

## Home Weekly Parsha Vayechi

### Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

This book of Bereshith, which comprises a substantial part of the entire written Torah, contains within it almost no commandments and is basically a book of narrative tracing the development of one family – eventually seventy in number – and of the difficulties that this family encountered over generations. So what therefore is its main message to us living in a far different world, millennia later? I think that the message of Bereshith is the obvious one of family and its importance. The Torah purposely and in minute detail describes for us how difficult it truly is to create and maintain a cohesive family structure. Every one of the generations described in Bereshith from Kayin and Hevel till Yosef and his brothers is engaged in the difficult and often heartbreaking task of family building. There are no smooth and trouble-free familial relationships described in the book of Bereshith. Sibling rivalry, violence, different traits of personality, and marital and domestic strife are the stuff of the biblical narrative of this book. The Torah does not sanitize any of its stories nor does it avoid confronting the foibles and errors of human beings. The greatest of our people, our patriarchs and matriarchs, encountered severe difficulties in attempting to create cohesive, moral and cooperative families. Yet they persevered in the attempt because without this strong sense of family there can be no basis for eternal Jewish survival. There is tragic fall -out in each of the families described in Bereshith and yet somehow the thread of family continuity is maintained and strengthened until the family grows into a numerous and influential nation. This perseverance of family building, in spite of all of the disappointments inherent in that task, is the reason for the book of Bereshith. It is the template of the behavior of our ancestors that now remains as the guideposts for their descendants. The task of family building remains the only sure method of ensuring Jewish survival. Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

### The Last Tears

#### Vayechi

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks** At almost every stage of fraught encounter between Joseph and his family in Egypt, Joseph weeps. There are seven scenes of tears: 1. When the brothers came before him in Egypt for the first time, they said to one another: "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us" ... They did not realise that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. He turned away from them and began to weep, but then came back and spoke to them again. Gen. 42:21-24

2. On the second occasion, when they brought Benjamin with them and, deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep: He went into his private room and wept there. Gen. 43:29-30

3. When, after Judah's impassioned speech, Joseph is about to disclose his identity:

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. Gen. 45:1-2

4. Immediately after he discloses his identity:

Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Gen. 45:14-15

5. When he meets his father again after their long separation:

Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father, Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time. Gen. 46:29

6. On the death of his father:

Joseph threw himself on his father and wept over him and kissed him. Gen. 50:1

7. Some time after his father's death:

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. Gen. 50:15-17

No one weeps as much as Joseph. Esau wept when he discovered that Jacob had taken his blessing (Gen. 27:38). Jacob wept when he saw the love of his life, Rachel, for the first time (Gen. 29:11). Both brothers, Jacob and Esau, wept when they met again after their long estrangement (Gen. 33:4). Jacob wept when told that his beloved son Joseph was dead (Gen. 37:35). But the seven acts of Joseph's weeping have no parallel. They span the full spectrum of emotion, from painful memory to the joy of being reunited, first with his brother Benjamin, then with his father Jacob. There are the complex tears immediately before and after he discloses his identity to his brothers, and there are the tears of bereavement at Jacob's deathbed. But the most intriguing are the last, the tears he sheds when he hears that his brothers fear that he will take revenge on them now that their father is no longer alive. In a fine essay, "Joseph's tears"[1] Rav Aharon Lichtenstein suggests that this last act of weeping is an expression of the price Joseph pays for the realisation of his dreams and his elevation to a position of power. Joseph has done everything he could for his brothers. He has sustained them at a time of famine. He has given them not just refuge but a place of honour in Egyptian society. And he has made it as clear as he possibly can that he does not harbour a grudge against them for what they did to him all those many years before. As he said when he disclosed his identity to them: "And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you . . . God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God."

Gen. 45:5-8

What more could he say? Yet still, all these years later, his brothers do not trust him and fear that he may still seek their harm. This is Rav Lichtenstein's comment:

"At this moment, Yosef discovers the limits of raw power. He discovers the extent to which the human connection, the personal connection, the family connection, hold far more value and importance than power does – both for the person himself and for all those around him." Joseph "weeps over the weakness inherent in power, over the terrible price that he has paid for it. His dreams have indeed been realised, on some level, but the tragedy remains just as real. The torn shreds of the family have not been made completely whole." On the surface, Joseph holds all the power. His family are entirely dependent on him. But at a deeper level it is the other way round. He still yearns for their acceptance, their recognition, their closeness. And ultimately he has to depend on them to bring his bones up from Egypt when the time comes for redemption and return (Gen. 50:25). Rav Lichtenstein's analysis reminds us of Rashi and Ibn Ezra's commentary to the last verse in the book of Esther. It says that "Mordechai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by most of his brethren" (Est. 10:3) – "most" but not all. Rashi (quoting Megillah 16b) says that some members of the Sanhedrin were critical of him because his political involvement (his "closeness to the king") distracted from the time he spent studying Torah. Ibn Ezra says, simply: "It is impossible to satisfy everyone, because people are envious [of other people's success]." Joseph and Mordechai/Esther are supreme examples of Jews who reached positions of influence and power in non-Jewish circles. In

modern times they were called Hofjuden, “court Jews,” and other Jews often held deeply ambivalent feelings about them. But at a deeper level, Rav Lichtenstein’s remarks recall Hegel’s famous master-slave dialectic, an idea that had huge influence on nineteenth century - especially Marxist - thought. Hegel argued that the early history of humanity was marked by a struggle for power in which some became masters, and others became slaves. On the face of it, masters rule while slaves obey. But in fact the master is dependent on his slaves – he has leisure only because they do the work, and he is the master only because he is recognised as such by his slaves. Meanwhile the slave, through his work, acquires his own dignity as a producer. Thus the slave has “inner freedom” while the master has “inner bondage.” This tension creates a dialectic – a conflict worked out through history – reaching equilibrium only when there are neither masters nor slaves, but merely human beings who treat one another not as means to an end but as ends in themselves. Thus understood, Joseph’s tears are a prelude to the master-slave drama about to be enacted in the book of Exodus between Pharaoh and the Israelites. Rav Lichtenstein’s profound insight into the text reminds us of the extent to which Torah, Tanach, and Judaism as a whole are a sustained critique of power. Prior to the Messianic age we cannot do without it. (Consider the tragedies Jews suffered in the centuries in which they lacked it.) But power alienates. It breeds suspicion and distrust. It diminishes those it is used against, and thus diminishes those who use it. Even Joseph, called “Yosef HaTzaddik: Joseph the Righteous” weeps when he sees the extent to which power sets him apart from his brothers. Judaism is about an alternative social order which depends not on power but on love, loyalty and the mutual responsibility created by covenant. That is why Nietzsche, who based his philosophy on “the will to power,” correctly saw Judaism as the antithesis of all he believed in. Power may be a necessary evil, but it is an evil, and the less we have need of it, the better. [1] In Alei Tziyon (Vol. 16, Iyar 5769): Special edition in honour of HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein, 109-128. Also available online: <https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-bereishit/parashat-vayigash/josephs-tears-part-2-2>

## Superstitious Customs

**Revivim – Rabbi Eliezer Melamed --** It is forbidden to believe in traditions that lack logic, and to act upon them \* Jews are commanded to focus their faith on the Torah and commandments, which uplift a person and guide them to be good and just \* The prohibition against counting Jews is not a custom, but a commandment from the Torah \* Many people customarily count individuals for a minyan or a trip by reciting verses \* It is permitted to round the upper side of the Tablets of the Covenant \* There is no need to heed the opinion of the stringently inclined who, in doing so, cast aspersions on the earlier authorities Q: Our family, who immigrated from Russia, has various customs that were common in Eastern Europe. I don’t know whether these have Jewish origins, or if they are permitted. For example, when a completely black cat crosses our path, it is considered a bad omen, and we make sure to change our path, as otherwise, we fear it will bring us danger. Similarly, if we leave the house and remember we’ve forgotten something, it is forbidden to return, as it brings bad luck. Instead, we must take a short detour, and only then return. It is also forbidden to whistle in the house, because whistling causes a lack of money. We also avoid sitting at the corner of the table because the person sitting there will not marry for seven years. Before going on a trip, after packing all the luggage, we sit in silence for at least a minute, so that harmful spirits will think we are still at home, and will not harm us. A: These customs are forbidden. In fact, these customs are prohibited because of the “divination” prohibition (Minachesh), as it is stated: “There shall not be found among you... a diviner, a soothsayer, or a sorcerer” (Deuteronomy 18:10). It is also said: “You shall not eat on the blood, you shall not practice divination or soothsaying” (Leviticus 19:26). A diviner is one who believes without logic that certain events are bad omens, and when these events occur, the person believes they must avoid their path, or actions. Examples of this are found in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 65b): “If bread fell from his mouth, or a staff dropped from his hand, or a raven called out when he began his journey, or a deer stopped on his way, or a snake crossed on his right, or a fox on his left”. Anyone who refrains from their path or actions due to such omens is violating the prohibition of divination. Therefore, it is forbidden to believe in superstitions that lack logical basis, and act upon them. The Roots of Superstitions in the Practices of Sorcerers As a general rule, superstitions were created by individuals with mystical intuition, often sorcerers, who felt that certain things hinted at danger, or success. Sometimes the divination was based on a natural feeling, such as the belief that a person who

began their business day by paying a high tax, might be depressed and fail in their business that day. The diviners deduced that paying taxes at the start of the day caused mystical forces to harm the person, and thus, they instructed to always avoid paying taxes at the beginning of the day, week, or month.

However, Jews are commanded to believe in the Torah and the commandments, which uplift the person and make them good and just, adding blessing to the world, and not to turn to superstitions that lack logical foundations. Even when diviners occasionally succeeded in predicting the future, they did not see the full picture, and therefore, the one who follows them, even if they benefit in the short term, ultimately loses twice. First, relying on their guidance prevents the person from considering rational options that would bring them more blessing. Second, following them focuses all their attention, including their spiritual attention, on external success, and leads them away from the Torah, whose guidance is meant to uplift a person morally and add blessing to their life, both in this world, and the next. The Prohibition of Counting Jews Q: Are there not customs in Judaism that lack logic, and are meant to bring good luck or avoid bad luck, such as the custom of not counting Jews?

A: This is not a custom, but a commandment from the Torah. When it is necessary to count Jews, they should not count themselves, but should each contribute a ‘half-shekel’ donation for the Temple, and then they count the half-shekels, knowing their number, which prevents a plague from affecting them (Exodus 30:11-12). This is how Saul counted his soldiers, using pebbles, or broken pottery (1 Samuel 11:8; 15:4). This is because “the counting is controlled by the evil eye” (Rashi). This happened with King David when he ordered the census of Israel, and a plague broke out as a result (2 Samuel 24:2-4; Berakhot 62b). Apparently, David believed the prohibition against counting Israel was only relevant when they left Egypt, when it was a novelty that Israel was a great nation, and the Torah commanded not to count them directly. However, the prohibition applies for all generations (Ramban and Kli Yakar on Exodus 30:12). Reason for the Commandment

The reason that counting leads to a plague in Israel is that the Jewish nations’ root is in the higher realms, above and beyond the accepted measure and counting in this world (see Numbers Rabbah 2:17). When they are counted like anything else in the world, their root is disregarded, and this harms their vitality. Only when there is a practical need in this world, is it permissible to count them for that specific time, as was the counting of the Israelites during the time of Moses, which was done for military purposes related to the conquest of the Land (in the sections of Numbers, and Pinchas). Even then, they were counted via a commandment, such as the half-shekel, where the counting was based on the commandment they were fulfilling, not on themselves. How to Count Participants for a Minyan or Hikers on a Trip

Since it is forbidden to count Jews by their heads, many people customarily count individuals for a minyan, or a trip, by reciting verses. For example, the verse “Save Your people, and bless Your inheritance; shepherd them and carry them forever” (Psalms 28:9) which in Hebrew has ten words, and each person is assigned one word. When the verse is completed, it is understood that a minyan is present (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 15:3). One may also count mentally (Chesed Le’alafim 55:10), or by counting fingers or toes, but not the head (Torah Lishma, 386). Population Census

The State of Israel, like other countries, periodically conducts population censuses for organizing the economy, taxes, military, education, healthcare, transportation, and more. Even before the establishment of the state, the question arose whether public leaders were permitted to conduct this census. Rabbi Uziel permitted it because the censuses are done for a purpose, and not by personal counting, but through another method, namely forms (Mishptei Uziel 4, General Matters 2).

Today, this question no longer arises, as the number of residents is known to the state authorities through a close monitoring of births and deaths recorded in the Ministry of the Interior’s computers. The primary purpose of current censuses is not to determine the population size, but for additional statistical data, and there is no prohibition in this. Drawing the Tablets of the Covenant with Rounded Upper Side

About a year ago, I addressed a question regarding the cover image in my “Peninei Halakha” books, depicting the Tablets of the Covenant with a rounded upper side. Some claim that they should not be depicted this way, as the Tablets were square, and the rounded depiction was derived from the customs of non-Jews. While I explained that the main halachic ruling permits making the upper side of the Tablets rounded, people still ask why not heed the opinion of those who argue against this. Casting Aspersions on the Early Authorities

A: The reason we need not follow their opinion is because doing so would be “casting aspersions on the early authorities.” For many generations, Jews in synagogues around the world adorned the Holy Ark, or the curtain, in the shape of two tablets with a rounded upper side. Similarly, we learned about liturgical poems where one prays to the angels, such as “Merciful ones, bring our mercy before the Merciful One,” where many great rabbis, both early and later authorities, ruled it is forbidden to say such prayers, as prayer should only be

directed to God, as the Rambam established in the fifth principle of the Thirteen Principles of Faith: "To God alone is prayer due, and no one else is worthy of prayer." Among the rabbis were Rabbi Yaakov Antoli; Maharam from Rotenburg, Mabit, Maharal (Netiv Avodah 12), Korban Netanel (Rosh Hashanah, end of first chapter), and 'Teshuva Me'ahavah' (1:60). Nonetheless, Jews are accustomed to follow the opinion of the majority of the rabbis who saw merit in these prayer formulas, one reason being not to cast aspersions on the early authorities who practiced saying them. The Chatam Sofer (Orach Chaim 166) wrote that he does not oppose the public saying these prayers, but personally, he extends the previous section of prayer until the congregation finishes the poem.

Indeed, there is a dispute about whether the prohibition of changing a custom out of respect for the early authorities applies only in matters of marriage and family lineage, as the aspersions are also cast upon their descendants. Some argue that even in other matters, it is forbidden to change out of respect for the early authorities (see, Talmudic Encyclopedia, Volume 37, "laz":4). However, in this case, since the opinion of the stringent ones is not particularly strong, as explained further, there is no need to be concerned with their opinion, and cast aspersions on the early authorities. The Stringent Opinions and Their Rejection

In recent years, two rabbis opposed the custom of rounding the upper side of the Tablets of the Covenant. The first, in 1963, was Rabbi Eliyahu Katz (Devarot Eliyahu, Orach Chaim 1:96), and after him, the Lubavitcher Rebbe (in a talk from 1981). Their claim was that this custom was learned from Christian imagery, while the Tablets in the Ark were rectangular.

However, for several reasons, their opinion was not accepted by many rabbis. First, their position assumes that the Tablets should be made exactly as they were in the Tabernacle, but according to halakha, we do not find this requirement, and on the contrary, it is forbidden to make items exactly as the Temple's vessels. Those who want to replicate them must make slight changes (see Avodah Zarah 43b; Sefer HaChinuch 254; Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 141:8).

Second, it is doubtful whether the Tablets were truly rectangular, as it can be learned from the Zohar (Section 2, p. 84:2), that the upper side was rounded because they were formed from two drops of dew. Rabbi Avraham Azulai, the author of Chesed Le'Avraham, in his explanation of the Zohar Ohr HaChama, wrote that the Tablets were partly rounded, and partly rectangular.

In practice, even after hearing the arguments of these rabbis, in tens of thousands of synagogues in Israel and abroad, the custom of rounding the upper side of the Tablets remains unchanged. This was also written by the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu (Responsa HaRav HaRashi, 1988-1989, Siman 198), and it was reported in the name of Rabbi Elyashiv (Yisah Yosef, Orach Chaim 3:36). It was also written in Responsa Mishneh Halachot (15:168), and Even Yisrael (8:57).

### **Parshat Vayechi: To Whom Do You Belong?**

**Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone** "And Israel saw the children of Joseph, and he said, 'Who are these?'" (Genesis 48:8) Jacob's death, which occurs towards the end of the book of Genesis, brings the era of the patriarchs to an end. He will be the last person to be buried in Ma'arat HaMakhpela in Hebron. He will be the forefather whose name, Israel, given to him after defeating the angel in an all-night wrestling bout, is the same name the Jewish people will carry forever. He will be the one patriarch whose twelve sons are transformed into the chiefs of their respective tribes, paving the way for a disparate family to emerge as a nation. In the lead-up to his death, Vayechi opens with Jacob in his old age asking Joseph not to leave his dead body in Egypt, but to transport his bones back to the burial-place of his fathers. When he takes sick, Joseph arrives with his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. At the deathbed scene, Jacob narrates his whole history: how he was blessed by God in Luz that he would be fruitful, that his descendants would inherit the land, and that there would eventually be an ingathering of all nations to the land and faith of Israel (the Messianic promise). But don't we know this already? And if this story is so important, why doesn't he repeat it to all the brothers who will soon be arriving for their blessings, instead of keeping this moment as a private encounter between himself and Joseph and his sons? Stranger still, in his very next breath the aged patriarch tells Joseph that he wants Ephraim and Menashe to be considered his and not Joseph's, '...just as Reuven and Shimon are mine.' (Although Jacob does allow for any sons that Joseph may have afterwards to be regarded as his own.) Jacob then concludes his own history, recounting the sudden death and burial of Rachel. And suddenly, almost as an afterthought, he turns to Ephraim and Menashe asking, 'Who are these?' Given that Jacob has just been talking about Menashe and Ephraim, his

question doesn't make sense. Doesn't he know who they are? After all, they are the focus of the scene. It sounds as if words spoken one moment are forgotten only moments later, a state of mind that could be seen as bordering on senility. Is Jacob losing his wits? On the contrary! Of all the profound questions that Genesis raises, I think that these two words – 'Mi eleh?' (Who are these?) – contain a library of existential philosophy constricted into one line of dialogue. It is a question that could have implications not only for Genesis, but for the entire destiny of the Jewish people. It could well be the question that Grandfather Israel (Jacob) is asking each and every one of us, his descendants.

Jacob knows that his death is the bridge into the next stage of Jewish history. We have reached the point in the evolution of his family where the seventy souls who came down to Egypt are going to become a fully-fledged nation. They are about to embark on a 210-year period of expansion that will see them emerge from slavery into nationhood. Many of them will suffer, many will assimilate, and some will wander across a desert under the leadership of Moses and ultimately return, as Israelites, to the very place where the family had its origins. Dying, Jacob clearly understands how the pattern of his life will mirror the subsequent experience of the Jewish people throughout their history. Born in Israel, Jacob goes into exile for twenty years, and returns to the land of his forefathers in an attempt to live out his remaining years in peace. But circumstances don't allow the peace to prevail. Through the mitigating circumstance of hunger, he is forced to leave Canaan for Egypt, where ironically the family of Israel will emerge into a nation. What happens to them among the Egyptians – seventy pioneering souls increasing and multiplying and thriving – is the essential experience of Jews scattered across the Diaspora from Casablanca to Krakow, from Toledo to Texas. They arrive few in number and thrive until either the Pharaohs of each community rise in protest and expel them, or until assimilation takes over. While the majority of the Jewish community will dissolve in the great melting pot, there will still be a chosen minority who will endure as children of Israel, who will survive as committed Jews. At this point in time, Jacob stands at the midpoint of five generations. Gazing back, he sees his grandfather Abraham; gazing ahead, he sees his grandchildren Ephraim and Menashe. Each generation is characterized by a unique relationship with the land of Israel. Abraham, born in another land, reveals the One God to the world, and arrives in the land towards which God has directed him, the land of Israel. His son, Isaac is the first native son, a true citizen in that he never leaves the land in which he is born. Jacob, in contrast, becomes a modern Jew because his exile and wanderings parallel the exile and wanderings of the Jews in Diaspora. Joseph, born in Israel, will leave, never to return while he is alive – the experience of many Jews who find their success in business ventures and opportunities across the major capitals of the globe. And finally, we have Menashe and Ephraim, the sons of Joseph, for whom the land of Israel is only a legend. They weren't born there, and they will not die there. Their entire lives are spent in the exile of Egypt. These sons of Joseph represent the longest period of our history, where for 2,000 years – until the early part of the twentieth century – Israel was also only a legend. Until 1948, most Jews in the world could identify with Ephraim and Menashe because for them, Israel was also unattainable. How did we survive? How did the dream and vision of Abraham cling to generation after generation of Jews who never lived in the land, and whose great-great-grandchildren would not live there? Would they retain the dream of their great-grandfather Israel, or would they disappear into the rainbow of nations? When Jacob asks Joseph to give him his sons, his true intention can be deduced from the very fact that Jacob asks for them in the midst of recounting his own history, the blessings that God gave him at Luz and the promise that his descendants will inherit the land. Jacob sees a successful Joseph, acculturating within the Egyptian milieu. He places a claim on Menashe and Ephraim. He wants them to be his, and not Joseph's; he wants their first allegiance to be to the Abrahamic culture and not to the Egyptian culture; he wants them to at least yearn to live in Israel, not to be content with remaining in Egypt. Hence Jacob insists on his question, the question that must plague every single Jew in every generation: 'Who are these?' Do these sons belong to Joseph, Grand

Vizier of Egypt, or do they belong to Jacob, the old bearded Jew? Do they belong to the civilization of the pyramids or do they identify with the 'Covenant between the Pieces'? Are they content in Egypt or do they long for Israel?

The answer is clear. Not only does Joseph receive a double blessing, but his sons become tribal heads, equal to Reuven and Shimon, Jacob's eldest sons. Later in the portion Jacob will inform Joseph that all future generations will use Ephraim and Menashe as a paradigmatic blessing: They will say, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe,' which is how parents bless their sons on Friday night. Menashe and Ephraim were children of Egypt who were nevertheless claimed by and chose to adopt Jacob-Israel as their true father. It is only those children who make a similar choice who remain part of the eternal Jewish people. Shabbat Shalom

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**Parsha Insights By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner** Parshas Vayechi  
Tears of Joy

This week we read the parsha of Vayechi, completing the Sefer {Book} of Breishis. "Vayechi Yaakov {And Yaakov lived} in the land of Mitzrayim {Egypt} for seventeen years. [47:28]"

When Yaakov arrived in Mitzrayim and was brought before Paroah, he told Paroah that he was one hundred and thirty years old. The Torah later tells us that Yaakov lived for one hundred and forty seven years.

The arithmetic is simple. Why did the Torah need to tell us that Yaakov lived in Mitzrayim for seventeen years?

The Ramban writes that Breishis is called the 'Sefer Yetzirah,' the Book of 'Forming.' It contains both the physical forming of the world, the creation, and also the life-events of the Forefather's which 'formed' and shaped the destiny of their offspring. Their lives laid out the blueprint for what we would endure and experience as a nation.

We as a nation have endured and are enduring many difficult exiles and persecutions along the demanding path toward our ultimate redemption. The blueprint for this was laid out by Yaakov and the many challenging hardships he endured throughout his life. There are commentators who go as far as to delineate how each of Yaakov's hardships aligns with each of our exiles.

Ultimately, we will reach the point of redemption. The point where we will be able to look back, reflect, recognize the need for and appreciate each national and personal stumble and persecution that we were subjected to. This too must be contained in the formative blueprint of our Avos' lives.

Where does the Torah allude to this state of redemption?

"And Yaakov lived in the land of Mitzrayim {Egypt} for seventeen years. [47:28]" The Medrash teaches that Yaakov was vibrantly alive for those seventeen years. (It's interesting to note that the numerical value of the word 'tov' {good} is seventeen.) Having endured all of the hardships his life would contain, he was in a redeemed state, similar to the state that one experiences in the World to Come.

The Ohr Gedalyahu explains the exact moment when Yaakov reached this state. When Yaakov arrived in Mitzrayim he had an emotion-filled reunion with his long lost son, Yosef. "He (Yosef) appeared before him (Yaakov) and fell on his neck and wept. [46:29]"

Yosef fell on the neck of his father and wept. The passuk {verse} pointedly writes this in the singular. Yosef was crying on his father's neck. His father, Yaakov, wasn't crying on his neck. What was he doing? Rashi brings from the Medrash that he was reciting the 'Shema' prayer: Hear Israel, Hashem is our G-d (Elokim), Hashem is One.

The questions are very obvious. Why did Yaakov decide to say Shema precisely at the moment when he sees his beloved son after a twenty-two year separation? Not five minutes earlier, not five minutes later! Furthermore, if this actually was the only time to say it, why didn't Yosef also recite the Shema?

The Mahara"l explains beautifully that at that moment, Yaakov's heart was filled with a most incredible, all-encompassing feeling of love. Yaakov didn't want to let that once in a lifetime opportunity pass without utilizing it to its full potential. He wanted to channel that feeling toward Hashem. At the moment when Yosef came to him, when the feeling of love was at its strongest, he said the 'Shema.'

However, based on what we've said so far, the Ohr Gedalyahu offers a different explanation.

"Hear Israel, Hashem is our G-d (Elokim), Hashem is One." We have different names for Hashem, each describing a different way that He deals with and interacts with this world. He is called Hashem, referring to His compassion. He is called Elokim, referring to His judgment. In this confusing world there are different names for what we view as almost contradictory ways that Hashem acts. Ultimately, Hashem will be one and His name will be One. Ultimately, we will achieve that understanding that there was no contradiction whatsoever in the myriad ways that He dealt with this world. There were no separate situations of 'tov' {good} and 'ra' {evil}-Hashem is Elokim. His name will be One.

"Hear Israel, Hashem is our Elokim, Hashem is One." That is a proclamation of our belief that we will ultimately reach that understanding and clarity.

Yaakov had thought that Yosef, along with his life-mission of fathering the twelve tribes of Israel, was lost. He was in a state of darkness. A state where the pieces of the puzzle didn't seem to fit together correctly. Suddenly, he hears the news that Yosef is alive. Not just in a physical sense, that Yosef is alive and is ruler of Mitzrayim, but in a spiritual sense, "Yosef, my son, is alive." He had continued to behave as a son of Yaakov even during their long separation.

The pieces of the puzzle begin to fall into place for Yaakov. He had his twelve sons intact. All righteous. Yosef had remained true to his upbringing under the most trying of circumstances. That which seemed to be his greatest cause of anguish, the disappearance and seeming death of Yosef, was suddenly transformed into his greatest cause of joy. Yosef's disappearance wasn't a foretelling that he had failed in his mission of building the nation. On the contrary! Yosef was busy transforming Mitzrayim into the place which would then transform his family into a nation.

He looked back on his life. It all made sense. It was 'tov.' He said the Shema. He lived and breathed the Shema. He had reached that stage of tangible understanding while still existing in this confusing world.

Yosef, on the other hand, was about to begin the national odyssey of retracing and re-'forming' the blueprint that had been laid out by the Forefathers. He was still at the beginning of the journey. He didn't say Shema-many tears would be spilled before that point would be reached. He cried on his father's neck...

May we speedily reach the stage where our tears will be of joy as we too pronounce the Shema with that perfect understanding that Hashem is Elokim. Chazak, chazak v'nischazek! Good Shabbos, Yisroel Ciner

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**Asarah Beteiveis on Friday?!**

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff** Question #1: Fasting on Friday

May we fast on a Friday? Question #2: An Unusual Year

In what ways is this year different from most other years? Question #3: Who Stole the Date!

Why do some years miss having Asarah Beteiveis? Question #4: Unusual Presidents

What did Teddy Roosevelt and Richard Nixon have in common? Introduction

In a previous year when the Tenth of Teiveis fell on Friday, Moshe, one of my students where I taught at the time, came to me, rather incredulously, "I heard that Asarah Beteiveis falls on a Friday this year—but I thought that we cannot have fast days on a Friday? I don't remember ever fasting on Friday!" Answer

Although Moshe's halachic assumption is inaccurate -- there is no halacha banning fast days on Fridays -- it is easy to comprehend why he thought so. In our current, fixed calendar, the only fast day that ever falls on a Friday is Asarah Beteiveis, and indeed it happens this year. Asarah Beteiveis last coincided with Friday seven years ago, and the time before was three years prior, which was the year that Moshe posed his observations. At the time, ten years had transpired since Asarah Beteiveis had fallen on a Friday, certainly way before Moshe was old enough to fast. To explain why Asarah Beteiveis is the only fast that falls on a Friday requires a bit of complicated explanation about our calendar, but it is well worth it to have a deeper understanding of this very important

institution. So find a relaxing place to do some entertaining calculations. First, we need some historical background. When the Torah commands us to create a calendar, it includes two different responsibilities: First, that Rosh Chodesh and the length of each month are determined on the basis of when the new moon appears, and, second, to have the holiday of Pesach fall in the spring and the holiday of Sukkos in the autumn (in the northern hemisphere). Thus, we have two separate and very different requirements, one of having the months determined by the moon, which is a little more than every 29½ days, and the second of having years that coordinate with the seasons, which follow the solar year, which is a bit less than 365¼ days. Sanhedrin calendar

To accomplish having the dates and holidays fall according to the seasons, the halacha is that some years have 12 months, or approximately 354 days, and others have 13 months, or approximately 384 days. Since 12 Hebrew months is shorter than a solar year, unless we occasionally add another month, Pesach would fall approximately 10 days earlier each year until, eventually, it would be in the winter. Adding an extra month periodically adjusts that Nissan remains in the spring. The mitzvah of the Torah is that the Sanhedrin is responsible every month to decide whether a month is 29 or 30 days long, and of deciding whether a year should have an extra month. In the latter case, the head of the Sanhedrin appointed a special committee to review the relevant information and determine whether the year should be 13 months or only 12. Hillel's calendar

Initially, these decisions were made by the heads of the Sanhedrin, and, indeed, when Moshiach comes, we will again have this procedure. This was the system in place for thousands of years – from the time of Moshe Rabbeinu until almost 300 years after the destruction of the second Beis Hamikdash. At that time, the head of the Sanhedrin, Hillel Hanasi (often called Hillel II or Hillel III by historians, to avoid confusion with his better-known ancestor, Hillel Hazakein, usually simply called "Hillel"), realized that, because of Roman persecution, the Sanhedrin's days were numbered, and it would be necessary to switch to a different method for determining the calendar. Hillel Hanasi implemented a temporary Jewish calendar, which is the one that we currently use. Although many people refer to it as a "permanent calendar," it will be in use only until we again have a Sanhedrin, which will then be in charge of the calendar. Hillel's calendar kept the same, basic structure of 29- and 30-day months and 12- and 13-month years, but it is based purely on calculation and not on observation or changes of circumstance. The two major changes in this new calendar are: A leap of fate

The leap years occur following a regular pattern of seven leap years and 12 non-leap (usually called "common") years in a 19-year cycle. The third, sixth, eighth, eleventh, fourteenth, seventeenth and nineteenth years of the cycle are always leap years, and the rest are common years. The new calendar bases itself on an estimate, an average time that it takes the moon to revolve around the Earth. This molad calculation is that each new moon appears 29 days, 12 hours, and 793 chalakim (singular: chelek) or 793/1080 of an hour after the previous new moon. Once one knows when the new moon, called the molad, occurred on the previous Rosh Hashanah, one could now add either 12 or 13 times the above figure and determine the time of the molad in the next year, which is the most important factor in determining the date of the next Rosh Hashanah. (The term chelek, used on Shabbos Mevorchim when announcing when the molad is, equals 1/1080 of an hour, or 3 and 1/3 seconds.) The haves vs. the have-nots

In Hillel's calendar, most months have a determined number of days, either 29 or 30, and only in two months, Marcheshvan and Kislev, does the number of days vary. Furthermore, whether those two months are 29 or 30 days long has nothing to do with the appearance of the new moon, which was the most critical factor under the Sanhedrin calendar, but is determined by two Rosh Hashanos (Rambam, Hilchos Kiddush Hachodesh 8:5), the Rosh Hashanah of the coming year and that of the year following. A year in which both Marcheshvan and Kislev have only 29 days is called chaseirah, lacking or defective; one in which Marcheshvan has 29 days and Kislev has 30 is called kesidrah, as expected or regular; and one in which both Marcheshvan and Kislev have 30 days is called sheleimah, full or excessive. The terms chaseirah,

kesidrah, and sheleimah apply in both common and leap years. Thus, in Hillel's calendar, all common years are either 353 days (if both Marcheshvan and Kislev have 29 days), 354 days (if Marcheshvan has 29 days and Kislev has 30) or 355 days (if both Marcheshvan and Kislev have 30 days) In a leap year, Adar Rishon always has 30 days, and Adar Sheini always has 29 days. Thus, the addition of an extra month of Adar in a leap year always adds exactly thirty days, and leap years are either 383 days (if both Marcheshvan and Kislev have 29 days), 384 days (if Marcheshvan has 29 days and Kislev has 30) or 385 days (if both Marcheshvan and Kislev have 30 days).. Another major innovation Did you ever notice that Yom Kippur never falls on Friday or Sunday? If it did, we would observe two consecutive days that both have the stringency of Shabbos. Indeed, when the calendar was based on observation, this could and did happen (She'iltos of Rav Acha'e'i Geon, #67; Ha'emek She'eilah ibid, Note 22; Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 5:21). However, Hillel's calendar does not allow Yom Kippur to fall on either a Sunday or a Friday, and does not allow Hoshana Rabbah to fall on Shabbos, which would cause the cancellation of the Hoshanos ceremony. As long as the calendar was determined on the basis of eyewitness testimony, it was halachically more important to have Rosh Chodesh fall on its correct day than to be concerned about the difficulties created when these holidays fall on or next to Shabbos (Ha'emek She'eilah ibid; Gri"z, Hilchos Kiddush Hachodesh). Once we fulfill the mitzvah in a less-preferred way with Hillel's "permanent" calendar, keeping Yom Kippur from falling on Friday or Sunday and keeping Hoshana Rabbah from falling on Shabbos are factors to be included in establishing the calendar. To accommodate these innovations, Rosh Hashanah must fall only on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday or Shabbos. Were it to fall on Sunday, Hoshana Rabbah would be on Shabbos; on Wednesday, Yom Kippur would be on Friday; and on Friday, Yom Kippur would be on Sunday. When Rosh Hashanah in the coming year would naturally fall on Sunday, Wednesday or Friday, an extra day is added to the calendar to move Rosh Hashanah to Monday, Thursday or Shabbos (Rambam, Hilchos Kiddush Hachodesh 7:1). This is the predominant reason why Marcheshvan and Kislev are sometimes 29 days and sometimes 30 -- to make the exact length of the years flexible. There is one other factor: Sometimes, Rosh Hashanah takes place not on the day of the molad, but the next day, because the molad occurs on the afternoon of Rosh Hashanah and is not visible until the next day. When Rosh Hashanah was determined by the observation of witnesses, this information was important not only in determining when Rosh Hashanah falls, but also for interrogating potential witnesses testifying to the appearance of the new moon. Hillel's calendar also does not allow Rosh Hashanah to be established on a day when the molad falls on its afternoon. In order to accommodate all these various calendar requirements, Hillel Hanasi established four rules, called dechiyos, which, together with the astronomical calculation used and the 19-year leap year rotation, form the basis for determining our calendar. (Because these dechiyos are extremely technical, I will not explain them.) Because the nineteen-year cycle synchronizes the lunar calendar with the solar year, the Hebrew and English dates of births, anniversaries and other occasions often coincide on the nineteenth anniversary of the event. If yours does not, but is off by a day or two, do not fret. Your record-keeping is accurate, but the cycle of nineteen years only relates to whether it is a leap year, not to whether the years are of the exact same length. As explained above, the lengths of Marcheshvan and Kislev are determined by other factors, and the secular year also varies in length, with the occasional addition of the 29th of February, which influences this also. These factors affect whether your 19th, 38th or 57th birthday or anniversary coincides exactly with its Hebrew/secular counterpart, or whether it varies slightly. Fourteen types of years

Based on all these calculations, there are seven prototype years for a common year and seven for a leap year that fulfill the calendar rules. Each of these fourteen template "years" is called by a three-letter acronym, called a kevias hashanah, in which the first letter identifies the day of the week of the first day of Rosh Hashanah, the second letter denotes whether the year is chaseirah, kesidrah, or sheleimah, and the third letter identifies the day of the week of the first day of Pesach. Let's

use this year as our example: Rosh Hashanah fell on Thursday. Both Marcheshvan and Kislev are 30 days this year; therefore, this year's kevias hashana is חטז, meaning that Rosh Hashanah fell on the fifth day of the week (ה), the year is sheleimah (ש), and the first day of Pesach is on Sunday, the first day of the week (א). No letter is used to denote whether the year is a common or leap year, because this is understood by knowing how many days of the week Pesach follows Rosh Hashanah. In a common year that is kesidrah, Pesach falls two days later in the week than Rosh Hashanah, and in a leap year, it falls four days later, the two additional days being the extra two days that the extra month of Adar Rishon, thirty days long, adds to the day of the week count. Of course, these calculations must be adjusted one day in either direction, if the year is chaseirah or sheleimah. Either way, the number of days between Rosh Hashanah and Pesach (and whether it is chaseirah or sheleimah) tells us whether it is a common or leap year, so there is no need to include this in the acronym. Back-to-back

During the Hebrew calendar years 5784 and 5785, we discover the fairly unusual situation of having back-to-back years with Asarah Beteiveis falling on Friday, both in 5784 (2023) and in 5785, (when it falls on January 10, 2025), each for a different reason: In 5784, which was a leap year, Rosh Hashanah fell on Shabbos and the year was a chaseirah -- both Marcheshvan and Kislev had 29 days. 5785 is a common year in which Rosh Hashanah fell on Thursday and it is a sheleimah, because both Marcheshvan and Kislev have 30 days. When this happens Asarah Beteiveis of the second year falls exactly 385 days after the previous Asarah Beteiveis. Since the number 385 is perfectly divisible by seven, the number of the days of the week, the dates will fall on the same weekday. At this point, we can explain another of our opening questions: What did Teddy Roosevelt and Richard Nixon have in common? The last time Asarah Beteiveis fell on Friday in two consecutive years was in 5733 (on December 15, 1972, when Richard Nixon was president) and 5734 (on January 4, 1974). No one reading this article was fasting the previous time that Asarah Beteiveis occurred on Friday in back-to-back years, since this was on December 20, 1901 and January 9, 1903. Both of these fasts occurred when Teddy Roosevelt was president, having succeeded to the office on September 14, 1901, when William McKinley succumbed to his wounds inflicted by Leon Frank Czolgosz. Thus, Teddy Roosevelt and Richard Nixon were the only two people in the twentieth century to have Asarah Beteiveis fall on Friday in two consecutive years while they were President of the United States! The next wait for back-to-back Friday Asarah Beteiveis observances after 5784 and 5785 is not quite as long. Someone blessed with good health and longevity can look forward to fasting on two Fridays of Asarah Beteiveis in the years 5831 (on December 12, 2070) and 5832 (January 1, 2072 -- providing an auspicious way to celebrate the secular New Year). You presumably have noted that the secular, or solar, years 1902, 1973, 2024 and 2071 all miss having Asarah Beteiveis. This is, in itself, not particularly significant. Almost every halachic leap year causes the pushing of Asarah Beteiveis into the next secular year. As a result, seven of nineteen secular years miss out on Asarah Beteiveis. (Actually, it is slightly less, since, about twice a century, Asarah Beteiveis after a leap year falls on December 30 or 31.)

#### Biblical Source

Although it would appear that the reason no other fast occurs on a Friday is simply a coincidence of the fixed calendar, one early authority contends that observing Asarah Beteiveis on Friday has a Tanach basis and deep halachic significance. The Avudraham explains this on the basis of the following pesukim in the book of Yechezkel: "And the Word of Hashem came to me in the ninth year in the tenth month (Teiveis) on the tenth of the month, saying, 'Son of man, write the name of this date, this very day (etzem hayom hazeh); the king of Bavel has surrounded Yerushalayim, on this very day, be'etzem hayom hazeh'" (Yechezkel 24:1-2). Since Yechezkel identifies the Tenth of Teiveis as etzem hayom hazeh, this very day, and then even repeats this assertion, these words require that Asarah Beteiveis be observed on the date that it occurs and may not be moved.

The Avudraham expressly states that if Asarah Beteiveis were to fall on Shabbos, we would be required to fast on Shabbos, just as we are

required to fast when it falls on a Friday. This means that, in his opinion, prior to the establishing of our calendar by Hillel Hasheini, whenever Asarah Beteiveis fell on Shabbos (during the period after the Churban), Klal Yisrael fasted on Shabbos, similar to the fasting we do when Yom Kippur falls on Shabbos! This ruling of the Avudraham seems unusual -- particularly, since there is no record in the Gemara of such a halacha. The Beis Yosef (Orach Chayim 550) takes strong issue with Avudraham's approach, and questions why Asarah Beteiveis should be treated differently from any other rabbinically ordained fast. In addition, Avudraham's position conflicts with Rashi (Megillah 5a s.v. aval) and the Rambam (Hilchos Taanis 5:5), both of whom mention that when Asarah Beteiveis occurs on Shabbos, the fast is postponed to Sunday. Nevertheless, we must understand the conceptual basis on which the Avudraham, himself a well-respected Spanish rishon, understands Asarah Beteiveis to be a stricter fast than the others. It would seem that its significance is because it is the beginning of the tragedies that resulted in the churban. Conclusion

The pasuk promises us that the "Fast of the Fourth (month, the Seventeenth of Tammuz, the fourth month counting from Nissan), the Fast of the Fifth (Tisha Be'av), the Fast of the Seventh (Tzom Gedalyah) and the Fast of the Tenth (Asarah Beteiveis) shall be for celebration and happiness for the household of Yehudah" (Zechariah 8:19). May we use the fast days and other days of mourning for reflection and teshuvah, so that the words of the prophet are fulfilled speedily and in our days!

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#### Rabbi YY Jacobson

The Transformative Power of Holding Space for the Pain of Another  
Why Does Genesis End on Such a Low Note?

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

The resting place of the Lubavitcher Rebbe in Queens, NY

Experiencing the Other

Sadie goes to see her rabbi. She complains about her very bad headaches, and whines, cries, and talks about her poor living conditions for hours. All of a sudden, Sadie shouts, overjoyed: "Rabbi, your holy presence has cured me! My headache is gone!"

To which the rabbi replies: "No Sadie, it is not gone. I have it now."

Culminating Words

Thus are the culminating words of the first—and in many ways the foundational—book of the Torah, the book of Genesis:

"Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; they embalmed him and he was placed in a coffin in Egypt[1]."

This ending is disturbing. Could have Genesis not concluded on a more inspiring note, just like the four following books of Moses?

Even the fifth and final book, Deuteronomy, which concludes with Moses' passing, culminates with a eulogy so rarely moving that it leaves one with an unforgettable impression of Moses.

Indeed, for thousands of years the classical Jewish sages, authors and rabbis have paid special attention to concluding their written volumes and verbal speeches on a positive note[2]. Even if the subject matter was one of melancholic nature, they desired that at least the punch line, the "last inning," as it were, should invigorate readers and listeners with a message of hope and promise.

Yet, the Book of Books chooses to conclude its first installment with a gloomy and despairing punch line: Joseph's death and burial.

That incredible human being who in the best and worst of times displayed enormous dignity and richness of spirit, that tremendous visionary and leader who rescued a world from famine, is now gone. If that is not enough, Genesis informs us that Joseph is embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt. There his remains would be stored for hundreds of years until the Jews leave Egypt and bury his bones in the city of Shechem (Nabulus).

While Joseph's father, Jacob, labored hard for assurances that his body would not remain among the morally depraved—and what would turn out to be genocidal—Egyptian people but would be brought back to the sacred soil of Hebron, Joseph's worn and sacred body must remain etched in Egyptian earth for centuries.

Even if the Torah felt compelled to culminate Genesis with Joseph's death, it could have ended with the second-to-the-last verse of Genesis:

"Joseph told his brothers: 'I am about to die, but G-d will indeed remember you and bring you up out of this land to the land that He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob... You will bring my bones up out of here.'" At least that would have ended the book with a promise for future redemption. What indeed are the final words of the book?

"Joseph died... and he was placed in a coffin in Egypt!"

"Be Strong! Be Strong!"

The question about the ending of Genesis increases upon considering the Jewish custom that when the reader of the Torah concludes each of the books of the Five Books of Moses, the entire congregation thunders out loud: Chazak! Chazak! Venischazak! "Be strong! Be strong! Let us be strengthened!"

This will occur this Shabbat morning in synagogues the world over. When the reader of the Torah concludes with the verse—"Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; they embalmed him and he was placed in a coffin in Egypt"—Jews will exclaim: Chazak! Chazak! Venischazak! "Be strong! Be strong! Let us be strengthened!"

But how can one glean strength, never mind triple strength, from this despairing end?

The Pain of Loneliness

Yet it may be that it is precisely this ending that grants us a deeply comforting message. Unfortunately, we cannot live life without pain. Every life comes with challenges. The very genesis of existence is rooted in a void and a vacuum—the concealment of the Divine infinite presence to allow for an egocentric universe and a perceived sense that we are alone, broken and detached. This means that life, whichever way you twist it, is a confrontation with a void, and a painful experience. No soul entering a body is devoid of the most profound of all traumas -- the feeling of perceived abandonment.

And it is on this journey that I must discover that I am not alone and that I can trust. That G-d is with me and in me at every moment.

Viktor Frankl (1905-1997), who survived three years in the concentration camps of Dachau and Auschwitz and went on to create a new school of psychotherapy, Logotherapy, once shared the following story. A woman phoned him up in the middle of the night and calmly told him that she was about to commit suicide. Frankl kept her on the phone and talked her through her depression, giving her reason after reason to carry on living. Eventually, she promised him she would not take her life, and she kept her word.

When they met later, Frankl asked her which of his reasons she had found convincing. "None," she replied. What then persuaded her to go on living? Her answer was simple. Frankl had been willing to listen to her in the middle of the night. A world in which someone was prepared to listen to another's distress seemed to her one in which it was worthwhile to live. He modeled for her the experience of attachment, one which we must each find in the depths of our souls which remains a derivative of infinite Divine consciousness and is never ever alone.

The Presence of Joseph

"Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; they embalmed him and he was placed in a coffin in Egypt." In these very uninspiring words, one may sense such profound solace.

The Jewish people are about to become enslaved and subjugated to a tyrannical government that will attempt to destroy them one by one, physically and mentally (as recorded at the beginning of Exodus). This new Egyptian genocide program will drown children, subject all Jewish men to slave labor and crush a new nation.

What will give the people of Israel the resolve they will desperately need? What will preserve a broken and devastated people from falling into the abyss? The knowledge that one day they would be liberated? Certainly. The knowledge that evil will not reign forever? Absolutely. Indeed, this is what Joseph told the Jewish people before his passing, recorded in the second-to-the-last verse of Genesis: "Joseph told his brothers: 'I am about to die, but G-d will indeed remember you and bring you up out of this land to the land that He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob... You will bring my bones up out of here.'"

But, then, when Genesis seeks to choose its final words, it provides us with a message that perhaps served as the greatest source of strength for an orphaned and broken Jewish family. "Joseph died at the age of one

hundred and ten years; they embalmed him and he was placed in a coffin in Egypt."

Joseph's sacred body is not taken back to the Holy Land to be interred among the spiritual giants of human history: Abraham and Sarah; Isaac and Rebecca; his father Jacob, or his mother Rachel. Joseph's spiritual and physical presence does not "escape" to the heavenly paradise of a land saturated with holiness.

Rather, Joseph remains in the grit and gravel of depraved Egypt, he remains etched deeply in the earthiness of Egypt, together with his beloved people.

It is true for each of us. When I can hold space for your pain, and embrace you in your anguish, telling you that you are not alone, it may provide you with the deep strength to discover your own inner infinite dignity and power.

The burial place of a virtuous and saintly human being contains profound holiness and spiritual energy and constitutes a place conducive for prayer to G-d. Since the soul and the body retain a relationship even after they depart from each other, the space where the physical body of a holy man is interred is a space conducive for spiritual growth, meditation, reflection, and inspiration[3].

"He was placed in a coffin in Egypt"—that is the culmination of Genesis. The Jew may be entrenched in Egypt and all that it represents, but Joseph is right there with him, in the midst of his condition, giving him strength, blessings, and fortitude.

The same is true throughout history. In each generation G-d plants such "Joseph's" in our midst, the Tzaddikim and Rebbes, who are there with the Jewish people in their pain and agony. Sometimes, even after their passing, if we open our hearts, we can feel the touch of their soul, the richness of their spirits, the faith of their lives.

We may be stuck in the quagmire of "Egyptian" dung, yet "Joseph" is present with us. Thus, even in the midst of a dark and horrific exile, we can hold each other's hands and thunder aloud: Chazak! Chazak! Venischazak! "Be strong! Be strong! Let us be strengthened!"

Contemporary Joseph's

This idea transcribed above I had the privilege to hear myself from the Lubavitcher Rebbe 38 years ago, on the Sabbath of the portion of Vayechi 5747, January 1987[4].

I will never forget the emotion the Rebbe displayed while giving this talk. At its conclusion, he noted that the name of his father-in-law, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe (1880-1950), was Yosef (Joseph) and that his father-in-law was interred not in the Holy Land but in New York, and continues to provide energy, inspiration, and blessings to our generation. Indeed, the Rebbe would visit his father-in-law's resting place frequently to pray on behalf of Jews and non-Jews the world over. The Rebbe would spend hours standing at his father-in-law's resting place, immersed in prayer, reading letters that he has received from people all over the world requesting him to pray for them.

I personally observed many times the Rebbe returning from his father-in-law's graveside sometimes close to midnight, his eyes swollen from tears and his back bent over from the extraordinary effort. The Rebbe suffered a stroke, in March 1992, as he was standing and praying at the resting place of his father-in-law.

Two years later, in June 1994, the Rebbe himself was interred near his father-in-law's resting place, in the Montefiore Cemetery in Queens, NY. Thousands of people visit the Rebbe's Ohel (resting place) on a daily basis, praying to the Almighty for themselves and their loved ones. I know many people who have experienced major blessings, often supernatural blessings, following their prayers to Hashem at the "ohel." If you are in need of a blessing for any matter in your life, it is worthwhile to pay a visit there for prayer. (For directions, click here.) It is a place that continues to bestow blessing, inspiration, and strength upon untold numbers of people from all walks of life during our present state of exile, until the bright dawn of redemption which shall transpire speedily in our days. Amen.

[1] Genesis 50:26. [2] See last Tosefos to Talmud Niddah. [3] See Talmud Sotah 34b, based on Numbers 13:22, quoted in Rashi ibid. [4] Published in Sefer Hasichos 5747 vol. 1 pp. 249-268. The idea is based on Zohar Vayechi p. 222b and its commentators Mikdash Melech and Or Hachamah ibid. Commentary of Sifsei Kohen to Genesis 47:29. (Please make even a small and secure contribution to help us continue our work. Click here.)

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## What Books Are On Your Shelves?

**By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg** While print book sales were up less than 1% last year, sales of the Bible rose 22% in the U.S. through the end of October, compared with the same period last year. Many ascribe this phenomenon to anxiety over uncertainty with the economy, security, and the world in general. It seems people are turning to the Bible for hope, strength and faith. The Wall Street Journal reports: “Publishers say the books are selling well at religious bookstores, but also on Amazon.com and at more mainstream retailers. People buy print copies to make notes in and highlight but often supplement them with audiobooks as well.” As people who place a tremendous value on the centrality of the Bible and on its study, we see this trend is most welcome. A woman once shared with me a story from her childhood. She attended public school and one day, when school let out it was raining hard. Her mother came to pick her up so she wouldn’t have to get soaked walking home. As she entered the car, her mother pointed to the public-school entrance and said, “I can tell you which kids are Jewish and which aren’t.” Surprised and curious, she asked her mother, how do you know? Her mother answered, “The children who put their books under their shirt or jacket to protect it and keep it dry are Jewish. Those who hold the book over their head to keep their head dry but sacrifice the book are not Jewish.” Since our inception, the Jewish people have placed a premium on literacy and on study. As a result, we have been dubbed the People of the Book. For us, study is not relegated to scholars and the elite. There is a mitzvah on every man to engage the book, to learn Torah every morning and every evening. Women, too, are obligated to study the laws that pertain to them. Indeed, the 613th and final mitzvah in the Torah is the obligation to write a Sefer Torah. Rabbeinu Asher, the Rosh, argues that today when we don’t study directly from a Torah scroll, this mitzvah is fulfilled when we buy seforim, when we collect and learn Torah books. Seforim, Torah books, should adorn every Jewish home and be its essential décor. There is a prominent teacher of Torah in the greater Jewish community whose father grew up with no Jewish background and had never learned or open a sefer in his life. When this teacher was a young boy and his father was becoming observant, someone in his community instructed the father to buy a set of Shas to keep in his home. The father resisted, explaining there would be no point since he did not understand the words and would be unable to study it. The person said, “That’s not why I’m telling you to get a Shas. Get a Shas and display it in your house so your children see and understand that their parents value Torah and its study.” The father bought the Shas, his children are now grown up and teach Torah all over the world, and the father himself grew into regular Torah study as well. We don’t just learn seforim or collect them, we celebrate them. Indeed, Chabad this week celebrated a holiday, the 5th of Shevat designated to the celebration of seforim. In 1985, the librarians of the Agudas Chassidei Chabad Library began to notice that rare books and manuscripts were missing from the library. Simultaneously, collectors and sellers of rare books began reporting suspicious items entering the market. After an investigation, it came to light that a nephew of the Rebbe was stealing books from the Chabad library and putting them up for sale. When confronted with his actions, he argued that as a grandson of the Friediker Rebbe, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, the seforim were his rightful inheritance. After several failed attempts to resolve the issue through Beis Din, Chabad filed a restraining order against the sale of any more books from its library. They also filed a lawsuit, and the case was brought before federal judge Charles Sifton. The nephew’s lawyers argued that the books were privately owned and were bequeathed to members of the family, essentially his rightful inheritance. Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, the Rebbe’s wife was deposed by the nephew’s legal team. In her testimony, she famously declared, “I think they [the seforim] belonged to the Chassidim because my father belonged to the Chassidim.” Her words and sincerity were compelling and ultimately persuasive to the judge. The trial lasted for twenty-three days. During that time, the Rebbe spoke about it at farbrengens, urging his chassidim to demonstrate how active, vibrant and alive Chabad is by increasing their efforts to spread chassidus. On the 5th of Teves, 5747,

corresponding with January 6, 1987, almost a full year after the trial ended, the judge issued his ruling that the books belong to Chabad. As the news spread among chassidim, they employed a rabbinic phrase from the Talmud: “victory is ours.” The intense celebration that followed lasted for days. The chassidim understood that this was about more than just the seforim. The ruling made a statement to the world that Lubavitch was alive and vibrant and that indeed, the seforim and the movement belong to the chassidim, to the people. From that day, the 5th of Teves was designated as a holiday, “Didan Notzach,” marked by the purchase of seforim, the printing of sefarim, and the rededication to learning seforim. I had the privilege of visiting the Rebbe’s Ohel this week on the 5th of Teves. An enormous crowd was gathered, people were dressed for Shabbos and wishing one another a Gut Yom Tov. Though not a Torah or rabbinic holiday, not a day that appears on any other Jewish calendar other than Chabad’s, I was moved by the simcha, the sheer and authentic joy, enthusiasm and love those who weren’t even alive when the trial happened still felt towards not only the judicial victory, but to the significance and centrality of seforim.

If sale and study of the Bible is surging in the U.S. in general, all the more so should it be surging among our people, the people of the book. We are living in an age in which there is a proliferation of Jewish and Torah literature in countless languages, in hard copy, online, audio and reading devices and on a diverse range of topics, themes, and ideas. There is so much noise and nonsense in the world today. Engaging Torah is our blueprint, our manual for navigating this complicated world. Don’t just buy seforim, learn them and celebrate them, not only on the 5th of Teves, but each and every day.

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## Rav Kook Torah

**Vayeichi: Fishy Blessings** Realizing that his death was not far off, Jacob gave his grandchildren, the sons of Joseph, the following blessing: “May [God] bless the lads, and let them carry my name, along with the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac. May they increase like fish in the land.” (Gen. 48:16) Yes, fish have astonishingly large families. But so do frogs and many other animals. Why were Joseph’s children blessed to be like fish? Furthermore, the phrase “increase like fish in the land” sounds like a very mixed-up metaphor. Fish do not thrive on land; they certainly do not increase there! What kind of blessing is this? Immunity from the Evil Eye

The Talmud (Berachot 55b) explains that Joseph shared a special quality with fish: “The fish in the waters are concealed by the water, and thus not susceptible to the Evil Eye. So too, the descendants of Joseph are not susceptible to the Evil Eye.” What does it mean that Joseph was immune to the Evil Eye like the fish? We explained previously that the Evil Eye is an example of hidden influences that exist between souls. An environment of jealousy and hatred can poison not only the atmosphere but also the soul against whom they are directed. This, however, is only true for weaker souls that are easily influenced. The Evil Eye can only harm those whose sense of self-worth is not fully developed, people who need to live their lives in a way that meets the approval of foreign ‘eyes.’ But if we are secure within ourselves, and our life is focused on our inner truths, then we will not be susceptible to the Evil Eye of those around us. The Evil Eye has no power over those whose robust sense of self-esteem does not let others dictate what is important and worthwhile. Why are fish immune to the Evil Eye? Fish are not concerned with envious eyes above the water. They live in their own world below the surface, a secluded realm that determines the direction of their lives. Like the fish, Joseph remained faithful to his inner convictions, despite the external pressures and influences of his roller-coaster life. Family estrangement, a foreign land, a foreign culture, temptations, slavery and imprisonment — none of these succeeded in leading Joseph astray. Even when he needed to contend with the hardest test of all — the incredible success, wealth, and power as Egyptian viceroy — Joseph was steadfast in his beliefs and inner convictions. Joseph remained true to his own inner world, despite his active participation in a vastly different outer world. Just like a “fish in the land.”

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## Chief Rabbi Mirvis



**Asarah B'Tevet** Fasting on a Friday? We will enter the coming Shabbat on empty stomachs. It's interesting to note that we generally don't have fast days on Fridays. The reason for this is that we want to ensure we have the stamina and energy needed to properly prepare for Shabbat. However, every good rule has an exception, and the exception in this case is the tenth of Tevet.

On rare occasions, when it falls on a Friday, we fast on that Friday. And this is exactly what will happen this coming Friday. So, why is this the case? In the book of Ezekiel, chapter 24, we are given details of the events that transpired on the 10th of Tevet. The prophet uses the term "Etzem Hayom Hazeh," meaning "in the midst of this day," which is the very same phrase used in the Torah in Parshat Acharei Mot to describe Yom Kippur. Therefore, just as we always fast on Yom Kippur on the 10th of Tishrei, regardless of which day of the week it falls on, so too, we observe a fast on the 10th of Tevet. One might wonder: why is Asarah B'Tevet, of all the fast days, elevated to such a position? Why must it be kept on the specific day? The 10th of Tevet marks the day when Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army laid siege to Jerusalem during the time of the First Temple. What followed was the destruction of the First Temple, and a series of catastrophes began to unfold. The Second Temple was later built, but many tragedies continued, and eventually, the Second Temple was also destroyed, leading to our exile. Asarah B'Tevet was the original cause—the first event that, had a domino effect, setting many other tragic events in motion. Consider a river with polluted waters. The solution would not be to focus on cleaning the water downstream—that will only help temporarily. The real solution is to go upstream to address the root cause of the pollution. Asarah B'Tevet calls upon us to reflect on the ways in which we, as a nation, sinned, leading to these catastrophic events. And to this day, more than any other sin committed by our people, we recall Sinat Chinam—causeless hatred. In my Drashot, Divrei Torah, and Shiurim, you may have noticed that I frequently speak about Jewish unity. This is the central message of Asarah B'Tevet. It is the root cause of many of the challenges we face as a Jewish nation to this very day. We must never stop and never tire of emphasising the importance of unity among our people. Indeed, by fasting this Friday, in such an uncharacteristic way, let us remember this root cause. Let's direct our focus toward ensuring Jewish unity, not just for today, but well into the future. I wish you a Tzom Kal and Shabbat Shalom.

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### **Parshas Vayechi**

#### **Rabbi Yochanan Zweig**

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Reb Meir ben Reb Dovid HaCohen. Business as Usual

Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years [...] (47:28). Rashi (ad loc) points out that this week's parsha opens without the customary delineation that is commonly found between two parshios. That is, the Torah is generally broken up into paragraphs and chapters – known as "p'suchos" and "stumos." A chapter ending is indicated by leaving the rest of the line open and a paragraph break is delineated by leaving nine letter spaces blank. However, this parsha begins with no break in the writing from the previous parsha. Rashi goes on to explain that this parsha is "sossum" or "sealed" because this parsha contains the death of Yaakov Avinu, and once he passed away the hearts and eyes of Bnei Yisroel were closed from the suffering of the enslavement, for that is when the Egyptians began to enslave them. Yet this Rashi is directly contradicted by another Rashi in Parshas Va'eira (Shmos 6:16). Rashi says there that the reason the Torah records the age of Levi when he passed away is to teach us how many years the enslavement lasted. As Rashi explains, Levi lived longer than any of his brothers and "as long as Yosef and his brothers were alive the enslavement did not begin." Levi died approximately seventy-seven years after Yaakov Avinu. So, at which point did the enslavement begin?

Furthermore, Rashi's use of the word "sossum" to indicate that this parsha is sealed is a little hard to understand. The halachic definition of a "stuma" would include a nine letter gap, and Rashi's whole point is that here we have no gap at all. Moreover, Rashi seems to be taking poetic license to describe the pain and suffering of Bnei Yisroel ("The eyes and

hearts of Bnei Yisroel were sealed from the enslavement"). This is odd; Rashi doesn't write poetry – Rashi gives us the literal meaning of the words of the Torah. What does Rashi mean by these words? A careful reading of Rashi reveals that he is describing a remarkable phenomena. Rashi is telling us that the eyes and hearts of Bnei Yisroel were closed; that is, they were in denial. Similar to Germany in the early 1930's, the Jewish population refused to "see" or "understand" the looming calamity that was slowly beginning to take shape. The Germans started by publishing virulently antisemitic propaganda – portraying the Jews first as greedy and immoral, and eventually characterizing them as inhuman vermin to be exterminated. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the Jewish population willfully ignored the warning signs, refusing to see or internalize what was really going on. Even many years later, the German Jewish population was shocked that "their" country and "fellow citizens" suddenly turned on them and shipped them off to die. In truth, by 1939 it had already been a decade in the making. Part of the human condition is to ignore what we don't want to see. That is what Rashi is teaching us here. Rashi points out that the parsha containing the death of Yaakov is written like every other verse of the Torah, with a one-space gap between the verses. The Torah writes it thusly to indicate that this event was not differentiated from anything else in their lives. The transition of Yaakov's death, which should have been understood as a momentous signpost on the road to their enslavement, passed without anyone noticing – they sealed their eyes and hearts to the coming slavery. The entire generation was in denial of the looming enslavement, ignoring the slowly changing attitude of the Egyptians that began with the death of Yaakov. By the time Levi passed away, the transition of the Egyptian attitude was complete and the actual slavery began. What a Blessing

And he blessed them that day, saying, "In you shall Yisroel bless, saying, 'May Hashem make you as Ephraim and as Menashe'" (48:20). This week's parsha introduces us to the blessing that Jewish fathers all over the world bless their sons on Friday nights. The text of this bracha is that which Yaakov Avinu composed when Yosef introduced his sons Ephraim and Menashe to Yaakov, "May Hashem make you as Ephraim and as Menashe." There has been much speculation as to what Yaakov intended when he blessed them. After all, very little is known about the actual lives of Ephraim and Menashe. Why would he designate them specifically as the paradigm with which all parents should bless their children? One of the more common answers given is that Ephraim and Menashe are the first two brothers in the Torah who don't have a bitter rivalry or fight with each other. After all, the Torah is replete with stories of brothers in conflict: Kayin and Hevel, Yishmael and Yitzchak, Yaakov and Eisav, Yosef and his brothers, etc. Still, this approach is difficult to accept. First, there are many examples of brothers in the Torah who show no specific animosity to one another: Shem, Cham, and Yefet, and Avraham Avinu and his brothers, to name a few. Second, we have no specific indication that Ephraim and Menashe had a unique fraternal relationship. Third, it isn't a law of nature that brothers have to be in conflict, many famous brothers lived in harmony, such as Moshe and Aharon. Finally, it is highly improbable that none of the children of the other shvatim had positive sibling relationships; why should Yaakov single out only Yosef's children for that reason? Ramban (ad loc) comments that this bracha was a specific blessing to Yosef. When the possuk says, "in you shall Yisroel bless" this refers to Yosef himself. This sentiment is echoed by Targum Yonason Ben Uziel, who adds that this bracha is also given on the day of a boy's bris. Ramban also says (48:15) that Yosef may have actually had more children after Yaakov and his family settled in Egypt, but this bracha was specifically regarding only Menashe and Ephraim. If this bracha is really for Yosef, why does Yaakov specifically designate only Ephraim and Menashe? Yaakov is alluding to a very powerful message, one that would be crucial to all generations of Bnei Yisroel to come. Yosef had come to Egypt as a slave, sat in jail for a few years, and then rose to the highest possible position of authority, below only Pharaoh himself. Egypt was a place well-known for immorality and idol worship. Yet, through it all, Yosef was able to maintain who he was and even raise children with the same values that he had absorbed from the house of his father Yaakov.

Yaakov is alluding to this remarkable accomplishment and foretelling the importance of this for future generations. We bless our children that they should be like Ephraim and Menashe; children who grew up in an environment totally bereft of holiness, yet persevered in representing the values of their father and the Jewish people. Yosef raised children under the most difficult of circumstances and they turned out exactly like him. This is also why Yaakov gives them the ultimate recognition by replacing Yosef with them among the shvatim, each one heading his own tribe. This further explains why we give our sons this blessing on the day of their bris. The day of one's bris a child is "brought into the covenant of Avraham Avinu." Avraham Avinu came from a family of idol worshippers and rose to make it his mission to bring Hashem into a world that had no knowledge of His presence. The very definition of being a Jew is bringing Hashem into this world by carrying on the values of your ancestors, no matter what life's circumstances may bring.

[[www.torahweb.org/torah/2025/parsha/rdst\\_vayechi.html](http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2025/parsha/rdst_vayechi.html)]

Rabbi Daniel Stein

Continuity Can Be Dangerous

Persistent and continuous study is an essential feature, if not the very definition of *ameilus beTorah* and an indispensable precursor to becoming a *talmid chacham*. Even minor or brief interruptions can have potentially deleterious and irreparable effects. For example, the Gemara (Kesubos 63a) relates that at the behest of his wife, Rabbi Akiva spent the first twelve years of his marriage away from home learning Torah in yeshiva. When the stipulated stint of twelve years had concluded, Rabbi Akiva made his way back with his newly acquired cadre of students in tow, all the while expressing the gratitude he felt towards his wife for her heroic sacrifice as he declared "my Torah knowledge and yours is actually hers." When the entourage reached his house, before he could enter, Rabbi Akiva overheard his wife expressing regret about his imminent arrival saying, "if he would listen to me, he would sit and study for another twelve years." Rabbi Akiva took this disclosure to heart and returned to the yeshiva forthwith to complete a full tour of twenty-four years. Even though Rabbi Akiva had already traveled home and was standing at the foot of his door, he did not pop inside for a few minutes or stop to have a cup of coffee with his wife for he was afraid that even the slightest interlude might diminish his momentum and disturb his concentration. In the inimitable words of Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, sometimes twelve plus twelve does not equal twenty-four.

Nonetheless, Rashi (Breishes 47:28) interprets the seamless and uninterrupted continuity between Parshas Vayigash and Parshas Vayechi negatively, as he explains, "This section is totally closed because as soon as Yaakov died the hearts and eyes of Israel became closed due to the misery of the bondage which they then began to impose upon them. Alternatively, because Yaakov wished to reveal the date of the End of Days but the vision was closed from him." Why is the lack of a break between these two parshiyos in the Torah a cause for concern? Isn't uninterrupted study the hallmark of true diligence and *hasmadah*? If anything, this textual anomaly should be an indication that Yaakov and his sons were constantly learning and *shteiging* away during this period.

Rav Yitzchok Meir Morgenstern (Likkutei Yam Hachochmah) answers that while consistent and continuous study is critical and laudable, if left

unqualified and undefined, it can have adverse and harmful consequences. Without proper framing and context, intense Torah learning has the potential to become a completely self-absorbed exercise, detached from its spiritual roots and character. For this reason, the Gemara (Megillah 32a) stresses the importance of closing the sefer Torah after it has been read and states, "the greatest among them should furl the sefer Torah, for this is the most distinguished honor, and the one who furls it takes the reward of all of them." Rav Yaakov Leizer of Pshevorsk suggests that the role of furling the sefer Torah is to provide an opportunity to reflect upon the Torah's Divine properties and significance, which is impossible and inappropriate to ponder while actively engaged in the pursuit of studying and processing its content. Rashi (Vayikra 1:1) claims that the purpose of the blank spaces in between the subjects and subsections of the Torah was for the sake of contemplation. These respites are intended not only for analysis but also for emphasizing that Torah study is first and foremost a religious obligation and endeavor. Hence, when these breaks are missing and the parshiyos flow directly from one to the next, it is a sign that the objective of coming closer to Hashem is in danger of becoming overlooked and obscured.

Chassidic doctrine holds that Torah should ideally be studied for the sake of *dveikus*, as the Tanya (Chapter 5) writes "study for its own sake is to study with the intent to attach one's soul to God through the comprehension of the Torah." To accomplish this goal, the Baal Shem Tov (Tzavaas Harivash) advises, "when studying Torah, pause and rest a bit every hour to bond yourself to Hashem, even though while you are immersed in the study of Torah itself this is not possible." Rav Chaim of Volozhin (Nefesh Hachaim, Chapter 4) passionately rejects this outlook and argues that the Torah is not a vehicle for clinging to God but the very representation of God in comprehensible terms. Therefore, by studying Torah for the sole purpose of understanding the material, one is simultaneously and inevitably engaged in an act of *dveikus*, since the Torah and Hashem are indeed synonymous. However, even though Rav Chaim of Volozhin believes that pausing Torah study to contemplate God would be nonsensical, counterproductive, and even offensive, he does concede that time should be dedicated to teaching and intermittingly reinforcing the precise nature and import of Torah learning. It is lamentable that some veteran talmidim, after spending years immersed in the yeshiva system and *sedorim*, emerge having never stopped to properly appreciate the spiritual function of Torah study and its relationship to the religious goal of connecting with God.

The Tenth of Teves is a fast day commemorating the beginning of the siege of Yerushalayim by Nebuchadnezzar which eventually led to the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash and the Babylonian exile. A siege is designed to sever the inhabitants that are inside the city from the markets and supplies that are outside the city. Perhaps, part of the mourning on this day revolves around the separation that sometimes develops between our external actions and the internal thoughts that they are designed to evoke. Only if we pause to consider and internalize the spiritual implications of our mitzvos, and specifically talmud Torah, can we begin to combat and overcome the personal siege that exists within ourselves and aspire to restore our continuous connection with Hashem once again.

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