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HaRav Nebenzahl on Parshat Vayechi

Staff Dvar Torah by Rav Hershel Berkin

Alumni Dvar Torah by Rabbi Elly Krimsky (5747-48)

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Parshat Vayechi 5770

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Alumni and parents, if you are in Israel next week, please join us at the annual Shana Alef Emunah Seminar this Monday, January 4th.

At the Yeshiva:

10:30 AM Rav Bina and Rav Amos Luban

At Matan, 30 Rashbag Street:

2:00 PM Rav Thaler - A Walk Through Jewish History

3:00 PM Dr Gerald Shroeder - Age of the Universe

5:00 PM Rabbi Lawrence Kelleman - Torah MiSinai

7:30 PM Rabbi David Orlofsky - Why be Jewish

Please RSVP to emunah@yna.edu

College break is here!!! Welcome to all of the alumni coming in every day to rejoin the Yeshiva for a few precious weeks.

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Snapshot

Sunday: Two students formerly from our Hesder program who participated in "Operation Cast Lead" addressed the Yeshiva and shared some of their experiences on the first anniversary after the war. Excerpts below.

Sunday Night: Rabbi David Pinto, noted *mekubal* and head of 'Orot Chaim U'Moshe' institutions gave a moving address to the Yeshiva. [Click here](#) to watch.

Monday: The Yeshiva visited [Yad Vashem](#), the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem.



Rabbi David Pinto

Operation Cast Lead Experiences

Due to the sensitive nature of the talk, the soldiers requested not to have their names published.

We would like to begin by introducing ourselves as alumni of Netiv Aryeh. We began our Shana Aleph four years ago and remained for Shana Bet until Purim at which point we joined the Israeli army and served for fourteen months. We feel that today, Asarah B'Tevet, is a fitting day to speak to you, for it is the anniversary of an eventful day for us and our Golani unit. I am referring to the events which took place one year ago in Gaza as part of Operation Cast Lead. We feel it is especially important that we speak to you today, as we have discovered that many people in this room are not even aware of the war which we fought last year at this time. It is vital that you understand that Zionism is not limited to summer camps and rallies, but you must identify with what is happening in Eretz Yisrael, even if you are unable to be here physically.



Operation Cast Lead

It all began last year on Shabbat Chanukah. We decided to spend our free Shabbat here in Yeshiva. We returned to our rooms on Shabbat morning after participating in the Yeshiva's customary all-night Shabbat Chanukah mishmar, when we noticed one of our cell phones ringing. The phone stopped ringing and then immediately rang again. We looked at each other not knowing whether to answer. After looking at the screen and seeing "four missed calls", we knew that the matter was urgent and we had better answer the phone. The voice on the other end was our officer instructing us to return to our base as soon as possible.

We were told to make our way to the Central Bus Station.

Remember, given that it was Shabbat, there were no buses running. We were able to find a taxi from the Old City to the bus station. We were the first soldiers to arrive there, but given that we were not the only soldiers spending a free Shabbat in Jerusalem, we were eventually joined by what seemed to be over two hundred fellow soldiers. Many of them already knew that we were preparing for war. We arrived at our base and were told that on Sunday night we were going to cross over into the Gaza strip and our first task was to provide cover for another Golani unit. Shortly thereafter we were to take over a row of seven houses known by army intelligence as locations housing terrorists and with underground tunnels leading to other locations. Our unit was divided into three sections, each assigned two or three of these houses.

Although we were told that our advance would begin within twenty-four hours, it was a full week before we actually entered Gaza. You can imagine the anxiety caused by this wait. The week, in addition to training, was filled with classes - Torah shiurim as well as ones involving army intelligence. We could not believe that we were about to put into practice all that we had learned and trained for, these past nine months. As frightened as we all were, we found strength in the incredible sense of achdut that existed among the soldiers.

Everyday groups of Chabad emissaries arrived to distribute books of Tehillim as well as tzitzit. What an incredible sight it was to see two secular Jews arguing over a pair of tzitzit. I even heard one of them say that there was no need for a bullet-proof vest, for the tzitzit served as protection. Shabbat had finally arrived. There were always a few non-religious Jews who joined us for Kabbalat Shabbat, but this week the attendance was greater than there was room in the base's shul. We decided to move to the basketball court outside. We were joined by the army's chief Rabbi who provided us with words of chizuk the entire Shabbat. It was during the Shabbat meal that we were informed that we would definitely enter Gaza within the next twenty-four hours. Shabbat morning we davened, had our second Shabbat meal, before pandemonium set in. We were told to gather everything and board the buses - the time had finally arrived.

We arrived at the Gaza Strip greeted by mushroom clouds of smoke - we were paralyzed with terror. The Arabs were shooting from one end and our own fire was shooting back from the other end. We were to enter between the lines of fire. Our commander instructed us to get the job done, do whatever we could to insure the safety of ourselves and our fellow soldiers, and equally important to do our utmost not to harm any civilians. We then all stood reciting Tehillim and Tefillat HaDerech and any other prayer someone may have thought appropriate. We were laden with ammunition making the four km walk a very difficult one. Under the cover of darkness we proceeded, cut a hole in a fence and went in. The muddy grounds caused by the rains of the past few days did not help our situation.

Mortars were falling all around us. One of them fell a mere fifty km in front of us injuring sixteen of our soldiers. We were trained in basic first aid, bandaging legs, stop bleeding, etc. but none of us was prepared for having to take care of sixteen soldiers with horrific injuries. We managed to bring them all safely back to what was our base. We lay down low, actually sinking into the freezing January mud, trying to avoid being spotted. When we were told that we could now get up, my legs failed to respond - they had become frozen in the mud. A fellow soldier dragged me to the side and we proceeded to warm each other up. For the next

day and a half a nearby orchard became our home. We were under strict orders to do everything in pairs. You need a drink during the night, find a partner, you need the bathroom - find a partner. Going anywhere alone is an invitation to kidnappers. That afternoon the first soldier of Golani was killed - Dvir Emanuellof hy"d.

The following afternoon, we made our way towards a factory that had been blown up. A large mound of gravel was supposed to provide us cover and protection. Our job was to provide cover for another Golani unit who was trying to take over the town. We were situated between two refugee camps and our task was to try to prevent terrorists from coming from the other town coming to assist them. Word came back to us that thirteen of our soldiers had been ambushed. Half of our unit was called in to assist. We were among those offering assistance. We approached the town to find it blown to smithereens. By the time we were finished three more of our fellow soldiers had lost their lives.

One year ago, the morning of Asarah B'Tevet was an especially trying day for our unit. We had received word that a paratrooper had been killed. It was on this day that the time had come to carry out the second part of our mission - to take over the seven houses. As we walked towards the house, a mortar suddenly fell right in front of us. We were taught that being within 5m of a mortar could be fatal and being within 15m could cause serious injuries. We were very close. A miracle happened - it did not explode, there was no shrapnel. With no time to reflect, we dove down trying to get out of the line of fire. One of our fellow soldiers kept repeating "I should be dead". With Hashem's help, we did not suffer a single injury. We finally reached the first house. We employed rockets to clear any objects in the way to make the entrance easier. Our commander, accompanied by three soldiers, proceeded to the house to make sure that it was empty. Many of these houses were booby-trapped either with explosives or with gas tanks that would blow up if hit by a bullet or other form of ammunition. They walked into the room and spotted an RPG. A member of the bomb unit was then summoned to dismantle the bomb. As he entered the house he was immediately shot. Two other officers and two soldiers were called in to assist. We discovered later that there was one terrorist in the house and two hiding on the roof. The combination of the explosives in the house and the ones we threw eventually blew up the entire house with many people still inside. Fortunately as well as unfortunately only one life on our side was lost.

Given that the halacha demands that all body parts be buried we decided the least we could do for him was to collect his body parts for burial. This was not an easy task, we identified an arm and many other parts that were unidentifiable and handed them to the medics asking them to take proper care of them.

We entered one of the houses which provided us with some protection from the freezing cold. This house was to serve as our shelter for the next few days. We went to make sure the rooms were clear - found gas canisters just waiting to be lit up in flames. One of our criteria for choosing a house was that it had to have many inner rooms - remaining in outer rooms made us easy targets. We finally found a house which met this requirement and we all camped out in the same room. We took turns guarding the front door and the windows. You must keep in mind that the food supply was not very much. Every two days a delivery would arrive with two rolls and two cans of tuna per person.

Guard duty was frightening. We stayed on the top floor with instructions to shoot anything that moves at the bottom of the staircase. Guard duty meant sitting for

two hours praying that everything would be quiet. As guards we realized that everyone out there wanted to kill us and everyone in the house was relying on us. With Hashem's help the entire week was quiet. We finally left on Motzaei Shabbat. The trek back through the mud was not easy. The soldier bringing up the rear had sunk into the mud, it was only thanks to the officer doing a headcount that we noticed he was missing. We went back to pull him out, not an easy task considering how big he was. What a feeling of relief when we finally arrived on our side.

This is a brief description of our experience during those two weeks last year. Unfortunately a heavy price was paid in defense of our citizens as ten precious lives were lost.

We would just like to conclude by saying that we felt Hashem's Guiding Hand every step of the way. We are not asking you to join the army, we are not even asking you to make aliyah. Our main purpose here is to instill in you the importance of identifying with your fellow Jews and understanding that we are all one big family.

HaRav Nebenzahl on Parshat Vayechi

HaRav Nebenzahl asks that his Divrei Torah are not read during Tefillah or the Rabbi's sermon

Printer Friendly Sichva

"PERSONAL CROSSROADS"



REBUKE OF REUVEN

Yaakov Avinu says to Reuven: "Reuven, you are my firstborn, my strength and my initial vigor, foremost in rank and foremost in power" (*Bereishit* 49:3). As the first born you were worthy of receiving a greater share than your brothers - the *kehuna* and the kingdom, but because of your "water-like impetuosity, you cannot be foremost" (*ibid.* 4). Your acting in haste was responsible for that additional share being taken from you and granted to others (the *kehuna* to Levi and the kingdom to Yehuda). Where do we find your impetuosity? "Because you mounted your father's bed" (*ibid.*), referring to the incident related in *Parshat Vayishlach*: "Reuven went and lay with Bilha, his father's concubine" (*Bereishit* 35:22).

Pertaining to Moshe's chastisement of the Jewish people immediately before his death Rashi asks: "from whom did he learn to do this? From Yaakov Avinu who did not rebuke his sons except immediately before his death. He said: 'Reuven my son, I am telling you: why I did not rebuke you all of these years, it was so that you should not leave me and go join up with Esav, my brother'" (*Rashi Devarim* 1:3). How are we to understand this? Do we really believe that a rebuke would cause a *tzaddik* as great as Reuven to leave the fold and join the wicked Esav? Do Chazal not tell us that Leah named her son Reuven because she said "'*Reu*' - See the difference between '*beni*' - my son (Reuven) and the son of my father-in-law (Esav), for regarding Esav, the son of my father-in-law, even though he voluntarily sold his right of the firstborn, as it is written 'and he sold his birthright to Yaakov' (*Bereishit* 25:33), see what is written about Esav 'and Esav harbored hatred towards Yaakov' (*Bereishit* 27:41), however, in regard to my son, Reuven, even though Yoseph took the right of the firstborn from Reuven against his will, as it is written 'and when he defiled his father's bed his right of the firstborn was given to the sons of Yoseph' (*Divrei Hayamim* I 5:1), even so Reuven was not jealous of Yoseph, as it is written 'Reuven heard, and he rescued him from their

hand' (*Bereishit* 37:21)" (*Brachot* 7b)?

Furthermore Chazal tell us that Reuven accepted responsibility for his actions "Reuven confessed and was not embarrassed" (*Sotah* 7b) he confessed his sin with Bilha and sought forgiveness for his acts. Can we really assume that such a person would leave the fold and join Esav? The Gemara asks "why was it so necessary for Reuven to confess his sin in public, did not Rav Sheishet say: 'I view as audacious one who specifies his transgressions in public!'" The Gemara then responds "so that his brothers should not be suspected by their father Yaakov of committing the sin of moving Yaakov's bed" (*Sotah* 7b). We see that when it came to this incident, Reuven's actions were that of a great *tzaddik*, can we really suspect him of joining Esav?

There are many more sources we can cite from Chazal proving just how righteous Reuven was. The Gemara asks "why did Reuven merit that Betzer, the city of refuge that was in his territory, be mentioned first in regard to rescue? Because he was the first to pursue rescue in the case of Yoseph, as it is stated: 'and Reuven heard and he saved him from their hands' (*Bereishit* 37:21)" (*Makkot* 10a). Furthermore, the *pasuk* states: "Reuven returned to the pit, and behold! Yoseph was not in the pit!" (*Bereishit* 37:29). Where did Reuven return from, why was he not present when Yoseph was sold? Chazal tell us "he was occupied with his sack-cloth and fast in penitence for having disturbed his father's couch" (Rashi on *Bereishit* 37:29). The Midrash adds that Hashem said to Reuven: "you opened with repentance first, your descendant is destined to be the one to bring the Jewish people to repent and who is that? It is Hoshea son of Be-eri" (*Midrash Agada Bereishit* 37). Would we think for a moment that such a person would join the ranks of Esav?

CROSSROADS

Perhaps this does not refer to Reuven actually joining Esav's side but that he would pity himself for being born to the house of Yaakov, for in the house of Esav they would never treat him like this. Even if he does not actually leave, the thought may enter his mind, rendering his piety lukewarm. That minor slide can, G-d forbid, continue until it leads to a great fall. He may be a great *tzaddik* now but should he think that life is better in the house of Esav this will propel him lower and lower. My esteemed teacher HaRav Dessler zt"l used to explain that a person constantly finds himself at a crossroad in life for each person the choice to make is individual. Someone brought up by the Cossacks does not have the choice of whether to learn R' Akiva Eiger or R' Shimon Shkop. His choice is rather whether he should murder the victim he is stealing from or should he steal without murdering. If he chooses the path of the *tzaddik* and only steals then he has risen to a higher level. Such a person has the potential to rise higher and higher until eventually he can become a *talmid chacham*. The Vilna Gaon, however, was not faced with the choice of whether or not to desecrate the Shabbat but whether to learn twenty-two hours that day or only twenty one hours and fifty nine minutes. If he were to make the wrong choice, he would then fall to a lower level and G-d forbid perhaps fall lower and lower. A person always has a choice of good or bad before him. If he chooses the good path he raises himself to a higher level and his choices are then on a higher level. If he makes the wrong choice, then he may, G-d forbid, descend to a lower level of choice.

SMALL SINS, GRAVE CONSEQUENCES

Even if such an attitude would not result in Reuven himself descending to a lower level, perhaps it would have a detrimental effect on his children this may have been what Yaakov Avinu feared. Chazal ask 'for what reason was our father Avraham punished that his children were enslaved in Egypt for two hundred and ten years? Shmuel said because he presumed to ask for confirmation concerning the decrees of G-d, as it is stated: 'My L-rd Hashem, Whereby shall I know that I am to inherit it' (*Bereishit* 15:8)" (*Nedarim* 32a). Avraham sincerely wished to know whether he had the merit to inherit *Eretz Yisrael*. His intentions were noble, but his choice of words may lead someone to think that he doubted whether Hashem would keep His word. Because of this *Klal Yisrael* descended lower and lower until they reached the level where in the words of the Rambam "It almost came to pass that the great tree that Avraham Avinu had planted was uprooted and the sons of Yaakov would have returned to their wanderings and aimlessness and the errors of the world ..." (*Hilchot Avodat Kochavim* 1:3). The Jewish people almost forgot that there was a Creator who guides the world. It begins with small sins but the consequences can be very grave.

We are still affected by some of the infractions of our forefathers. Reuven's sin with Bilha, for example, led to his tribe forfeiting the *kehuna* and the kingdom for eternity. By the same token, the mitzvot of our forefathers hold us in good stead. We constantly mention the merit of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and the fact that Yitzchak was willing to sacrifice himself upon the altar. The descendants of Aharon are the only ones who may serve in the Beit HaMikdash because of the exalted status of their ancestor which they inherited, while the right to the kingdom belongs exclusively to the descendants of David HaMelech.

SPIRITUAL LEGACIES

Each of the tribes has their own spiritual characteristics passed down as a legacy from father to son. Just as each of us has a spiritual inheritance passed down to us from Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, so too members of different tribes have their own spiritual characteristics passed down to them from the head of their tribe. The Talmud records examples of this: "there was this man who would always say 'judge my case in court'". He would never agree to compromise and insisted on bringing every matter to court. Our Sages therefore said: "learn from it that he comes from the tribe of Dan, as it is written 'Dan will judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel' (*Bereishit* 49:16)" (*Pesachim* 4a). The man refused to compromise on anything - everything had to go to court. Given that Dan was imbued with the tendency to judge, there was a very good chance that the man descended from Dan. Similarly, "There was this man who would go around saying 'on the shore of the sea I will establish a palace', they investigated and found out that he came from the tribe of Zevulun that which is written 'Zevulun shall dwell by the seashores' (*Bereishit* 49:13)" (*Pesachim* 4a). (This can explain why when the prophet Yonah decided to "flee" from Hashem, to go from *Eretz Yisrael* to *Chutz la'Aretz* where there is less *Hashgacha Pratit* (see Rashi Yonah 1:3), he fled to the sea. Why did he choose the sea rather than a different part of *Eretz Yisrael*? Because he belonged to the tribe of Zevulun (see *Yerushalmi Sukkah Perek 5, Halacha* 1) and "Zevulun shall dwell by the seashores", and when he fled, his tendency was to run away to the sea). These are but a few small illustrations of how each tribe has its own specific spiritual makeup that is passed down from generation to generation.

Even if Reuven himself would never leave Yaakov for Esav, any slight sympathy towards Esav would be passed down to future generations and may possibly mean

spiritual destruction for his later descendants, G-d forbid.

ETERNAL LIFE

We must be aware that when it comes to spirituality, any upward climb means life while any lower descent spells death. Chazal tell us "he who learns from his fellowman a single chapter, a single *halacha*, a single verse, a single Torah statement, or even a single letter, must treat him with honor" (*Avot* 6:3). He has given you new life! You are now a greater *talmid chacham* than you were before! The Torah is chaye olam eternal life. Every Rashi and Tosafot we learn, even those we do not remember gives us new life, for it raises us to a higher level. At a *siyum* we recite "we toil and receive reward and they toil and do not receive reward" (see *Brachot* 28b). Do others really work without compensation? Does everyone not get paid for their work? The difference is that they get paid when they produce results. Even were they to get paid before showing any results, without eventually producing results they would be fired. We, however, are rewarded for the work and toil itself even if we are as of yet unable to fully understand and retain that which we have learned. When it comes to the written Torah it is sufficient to simply read the *pasuk*, how much greater is the reward for one who works hard and succeeds in understanding the words of the Torah.

Ben Azzai who was one of the greatest scholars of his time said "all the Sages of Israel are in my estimation like a garlic peel except for this bald one (R' Akiva)" (*Bechorot* 58a). Ben Azzai said about himself: "a pity on you Ben Azzai that you did not study under R' Akiva" (*Nedarim* 74b) what a pity that you did not learn Torah from R' Akiva, because every word you learn is new life. In this world a person is either alive or G-d forbid, no longer alive. In the Next World a person's soul is divided into billions of micro units. Each separate unit can either be alive or dead. The Gemara tells us "each and every one will be burned by his fellow's canopy" (*Baba Batra* 75a). This may not refer to people on the level of Moshe Rabenu, but regarding ordinary *tzaddikim*, each will get burned by the honor his fellow *tzaddik* will receive in the Next World. He will think to himself "look at how much Gemara he learned in his lifetime why did I not learn as much as he did", another may say "look at the way he honored his parents and performed other acts of *chesed*", and so forth.

CONTRADICTIONS?

A *talmid chacham* once asked me is this life in the Next World? Do we not believe that the Next World will be filled with joy? What joy is there in getting burned in a fire? Sounds more like Gehinom to me! I answered him with an analogy we can relate to in this world. On the first night of Pesach we have a beautiful Seder. It is a Yom Tov with delicious food. We recall Hashem's taking us out from Egypt with great miracles while giving the Egyptians what they deserve. We drink four cups of wine to celebrate. All in all we are in very good spirits. Yet, in the midst of all this joy we feel sadness that we are not able to offer the *Korban Pesach* and *Chagiga*. Is it a contradiction to feel both joy and sadness? No! A person is able to feel joy on the one hand and sadness on the other. Similarly, the *halacha* states that one who lost his father and receives an inheritance recites two *brachot*: "*Dayan HaEmet*" on his loss and "*hatov vehameitiv*" for the inheritance. It is possible to feel the two things together I would hope that the loss of the father has more impact on him than his newfound wealth, but a certain sense of good feeling he cannot deny.

A person's soul contains parts which are good and portions which are dead for not

having fulfilled their expectations. Regarding damage caused by a pit in a public domain, the Torah tells us "and the carcass shall be his" damage is paid only for things that can die. There is a discussion as to whether one pays for broken vessels that fall into a pit. The Gemara asks: "are utensils subject to death?" To which the Gemara responds "their breakage is their death" (*Baba Kamma* 54a). The pieces of the vessel remain but if they cannot function as they did before they are considered dead. When a human being rises to a higher level he gains more life, but when he descends, in comparison to the level he was on before it is as if he is dead. He may have other virtues, but that part of him that could have been higher is now dead, relatively speaking.

MAKING EVERY DAY COUNT

The *pasuk* states "A path of life waits above for the intelligent one, so that his soul will turn away from the grave below" (Mishle 15:24) the intelligent person understands that he must rise higher in order not to fall. In this world terms we can remain stagnant, the soul, however, cannot remain in one place it either rises or descends. The Torah tells us: "now Avraham and Sarah were old, '*ba-im bayamim*' well on in years" (*Bereishit* 24:1). "*Ba-im bayamim*" can also mean that they arrived with their days - at the end of their lives they arrived equipped with their full days - not a moment of their life was spent in vain. A person who wastes time can spend one hundred and twenty years in this world and arrive at the next world with only twenty or thirty years of "life" - the rest of his years were wasted. Our goal must be to enter the Next World with all of our days - no time should be wasted on nonsense. There are people whose entire days are spent doing mitzvot, making a Kiddush Hashem, and bringing people closer to the Kingdom of Heaven they arrive with their days full. Many people, however, arrive in the Next World empty what did he do on this day? He played, he slept. Before he knows it the day is gone.

The *midrash* relates how R' Akiva was once in the midst of a *shiur* when he noticed that some of the participants fell asleep. He said to them: "How was it that Esther merited ruling over one hundred and twenty seven nations? Rather Hashem said, let Esther the daughter of Sarah who lived one hundred and twenty seven years come and rule over one hundred and twenty seven nations" (*Esther Rabba Parsha* 1:8). R' Akiva did not simply find the number one hundred and twenty seven written twice in Tanach. It is not mere coincidence that the number of years Sarah lived and the nations Esther ruled over are the same.

We may ask - why did R' Akiva see this as a way of waking the people from their slumber? Secondly, why does Sarah deserve to be rewarded for having lived that number of years? A person should be rewarded for giving life not for having lived it.

The *midrash* is trying to tell us that Sarah's life was lived to the fullest. If she lived for one hundred and twenty seven years, she utilized every possible moment. She deserves to be rewarded for having lived her life the way she did. R' Akiva was telling the people in the *shiur* that they should not be wasting their time. There is a time to sleep, however, the middle of R' Akiva's *shiur* is not the time to do it! Sarah having lived every minute to the fullest not only resulted in Esther ruling over such a vast area but allowed her to save her people. Had it not been for Esther's reign "relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place" (*Esther* 4:14). Thus in the merit of Sarah's having lived her life to the fullest, Esther was able to save the Jewish people.

There is an expression people use today to "kill time". Time cannot be killed, when you waste time then you are G-d forbid killing yourself! You have only one hundred and twenty years on this earth, when you waste it you have killed a part of yourself.

The Talmud teaches "if a disciple was exiled to a city of refuge, an 'Ir Miklat', they exile his teacher with him, for it says 'and he shall live', which implies providing him with arrangements that will enable him to live" (*Makkot* 10a) - the student cannot survive without the one who teaches him Torah. Similarly "if a teacher is exiled, his academy is exiled with him" (*ibid.*). The *talmid chacham* cannot survive without his Yeshiva. There is no life without the Torah. One who did not study Torah in his own town, can survive in the *Ir Miklat* without it. For those who do learn, learning is their life and thus we must insure that they will be able to continue to do so in the city of refuge. The punishment for accidental murder is exile, not death! Taking away their Torah is tantamount to sentencing them to capital punishment.

THE TENTH OF TEVET

This week we observed the fast of the Tenth of Tevet, referred to by the prophet as "the fast of the Tenth Month" (Zecharia 8:19). The prophet tells us that the fast is observed because "the king of Bavel has reached Yerushalayim on this day" (Yechezkel 24:2) this was the beginning of the siege on Yerushalayim. The actual destruction took place only a year and a half later, for we are informed that the siege took place on Tevet of the Ninth year of Tzidkiyahu's reign and the wall was broken through in Tammuz of the eleventh year, with the destruction taking place three weeks later. The Tanach tells us that the siege around Yerushalayim did not remain in effect during this entire time, for the Egyptians came to the aid of the Jewish people and Nebuchadnezzar's army had to be diverted to fight off the Egyptians. It was Hashem's will that the Egyptians saw something that resembled the bodies of their forefathers at sea and they returned home claiming "the Jews did this to our forefathers, how can we go help?" Should we not rather observe the final siege that led to the destruction? Perhaps we can explain that Nebuchadnezzar's initial siege was a time for the Jewish nation to repent and rise to a higher level. After believing all the false prophets who claimed that Nebuchadnezzar would not come, and recognizing the truth in the words of prophets such as Yirmiyahu and Tzania, should they not have repented and come closer to Hashem? By not doing so they in fact fell to a lower level it is this death that we commemorate on the Tenth of Tevet.

The Rambam tells us that these fasts we observe today are not only in commemoration of the sins of our forefathers. The fact that the *Beit HaMikdash* has not yet been rebuilt signifies that we are no better and the fast day is a time to repent. The *pasuk* states "He will heal us after two days; on the third day He will raise us up and we will live before Him" (Hoshea 6:2) - we have died twice - we hope Hashem will bring us life once again. May the words of the prophet that the "fast of the tenth month will be to the house of Judah for joy and for gladness" (Zecharia 8:19) come true speedily in our day. Amen.

Staff Dvar Torah
by Rav Hershel Berkin

The "Good" Life

Parshat Vayechi is a Parsha Stuma - closed - there are no blank spaces in the Sefer Torah between the end of Parshat Vayigash and the beginning of Vayechi. Chazal explain that this "closed" parsha refers to Yaakov's descent to Egypt and reunification with Yosef.

The pleasure these last seventeen years of his life brought Yaakov served to "close off" the many years of anguish he had suffered previously in his life. Yaakov's life was filled with difficulties - his brother wanted to kill him, he fled from home, had all of his possessions stolen from him, was deceived numerous times by Lavan, the numerous incidents involving his children culminating with the sale of Yosef and the appearance that he had been killed.

Chazal teach us that these last seventeen years of his life compensated for all that suffering.



R' Moshe David Valli, points out that the number seventeen is the numerical value of the word tov - good. These were seventeen good years. This explains why the pasuk stresses that "Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years" - it was during these years that Yaakov truly lived.

R' Valli then poses the following question: if this was the main part of Yaakov's life, why does the continuation of the pasuk state: "these were the days of Yaakov, the years of his life were seven years, and forty and one hundred years". In fact the first years of his life (the first 130) were filled with pain and anguish to the extent that we can derive from the opening pasuk that they weren't considered "living". Why then does the conclusion of the pasuk refer to his entire life as "years of his life", implying that they were all equal?

R' Valli explains that the pasuk is stressing that they all are fit to be called the years of his life; even the years filled with pain and anguish. The essence of a person's existence is to be a righteous Jew no matter what the circumstances are.

The Ramchal teaches us that one of the reasons a person is placed in this world is to try and withstand the many tests of faith and thereby come closer to Hashem.

Yaakov Avinu was able to remain committed to Hashem despite all the years spent in anguish - this closeness to Hashem is what life is all about.

For this reason, Chazal teach us that the evil are referred to as dead in their lifetime while the righteous are referred to as alive even after their death. Life is having a relationship with Hashem, the wicked appear alive but according to the true definition of life they are in fact dead. Tzaddikim on the caliber of Yaakov Avinu remain steadfast in their commitment to Hashem no matter how much they are suffering, their life is defined by mitzvot and not by material gain.

May we be zoche to stand up to all of the tests that Hashem may send our way and merit to attain true life.

Alumni Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Elly Krinsky (5747-48)

Differentiated Learning Styles

Differentiated Learning styles has become one of the cardinal rules of pedagogy. Of course, as most great ideas, it finds its source in Tanach and Chazal. King Shlomo warned us to educate our children based upon their individual paths (Mishlei 22:6); Chazal taught us based upon the latter that we have children at the Pesach Seder with unique inclinations and we need to address them differently.

In Parshas Vayechi, Yaakov Avinu struggles with his relationship with Ephraim and Menashe. First we encounter the debate between Yaakov and his son Yosef as to which hand would hover over which son's head during the brachah (blessing.) Secondly, we find Yaakov elevating Ephraim and Menashe to the level of tribe, so at times, we count Ephraim and Menashe as 2 of the 12 Shivtei Kah (tribes of God).

Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky in his Emes L'Yaakov teaches us a very important lesson about differentiated learning. Most understand that Yosef desired the stronger hand over his b'chor (elder child) while Yaakov wanted the more resilient hand over the spiritually superior child. Rav Yaakov argues that Yaakov endeavored to place his stronger hand on Ephraim because Ephraim needed more help.

When Yosef named his sons, Menashe's name is tied to Eretz Yisrael while that of Ephraim referenced their dwelling in Egypt. Furthermore, advances Rav Yaakov, it seems clear that Egyptian names favor the Hebrew letters 'peh,' 'resh' and 'ayin' i.e. Paraoh, Potifar, Tzafnat Paneyach, Shifra and Puah, the Egyptian names of the midwives. Ephraim falls into that category as well; hence, it seems to be an Egyptian name. Menashe's name reminds us of Yosef's dislodging from his family; Ephraim's name, according to Rav Yaakov's argument, is Egyptian. So to put this into modern day imagery, imagine that Yosef named his eldest Chayim Yankel, a European Ashkenazi name, and his second son Steven, an explicit Anglo name. Yaakov therefore felt that 'Steven' needed more chizuk (spiritual strengthening) than Chayim Yankel. For this reason he learned Torah with Ephraim during the sunset years of his life.

Rav Yaakov suggests that for this reason Ephraim and Menashe were made Shvatim (tribes); because they were both the only grandchildren of Yaakov to be born in Egypt. They were clearly different from the rest of their cousins. Their challenge through the darkness of 'galut' (exile) would be much more pronounced, hence, elevating them to tribe status.

Yaakov teaches us a very important lesson. We need to make sure that students with greater challenges receive full Torah educations. Torah is not merely reserved for the most brilliant and erudite. Every Jew must be able to learn Torah at their level. If we need to provide them with tutoring, we will do it. One of the great outward miracles of the post Shoah Diaspora has been our collective ability to provide quality Torah education for our children, at such a high cost. We spare no expense to assure our children's liaison with and love for the Ribbono shel Olam and His Torah.

Moreinu v'Rabbenu Rosh Hayeshiva, Rav Aaron Bina Shlita, and the dedicated

ramim, m'chanchim and faculty on staff exemplify Yaakov Avinu's wisdom and dedication. As a proud alumnus I am reminded daily of the lessons I learned in Yeshiva regarding hatmadah (diligence) in limud Hatorah (Torah study), and the role models such as Harav Nebenzahl Shlita I had the privilege just to observe and with whom I merited to share a Beit Midrash.

Rabbi Krinsky serves as Rabbi of the Young Israel of Stamford, CT and Assistant Director of the Morris and Gertrude Bienenfeld Department of Jewish Career Development and Placement at Yeshiva University.

Visitor Log, Mazal Tov's, Tehillim List

Announcements from the Yeshiva

Mazal Tov

Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh wishes a Mazal Tov to:

- [Ariel](#) (5759-60) and Nava Cohen on the birth of a baby boy.
- [Joel](#) (5758, 61) and Shoshana Fogel on the birth of a baby boy.
- [Aharon](#) (5754) and Anat Wexler on the birth of a baby boy.
- Rabbi [Motty](#) (Staff 5761-64) and Shoshana Rabinowitz on the birth of twin boys.
- [Nicholas](#) Kett (5764-65) on his marriage to Shira Mann.
- [Andrew](#) Jay Cohen (5766) on his engagement to Lauren Tink.
- [Daniel](#) Schilowitz (5764-65) on his marriage to Rachel Cooper.

Visitors

The following people visited/learned in the Yeshiva:

- Rabbi Ben Packer (5760-61)
- Jeffrey Koppel (5767-68)
- Steven Lerner (5767-68)
- Stephen Fruchter (5768-69)
- Moshe Rothstein (5768)
- Evan Kollander (5769)
- Sam Fromson (5768-69)
- Rabbi Barry Lerer (5752)
- Eli Litwin (5768)
- Meir Fox (5768-69)
- Aytan Wachspress (5768)
- Samuel (Shmueli) Sondheim (5769)
- Isaac Levy (5768)
- Jon Gomberg (5767-68)

Tehillim List

The following members of our extended YNA family need our tefilot:

- Taube Yehudit bat Temma Gasia
- Yitzchak ben Shayna Ita
- Zev Eliezer ben Chaya Shayndel
- Rueven ben Tova Chaya
- Fruma bat Eeta
- Moshe Zanel ben Breindel

- Sima Rivkah bat Eidel
- Leah bat Eidel
- Chaim Shmuel Moshe ben Golda
- Aryeh Rephael ben Sarah
- Chaya Sarah bat Fanya Luna
- Yitzchak ben Tova
- Fraida Rachel bat Sarah Milcha
- Lea bat Bracha
- Miriam Rivka bat Adina Leah
- Dina Sarah bat Shaindel Mira
- Tali bat D'vorah Bina
- Tobah Pessal bat Esther
- Lottie Adina bat Claudia
- Orly bat Yaerah
- Miriam Naomi bat Sarah
- Dov Eliyahu ben Mindel Hudis
- Rahamim ben Miriam
- Hinda bat Sara Leah
- Rivka Zelda bat Bracha
- Dovid Ben Miriam
- Yaackov Chaim Meir ben Miriam
- Avraham ben Leah
- Chaim Naftali Yaakov ben Shifra Shaulah
- Michael Yosef ben Tzipora
- Gidon Shlomo ben Esther
- Haya Rebecca Rivka bat Jeanne Yaffa
- Temima Adina bat Keren Ronit
- Avraham ben Meela
- Bracha Sara bat Rivka Zelda
- Ita Blima bat Malka Fraidel
- Eliyahu ben Victoria
- Chaya Malka bat Rachel Braindel
- Elnatan Meir ben Devorah Ze'eva
- Yahel Liam Gittel bat Rachel
- Shifra Sheulah bat Chana Sarah
- Dovid Chaim ben Brina
- Natan Zelig ben Leah
- Refoel Chaim Simcha Binyamin ben Devorah Aliza
- Menachem Mendal Halevi ben Tova
- Akiva ben Gittel
- Aharon Dovid ben Elke Shprintza Machla
- Eitan Meir ben Rivka Ora
- Shimona Chaya bat Shintamar
- Yaacov ben Ester
- Sharona Charna bat Nechama Zvia
- Shaul ben Sulcha
- Ariel Avraham ben Chana
- Chaya Zeesil bat Tzivia Leah
- Batyah Leah bat Sarah

[Send Us Your Announcements](#)

Please, if you have any smachot or chas v'shalom, less happy occasions, [let our office know](#) so we can keep everybody updated. Are you visiting Israel? - [let us know!](#) We'd love to host you for a shabbat meal, davening, a shiur and would love for you to stop by.

Shabbat Shalom,

HaRav Aharon Bina, Netiv Aryeh
Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh

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