

## Vayigash

In this week's Torah portion of Vayigash, we shall read the dramatic story of the reunion of Jacob and his beloved son Joseph from whom he was physically separated for a period of twenty-two years. However, even before Jacob begins his trip to see Joseph, he commands his son Judah to prepare a place where the Patriarch can settle with his family. In the Hebrew text it reads "V'et Yehudah Shalach..Lehorot L'fanav." Our Talmudic sages noted that "L'horot" derives from the word "hora'ah" teaching; therefore for them the passage denotes that Jacob sent his son Judah,<sup>1</sup> "*L'hatkin lo bet va'ad shey'he moreh bo divrei Torah, v'she-yih'yu hash'vatim lom'dim bo.*" His task was to arrange for Jacob a gathering place where he could teach the words of our Holy Torah and where his twelve sons, the Tribal Ancestors, would study. Rashi on this verse paraphrases: "she-misham taytze hora'ah;" for from this institution, instruction would emanate to his offspring. Coming to Egypt, a country infamous for its idolatry and witchcraft, immorality and wickedness, our Patriarch Jacob was deeply concerned and most anxious about the religious future of his family. Jacob sought to safeguard their religious identity and integrity. His secret weapon was to establish an institution for learning Torah.

Jacob's devotion to religion was so great that when our Rabbis describe the reunion with Joseph, they remark that Jacob was so absorbed in the recital of the Shema, that he hardly took notice at first of his son Joseph dressed in the resplendent robes of an Egyptian viceroy.<sup>2</sup> For he never for a moment relaxed his devotion to G-d. It was this loyalty to tradition that Jacob sought to perpetuate.

The fact that he sent Judah, and not Isaachar, who was the student par excellence amongst the brothers, was to teach us two important lessons, applicable also to our generation.

It should not be the task or concern of the Rabbi alone to plan and work for the education of our youth. Jewish education must also be the concern of the businessman and lay leaders as exemplified by Judah.

The businessman, the professional, the worker, men who meet and deal with the physical and mechanical skills in daily life, should be the ones to take the lead in establishing and supporting Torah institutions. They should cooperate with the Rabbi, but never permit him to carry the load by himself. There must be total involvement in Jewish education by the laymen of each community.

A second lesson! Going into our first exile, Jacob insisted that the man of wealth must seek to insure not only his physical possessions, but also his moral and spiritual wealth. That could only be accomplished by assuring the religious education and training of children. Therefore, was Judah chosen. Our father Jacob wanted to impress on future generations that we must insulate religiously and prepare educationally, the youth of each generation. Only then can we overcome the various forces which seek to alienate us from Judaism and the Jewish people.

Jacob was the symbol of learning as the Torah describes him—"Yoshev Ohalim" a man who studied Torah constantly. He taught for posterity that only through Torah study will we remain a nation, separate and different.<sup>3</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Bereishis 46:28. Tanchuma, Vayigash 11
2. Rashi, *ibid* 46:29
3. Bereishis 25:27, Rashi