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CHANUKAH IN ST PETERSBURG

G-d blessed us with a wonderful Chanukah celebration in St. Petersburg FL with about 75 people attending. It was a joyous time with great Chanukah music, food, and message about the real miracle of Chanukah and importance of taking a stand when our religious freedoms are taken away from us. We were also reminded not to neglect the freedoms to worship G-d that we have today. Fortunately today we don't have to fight for the right to pray and gather together in our temples and we don't have to hide our gatherings and torah readings behind dreidel games.



NEW CONGREGATION IN PARIS

It is with a great joy that I can announce that after more than one year of preparation, the Adventist community in Paris is ready to start a new Jewish Adventist congregation in Paris. France is the third largest Jewish community in the world.

about 650,000 Jews live in France and half of them in Paris and suburb, it is time now to offer to this Jewish population a possibility to worship G-d in Yeshua the Messiah and also in their Jewish culture. We will have this new worship on January 6, at 7:00 pm, at the "Maison de l'Espérance", 13, rue Gracieuse, Paris (5e) métro Place Monge.

During more than one year we had two kind of meetings: first with the leaders of the Conference and the Union, the second with the leaders of the Messianic Jews in Paris. At these meetings we had very good talks about this new kind of worship, knowing that we wanted Jews to be happy and comfortable in our worship. That is why we want a contextualized worship. A worship where Jews will be accepted in their culture, history and heritage remembering that believers in Yeshua have many things to learn from their four thousand years of tradition and Biblical interpretation. Our worship will be in Hebrew and French, singing, praying, reciting some parts of the Jewish Siddur in Hebrew, but the drasha (sermon) will be in French to be sure that everyone will understand what is said. In the Jewish culture it is very appropriate to cover the head with a hat or a kippa to honor G-d who is above us, that is why everyone who wants to cover his head with a kippa during this worship will be welcomed to do it, and also to wear a talith in order to fulfill the commandment: **"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: "Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the L-rd, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes. Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your G-d. I am the L-rd your G-d, who brought you out of Egypt to be your G-d. I am the L-rd your G-d." (Numbers 15:38-41.)**

OVERVIEW

VAYECHI

GENESIS 47:28-50:26

Parasha

2

Newsletter

After 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close and summons Yosef. He has Yosef swear to bury him in the Machpela Cave, the burial place of Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka.

Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion that removes the status of firstborn from Reuven.

As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children.

Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder.

According to the Jewish tradition, Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of Eretz Yisrael and the teacher of Torah to the Jewish People.

Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving G-d.

Yaakov passes away at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the Cave of Machpela in Chevron.

After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families.

Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Efraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that G-d will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah.

YAAKOV'S LIFE WAS 147

In the beginning of this week's parasha, which is called "Vayechi Yaakov" and means "and Yaakov lived!", we read about the last seventeen years of Yaakov's life, which he spent in Egypt and where he passed away at the age of 147. The Parasha tells us about the blessings which Yaakov gave to his grandchildren and to his children. At the end of the Parasha, the Torah describes in great detail the honor given to Yaakov after his passing away as he was carried from Egypt to the family burial plot in Hebron. the name of the Parsha.

LIFE OF THE TWELVE PATRIARCHS

The Parasha ends with the passing of all of Yaakov's children. Joseph lived the shortest of his brothers. He passed away at the age of 110. Levi lived the longest and passed away at the age of 137.

YAAKOV DID NOT DIE!

Unlike Abraham and Yitzchak, the Torah doesn't use the word "death" to describe Yaakov's passing. As a result, our sages say, "Yaakov did not die!" The Talmud explains the above concept as follows: Abraham's son Yishmael and his descendants departed from Abraham's ways. Similarly, Yitzchak's son Esau and his descendants strayed from the teachings of Yitzchak. Yaakov was the only one of the patriarchs whose children all followed in their father's tradition.

Thus, our sages say, "Yaakov didn't die. For as long as his children are alive [continuing his ways] he too is alive." In other words, true life is not measured by the length of one's days. It is measured by the values one lives and the ability to transmit these values to future generations. Since Yaakov's children, grandchildren and great grandchildren continued in his footsteps, Yaakov is always considered alive even though he is waiting for the resurrection on the last day.

YAAKOV WAS THE FIRST "SICK"

The first time that the Torah mentions sickness is in this week's Parasha. In the beginning of the Parasha, the Torah tells us that Joseph is told "**Behold your father is sick.**" (Gen 48:1) Hearing this, Joseph took his two sons, Menashe and Ephraim and went to visit his father, Yaakov in Goshen. When Yaakov learns that Joseph has arrived, "**he strengthened**

himself and sat upon the bed.” (Gen 48:2)

On his sick bed, Yaakov says to Joseph, “Your two sons who were born to you in Egypt, before I came to Egypt, are like my own sons; Ephraim and Menashe as Reuben and Shimon shall be unto me.” (Gen 48:5) As a result, Ephraim and Menashe are the only grandchildren of Yaakov to be counted among the twelve tribes of Israel.

Rabbi Zalmen Marozov asks the question: Why is Yaakov the first one to be mentioned in the Torah that he became ill? He answers that the Midrash says that before Yaakov, people would not become sick but would pass away without any warning. Yaakov prayed that G-d let him know when his death was near so that he could pass along his last will and testament to his children and bless them before his passing. Thus, Yaakov was the first person to become sick before passing away.

LIKE EPHRAIM AND MANASSEH

The Torah States, He blessed them that day and said, “In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing: ‘May G-d make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.’” So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.” (Gen 48:20) It is a tradition to bless our sons every Shabbat evening with the blessing, “May the Almighty make you like Ephraim and Manasseh” because Ephraim et Manasseh grew up in the Diaspora amongst foreign influences and still remained devoted to the Torah.

The Shabbat evening blessing for girls is “to be like Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah.”

When Joseph brought his two sons, Menashe and Ephraim, to be blessed by their grandfather, Yaakov kissed and embraced them, and said to Joseph, “I didn’t think I would see your face and now, G-d let me see also your children.” (Gen 48:11) Yaakov’s fondness and admiration for these two grandchildren is clearly seen in the Parasha. In addition to giving Menashe and Ephraim special blessings, Yaakov appoints each as the head of a tribe in Israel. Menashe and Ephraim are Yaakov’s only grandchildren to merit becoming heads of tribes. In addition, Yaakov proclaims, “By these shall Israel bless saying, ‘May G-d make you as Ephrayim and as Menashe.’” (Gen 48:20) Jewish parents have used this phrase to bless their sons for thousands of years.

Rabbi Zalmen Marozov ask this question: What was special about Ephrayim and Menashe? And give this interesting answer (interesting for every parent). Our sages explain that Yaakov’s other children and grandchildren were raised under Yaakov’s guidance. This naturally

instilled in them the spiritual heritage and love of G-d. However, his son Joseph was sold into slavery at the age of seventeen and his grandson’s (Joseph’s children), Ephraim and Menashe were born and raised in Egypt, away from their grandfather. Yet they conducted their lives as befitting a grandchild of Yaakov. Menashe and Ephraim proved to Yaakov that the education he gave his son Joseph, during his youth remained with him and enabled him to transmit the same values to his children even in such an alien environment. Our sages translate the first verse of the Parasha, And Yaakov lived (Vayechi) in the land of Egypt seventeen years, that Yaakov’s seventeen years in Egypt were the years which he truly “lived” - they were the best years of his life. Seeing his two grandsons who were born and raised in

Egypt, brought the greatest pleasure to him. As a result, Yaakov gave a special blessing to these two grandchildren. “By you shall Israel bless, saying, ‘May G-d make you as Menashe and Ephraim,’ is Yaakov’s blessing to all generations that no matter what the conditions, we should have the will and strength to be connected to our heritage.

TRUE SIMCHA

Giving his blessing to Judah, Yaakov say “His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk.” (Gen 49:12) The Jewish tradition has associated these “white teeth” with Joy, simcha, since it is when we smile that we show our white teeth. The sages of Israel have also associated joy with the study of Torah because the Torah gives true simcha. A person immersed in Torah and Torah thought possesses a repository of happiness which not only fills his or her life, but can be shared with others. Such a person is able to be greater than the milkman. Those who study Torah often make the best therapists, because they have deep, spiritual insights to offer, reaching into eternal Jewish wisdom for an understanding of human nature. And because they have “stocked up” on happiness, troubles shared by others cannot overwhelm and defeat them.

But the Torah is for everyone, and affects everyone. In Psalm 119, King David wrote, “had your Torah not been my comfort, I would have perished in my affliction.” At the lowest of times, Jews for thousands of years have turned to Torah for the spiritual fortitude and well-being which our generation so sorely needs.

WHATEVER YOU WANT

Rabbi Chayim ben Atar explains the decline in longevity in Genesis with the following parable: A king who had many diamond mines gave the rough unpolished stones to craftsmen to bring out their great potential beauty. He promised that whoever would fulfill his duty and quota of polished stones would be rewarded generously.

He gave each worker many stones. One he gave 300,000 stones to work on.

Another he gave 350,000 stones etc. He allotted one day for each stone.

Each craftsman was to bring his stones back when he was completely finished.

When the time came and the king checked their work, he was greatly disappointed. Not only didn't they bring the stones to their greatest potential, but they even gave back many of them in worse shape than they were originally. The king was very upset. He punished the workers. He commanded the next generation of workers that they should be careful not to make the same mistake as their parents.

However, the king also realized that he would have to make it easier for the children to accomplish their task and not to overburden them with his expectations. So instead of giving them 300,000 stones, he gave them only one tenth (30,000 or 40,000) etc. The king thought to himself, "Once the children realize that they don't have as much work as their parents and that they will have to give an accounting and show their work sooner, they will be much more aware of the time when they have to return the diamonds and do a better job."

The same says the Ohr Hachayim is with life. Each one of us is the G-dly diamond which the person must polish. This is accomplished through faith and obedience to G-d. Each day of one's life has been allocated to polish one of his qualities.

In the beginning of creation, G-d gave mankind many qualities and a character which need to be developed. G-d gave to human beings hundreds and hundreds of years to accomplish this goal, but men failed. They oriented most of their energy to do evil.

As a result, G-d decided to shorten the time span. In the same time he gave men greater encouragement to fulfill their mission."

PRAYING FOR THE SICK

The Talmud relates the following story. Once, one of Rabbi Akiva's students became very ill and no one visited him. Rabbi Akiva went to visit him and, realizing that no one was attending to him, cleaned and washed his room. As a result, the student survived. Rabbi Akiva then told his students that not visiting one who is sick is "like spilling his blood!" In other words, it is everyone's responsibility to visit the person and make sure that the sick person's needs are met.

When the Talmudic sage, Rava, fell ill, he would ask that on the first day his sickness not be made known. After that, he would say, "Go out to the marketplace and announce that Rava has fallen ill."

Rava explained how this would help him, "My enemies will rejoice and in Proverbs (24:17) it says, 'Rejoice not when your enemy falls... lest G-d will see it and it will displease Him and He will turn away His wrath from him. As for those who care for me when they will hear of my illness, they will pray on my behalf.'"

Sources: These comments of the parasha are based on comments published by Rabbi Zalmen Pakouz, Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, Rabbi Ozer Alport, Rabbi Ari Kahn, Rabbi Noson Weisz, and Rabbi Avigdor Bonchek, from Aish HaTorah (Aish.com). By Rabbi Naftali Reich, Rabbi Berel Wein and Rabbi Yochanan Zweig, Rabbi Yissocher Frand from Torah.org (Project Genesis). By Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair from Ohr Somayach, by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky..

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HAFTARA

1Kings 2: 1-12

Yaakov is dying and give his last instructions to Yosef and other sons: [Yaakov] blessed Joseph, and said, “The G-d before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked, the G-d who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys; and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude on the earth.” (Gen. 48:15-16)

HAFTARAH: The Jewish tradition has made a parallel between Yaakov dying and King David dying and giving instruction to Solomon his son: “When David’s time to die drew near, he charged his son Solomon, saying: “I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, be courageous, and keep the charge of the L-rd your G-d, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn. Then the L-rd will establish his word that he spoke concerning me: ‘If your heirs take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel.’ “Moreover you know also what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner son of Ner, and Amasa son of Jether, whom he murdered, retaliating in time of peace for blood that had been shed in war, and putting the blood of war on the belt around his waist, and on the sandals on his feet. Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace. Deal loyally, however, with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table; for with such loyalty they met me when I fled from your brother Absalom. ... I swore to him by the L-rd, ‘I will not put you to death with the sword.’ Therefore do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man; you will know what you ought to do to him, and you must bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol.” Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. David spoke just before he died to Solomon as Yaakov spoke to Joseph, both of them were very concerned about the future of their descendents and their spiritual heritage.

BRIT HACHADASHA

Rev 21 & 22

We read this week the last parasha of Genesis. Yaakov is dying and calls Yosef and his brothers to bless them. In spite that most of the Christian commentaries are not very positive about Yaakov the Brit Hachadasha is proud to present him as one of Patriarchs loved by G-d. “I am the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob? He is not the G-d of the dead but of the living.” (Matt. 22:32.) I would say more, Yaakov succeeded where Abraham and Isaac failed. He succeeded to keep his twelve boys with G-d. Of course they were not a perfect family, they failed in many points, but Abraham had two boys, Ishmael and Isaac, Isaac followed the path of G-d, but not Ishmael. Isaac had two boys Esau and Yaakov, Yaakov followed the path of G-d but not Esau. However when we consider the family of Yaakov, we discover that his task was not easy, a lot of conflicts occurred in his family and among his four wives, he had to educate thirteen children and maybe more if he had more than one daughter. And at the end of his life he was a happy man to see that all his twelve boys followed G-d, they became the twelve tribes of Israel and became so good in their spiritual life that the new Jerusalem will have twelve gates, one for each tribe of Israel “It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Rev 21:12.) No one of us can enter the new Jerusalem, without entering by one of the gates. Yeshua said “I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.” (John 10:1.) We know that the true gate is Yeshua, we cannot enter the gate without Yeshua “Therefore Jesus said again, ‘I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.’” (John 10:7.) Since the gate is Yeshua, we can enter only by faith in Yeshua, but since on the gates were written the name of the twelve tribes of Israel, we must reflect the transformed characters of the twelve sons of Yaakov. It is one of the seven blessings of the book of Revelation. “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.” (Rev 22:14.)