

# THE TRIBE WEEKLY

PARASHAT VAYECHI

6-7 JANUARY | 14 TEVET

## Understanding Everyone



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*Vayechi*, the opening word of this week's parasha, means 'And he lived,' even though the parasha is about the death of Yaakov. Although it is important to assess our lives throughout our years, only at the end of a person's life can they see what kind of life they led. Yaakov uses his end of days to bless the two sons of Yosef (Joseph) and later, the twelve tribes.

We are told: "And he blessed them on that day, saying, 'By you, Israel will bless saying, "May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe"" (Bereishit 48:20). This universal blessing is given to all Jewish

generations after them. However, this is a unique occurrence; it is unusual for one blessing to fit all.

As we are told later in the parasha, Yaakov blesses each one of the twelve tribes with a different blessing. Each blessing is fundamentally different and is tailor-made to the character traits and emotional make-up of each tribe. The Torah says: "All these were the tribes of Israel, twelve in number, and this is what their father said to them as he bade them farewell, addressing to each a blessing appropriate to him" (ibid. 49:28). To each a different blessing, to each his own parting words.

The Talmud teaches us that "just as no two faces are alike, so too no two personalities are alike" (Berachot 58a). We are all physically, psychologically, intellectually and

spiritually different, and this message is vitally important for education and how we treat others.

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook (1865-1935) teaches us that the very purpose of education is to help each person discover their own individuality, to learn what they can do best. Self-discovery, according to Rabbi Kook, is the essence of the educational endeavour. Each individual offers something else to this changing and complicated world.

As leaders and role models, we have a responsibility to help individuals understand their own complexities. Like Yaakov's children, we all are uniquely blessed. Appreciating our uniqueness, like that of every one of our fellows, is an essential component of Jewish spirituality.

## Vayechi Quiz

1. How old was Yaakov when he descended to Egypt?
2. How long did Yaakov live in Egypt?
3. Yaakov asks to be buried in the cave in the field of Machpelah. Who was already buried there? Which of the matriarchs is not buried there, and where are they buried?
4. How old was Yosef when he died?
5. What was Yosef's last request?



Answers: 1. 130 2. 17 years 3. Avraham, Sarah, Yitzchak, Rivka and Leah were buried in the cave of Machpelah. Rachel is buried near Beit Lechem 4. 110 5. That his bones be buried in Canaan