

## Torah Talk - מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Post of Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School of the Nation's Capital*

**Parashat Vayechi**  
**December 22, 2018**

**פרשת ויחי**  
**י"ד בטבת תשע"ט**

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 47:28-50:26

In this *parasha*, Yaakov blesses his sons on his deathbed and asks them to bury him in Cana'an.

*Vayechi* is the last *parasha* in *Sefer Bereshit*, the Book of Genesis. The Book began with universal themes of the creation of the human being, corruption, destruction, and renewal. It then narrowed its focus and centered on the stories of the first proto-Jews, the progenitors of the Jewish people.

Avraham, the first of the proto-Jews, took it upon himself to teach the world about the existence of one God who loathes human sacrifice and loves kindness. Avraham was the pillar of kindness, and he educated the world about God through his acts of kindness. He had tens of thousands of followers. He established places of worship where his students continued to teach as he made the rounds planting seeds, building, and encouraging people to give up self-defeating idol worship. He complained bitterly to God that he had no spiritual inheritor. He wanted a son who would father a nation that would exemplify the elevated ideals of service to the One God. He was right to be concerned. By the generation of Yitzchak, all of those tens of thousands of followers seemed to have disappeared. The formation of the Jewish people needed to be accomplished within the family.

Avraham had two sons. Yitzchak carried on his father's spiritual mission; Yishmael did not. Yitzchak had two sons. Yaakov carried on his father's and grandfather's spiritual mission; Esav did not. Yaakov had 12 sons. Each and every one of them carried on the mission, as did his grandchildren.

The *Talmud Yerushalmi* (Palestinian Talmud) relates the following *midrash*:

When Yaakov's sons had assembled, they thought they would hear a litany of blessings and consolations. Yaakov, their father, answered and said to them, "Avraham my father's father had flawed children that came out from him, Yishmael and all the children of Ketura. From my father Yitzchak issued my brother Esav who was disqualified. I am afraid that that there might be amongst you a person whose heart is divided from his brothers and goes to serve other gods." All twelve tribes responded simultaneously and said, "שמע ישראל ה' א-להינו ה' אחד – Listen, our father Yisrael, Hashem is our God, Hashem is the One and Only." At that moment Yaakov our father answered, "ברוך שם כבוד ועד מלכותו לעולם ועד – Blessed is the Name of Hashem's glorious kingdom for all eternity!"

The Jewish people arose from this simple clan. The members of the clan were special people, but not superhuman. They made mistakes, but they were the only ones who continued to believe in and worship Hashem as we do today.

The end of *Sefer Bereshit* signals the end of the family story. When we pick up our reading next week in *Sefer Shemot* (the Book of Exodus), we will read a story not about a family, but about the nascent nation which arose from this line of remarkable human beings.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Why was Yaakov concerned that one of his sons would not carry on the Jewish traditions of his family?
- Where do we read on a regular basis the words of the answer that Yaakov's sons gave him and his response? Why do you think this is?
- What mistakes did the אבות and אמהות (forefathers and foremothers) make? What great things did they accomplish?
- What are the first three words that come to your mind when you think about our forefathers and foremothers? Why these words?