



IS THIS LIFE?

HAVE YOU EVER HEARD SOMEONE SAY “I’M NOT LIVING”? WHAT DO THEY mean? If they are alive and well, surely they are ‘living’? Or does a person expect more from life? In fact, as we know, often people make this kind of statement when they are oppressed by adversity. Everything seems so dismal, that they feel that life is not life.

The Sedra¹ is called Vayechi, meaning “He lived”. Perhaps it will throw light on the question of life and facing adversity. Have you guessed? Yes, of course. As explained by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Sedra suggests that it is particularly when we are surrounded by adversity that we are truly alive...

Now, since we are using the word ‘life’ to mean something special, not just still breathing, not just ‘existing’ - we must try to understand what this mysterious life actually is. The answer the Sages give us: G-d. G-d is the source of all life and is the essence of life. “G-d is true and G-d is life” declares one of our Prophets².

This means that by being *connected* with G-d, a person acquires genuine life themselves. As the Torah says: “You who are cleaving to G-d, are all living today”³.

Now, how do we cleave to G-d? Through Jewish teaching, the

guidance of the Torah and the Commandments, in their broadest sense. The Torah connects us to G-d in every detail of our lives, whether we are at work, eating or sleeping.

Now comes the next question: are we more connected with G-d when we are in easy situations or when we are surrounded by difficulties? What do you think?

This is where we come to our Sedra. Right at the beginning it tells us that our great ancestor Jacob “lived” for seventeen years in Egypt. Then it tells us that his entire life-span was 147 years.

There are two different ways to understand this. One is, that the last seventeen years of his life were very peaceful. The previous years had all been very difficult, struggling in different ways against different kinds of opposition or oppressed by the loss of Joseph. The peaceful 17 years were real “life” and they made up for the previous 130 years which were not.

The second way is the exact opposite. Ancient Egypt was known to be the most immoral country in the world. For Jacob to live there rather than in the sacred Land of Israel, meant being surrounded by tremendous spiritual adversity. Yet for 17 years he lived there, and those years were real “life”, with the sense of being connected with G-d at every moment.

Much of Jacob’s earlier life had been in the sacred atmosphere of the Holy Land. In Jacob’s view, the fact that in the Holy Land he had been connected to G-d was not surprising. True, there had been difficulties, and sometimes the difficulties seemed to outweigh everything. But the fact that he was able to feel close to G-d in the negative environment of Egypt helped Jacob see the meaning in his entire life. Because he successfully faced adversity in Egypt, his entire life - with all its problems - became more meaningful.

So next time things seem difficult, just think: by facing the challenge now, not only am I really alive today, but every moment of my life is being affirmed. So life *is* life, after all!”⁴

1. Genesis 47:28-50:26. 2. Jeremiah 10:10. 3. Deuteronomy 4:4. 4. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol.15 p. 422

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SEDRA VAYECHI

TEAM WORK

Joshua Rosen pressed his face against the car window and watched the miserable weather outside. The rainy weather, he decided, matched his mood perfectly. He should have been excited because he was on the way to the aquarium with his family during the winter holidays. Instead, he felt frustrated. He felt as though nothing he ever did was good or special. His older brother, Ariel, was so popular and talented at everything. His younger sister, Leah, always got top grades in school. Why couldn't he be clever as well and have his own special talents?

Suddenly, they heard a bang and the car slowed down...thump...thump...thump...

"Oh no!" Mr Rosen sighed heavily as he pulled into the petrol station, luckily located around the corner. "I guess we have a flat tyre." He called out to Ariel to help change the tyre while Mrs Rosen took the rest of the children inside the service shop. *Well of course it's going to be Ariel helping,* Joshua thought sarcastically as he slowly followed his mother, *he's good at everything.*

As they stood waiting in the shop his one year old sister Dina began whining loudly. Mrs Rosen tried to comfort her, then Leah tried holding her, but all to no avail.

"Here, let me try to calm her," Joshua said, feeling bad for his mother. "Dina, ssshh! Here, do you want to see pictures on my iPod? Look! That's you last week wearing that funny hat. That was funny, wasn't it?" Dina's cries quietened down as she turned her attention to his iPod. When he saw that she began losing interest in the iPod, he changed track and began

telling her funny jokes and making funny faces. She was soon giggling happily.

They were interrupted by Mr Rosen who came in to announce that the car was ready. They all piled back inside and continued their journey.

“Good team work,” Mrs Rosen remarked. “Ariel helped Daddy change the tyre, and Joshua helped me keep Dina happy. I was really stuck there, but Joshua knew exactly what she needed; entertainment from her great older brother. A big thanks to both of you, boys.”

Joshua felt happy. It was good to know that, after all, he could do *something*. ‘Perhaps’, he thought, ‘I have some good points after all. People say I think fast...and that I’m so organized... And now, another skill: I am good at making people happy. Like just now. So what, that he wasn’t like Ariel or Leah? He was himself. Joshua. With his own unique abilities and personality.’

“You know,” Mr Rosen began, “talking of team work, this week’s Sedra talks about team work as well. It tells us that Jacob blessed his twelve sons before he passed away. Jacob blessed Zevulun that his descendants should be successful businessmen and he blessed Yissachar that his tribe should be great Torah scholars.

“So, the tribe of Zevulun made an agreement with Yissachar’s tribe: The men of Zevulun would travel and do business, while the men of Yissachar would study Torah all day. Then, Zevulun would split their earnings with Yissachar and in return, G-d would give a part of the reward from Yissachar’s Torah learning to Zevulun. You see, that’s team work! Each one had their own abilities and they worked side by side together, providing for one another. That’s what you boys did today, wasn’t it?”

Joshua’s heart swelled with happiness. He turned to his brother, held up his hand, and they slapped five. “High five, bro! Great team work!”

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