

16 Tevet 5770

2 January 2010

# KOL MEVASSER

KAHAL JOSEPH CONGREGATION • 10505 SANTA MONICA BOULEVARD, LOS ANGELES, CA 90025 • 310.474.0559 • WWW.KAHALJOSEPH.COM

# PARASHAT VAYEKHI

## Worldly Jews

Rabbi Yosef Benarroch  
SEC Jerusalem

Recently I read a letter that was written by a concerned Jewish father to his son. The letter includes words of encouragement and an inspirational plea to his son to follow the ways of the Torah. I would like to share some of the contents of the letter with you.

*"My son, remember to be careful in the recitation of the daily Shema both in the morning and in the evening. Also take care to pray three times every day. My son before you eat make sure to recite a blessing before and after, as the law requires. My son at the very least read the weekly Torah portion every Shabbat and make sure that you have an accurately punctuated Humash with you everywhere you go. It's words should not cease to be on your lips and you should recite them day and night for then you will succeed in your ways and attain wisdom...My son always remember me and may the appearance of my face always be before your eyes, and anything that you know I despise do not do it."*

I was touched by the advice and concern displayed by the father towards his son. Who is the father who wrote the letter you may ask? Where does he live and why is he so concerned about his son's Jewish well-being? The truth of the matter is that the letter was written some



750 years ago. The author is the famous Spanish Rabbi, Moses the son of Nahman, better known as "Nahmanides". He wrote the letter in the last year of his life, perhaps even in his last days. At that time Nahmanides lived in the land of Israel while his family remained in Spain. The letter was written to his son who served in the house of the King of Spain.

The question that begs to be asked is what was the son of the illustrious "Nahmanides" doing in the king's court? One would think that the son of such a great Rabbi would be attending the finest academies of Torah study. Shouldn't we expect that the son of one of the great Torah luminaries of all time be himself a man of the book? How odd that the words of "Nahmanides" to his son are an attempt to reinforce basic Jewish practices that every child is taught in primary school.

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## Prayer Schedule

### SHABBAT

#### PARASHAT VAYEKHI

*Friday, January 1st*

Minhah & Arbit 4:35 pm  
Candle Lighting 4:36 pm

*Saturday, January 2nd*

Shaharit 8:30 am  
Minhah & Arbit 4:10 pm  
Motzei Shabbat 5:41 pm

### WEEKDAYS

*Sunday, January 3rd*

Shaharit 7:30 am

Talmud Torah

Barr Mitzvah Class 8:30 am  
Bat Mitzvah Class 8:30 am  
Regular Classes 9:30 am

*Mon.-Thurs., Jan. 4-7*

Shaharit 6:30 am

### EREV SHABBAT

#### PARASHAT SHEMOT

*Friday, January 8th*

Minhah & Arbit 4:40 pm  
Candle Lighting 4:42 pm

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I suggest that what we can learn from the letter is a model of Jewish living that was unique to Spanish Jewry and in many ways part of the legacy of Sefarim, certainly in the Middle Ages. Many of Spain's Jews shared the predicament of "Nahmanides" son. In medieval Spain, Jews were members of the government, academia, business, and participated in just about every walk of life. They believed strongly in the importance of being worldly. Yet hand in hand with their venturing out into the world there was one thing that bound them all together. As "Tevia" said in Fiddler on the Roof, TRADITION. The Jews of Medieval Spain taught us that one's commitment to living a dedicated Jewish life did not have to come at the expense of being worldly. To be a successful businessman or a member of the government didn't mean you had to throw out your Kippah, or stop observing Shabbat. The opposite was true; both could be observed in harmony.

I can well imagine that "Nahmanides" was proud of his son the politician. In his letter he encourages him to remember to harmonize his life as a Jew with his obligations as a Spaniard. The two could go hand in hand. We would all do well to learn the message of "Nahmanides". In today's world how many Jews have left the fold because they see no harmony between the modern world and our ancient traditions? For too many keeping kosher while attending meetings is just

not possible. Finding a quiet place to recite the afternoon prayers between executive meetings is just not an option. But where there is a will there is a way. It can be done, it is done, and the precedent for it we see as far back as "Nahmanides" and his son.

The truth is the precedent goes back even further to our Parasha. In this week's portion of "Vayehi" we see a similar theme. The Parasha deals with the last days of Jacob's life. With his life coming to a close he asks to bless his children. In essence he wants to send them a letter (the parallels between Jacob blessing his children and the letter of Nahmanides are striking).

But when Jacob blesses his sons he does a number of strange things. First of all before blessing his own children, he blesses his grandchildren, "Menashe" and "Ephraim," the sons of Joseph. This is quite odd and problematic. Did Jacob not have many grandchildren? Why does he single out the children of Joseph over all his other grandchildren? Is this not a blatant show of favoritism? Did showing favoritism towards one son not raise the ire of his children many years ago? Why would he repeat the mistake he made favoring Joseph over his brothers? Furthermore why does he bless the grandchildren before his own sons?

To add to the problem, when he is about to bless Joseph's sons, "Menashe" and "Ephraim," we are told the following, "*And Yisrael*

*(Jacob) took his right hand and placed it on the head of Ephraim even though he was the younger one and his left hand he placed on the head of Menashe the older one" (Bereshit 48:14).* The fact that Jacob wanted to bless the younger brother first did not sit well with Joseph. He comments as follows, "*And Joseph saw that his father placed his right hand on the head of Ephraim and it was not pleasing in his eyes so he took his father's hand removing it from the head of Ephraim and placing it on the head of Menashe... But his father refused and said my son I know, my son I know" (Bereshit 48:17-18).* Why would the father bless "Ephraim" the younger one first? What are we to learn from Jacob's actions?

I suggest that when Jacob blessed his grandchildren he was also blessing every Jew in every future generation. The blessings to his immediate children are specific to them. But the blessings to his grandchildren speak to every one of us. This is why the blessing of Jacob to his grandsons was chosen as the blessing we bless our sons with every Friday night. To our daughters we bless them to be like Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah our matriarchs. But our boys we bless them to be like Menashe and Ephraim, because their blessing was an eternal one to every future Jewish child.

What was so special about those two boys? The answer is they grew up in courtyards of Egyptian nobility. Their father was also a member of government. Joseph also had to walk the fine line of choosing modernity and upward mobility to tradition and

the ways of his father, Jacob. Joseph and his sons are the examples par excellence of Jews who succeeded in worldly matters and yet remained strong and committed Jews. This unique quality Jacob sees only in the sons of Joseph. His desire to bless them above all of his grandchildren does not stem from favoritism but as a message to every future Jew that we can live in the world and still remain committed to Judaism.

Perhaps this is also why he blesses "Ephraim" the younger one before "Menashe" the eldest. When "Ephraim" is born the text states, "*And the name of the second he called Ephraim for G-d has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction" (Bereshit 41:52).* The name "Ephraim" suggests Joseph finally making it in exile. He is the son that embodies Joseph's success as an Egyptian noble. It is that son Jacob wishes to bless first because the message he wishes to convey is that no matter how successful one may be in worldly matters, one's Judaism does not have to be compromised or sacrificed

In the end Joseph along with his sons emerges as part of the Jewish nation. They stand alongside the other brothers as members of the twelve tribes. Their names are engraved on the breastplate of the High Priest (Kohen Gadol).

How interesting that the last words of "Nahmanides" to his son are, "My son always remember me and may the appearance of my face always be before your eyes". I cannot help but compare

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## In Memoriam

It is customary to light a memorial candle in the evening and donate tzedakah. Family members are encouraged to attend services in honor of their loved ones.

**Shabbat / 16 Tevet**  
Khasnah bat Rahel

**Sunday / 17 Tevet**  
Victoria bat Chahla  
Farha bat Masooda\*  
Yehezkel ben Moshe\*

**Monday / 18 Tevet**  
Esperance bat Simcha  
David ben Yehezkel\*

**Tuesday / 19 Tevet**  
Shlomo ben Rahamim\*  
Yeheskel ben Shaul\*

**Wednesday / 20 Tevet**  
Raphael ben Saleh Moshe  
Kadoorie  
Joseph Hayeem Messiah  
Reuvan ben Yaacob Saleh  
Mussry

**Thursday / 21 Tevet**  
Shlomo ben Reuven D'loomy\*  
Behejohn bat Yehudah

**Friday / 22 Tevet**  
Matooka bat Farha

**Shabbat / 23 Tevet**  
Kovkah bat Yaakov HaCohen  
Hannah Dallal  
Pinchas ben Nissan

*Yahrzeit names with asterisks are missing contact phone numbers and addresses for family members. To update the database, please call the office at 310.474.0559.*

## Community News

### SHABBAT KIDDUSH

is sponsored by  
Moussa Shaaya &  
Hilda Shaaya Rojhani

in honor of their mother  
Esperance bat Simcha

### MAZAL TOV

to Melissa & Richard Darwish  
on the birth of their son  
Noah Daniel

Congratulations  
to Grandmother  
Arlette Darwish  
and  
to Great Grandmother  
Rachel Darwish

### SEUDAH SHLISHEET

is sponsored by  
Robert & Eddie Ives

In memory of  
Saul Bar, z"l

### MAZAL TOV

to Jennifer & Aryeh Aslan  
on the birth of their son  
Ezra Shaoul

Congratulations  
to the Grandparents  
Irene & Shaoul Aslan  
Linda & Jeffrey Kaufman  
& to Great Grandmother  
Tilda Levy

## Announcements

### *Haftara Readers*

Wouldn't you like to chant from the Torah? Reserve your haftara portion at 310.474.0559. Then, schedule time with Saeed & learn your haftara with authentic Baghdadi ta'amim, Iraqi melodies for Torah reading.

### Refuah Shlemah

*Please include these individuals in your prayers for healing:*

Yonatan ben Alizah • Mazal Tov bat Sulha Mitana • Matilda Louisa • Yaheskel ben Regina • Ayala bat Naomi • Khayah Noa bat Sara • Haim ben Mordechai • Pnina bat Esther • Yosi ben Esther • Victor ben Latif • Ramah Regina bat Farha • Aziza bat Sara



## MITZVOT ON SHABBAT

We now offer for donation the following Mitzvot on Shabbat:

1. ***Petichat Hechal*** The opening of the ark where the Torahs are kept.
2. ***Carrying of the Sefer Torah and Sefer Haftara***
3. ***Hakamat Sefer*** The lifting and showing of the Torah.
4. ***Mashlim\**** The seventh aliya to the Torah who recites Kaddish
5. ***Maftir\**** The last aliya to the Torah which includes the reading of the Haftara (which will be read by one of the clergy unless member reading has been previously approved)

Since we count on your donations to the synagogue to keep our membership fees as low as they are, we suggest a minimum donation for all those who are called to the Torah of \$126 or multiples of \$18 or \$26. We appreciate your support.

\*Paid members may call the office to book the Mashlim or Maftir in advance, in memory of a departed relative. You will receive confirmation before Shabbat if you will receive the aliya or if there is a conflict. The member may also reserve any other aliya in advance by calling the office.

Non-members who are interested in aliyot should contact Sarah in the office to determine availability. Please call 310.474.0559 between 11 and 4, Monday through Thursday.

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these words to the famous statement of our Rabbis regarding Joseph and the incident with the wife of Potiphar. The Talmud in Tractate Sotah 36b explains that Joseph had full intentions to sin with Potiphar's wife. At the moment he was about to commit the sin the Talmud explains that the face of Jacob his father appeared to him and said, "*Joseph you are to be inscribed with your brothers on the breastplate of the High Priest. If you sin you will be erased and remembered as one who went off with promiscuous woman. Is that what you want?*" It was the appearance of his father's face that saved him. It was at that moment that Joseph chose to be part of the legacy of his father. Did the story of Joseph influence the words of "Nahmanides"? Was Joseph, the Jew in the Egyptian Kings Court, a role model for the son of "Nahmanides"?

In the end the message is a powerful one. Judaism is not afraid of modernity. As Jews we should not be weary of engaging the world. Yes we can learn Torah even at the office. We can pray even though our schedule is hectic. G-d can still be a focal point in our lives in spite of the professions we have chosen. This is the message that "Nahmanides" so badly wanted to convey to his son, and it is this message that is clearly behind the blessings of Jacob to his grandchildren "Menashe" and "Ephraim".

Wishing you all a Shabbat Shalom

