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**Is American Jewry Doomed**

**to Repeat the Mistakes of Their Grandparents?**

**By Yael Zoldan, M.A.**



On the rare occasions when my grandmother spoke of Europe before the war, I listened with the mounting dread of someone watching a horror movie. The tension was terrible. Underneath the singsong sound of her accented words, I could hear my own shallow breathing and feel the small hairs on my neck rising. Strains of eerie music were ramping up in my ears. My stomach clenched and twisted. My heart beat madly in my chest. I needed her to go on, and I wished that she would stop.

Because I knew the ending. The shattered glass, the cattle cars, *Arbeit Macht Frei* on the twisted metal gates to Auschwitz. I knew what she didn't know then, and it terrified me.

I wanted to go back in time to help her. I wanted to shake her. I wanted to shock her, to shock all of them out of their complacency. I wanted to scream, *Don't stay in Europe. Don't you know what's going to happen? Get out while you can!*

But of course, they didn't know. They didn't believe. And they didn't leave.

**“They Were Our Friends,…They Were Our Neighbors”**

“You see, they were our friends,” my grandmother continued gently, oblivious to my rising horror. “They were our neighbors. We had known them all our lives. We did not think they would ever hurt us.”

But they were wrong. They were horribly, fatally wrong. Because they had grown comfortable, complacent where they lived. And because they had forgotten that under the genial faces of their neighbors and friends simmered the ancient evil of otherness, that hatred lurked just underneath the civilized surface.

“Surely they understood that we were just like them,” she said. “We were professors and prominent businesspeople, you know. We were in all the elite universities. We were good citizens, part of the fabric of the community. Surely, they could see that we contributed!”

I listened with a helpless, terrible sadness. From my vantage point in the safety of America, the kindest of any of our exiles, I knew what she did not know then. And I thought it would never apply to me.

**They Know Me and They Hate Me**

These days, in a different America, I look around at libraries and parks, peaceful places that have been turned into sites of mass protests by raging, screaming, hate-filled people. I don’t know these people. But they seem to know me. They know me and they hate me. They hate you, too.

These are college students. Professors. Deans and businessmen. Newscasters, reporters, senators. I look at these people, the best and the brightest our country has to offer, and I can't decide if they’re mad. Or if we are.

Just yesterday – or last week? Last month? – these normal-looking people stood before us on line at the store, exchanging murmured “Good mornings,” commenting on the weather and the price of milk. Today, they gather in seething masses, protesting our right to be alive. Such an old hatred on their bright young faces, twisting their features into diabolical masks.

*Kill the Jews*, they chant. *Gas the Jews*. Their eyes shine with the seductive hatred that is ancient and knows no reason. *Hitler should have finished you off*, they shout hoarsely.

But it’s not the chanting that twists my stomach. That causes my shallow breathing and the hairs on my neck to rise. I’m frightened because I hear that music again. That eerie, foreboding music foretelling disaster.

Only this time, *we’re* the ones ignoring the angry shouting, turning a blind eye to the shocking crimes, disregarding the foreshadowing, insisting that we’re good citizens. We’re the ones shaking our heads and protesting that these are our neighbors and friends. That surely, they would never hurt us.

This is my home where I have lived my whole life, raised my children, built a family. The light shines through the windows of my kitchen at exactly the right angle, and I have a favorite takeout place around the corner. It’s impossible to consider leaving a place where we have been so very comfortable for so very long. Where we’re part of the fabric of the community. I can’t imagine it.

But I’m hearing that music in my head again, and I can’t imagine ignoring that either.

*Reprinted from the November 26, 2023 posting on the website of aish.com. A version of this article appeared in Mishpacha magazine.*

**Thoughts that Count**

*And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt* (Gen. 47:28)

Our forefather Jacob is symbolic of the attribute of truth, as it states in the Book of Mica (7:20), "You will give truth to Jacob." For with the quality of truth, a person can survive even the worst of times and live through the direst of circumstances. (The Hebrew name for Egypt, Mitzrayim, means narrow boundaries and limitations.) (Chidushei HaRim)

*As Rashi explains, this section of the Torah is "closed*" (the customary space of nine letters between the end of the preceding section and this one is missing), "for when Jacob our father died, the eyes and hearts of Israel were closed because of the affliction of the bondage." Yet according to the Midrash, the enslavement of the Jews did not begin until after the heads of the Twelve Tribes passed away. How do we reconcile these two statements? The Jews' actual, physical slavery did not begin with Jacob's death, but it was then that their spiritual bondage started to take root. The inner truth of what was happening began to be concealed from their eyes and hearts - which is the main characteristic of exile. (Sefat Emet)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayechi 5761/2000 edition of L’Chaim.*

**Rav Miller on How Can a Husband Keep His Wife Happy**

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**QUESTION:** How can a husband keep his wife happy if he cannot afford to buy her expensive things?

**ANSWER:** And the answer is diamonds don’t make anybody happy. It’s diamond words that matter! If a man makes it a career to be an actor and to always encourage his wife, that’s how he’ll make his wife happy. When she makes supper, he has to encourage her. Whatever she does, he has to praise her – That’s what it says in Mishlei when it describes the Woman of Valor. Her husband and her children arise and praise her enthusiastically.

Encouragement – that’s what everybody wants. There’s nobody in the world who doesn’t have a craving for encouragement. And why should a housewife be different? And so, the Jewish wife can be made happy even without any gifts at all.

Of course, if her husband remembers from time to time to buy her small inexpensive gifts, it’s proper to do that; but he could always make the house a place of happiness no matter what.

Poor people can be just as happy as rich people. That’s a truism that you don’t need to hear from me. If a husband and wife live with wisdom and kindliness, if they live with a certain affection and self-respect, then they can live a happy life that cannot be bought by any money.

*Reprinted from a recent email of Toras Avigdor. (Tape #536, January 1985.)*

**The Significance of a Jew’s Dipping His Feet into Oil**

**From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



With this week's Torah reading, Vayechi, we conclude the Book of Genesis. Before our Patriarch Jacob passed away he called all his children over to his deathbed. The Torah portion of Vayechi relates the blessings Jacob gave to each of the Twelve Tribes.

The blessing Jacob bestowed upon Asher was as follows: "Out of Asher his bread shall be fat [full of oil]." Moses, too, gave Asher a similar blessing: "And he shall dip his foot in oil." The literal meaning is that Asher would be blessed with so much oil that he would be able to immerse his foot in it.

**An Object’s Physical Existence is**

**Derived from its Spiritual Reality**

It has been explained many times that everything that exists in the physical world has a spiritual counterpart. In truth, an object's physical existence is derived from its spiritual reality, and not the other way around.

What does "And he shall dip his foot in oil" mean in the spiritual sense?

The Talmud explains that oil is an allusion to chochma (wisdom), the highest function of the human being. The foot, by contrast, is symbolic of man's lowest level, and alludes to kabalat ol, the acceptance of the yoke of heaven.

This contains a lesson for us to apply in our Divine service:

Oil, chochma, is symbolic of the study of Torah, which involves a person's intellect and understanding. The foot is symbolic of our service of G-d with kabalat ol, i.e., obeying the Torah's commandments simply because G-d wants us to. Moreover, the foot is the foundation and support of the entire structure.

Here we see an astounding thing: Serving G-d with acceptance of the yoke of heaven has a very distinct advantage over serving Him with our intellectual capacities, for the mind is by nature a limited creation. When a Jew serves G-d out of a sense of subservience he can attain far higher levels than when he serves Him utilizing his powers of comprehension.

Furthermore, it is precisely the service of accepting the yoke of heaven that constitutes our preparation for the Final Redemption. For when Moshiach comes, the advantage of this type of service will be revealed in its totality.

May it be G-d's will that by serving G-d with true kabalat ol we will merit the coming of our Righteous Moshiach, speedily in our day.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayechi 5761/2000 edition of L’Chaim. Adapted from Volume 1 of Likutei Sichot.*

**More Thoughts that Count**

*Deal with me kindly and truly: do not bury me... in Egypt* (Gen. 47:29)

One reason the mitzva of burying the dead is called a "kindness of truth" is that it is one of the few deeds a person can do that is completely good: It often happens that we think we're doing someone a favor, yet later it turns out to have been harmful, or something negative results from it. Nothing bad, however, can ever arise from giving a Jew a Jewish burial. (Ohel Yaakov)

*And now your two sons...Ephraim and Menashe, are as Reuven and Shimon* (Gen. 48:5)

It is only "now," when the Jewish people will enter Israel for the first time after the Exodus from Egypt, that Ephraim and Menashe will each receive a separate portion of land. When Moshiach comes, however, they will both share in the single portion of Joseph. (Meshech Chochma)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayechi 5761/2000 edition of L’Chaim.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Vayechi 5784**



The conclusion of the book of Bereshith reaches its climax this week with the recording for us of the death of our father Yaakov and of Yosef. The era of the founders of our people ended in relative tranquility and contentment, albeit on foreign soil. It will be a long and arduous journey for the descendants of Yaakov to return home to the Land of Israel.

A dark and forbidding era is about to begin but, though still in the future, it was foretold already many years earlier to our father Avraham. From the simple meaning of the words of the Torah, it is apparent that the family of Yaakov found themselves comfortable and well settled in their home in Goshen.

The promise of Yosef that the L-rd would take them forth from Egypt was certainly remembered and passed on from one generation to the next. Nevertheless, there was no sense of immediacy regarding this promise and its fulfillment, and the Jews would view Egypt as their home rather than the Land of Israel for a long time.

They hastened to return home after burying Yaakov in the Cave of Machpela, seeing Egypt as their home and the Land of Israel as a far distant goal and dream that would somehow eventually be realized but that had no immediate bearing on their day-to-day living.

This attitude remained constant throughout the long history of the Jewish people and of its various exiles, in Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, Europe and today the entire world, outposts that have hosted and still host the Jewish people in our far-flung diaspora. The Jewish people were never in a hurry to leave any of these places and to return to the Land of Israel. This still seems to be the case in our time as well.

It is difficult to understand why the holy family of Yaakov seems so passive and unresponsive in relation to the Land of Israel. There are commentators who state that they were aware of the heavenly decree that they would have to be strangers in a strange land for many centuries and that they accepted their lot and decided to make the best of it under the circumstances.

However, as Maimonides points out regarding the Egyptian enslavement of the Jewish people, Egypt was not preordained to be the oppressor and enslaver of Israel. And, it was also apparently not preordained that those early generations of Jews living in Egypt were to fulfill the vision of Avraham to be strangers and slaves in a land that did not belong to them.

Apparently according to Maimonides, the Egyptians had a choice as to whether to enslave the Jews, and the Jews before their enslavement occurred had an equal choice of leaving Egypt and returning to their ancestral home in the Land of Israel

However, we will deal with this baffling issue, there is no question that this represents a template for all later Jewish exiles and for Diaspora Jewry in all times and places. Apparently only tragedy moves the Jewish people…and throughout our history tragedies abound. Let us hope that somehow history does not repeat itself in our time as well.

*Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com*

**Civilian Casualties:**

**How Does Halacha Require Treating Civilian Noncombatants During War?**

**By Rabbi Hillel Raskin**

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**Rabbi Hillel Raskin**

The halacha is that it is forbidden to cause death to a gentile, even indirectly. Yet, during wartime, different halachos apply, and an enemy nation may be killed, especially those who pose a threat.

Maharal explains that the Torah allows killing an entire nation who comes to fight. Shimon and Levi were allowed to fight and kill the entire population of Shechem. Since they attacked and defiled Dina, it was permitted to punish the whole community collaterally. Likewise, when fighting against Midyan, the Jews were allowed to kill even those who didn’t pose a threat, being part of the nation that initiated the war.

What is the reason for this permissibility? Some explain that civilians generally participate in the war efforts in some way or another by providing the enemy soldiers with food, electricity, and so on. Many civilians who aren’t actively involved would likely join when the opportunity presents itself (like the G-d-fearing Egyptians who provided horses for the army to chase the Jews).

In Dovid Hamelech’s wars, he killed many noncombatants who may have been innocent, but his sole intention was to protect and save the Jewish people.

When the enemy is using innocent people as human shields, there is a further issue: can a Jewish soldier’s life be endangered to save the civilian human shields? The halacha is clear that we must take any steps necessary to protect a Yid’s life, even at the cost of more collateral damage.

Moreover, if gentile soldiers join forces with the Jewish army, their lives also take precedence over civilians on the other side. Some add that the civilians being used as human shields have the halachic status of rodef (even if against their will), and they may be killed for one’s protection.

In a regular war that Jews wage against another nation, they would always leave one side open for people to escape. However, when waging a milchemes mitzva — to save Bnei Yisroel from an enemy who attacked them — they may set a complete siege and close the city from all sides.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayigash 5784 edition of The Weekly Farbrengen. Rabbi Raskin is Rov of Anash in Petach Tikva, Israel.*

**The Importance of a Good Ending**

*“And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt…”* (47:28)

The Posuk tells us Yaakov lived in Mitzrayim for 17 years. The Meforshim all point out that the word “VaYechi” is telling us that these were the years he “lived”. In VaYigash when Pharaoh asked Yaakov his age, Yaakov first uses the term “Yimei Migurai” the days of my dwelling because his life was so difficult it was hard to use the word “living”. He merely “existed”.

Once he came to Mitzrayim and he rejoined his closest son Yosef, then he “lived”. The Kli Yakar points out that this is the meaning of the Medrash that says there the gap between VaYigash and VaYechi is “stuffed up”, as it is a “Parshah Stuma”, there is no gap in the Torah. The reason is to teach us that once Yaakov arrived in Mitzrayim the trials and tribulations of his life were finally closed as well.

That is why, says the Kli Yakar, immediately after this it says “VaYehi Yimei Yaakov Shnei Chayav Sheva Shanim…” The years of Yaakov’s life were 147. These final years were so good that although beforehand he didn’t consider the first 130 years living, now after the last 17 wonderful years the troubles of the past were forgotten and his whole life seemed enjoyable and memorable. A good ending can make the entire past, no matter how difficult, disappear! (Benjamin A Rose)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayechi 5784 email of R’ Yedidye Hirtenfeld’s parsha sheet – whY I Matter for the Young Israel of Midwood in Brooklyn, NY.*

**Why Is Kiddush**

**Said Over Wine?**

**By Rabbi** [**Yehuda Shurpin**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/15169/jewish/Shurpin-Yehuda.htm)

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***Art by***[***Sefira Lightstone***](https://www.chabad.org/3159160)

First let’s talk a bit about *kiddush*. In the Ten Commandments, the Torah commands us to “remember *(zachor)* the Sabbath day to sanctify it.”1 This teaches us that we are to [verbally declare the Shabbat holy](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/260252/jewish/What-Is-Kiddush.htm), which we do when we make [*kiddush*](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/484181/jewish/What-Are-the-Kiddush-basics.htm). The term *[zachor](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/70399/jewish/Zachor.htm%22%20%5Co%20%22Zachor)* is associated with wine in numerous places in Scripture.2 Thus, the sages instituted that this mitzvah be done over wine. (This is also the reason for the *havdalah* wine.)3

The wine—which is a celebratory beverage—also serves to show that the meal we are about to eat isn’t just another regular meal, but a special, joyous and festive one. (This is the main reason for using wine at the daytime *kiddush*.)4

Additionally, the rabbis throughout the ages have offered further reasons why *kiddush* is recited specifically on wine.

**Wine Brings Joy**

Wine has a special power to gladden the hearts of men. And when it is used for a holy purpose, such as to celebrate Shabbat, it also “gladdens G‑d.”5

**Wedding Celebration**

The Zohar describes Shabbat as the “bride” of the Jewish people. Just as the betrothal of a bride (called *kiddushin*, “sanctification”) is recited over wine, so is *kiddush* recited over wine.

All blessings flow from the [Torah](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1426382/jewish/Torah.htm), which is compared to wine. When we sanctify and bless this holy day, it is through the power of this “wine.” This is alluded to in the verse, “We will recall Your love more fragrant than wine [מיין]; they have loved You sincerely.”6 The Hebrew word for “more than wine” can also be translated as “from wine,” i.e., [G‑d](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/433240/jewish/God.htm)’s love flows from the power of wine—Torah.7

**Rectifying the Forbidden Fruit**

The sages tell us that Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit late on Friday afternoon.8 Due to the honor of the Sabbath, they were granted a reprieve of judgement until after Shabbat.9

According to many opinions, the forbidden fruit was a grape.10 We rectify the sin when we make a blessing and use grape wine for a [mitzvah](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1438516/jewish/Mitzvah.htm) around the same time that the sin took place. (Technically, one can accept Shabbat late Friday afternoon.)11

**The Numerical Value**

The Hebrew word for wine (יין) has the numerical value of 70 (10+10+50=70). There are 35 words12 in the verses that we chant before the *kiddush*,13 and another 35 words in the actual *kiddush* blessing. Put them together, and you get 70 (35+35=70).14

Now, if you take out your *siddur* and count, you may discover that there are 42 words in the *kiddush* blessing. Some people do not say the seven words that translate as “for You have chosen us and sanctified us from among all the nations.” Others, including Chabad, do say those words. So how do we get 35? By not counting the opening words *Baruch atah . . . asher*, since they are a general introduction to many blessings, and not unique to *kiddush*. Rather, the word count begins from the word *kideshanu*, where we begin to discuss the theme of *kiddush*: sanctification.15

**The Wine of Moshiach**

We celebrate the Sabbath as a testimony to G‑d having created the world in six days and “rested” on the seventh. At that time, He set aside special wine to be used at the celebratory meal when the Moshiach comes.16 Just as the six-day workweek culminates in Shabbat, so will the six millennia of our work to make the world a home for G‑d culminate in the messianic era—“the day that is wholly Shabbat and tranquility, for life everlasting.”17 May it be speedily in our days!

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**Rabbi Yehuda Shurpin**

**FOOTNOTES**

[1.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef1a3340700) [Exodus 20:8](https://www.chabad.org/9881#v8). [2.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm#footnoteRef2a3340700) See [Hosea 14:8](https://www.chabad.org/16168#v8) and [Song of Songs 1:4](https://www.chabad.org/16445#v4). [3.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm#footnoteRef3a3340700) Talmud, Pesachim 106a. [4.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm#footnoteRef4a3340700) See Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav, Orach Chaim 289:2. [5.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm#footnoteRef5a3340700) [Judges 9:13](https://www.chabad.org/15817#v13).

[6.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef6a3340700) [Song of Songs 1:2](https://www.chabad.org/16445#v2). [7.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm#footnoteRef7a3340700) See Zohar III:95a. [8.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm#footnoteRef8a3340700) Talmud, Sanhedrin 38b.

[9.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef9a3340700) Bereishit Rabbah 11:2. [10.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm#footnoteRef10a3340700) See [On the Identity of the Tree of Knowledge](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1982723/jewish/Was-the-Forbidden-Fruit-Really-an-Apple.htm).

[11.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef11a3340700) See [The Proper Time for Lighting](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/110393/jewish/When.htm).

[12.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef12a3340700) The standard formula for *kiddush* also tacks on an additional two words, יום הששי, from the end of chapter 1. A number of reasons are given: a) they correspond to the words *zachor* and *shamor*, which enjoin us to remember the Shabbat and keep it holy; b) with these two words, the initials of the first four words of *kiddush* form the Tetragrammaton (יום הששי ויכלו השמים); c) they boost the total word count up to 72, corresponding to what is called in Kabbalah *Shem Ab*, a way of spelling out the four letters of G‑d’s name with the numerical value of 72.

[13.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef13a3340700) [Genesis 2:1](https://www.chabad.org/8166#v1)–3.

[14.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef14a3340700) See Zohar II:207b; Tikkunei Zohar, *tikun* 24 and 47.

[15.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef15a3340700) See Shaar ha-Kollel 18:4. See also Reshimot, no. 96.

[16.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef16a3340700) Talmud, Berachot 34b.

[17.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3340700/jewish/Why-Is-Kiddush-Said-Over-Wine.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef17a3340700) Talmud, Berachot 57b; Nachmanides, commentary to Genesis 1.

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