

R' Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik, the Rav of ישראל, (whom I had the privilege of hearing on numerous occasions and studying many of his שיעורים), shares a wonderful essay based on a דרשה titled "The First Jewish Grandfather," inspired by this week's פרשה.

Of the three אבות - אברהם, יצחק, and יעקב - יעקב had two unique special privileges which were denied to the other אבות. The first is that יעקב's names, ישראל and יעקב, became synonymous with כלל ישראל. We are called בני ישראל, בני יעקב, כלל ישראל, בני יעקב, and בית יעקב. In contrast, אברהם and יצחק remained individual names, which were never raised to the status of all of כלל ישראל, only יעקב had such a זכות.

The second זכות is that יעקב is frequently referred to as "הזקן" in both the תורה and מדרש. This is notable because, even though אברהם and יצחק lived longer than יעקב, the title "זקן" is uniquely associated with יעקב. One example of this is found in פרשת מקץ (43:27): וישאל להם לשלום ויאמר השלום אביכם הזקן. Here, and in other places in יעקב, יעקב is described as the זקן, which means "the elderly one" but it also refers to his title, which is "grandfather." While אברהם and יצחק also had grandchildren, the relationship of a grandfather to his grandchildren is explicitly highlighted for the first time in this week's פרשה, ויחי. We learn that the בני יוסף studied with their grandfather יעקב every day after he arrived in מצרים. אפרים, and also מנשה, learned with their Zeidy. It was the זקן who listened to their problems, worked with them, played with them, and planned with them. The most effective teacher, R' Yoshe Ber says, is not one who lectures with a detachment, but rather one who befriends his students, becoming a co-searcher of אמת. This was the unique relationship that יעקב אבינו shared with his grandchildren.

Modern man often prides itself on technological achievements and disdains the past, viewing it with contempt. The modern man may think, "I am so far ahead of previous generations." However, a Jew of מסורה lives with both the present and the past. מסורה transcends the bounds of time. Though thousands of years have passed since the days of אברהם, יצחק, and יעקב, we relate to them as if they are our own fathers and grandfathers. For Jewish boys and girls, אברהם is not a mythical figure, but a constant source of inspiration. We journey with him, feeling his trials in לך לך. We tremble with יצחק at the עקדה. We run with יעקב to חרן.

R' Yoshe Ber offers a beautiful משל to illustrate this idea. "An old rebbi enters a classroom filled with young students, young enough to be his grandchildren. He enters as an old man with a wrinkled face, his eyes reflecting the fatigue and the sadness of old age. He sees his דור slowly but very regularly slipping away, נבוך, and they only linger in memory. The rebbi sits down and he sees before him rows of young beaming faces, clear eyes radiating with the joy of being young. For a minute he says "Can I as an old man talk to these young children? Can a rebbi in his Indian summer, and the students enjoying the spring of their lives, have any connection"? With hesitation he begins his שיעור, uncertain as to how it will proceed. Suddenly, the door opens, and his grandfather, רב חיים בריסקר, enters to help explain the גמרא. Then, another figure enters - the ש"ך, followed by רש"י, רבינו תם, רמב"ם, the ראב"ד, the רבי, רשב"א, and more. Giants of past generations take their seats. The rebbi introduces these guests to his students, and a great dialogue begins. The רמב"ם states a הלכה; the ראב"ד sharply disagrees. Students defend the רמב"ם, while others challenge the ראב"ד. The rebbi softly corrects the students and suggests more restrained tones. The רשב"א smiles gently. רבינו רבינו gives his opinion. All of a sudden all of the



דורות come together, the young students debate earlier generations with an air of familiarity. A crescendo of discussion ensues. All speak one language, all are pursuing one goal, all are committed to a common vision, and all are operating with the same categories that all of the previous דורות utilized. A מסורה is achieved, a friendship, a comradeship of old and young spanning the antiquity of the middle ages and our times today. This is the קץ [he mentions it with a saying of רבי עקיבא], all of these generations come together and this will bring the final גאולה אליהו. גאולה will come, וְהָשִׁיב לְבָאֲבוֹתָ עַל־בָּנָיִם, The great dialogue of the generations will come to actual fulfillment when משיח comes.”

R' Yoshe Ber concludes, “After a two or three hour שיעור the Rabbi emerges from the chamber young and rejuvenated! He has defeated age - the students look exhausted! The students are exhausted from this exercise. In the מסורה experience, years play no role. Hands, however dry and wrinkled like parchment, embrace warm and supple hands together in a common bond, bridging the gap separating the generations. When יעקב benched אפרים and מנשה, he began a process of the previous דורות bringing the מסורה down to the new generations.”

And it was the Rav, in his brilliant way, able to bring us this further understanding of this פגישה between יעקב and his grandchildren. The first Jewish grandfather symbolizes the secret of the מסורה, that through our connection with all of you together, we keep on living and we continue the גואל צדק. מסורה עד ביאת גואל צדק. Good Shabbos!

