

# OUR FATHER YAAKOV'S LEGACY

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The last seventeen years of the lifetime of our father Yaakov are, so to speak, the best years of his long and eventful life. When appearing before the Pharaoh of Egypt, Yaakov freely admits that the first one hundred thirty years of his life were sparse and difficult. He experienced a lifetime of troubles and travails from the moment he was born holding on to the heel of his brother Eisav.

He and Eisav will contend for the blessings of their father and for the immortality of founding an eternal people that will live throughout history against all odds. Yaakov will struggle to save his family and possessions from the wiles of Lavan and his sons. Yaakov will wrestle with an angel, be sorely tested and wounded, and yet prevail. Eventually he will receive the blessings of that angel which are encapsulated in the name of Yisrael.

Yaakov will suffer the indignity and trauma of his daughter being raped by Shechem and yet he will disapprove of the bloody revenge that his sons visited upon the community that spawned the perpetrators of that outrage. His beloved wife Rachel dies in childbirth and Yaakov is hard-pressed to recover from that blow.

Yaakov seeks a modicum of peace of mind and body when the greatest tragedy of his life - the story of Yosef and his brothers - rests upon him. In despair, he is convinced that he will go to his grave mourning for his beloved lost son. All in all, Yaakov's description of his life and its events when standing before the Pharaoh is unfortunately very accurate, if not even understated.

So it comes as no wonder that the final years of his life are called the years that he actually "lived." He is reunited with his beloved son Yosef, the family is bound together, at peace with one another and is protected, secure and prosperous in their new home in the land of Goshen. Yet Yaakov is aware that this rosy picture of Jewish life in Egypt is a temporary mirage, an illusion that will soon fade and that the years of hardship and bondage are already on the horizon.

The Lord had revealed that future to Yaakov's grandfather Avraham generations earlier and that bill was now coming due. God has promised Yaakov that these future troubles will not be seen by him in his lifetime. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Yaakov is troubled by the darkened future of his people, a future that he is completely aware of.

Yet, we hear no note of pessimism in his final words to the Jewish people. Rather, both he and Yosef reassure the generations to come that the Lord is somehow with them, and that he will redeem them from all of their troubles and fashion them into the most eternal and influential people on the

face of the globe.

It is this faith in the future, the belief that good will somehow prevail that is the most important legacy that our father Yaakov has left to us. It is this belief and attitude that is the unique hallmark of the people of Israel and guarantees to us our continuity and ultimate triumph and success.

Shabbat shalom

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