

## Parashat Vayechi, Rabbi James Proops

When a boy or girl comes of age, reaching their Bar or Bat Mitzvah, the phrase “Now you are a man/woman” is often directed at them with glee. However, when someone enters medical school or law school we wouldn’t say to them on their first day “Now you are a Dr!” or “Now you are an attorney!”. We recognize that they are embarking on the next stage of their journey, which will involve much study and hard work, and ultimately we hope that they will achieve their goals. To be a Jewish man or woman is similarly a process of continued effort and improvement so that we can become something truly worthwhile.

In the *HafTarah* that accompanies *Parashat Vayechi*, *David HaMelech* is about to die and pass over the throne to his son *Shlomo*, and he is very exacting in his words. He did not say “Now you are a man” but rather *והיית לאיש* “You will come to be a man”. The message of *David HaMelech* is clear. You have to grow into a man, you have to develop your mind and character. Everyday you will grow a little more in becoming the great *Shlomo HaMelech*. Similarly, to be a Jew is an ongoing process of development and growth. We must continue to learn, striving to scale the heights of understanding and build on our spirituality and *emunah*. Another fundamental part of this development is we each have to ensure that we carry over from previous generations and continue to pass on to the next, the values, *mesorah* and practice of Torah Judaism.

We can see this clearly demonstrated in the famous scene of Yaakov blessing his grandsons Ephraim and Menashe. Rabbi Berel Wein points out the great significance of a grandparent bestowing a blessing on their grandchildren. The *Talmud (Bava Metzia 85a)* states that if there are three consecutive generations of Torah scholars in a family then the Torah will always find its way back into that family no matter how far down the line or how far the family have strayed from observance. Rabbi Wein suggests that this is one of the reasons that Yaakov emphasized his blessing to his grandchildren. Yaakov has done his spiritual best together with Yosef, but now it is up to the next generation, to Ephraim and Menashe. If they will continue in the ways and path of Yaakov, then the Jewish future is assured. “Yaakov strives for this success and therefore concentrates his blessings on his grandchildren, and by doing so, he also instructs all later Jewish

generations to concentrate their blessings on their grandchildren as well as their children. Building the three-generation cord is a key to Jewish survival and success.”

In both the *Parasha* and the *HafTarah* we are told how two of our greatest ancestors died, Yaakov Avinu and David HaMelech respectively. We have seen how both of them were intimately focussed on passing on the mantle of Torah to the next generations. We can also see that in both cases there is something unique in how their deaths are recorded. Rather than the usual expression “Yaakov died” or “David died” the Torah states “וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל-עַמּוּיוֹ - he was gathered to his people” and regarding David we read “וַיִּשְׁכַּב דָּוִד עִם-אֲבוֹתָיו” - And David slept with his fathers”. We learn from this is another powerful insight. In both cases great leaders were not simply leaving the world, but they were passing over the mantle of responsibility to the next generation. It can be said that fathers and mothers never die when children take over the charge, they just sleep. In this way the Jewish People never dies. Throughout the generations people have tried to eliminate us but their attempts, while damaging, are ultimately futile. We live on because the charge is carried over from generation to generation and with each new link in the chain there is a resolve to pass it on to the next.

We we all merit to internalise these important lessons, Shabbat Shalom