

Vayechi: Yaakov Lives

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

The Torah portion *Vayechi* begins by saying:¹ “And Yaakov lived.” Why does it begin in this manner when the entire portion deals with Yaakov’s demise and the events surrounding it? Additionally, since the title of a Torah portion relates to the entire portion,² why the title “And he lived,” if the whole portion speaks of dying?

The true meaning of life is eternal. This is why true life exists only in relation to G-d, as the verse states:³ “G-d, the L-rd is Truth, He is the Living G-d.”

Truth is not subject to change; if something is genuinely True it will remain so forever. Since G-d is Truth, never ceasing and never changing, He is also the true aspect of life.

Created beings, however, are not *true* entities, for they do not exist in and of themselves; they had to be created, and as such are intrinsically subject to change and decay. Only by cleaving to and uniting with G-d can they be invested with true life.

Indeed, the Jewish people are called “alive”⁴ precisely for this reason, as the verse states:⁵ “And you who cleave to the L-rd your G-d are all alive today” — the Jewish people are alive in an eternal manner only because of their unity with G-d.

However, in order for this dimension of “life” to be *perceived* in a physical world, it is necessary to encounter obstacles to one’s attachment to G-d and nevertheless remain steadfast and whole in the performance of Torah and *mitzvos*. Only then is one’s true “life” fully revealed, for it is then obvious that nothing can stand in one’s path and affect one’s unity with G-d.

The connection of “And Yaakov lived” to the entire portion, as well as the reason for the whole portion being titled “And he lived” — although its main theme is Yaakov’s demise — will be understood accordingly:

During all of Yaakov’s years before his descent into Egypt it was not clearly seen that his existence was one of true “life,” a life of “And you who cleave... are all alive.” For the principle of “Do not be sure of yourself until the day you die”⁶ applies even to the very righteous.⁷ Thus Yaakov’s degree of attachment to G-d throughout his life was not sufficient proof of “life.”

Even the fact that Yaakov’s conduct caused his children and grandchildren to be righteous as well does not prove that he was truly “alive,” for Yaakov and his entire family lived in the Holy Land; and one could not be sure about their conduct in a coarser country.

Only when Yaakov approached the time of his death, having meanwhile descended uncorrupted with his family to Egypt, was it *revealed* that his entire life, although externally filled with pain and suffering, was true life — “And Yaakov lived.”

This also explains why the portion is titled “And he lived,” notwithstanding the fact that it describes Yaakov’s demise and the events that transpired afterwards:

The *Gemara* states:⁸ “Our father Yaakov did not die; as his progeny lives on, he too lives on.” Since the true aspect of life is eternal, Yaakov’s existence can only be judged after observing its perpetual effect.

This effect is perceived when one realizes that not only did Yaakov’s own soul continue to cleave to G-d, but that his children pursue the true life led by their father.

The above provides an additional reason for the Torah portion being titled “And he lived.” The title not only emphasizes that even after Yaakov’s passing it is still possible to say that he lives, but that it is *specifically* after Yaakov’s demise that one can say he lives on.

Compiled from *Likkutei Sichos* , Vol. XV, pp. 427-430.

FOOTNOTES

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| 1. <i>Bereishis</i> 47:28. | 5. <i>Devarim</i> 4:4. |
| 2. See <i>Likkutei Sichos V</i> , p. 57ff. | 6. <i>Avos</i> 2:4; <i>Berachos</i> 29a. |
| 3. <i>Yermiyahu</i> 10:10. | 7. See <i>Berachos</i> <i>ibid.</i> ; <i>Zohar III</i> , 285a. |
| 4. See <i>Avos d'Rebbe Nassan</i> conclusion of ch. 34:
“Ten are called ‘alive,’ G-d, Torah, Jews....” | 8. <i>Taanis</i> 5b. |

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