

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi YY Jacobson

Twelve Seconds

Avremi Fizm is eight and a half years old. He lives in Sderot, southern Israel, at the border of Gaza. His parents and grandparents are the Chabad Shluchim in Sderot.

Some weeks ago, he came to the United States to explain to thousands of people in his audience what it's like to grow up in Sderot when thousands of rockets are launched incessantly at your homes and schools, gardens and backyards and streets, and you have 12 seconds to run and find cover. 12 seconds that can distinguish between life and death. He spoke of the thousands of times in his eight short years when he made it to the bomb shelter after hearing the sirens, and many other times when he could not find cover and had to fall to the ground and protect his head with his hands. Avremi addressed the thousands of guests at the international banquet of Chabad Shluchim.

"I want to ask you for a small favor," he said. "Close your eyes for twelve seconds. I'll ask to turn off the lights and... let's begin."

...11... 10... 9... 8... 7... 6... 5... 4... 3... 2... 1...

But then he shocked his audience. Instead of sharing the depth of the fear and anxiety during those 12 seconds, he told the audience how over these years of experiencing these 12 seconds thousands of times, he discovered the

power and potential contained in 12 seconds. What can be achieved in 12 seconds?

"I'm sharing this with you," Avremi said, "to inspire growth and for the sake of learning—cherish these 12 seconds!"

In 12 seconds, Avremi said, you can smile from ear to ear toward a fellow human being. In 12 seconds, you can uplift another soul with a loving word or gesture. In 12 seconds, you can recite a blessing with another Jew. In 12 seconds, you can embrace your fellow Jew, bring them joy and offer support and love. In 12 seconds, you can give him or her back their soul and breathe new life into them. And in 12 seconds, as you lay on the ground and protect your head, you can pray that the rocket does not fall on an innocent human being.

In the Jewish tradition, the first thing we say when we wake up every morning takes 12 seconds, and consists of 12 words. The first thing we upon opening our eyes is, "Modeh ani Lefanecha Melech Chai V'Kayam she'hechezarta bi nishmasi b'chemla raba emunasecha—I thank you, living and eternal King, for You have graciously returned my soul to me, abundant is Your faith in me." You have given me another day. Thank you.

In our personal lives, the enemy within often sends rockets of destructive thoughts and feelings into our hearts. Self-loathing, anger, fear, shame, insecurity, guilt, negativity,

TheTorahAnyTimes is a publication of



Compiled and Edited by Elan Perchik

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toxicity. We have less than 12 seconds to decide if these thoughts will take us over and wreak havoc in our mind and relationships, or our life is

too dignified and precious for us to allow ourselves to be derailed from love and light.

“Be strong, be strong and let us be

strengthened.” Thank you, Avremi, for this priceless and life-changing lesson. We love you.

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Scrapbook of Eternity

I was leafing through an ancient family album the other day when I came across some photos I'd completely forgotten about. Moments from long ago, presumed to be lost, smiled up at me from the yellowing pages. Others had not fared so well. Those photographs had been abducted from their place in history; their memory was preserved only by a faded oblong and four browning photo corners.

History is so selective. This moment survived, this one didn't. And how many of the myriad pixels of our lives will endure the ruthless editing of time?

There are two worlds: the world in which we live each and every moment of our daily lives, and then there are those moments which will be internalized as scrapbook memories. The name of this week's Torah portion is Vayechi, which means, “And he lived,” referring to the life of Yaakov Avinu. You might think the title is a bit ironic because it's in this week's Torah portion that Yaakov dies. In a similar manner, Sarah, the mother of the Jewish people, passes from this world in a weekly portion which is entitled Chayei Sarah, the Life of Sarah.

The word for life in Hebrew is a plural noun: Chaim. It's not by coincidence. A person has two

lives—the life we live in this world and the life we live in the Next world. This world is called Olam Haze, and the Next World is called Olam Haba. Grammatically, the corollary of Olam ‘Haze,’ this world, should be Olam ‘Hahu,’ that world. Why then is the Next World called Olam Haba? Haba literally means, “That comes.” The World to Come is just that—a world that comes as a direct result of what we do in this world. The righteous take every moment and paste it into the scrapbook of eternity.

Now, how do we take the fleeting nature of this world that comes today and is gone tomorrow and eternalize it so that it memorializes forever?

We must make this world a world that tastes of eternity.

There's a well-worn canard that the Torah of the Jewish people is nit-picking and stifles our natural outpouring of love and kindness. Ultimately, this claim goes, it leads to the heartless demand for a pound of flesh.

In contrast, secular cultures with their cults of romantic self-abandon make it difficult to relate to the Torah's insistence on limits. However, without the limits of truth, kindness descends into depravity.

The Hebrew word for kindness—chesed—is connected to the word meaning to “pour oneself out,” or

ashed. When the Torah prohibits incest, it describes this relationship as “chesed,” kindness. But true kindness is always controlled and appropriate. Thus, the ways of G-d are always described as “chesed v'emes,” kindness and truth. No being can be kinder than G-d, and His kindness is tempered by truth.

Yaakov knew that Yosef would inter him with all possible pomp and ceremony in Egypt. But despite the true kindness in burying the dead, Yaakov preferred not to be buried at all rather than have his bones take up residence in the soil of Egypt. After seventeen years of living there in Egypt, Yaakov had seen that the Jewish people were already starting to mistake the Nile for the Jordan River. The Jews were so comfortable in Goshen that Egypt didn't seem like an exile at all.

Egypt is the matrix of all the exiles of the Jewish people, and we, the Children of Israel, of Yaakov, find ourselves now in the last of those exiles. By refusing to be buried in Egypt, Yaakov was sending a message not just to his Children in Egypt, but also to his most distant descendants across the millennia saying, “Don't make yourselves too comfortable in a land in which I refuse even to be buried.”

Rebbetzin Chaya Sora Gertzulin

The Crown

Pashas Vayechi. The closing of Sefer Bereishis. The end of an era. “Vayikrivu yemei Yisroel lamus, When the end of Yisroel’s (Yaakov) life approached, Vayikra l’vno, l’Yosef, he called upon his son, Yosef. (Bereishis 47:29). Ramban comments that although Yaakov was not ill at this point, he felt weak and experienced a loss of strength. He realized that it was time to make end-of-life decisions.

Yaakov doesn’t call a lawyer or a financial planner, but calls upon Yosef. Yosef, who held a position of power of Egypt and had the ability to fulfill Yaakov’s wishes. Yaakov asked for a “chesed ve’emes, kindness and truth.” He doesn’t want to be buried in Egypt, but in Eretz Yisroel, the Holy Land, alongside his fathers, Avrohom and Yitzchok.

Chesed shel emes, kindness of truth. The ultimate kindness, for it is a kindness that one does not anticipate receiving any reward from the beneficiary. Even though Yosef accepts the responsibility, Yaakov asks him to “swear to me.”

Does Yaakov not trust Yosef? The Talmud teaches, “Eizehu chacham, haroeh es hanolad, Who is a wise man, one who contemplates the future.” As a father, Yaakov trusted Yosef unequivocally, but was afraid of Pharaoh giving Yosef a hard time leaving the country to bury his father. If so, Yosef would be able to tell

Pharaoh, I promised my father, I took a vow. Even Pharaoh would not deny Yosef fulfilling his father’s last request.

“Please don’t bury me in Egypt.” Not just a wish to be buried in Eretz Yisroel, in Meoras Hamachpela, but a strong wish not to be buried in Egypt. Rashi gives us reasons for Yaakov’s request. One is, that knowing that Egyptians worship the dead, Yaakov feared the Egyptians would worship him – being that blessing came upon Egypt when he arrived.

When asking Yosef to bury him in Chevron, the name Yisroel is used in place of Yaakov. Yisroel, from the word sar, a prince, a leader, a position of authority. A name that symbolizes our nation, Bnei Yisroel. Yaakov’s request to Yosef was a message not only to his family in Egypt, but a message to all future generations. Yaakov is telling his descendants, don’t be mistaken, Egypt is not your land, not your country. While you may now be living comfortably in Goshen, or anywhere in exile, with all your needs being taken care of, never forget who you are and where you come from. Never forget that your true homeland is Eretz Yisroel.

The war in Eretz Yisroel that began on October 7 is hard and painful for every person living there. Israel is a small country, where everyone is affected. A country where everyone is a brother. The unending tension and constant barrage of rockets cannot be minimized. However, the repercussions of October 7 have spread world-wide. It’s spawned an

explosion of blatant anti-Semitism. We are witness to acts of hate, even violence, directed towards our people. Hate meant to intimidate.

From out-of-control demonstrations, to bomb threats against yeshivas and shuls, to swastikas painted on Jewish-owned businesses, the Israeli flag being burned, and sadly to people who are visibly Jewish being attacked. We have seen it all.

Commentary magazine featured an article entitled They forgot to be Afraid, in which James B. Miegs writes of Israel becoming too comfortable with their surroundings pre-October 7. They forgot to be afraid. Living in a land surrounded by enemies, one must always be on high alert, with eyes laser-focused 24/7 on the borders.

They forgot to be afraid. Maybe we too, forgot to be afraid. It’s not just “they”, but “we”. We have become very much part of the culture and society around us. We are comfortable with our homes, our jobs, our lives. We are living in our own “Goshen”, a life of both material and spiritual comfort. But it is not our home.

My mother’s words echo in my mind. “Chaya Sarale... I am so afraid it will happen again.” I didn’t think I would see anti-Semitism in a country that welcomes its immigrants with the Statue of Liberty, a country that hosts the Liberty Bell. A country whose founding fathers guaranteed liberty and justice for all.

But then I see the calls of hate, the downplaying, ignoring, even deny-

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ing (like the Holocaust deniers before them) the atrocities of October 7. We too forgot to be afraid. Our father Yaakov's request is a message to all of us. We are in galus. As good as things may seem, be mindful, be cognizant, and remember that this is not our true home.

Yaakov asked Yosef to "carry me out of Egypt". Me – my entire body, not to wait until the body decomposes and becomes bones. There is a deeper understanding. A message for generations. "Carry me". Carry my teachings, my life lessons with you. As a nation you will experience many exiles, but remember my teachings. Remember Eretz Yisroel.

The parsha closes with yet another loss. The death of Yosef HaTzadik. Like his father before him, he too requests to be buried in Eretz Yisroel – but with one big difference. "You shall carry my bones from here."

Yosef was very much aware that hard days were on the horizon. Days fraught with pain, suffering, and loss of freedom. Days that will not allow Bnei Yisroel to leave Egypt. Unlike Yaakov who said "carry me out", Yosef said "carry my bones" (Bereishis 51:25). Yosef's body was placed in a lead casket and sunk into the Nile. Yosef, who brought blessing to Egypt during the years of famine was lowered into the Nile, with the Egyptians hoping that he would bring blessing to the Nile, the source of water and vegetation for all of Egypt.

Years later, it was Moshe who searched the Nile for Yosef's casket before the Exodus. And it was Moshe who carried the bones for forty years in the desert, transporting them from resting stop to resting stop. Yosef's bones found their final resting spot in the city of Shechem (Nablus). How tragically sad that the final resting place of this great

Tzadik was vandalized, burnt, violated time and time again by Palestinians. It became a hotspot of Arab terror. Even more chilling is that on October 7, 2000, -- yes, the same day, October 7 – a mob of Palestinian rioters, armed with sledgehammers, smashed the kever, setting it ablaze, destroying seforim and other holy articles. Today, the terror continues. We are faced with an enemy that vows to come back again and again.

When Yaakov was buried in Chevron, Yosef took off his crown, and placed it on the coffin of Yaakov. An honor to his father, as if saying – you, my dear father, are the true king. The kesser Torah, the crown of Torah rises above all.

Parshas Vayechi tells us of the death of Yaakov. Yet, the word Vayechi denotes life. As the Talmud states, Yaakov lo meis, Yaakov didn't die. His name lives on. His teachings live on. He is part of us.

Rabbi Ephraim Shapiro

Which Mesechta?

I have the privilege of giving a nightly Gemara shiur. A number of years ago, we finished learning one mesechta (tractate), and we didn't know what the next mesechta should be. With a number of us in the chabura (learning group) in need of shidduchim for our children, I was encouraged to ask Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt"l what mesechta is a merit to finding a shidduch for our children. Between all of us, there are about fifteen to seventeen members on a given night. I personally had a daughter who was looking for her bashert, as did several other members of the shiur.

Along with Rav Nossan Yaffe, I

approached Rav Chaim and asked his opinion. Rav Chaim replied, "Mesechta Kiddushin (the tractate which primarily deals with marriage)." Then Rav Chaim added, "But in one day."

In the most respectful way I could, I explained that there's no possible way that we could learn the entire mesechta as a chabura in one day. To this, Rav Chaim responded, "It's a kleine mesechta (small mesechta), only 81 blatt." Rav Chaim, though, had more to add. "But with Tosafos (the running commentary on the side of each page)." I didn't know what to do at this point. Learn the entire mesechta in one day with all of Tosafos? Rav Nossan Yaffe at this point helped me.

Turning to Rav Chaim, he asked, "But can the Rav say that if they start learning Kiddushin, the beracha will work and take effort even if they don't finish in one day?" (Parenthetically, it took us about two years to complete the entire mesechta). Rav Chaim responded, "Yes, the beracha takes effect just for starting." Along with this, Rav Chaim gave us all a tremendous beracha for shidduchim.

That year, 13 of us made weddings for our children—myself and 12 others— and the next year, I was asked to tell Rav Chaim the end of the story.

The power invested in the words of Hashem's Torah is as real as can be. Invest in it, and it will invest in you.

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Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza

(Updated: 17 Tevet)

עמית אסתר חיה	יצחק בן אנטה	אמילי תהילה בת	אבינתן בן דיצה
בת אילנה אלן	(אלגרט)	אמנדה פרנסיס	תרצה (אור)
(בוסקילה)	יצחק בן גילה	(דמארי)	אביתר בן גליה
עמרי בן אסתר	(גלרנטר)	אנדריי בן יבגניה	(דוד)
ורה (מירן)	ירדן בן פנינה	(קוזלוב)	אברהם גלעד בן
פרננדו סימון בן	(ביבס)	ארבל בת יעל	ליאת (מונדר)
טניה (מרמן)	כפיר בן שירי	(יהוד)	אגם בת מירב
צחי בן דבורה	(ביבס)	אריאל בן סילביה	(ברגר)
(עידן)	כרמל בת כנרת	מוניקה (קוניו)	אוהד בן אסתר (בן
קית' שמואל בן	(גת)	אריאל בן שירי	עמי)
גלדיס (סיגל)	לואיס נורבטו בן	(ביבס)	אוהד בן אסתר
קרין בת אירינה	נורה (הר)	בר אברהם בן	(יהלומי)
(ארייב)	ליאור בן מיכל	ג'וליה (קופרשטיין)	אור בן טלי (לוי)
רום בן תמר	(רודאיף)	גד משה בן שרה	אורי בן עינב
(ברסלבסקי)	לירי בת שירה	(מוזס)	(דנינו)
רומי בת מירב	(אלבג)	גיא בן מירב	אוריאל בן נעמי
(גונן)	מישל בן סולמירה	(גלבוע דלאל)	(ברוך)
רון בן חנה	(ניסנבאום)	גלי בן תמר	אילן שלמה בן
(בנימין)	מקסים בן טלה	(ברמן)	מרים (וייס)
רן בן טלי (גואילי)	(הרקין)	דוד בן סילביה	איתי בן אורית
שגב בן גלית	מתן בן ענת	מוניקה (קוניו)	(סבירסקי)
(כלפון)	(אנגרסט)	דולב בן יעל (יהוד)	איתי בן חגית (חן)
שגיא בן נעמית	מתן בן ירדנה	דורון בת סימונה	איתן בן רות אדית
(חן דקל)	(צנגאוקר)	(שטיינברכר)	(הורן)
שירי בת מרגיט	נדב בן חנה	דניאל שמעון בן	איתן אברהם בן
(ביבס)	(פופלוול)	שרון (פרץ)	אפרת (מור)
שלומי בן רוזיטה	נועה בת ליאורה	דניאלה בת אורלי	אלון בן עידית
(זיו)	(ארגמני)	(גלבוע)	(אהל)
שלמה בן מרסיל	נמרוד בן ויקי	דרור בן דורית	אליה בן סיגי (כהן)
(מנצור)	(כהן)	(אור)	אליהו בן חנה
תמיר בן חירות	נעמה בת איילת	הירש בן רחל	(שרעבי)
(נמרודי)	(לוי)	(גולדברג פולין)	אליהו יעקב בן
תמיר בן יעל	עדן בת שירית	זיו בן תמר (ברמן)	הדסה עדי - נעדר
(אדר)	(ירושלמי)	חיים בן נחמה	אליקים שלמה בן
	עודד בן בלהה	(פרי)	אבישג (ליבמן)
	(ליפשיץ)	חן חנן בן ורד	אלכס בן אוקסנה
	עומר בן ניבה	(יבלונקה) - נעדר	(לובנוב)
	(ונקרט)	טל בן ניצה (שוהם)	אלכסנדר ששה בן
	עומר בן שלי (שם	קורנגולד)	ילנה (טרופנוב)
	טוב)	יאיר בן רות אדית	אלכסנדר בן נינה
	עומר מקסים בן	(הורן)	(דנציג)
	אורנה אסתר	יאיר בן פלור	אלמוג בן אורית
	(נאוטרה)	(יעקב)	(מאיר ג'אן)
	עידו בן כוכבה	יגב בן אסתר	אלמוג בן נירה
	(קלדרון)	(בוכשטב)	(סרוסי)
	עידן בן יעל	יוסף בן חנה	אלעד בן חנה
	(אלכסנדר)	(שרעבי)	(קציר)
	עידן בן דלית	יוסף חיים בן מרים	אלקנה בן רוחמה
	(שתיזי)	(אוחנה)	(בוחבוט)
	עמירם בן שרה	יורם בן בלה	
	(קופר)	(מצגר)	