

MORASHAH
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Parashat HaShavuah Series

VAYECHI

Many times we, as Rabbis, are asked to sum up a person's life at a funeral. I, like other rabbis, go into a flowery explanation of what that person did. (Sometimes that is a little difficult, but we find a way!) One would think that when it comes to a person like Jacob, for whom we are all named (*b'nei Yisrael*), there would be a long flowery explanation of his life. Instead, the Torah sums it up with two words, "*Vayechi Yaakov*" – Jacob lived.

The Torah says that Yaakov lived 147 years; the Midrash, however, says that he truly lived only 34 years: the first 17 years of Joseph's life (before Joseph was sold by his brothers) and the 17 years that he spent with Joseph in Egypt. Yet when it describes Yaakov's death, the Torah says "*Vayikr'vu y'mei Yisrael lamut*" – the days grew near for Yisrael to die.

Why the difference between the beginning reference to "Yaakov" and the use of "Yisrael" when he prepared to die? Rabbi Bechaye writes that the name "Yaakov" refers to bodily concerns, as is hinted in the word *akev*, i.e., heel – lowly things – while the name "Yisrael", derived from a root meaning dominion, alludes to concerns of the soul – elevated things. When Jacob came to Egypt, he came to handle his bodily needs for food. Now, when his soul is about to leave him to go to the place of true life in the Next World, and he is about to bless his children, he is called "Yisrael".

It is with this in mind that Jacob first blesses Joseph's sons and then his own children. Jacob was different from his father and grandfather. Each of them had more than one son, yet each had only one son who remained true to

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the beliefs of his father. Jacob had 12 sons and each one remained true to the God of their father, as is shown by the blessing of Joseph's sons. Jacob asks "*Mee heim*" - "who are they?" I submit that it is not only because of his failing eyesight, but rather it is another question: "Who are these two young men who are dressed in Egyptian clothes and attended Egyptian schools?" Joseph answers "*banai heim*" - "they are my sons." They may look like Egyptians and speak like Egyptians, but they are my sons, who have continued my traditions and beliefs in God.

The proof that Joseph was right is shown by the fact that we today on Friday evenings, before Kiddush, still bless our sons that God should make them like Ephraim and Menashe. May we be *zocheh* to see our children and students inherit the blessings of Jacob, Joseph and his children, and the Matriarchs in whose names we bless our daughters.

Shabbat Shalom!

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