



The era of the First Holy Temple was replete with both the greatest wonders and the greatest temptations. Although miracles were daily occurrences, the people succumbed to the temptation of idol worship which prevailed among the nations of the world at that time. Destruction came upon the Jewish nation slowly, and though the prophets begged the people to return from their sinful practices, it was to no avail.

In the year 3228 (533 b.c.e.), Menashe, the evil son of the righteous King Chizkiyahu, rose to the throne of Judea. Through his insidious influence idol worship spread through the land. The next half century saw the great struggle between the arch-rivals Babylonia and Egypt encroach into the Jewish kingdom, as Judea became a vassal king of King Nebuchadnezzar.

The year 434 b.c.e. saw the first wave of exiles, the elite of Jerusalem, leave for Babylonia. These men included the greatest leaders and scholars of the time: Mordechai, Daniel and Ezekiel, men who would be instrumental in bringing about great miracles in the future. Only the poor were left in the land, and the future clearly pointed to the exiled community which was to grow and flourish in Babylonia.

Eight years later, the end came as the forces of the Babylonian commander besieged Jerusalem and battered its defences. The Holy Temple, the king's palace, as well as the rest of the city was burned and laid waste. The remaining leaders were executed and the people forced into exile under torturous conditions.

Although the destruction had been bloody and crushing, the Jewish exiles in Babylonia gradually rebuilt their lives and communities. The Babylonian rulers permitted the Jews considerable independence to reconstruct Jewish life in the new environment. The adjustment was made easier by the fact that the earlier exiles were now well established.

The exiles thought that their stay in Babylon would be a short one. They waited and longed for the day on which they would return to the Holy Land. However, it was decreed differently: The prophet Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) told them that it was decreed in Heaven that they must remain in Babylon. "Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat their fruit...Increase there...Seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to G-d for her, because through her peace, you will have peace."

And so, the exiled Jews settled down in Babylon. But how could they retain their Jewishness in a foreign land, bereft of the Holy Temple and its Divine service, and surrounded as they were by idol worshippers? The guidance of the Sages of the time set the pattern for Jewish life for all coming generations by establishing the foundations of Torah study, assuring the continuation of the Jewish people both in and out of exile.

One of the early exiled Jews mentioned above was Daniel. Together with three companions, the fifteen-year-old Daniel was amongst those chosen to attend the king in the royal palace. True to their upbringing, Daniel and his friends resisted the temptations of the royal lifestyle. Refusing to partake of non-kosher food, they were given beans and water, but in spite of this meager diet, they remained robust. The wisdom of the Jewish youths attracted attention, and Daniel and his companions were appointed to high positions in the royal court. Nebuchadnezzar had reached the pinnacle of his power, but he began to worry about the future.

One of the most remarkable episodes in the life of Daniel occurred when the king had a terrifying dream. When he awoke, the king was unable to remember the dream that had so frightened him. His terror and anxiety mounted, and he summoned his advisors, and ordered them to reveal to him both the dream and its meaning. But even under the threat of death, they couldn't explain a dream which the king himself couldn't recall.

Then, the king called upon Daniel. In response to his prayers, G-d enabled Daniel to describe and interpret the dream. His explanation was as follows: The king saw in his dream a towering statue whose head was made of gold. The golden head represented

Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of the known world at the time. The chest and arms were silver, which symbolized Persia and Media, weaker kingdoms, which would, nevertheless, replace Babylon. The thighs of the statue were copper, representing Greece, the third and weaker empire in the chain. Its legs were of iron, this symbolic of the cruel rule of Rome, the fourth empire. The statue's toes were partly iron and partly earthenware. This represented the two kingdoms which would follow Rome: the Holy Roman Empire and the Moslem rule and the many smaller kingdom's which would result from their fragmentation. As the dream continued, a small stone rolled toward the figure and smashed it. Then, the small stone grew into a huge mountain. This small stone represented the King Moshiach, who would overthrow these kingdoms and rule in the end.

The king accepted Daniel's interpretation and raised him to even higher rank. A succeeding king, Belshazzar was to have another, even more astonishing need for Daniel's interpretive powers when Hebrew words mysteriously appeared on the wall of his palace during a drinking orgy. He interpreted those words correctly, as well, predicting the demise of his kingdom, which occurred that same night.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

On the weekly Torah portion

Until Shiloh comes (Gen. 49:10)

Rashi comments that the above words refer to Moshiach. In addition, the Baal HaTurim points out that the Hebrew words meaning "Shiloh comes" have the same numerical value as the word "Moshiach." The word "comes" (yavo) contains a profound allusion to the means by which Moshiach can be brought. For yavo is numerically equivalent to the word echad--one. When there will be unity among Jews, and in particular, when Jews will unite in speaking about Moshiach, they will succeed in drawing down and realizing the ultimate Redemption through the Righteous Moshiach. (The Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe)

Benjamin shall be a wolf that rends (Gen. 49:27)

The task of Benjamin, referred to as ben-acher--"another son"--in the Torah, is to elevate the "other," the animal soul of man, until it is in the category of a "son" of G-d. For this reason Benjamin is likened to the wolf, which rips into its prey and rends it into pieces. (Ohr Hatorah)

G-d will surely remember you (Gen. 50:25)

When Joseph told the Jews that the time for their redemption was near, he gave them a sign by which they would recognize their redeemer. "G-d will surely remember you (pakod yifkod)," he said, doubling the verb "to remember" for added emphasis. For true redemption must free both body and soul, liberating the Jews from physical and spiritual enslavement. Physical freedom alone is not enough; even return to the Holy Land is insufficient without the spiritual component which signifies true redemption. So it was in Egypt, and so is it today...

(Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin)



4:22 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
13 Tevet / January 2
Torah Portion Vayechi
Shabbat ends 5:26PM



בס"ד
1905
13 Tevet, 5786
January 2, 2026

The Weekly Publication
for Every Jewish Person

נוסד תור ימי השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson
"Our help is in the name of the L-rd, Who made heaven and earth" (Psalms 124:8)



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

In this week's Torah portion, Vayechi, Jacob, on his deathbed, makes a last request of his son Joseph. "Bury me not, I pray you, in Egypt!" he implores. "I will do as you have said," Joseph promises his father. But Joseph's promise is not enough. "Swear to me!" Jacob insists, and Joseph does.

Why was Joseph's promise insufficient? Was Jacob worried that his son would not fulfill his promise? What is the difference between a promise and an oath?

An oath differs from a promise in the sense of obligation and urgency it imposes. When a person makes a promise, he most certainly intends to carry out his word when the opportunity presents itself, but he does not spend all of his waking hours thinking about the promise and wondering how to implement it. But when a person utters an oath, it becomes the single most important motivating factor in his life. An oath is so serious, in fact, that the person dare not divert his mind from the matter for even a moment.

Jacob realized that what he asked of Joseph was so difficult and fraught with obstacles that the force of an oath was necessary.

This exchange between father and son also underscores an important difference between Jacob and Joseph: Jacob refused to be interred in Egypt, insisting that his body be brought back to the land of Israel for burial. Joseph, however, before his death, made the Jews swear they would take his bones back with them to Israel when the time for redemption came. His casket remained in Egypt for the duration of the exile.

It is erroneous to conclude that Jacob's request was made for selfish reasons; that he preferred to be buried in the holy soil of Israel while his children languished in Egyptian exile. Rather, Jacob's concern was for the welfare of the entire Jewish people.

"The prisoner cannot free himself from prison," our Sages have declared. The Jewish people, subjugated and enslaved, needed an outside force to free them from exile in Egypt. This outside force was the merit of Jacob, whose rightful place was the holy land of Israel, from where the Jewish people drew strength and spiritual sustenance.

Joseph, however, was exiled in Egypt with the rest of his brethren. His positive influence came from within and was therefore closer and more immediate. When he passed away, his remains stayed in Egypt, affording the Jews an additional merit. Jacob wanted to forestall the possibility that Joseph would want his body to remain in Egypt for this reason, and insisted that he swear to his request.

We learn from this that although the Divine Presence has indeed accompanied us throughout our exile, a Jew must nevertheless cry out for the galut to end and for all of us to be "carried out of Egypt." With faith and trust in G-d we will merit the coming of Moshiach and the Final Redemption, speedily in our day.

Adapted from Collected Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, vol. 25.

Why It Is Good That Life Is a Struggle

By Rabbi Simon Jacobson

As much as we may prefer an "easy" life, and no matter how "perfect" other people's lives look, the truth about life is that it is a struggle — and that's healthy. The "feel good" advertising industry wants us to think that an easy life is one click or one purchase away. That is simply not true — life is meant to be challenging. Here are the whys and hows of embracing it.

STRUGGLE IS THE PURPOSE OF EXISTENCE

It's an illusion to think that life is easy and that faith is bliss. On the contrary — life is a battle. And it is precisely this battle that we were designed to face. Therefore, do not be disturbed or demoralized by your challenges, by your inconsistencies and by your weaknesses. Do not be shaken when you do not live up to your highest aspirations, and often do not actualize or maintain your inspiration. Do not be discouraged — because this struggle is the fundamental purpose of all of existence.

BE HONEST: FACE THE TRUTH OF THE CHALLENGE

So many of us try to fight the fact that life is difficult, and we seek out ways to numb ourselves or find temporary balms to make us feel good. We turn to all sorts of escapes to relieve our pain. But they never last. However, when you embrace the struggle and realize that it is exactly what life was meant to be, you paradoxically get empowered to face your challenges with confidence and

strength. The key is not to deceive yourself into thinking that the world is just fine and you can remain passive and complacent. You must be wise and awake to life's traps and realize that life is a struggle. Make peace with your struggles. The first step to winning your battles is to recognize their value and importance.

YOU HAVE TOOLS TO FACE IT

You must always know that each challenge, no matter how difficult, comes with tools to face that challenge and come out stronger. Since struggle is the purpose of life, and not just some incidental distraction, you are provided with all the resources you need to deal with your struggles. Whatever difficulty and hardship that comes your way, whatever loss or setback you are experiencing, you must always know that you have all the tools necessary to face the struggle and prevail. Not just prevail but thrive and grow, and transform your corner of the world. This is also true about past traumas. You always have the ability to begin at whatever stage you are in your life.

START AT HOME

In order to take on life's battles, you need a strong foundation. What is most vital is to create a peaceful oasis — a space, a moment, a corner, in which you have the ability to stock up, gather strength and reinforce yourself before you face the harsh realities around you. This also serves as a solid base and station from which you can engage the often difficult world, and do what it takes to reveal the light in the darkness.

Dedicated in honor of dear friend
of the Lubavitch Youth Organization
Mr. Joseph Fraiman

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