from death itself."

The Two Watchmen

Antoninus said to Rabbi Judah HaNassi: The body and the soul can each absolve themselves from judgment. The body can say: "It is the soul who has sinned. Why, from the day it left me, I lie like a dumb stone in the grave!" And the soul can say: "It's the body who transgressed. From the day I departed from it, I fly about in the air like a bird!"

Said Rabbi Judah: I will tell you a parable. Once there was a king who had a beautiful orchard with splendid figs. He appointed two watchmen for his orchard. One watchman was lame, and the other one was blind.

One day the lame man said to the blind man: "I see beautiful figs in the orchard. Come, I will ride on your shoulders, and we'll take them and eat them." So the lame man rode on the shoulders of the blind man, and they took the fruits and ate them.

Some time after, the owner of the orchard came and inquired of them, "Where are those beautiful figs?" The lame man replied, "Have I feet to walk with?" The blind man replied, "Have I eyes to see with?"

What did the king do? He placed the lame watchman on the shoulders of the blind watchman, and judged them together.

A Joyous Divorce

A woman was married for many years to her husband, but had not had children. Her husband decided to divorce her, so he

went to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, of blessed memory.

Rabbi Shimon told him that just as they had celebrated with joy their mutual bond when they got married, so should the severance of their mutual bond be celebrated in joy.

The husband therefore prepared a great feast, at the height of which he called his wife and asked her in his joy to choose whatever she desired of his possessions to be hers, and said that he would not refuse her anything.

What did she do? She served him so much wine that he got drunk and fell asleep on his bed. She then told her servant to take him on his bed into her bedroom in her father's house.

The following morning, when he awoke and found himself in his wife's home, he asked her why he was brought there—wasn't it clear that he intended to divorce her? She replied, "Didn't you tell me that I could take whatever I wanted? I desire not gold, nor silver, nor precious gems, nor pearls. All I want is you. You yourself are the sole object of my desire."

When the husband heard this, he became once again enamored of his wife, and took her back as before. And in this merit the Holy One, blessed be He, granted them children.

PARSHAH IN A NUTSHELL

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.

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."

CANDLE LIGHTING



	Shabbos 29 - 30 December	
	Begins	Ends
Melbourne	8:27	9:32
Adelaide	8:14	9:17
Brisbane	6:28	7:26
Darwin	6:56	7:49
Gold Coast	6:27	7:26
Perth	7:07	8:08
Sydney	7:51	8:53
Canberra	8:03	9:06
Launceston	8:30	9:39
Auckland	8:25	9:29
Wellington	8:39	9:48
Hobart	8:34	9:45
Byron Bay	7:28	8:27

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PARSHAS VAYECHI • 11 TEVES • 29 DECEMBER

FRIDAY NIGHT:	MINCHA	8.35 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS	9.05 PM
SHABBOS DAY:	LATEST TIME TO SAY SHEMA	9.38 AM
	SHACHARIS	10.00 AM
	MINCHA	8.25 PM
WEEKDAYS:	SHACHARIS	8.00/9.15/10.00 AM
	MINCHA	8.30 PM
	MAARIV	9.15 PM