

Vayechi

The name given to a Sidrah in the Torah capsulises the essence of that Sidrah. The portion of the Torah which we shall read this Shabbat is called Vayechi, which means literally "and he (Jacob) lived." Where did he live and really enjoy his life—"in the land of Egypt." The Rabbis teach us that the last seventeen years of his life, spent together with his children and grandchildren were the happiest and most fulfilling of his entire lifetime. Although he then lived away from his native country of birth, Israel, he nevertheless enjoyed true living.¹

There is a wealth of religious instruction and inspiration in this Biblical narrative. True happiness and joy do not come by chance or accident of birth or circumstance. Rather, does one create the atmosphere and environment in which pleasure and contentment are the natural results.

Jacob, about whom our Sages relate that all of his actions and life struggles are but an omen of what will occur to his offspring, the Jewish people, wished to entrust us with a sacred concept. Real and lasting life is determined and secured by the family you create and develop.

If you dedicate your life to the upbringing of your children in the faith and tradition of your faith, and are successful, then your entire life takes on meaning and earns an aura of timelessness. The pleasure of living with children and grandchildren who agree with and join in the exciting life style of Torah and Mitzvot is immeasurable.

Knowing that your efforts, sacrifices and teachings were not in vain, but that they brought satisfying religious, moral and educational results, gives life new meaning and value.

Our patriarch Jacob, who was the first Jew to go into Galut (exile) with his entire family, showed the ensuing generations

what priorities must be established if we are to perpetuate our faith and nation.

He insisted on having Yeshivot for his offspring, where they could receive the proper Jewish education which would protect them against the ravages of assimilation and cowardly desertion to other faiths and philosophies.

And when he blessed the children of Joseph he said, "the Jewish people will bless their children to be like Menashe and Ephraim." Indeed, these two sons of Joseph born in an alien land were as close in their religious thinking and practice as were the original twelve sons of Jacob born and reared in Israel. In fact Jacob stated they would be considered by him as his own sons Reuben and Shimon.²

Because Joseph proved that you can raise loyal and proud Jewish sons also in the Galut, Jacob therefore prayed that all Jewish children throughout the centuries, born in or out of Israel should be similar to Joseph's sons. For they proved by their life style that they were true to the ideals and principles of our faith.

Jacob further blessed them by comparing them to the fish of the sea. When one stands at the edge of a stream and observes the schools of fish, their habits and ways, he marvels at them and at their system. So, too, with the Jewish people. All who observe the Jews should be able to recognize them as a people living apart from the rest of the nations, pursuing their own life style, with their own unique observances and traditions.³

Only by being different in our religious, moral and national standards will we survive. And perhaps that may be the reason for concluding the entire first book of Bereishit with this Sidrah. To emphasize that the essence of life from beginning to end depends on loyalty to Judaism and devotion to our traditions.

In order to assure the perpetuation of our dedication to our faith it is incumbent upon us to study Torah and teach our children.

FOOTNOTES

1. Baal Haturim, Bereishis 47:28
2. Bereishis 48:5, 20
3. Ibid 48:16, See Rashi