

"FULFILLMENT"

Several times in the Book of Genesis, the Torah summarizes the biography of a protagonist of the biblical narrative, and introduces this spiritual profile by the words v'eleh toledot, "and these are the generations of," or, in more colloquial English, "this is the story of" such-and-such an individual. Four such instances are particularly worthy of our attention: those referring to Esau, Noah, Isaac, and, in this morning's Sidra, Jacob. The differences between them are noteworthy, for these are four archetypes who are still very much with us, and they represent four attitudes towards spiritual fulfillment.

The first of these, and the one who is of least concern to us is Esau. Of him we read, v'eleh toledot Esav hu Edom, lakah et nashav mi'benot kenaan, "and these are the generations of Esau, he is Edom; he took wives from the daughters of Canaan." Esau is a man whose life begins and ends in the satisfaction of his own concupiscence; the v'eleh toldeot of Esau is -- Edom, which implies the redness of heat and passion. He is a man who believes that one's manliness can be expressed only in the number of wives he amasses, in the harem that he builds for himself, in the natural appetites that he succeeds in indulging, in the conquests that he makes. He has no spiritual pretenses; he lives only as an animal

in human form. We need not belabor the point about the prevalence of this type of personality in our own society.

The second of the four is a much higher type -- Noah.

V'eleh toledot Noah, "these are the generations of Noah," Noah ish tzaddik tamim hayah be'dorotav, et ha-Elohim hithalekh Noah, "Noah was a righteous man, whole in his generation, a man who walked with God." He was a man who saw his destiny not in the satisfaction of every personal impulse and erotic whim, but rather in transcending these material desires. However, the problem with Noah is that his spiritual aspirations are entirely self-centered. We look in vain in Noah's biography for some hint that there are human associations that enhance his spiritual ambitions. Did he perhaps have a special relationship with his father? Apparently not. How many of us recall that the Bible informs us that the name of his father was Lamech? It is a rather unimportant fact. Was he especially concerned with his children? It appears that he had no special fatherly relation to them. One of them, Ham, had utter contempt for Noah; the others were better: they did not have contempt for their father, or, if they did, they didn't show it. No wonder that at the beginning Noah is not described as the father of his three sons, but rather, quite biologically, as va-yoled Noah sheloshah banim -- he sired or begot three sons. He is a pious man, a fine individual -- but he does not relate, he is unconcerned with the past or the future, or even the present of others. V'eleh toledot Noah -- Noah; the story of Noah is -- Noah!

This type is still available today. There are people who are religious, observant, even aspiring to some knowledgeability in Judaism, but they are insular and isolated. They are people of small sentiments and little concern for others. They are spiritually egoistical, though not egotistical. Like Noah, their selfishness is of a spiritual kind and not obnoxious; but it remains selfishness nonetheless. V'eleh toledot Noah -- Noah!

The third type is yet greater in importance and is represented by Isaac: V'eleh toledot Yitzhak ben Avraham, Avraham holid et Yitzhak. "And these are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham, Abraham was the father of Isaac." The self-image of Isaac was inextricably tied up with his father. He saw his own life and his own destiny as the fulfillment of the spiritual career of Abraham. At the time of the Akedah he was a very young lad -- Maimonides does not accept the Midrash relating that Isaac was already 37 years at that time -- and so he was the young object of the great episode in which his father Abraham was the heroic subject. All his life he lived under the giant shadow of a great father. His greatest ambition was to realize in his life his father's unrealized dreams, to make his father proud of him retroactively -- even after his father had long since been deceased. Hence, Isaac remained in Palestine all his life, because his father came there. He married Rebecca, because his father chose this wife for him. He was a shepherd and he dug wells, because

that is the career Abraham outlined for him. All Isaac asked of life, his entire v'eleh toledot, was that he, Yitzhak, be worthy of the title ben Avraham, the son of Abraham.

Such parent-oriented individuals are fully authentic Jewish spiritual types. We meet them occasionally, though not often enough. You can recognize such a person by his conversation. It is frequently peppered with such remarks as, "My father 'Zelig' used to say.." or "My mother of blessed memory would do such and such..." It is a marvelous, heart-warming thing to encounter such an individual who dedicates his or her life to the fulfillment of the life of a beloved parent.

Most of us are not that type. Our parents were either immigrants or first-generation American Jews, busy surviving and unable to achieve distinction as religious personalities or Jewish scholars. We love them, we respect them, we want to continue their traditions; but, speaking objectively, we do not see them as distinguished spiritual giants whose destinies we must dedicate our lives to consummate in our own experience.

And not only are we not the Isaac type, we are not even the Noah type. We ourselves are too busy proving that it is possible to live as a full participant in modern culture and Western Civilization and still remain Orthodox, loyal to Torah. We are therefore spiritually unfulfilled, and, if we are honest, we cannot disguise the thirst and the hunger. We therefore seek this ful-

fulfillment which has eluded us in our own experience -- in the lives of our children. It is in them, in our children, in whom we place our hopes, our trust, our dreams for the unrealized religious greatness and the untapped spiritual resources of our own lives. And this type of personality is represented by Jacob.

In our Sidra this morning we read, v'eleh toledot Yaakov, Yosef ben sheva esreh shanah. "And these are the generations of Jacob, Joseph was 17 years old..." Jacob was a man who no doubt loved and revered his father; but their relationship was not remarkable. Isaac was actually ready to give the blessing to Esau! Jacob himself knew full well that he could not fully realize his own spiritual potential. He was always on the go, always running away, always a fugitive, always in exile. At the very beginning of today's Sidra, on the opening words va'yeshev Yaakov, "and Jacob dwelt," which literally means that he sat, our Rabbis commented: bikesh Yaakov leishev be'shalvah, kaftzah alav rogzo shel Yosef -- that when Jacob finally thought he would find some peace of mind, some equanimity in which to grow spiritually, the entire Joseph episode erupted in his life and placed him in eclipse. How then did Jacob hope to achieve his spiritual fulfillment and immortality? -- V'eleh toledot Yaakov -- Yosef! The story of Jacob can be found in its consummation in the story of Joseph!

If a child vindicates his faith in him by his parents -- it is a sublime achievement of unparalleled proportions. But it involves a great risk on the part of the parent: to place one's

very destiny, one's whole immortality, in the hands of another human being, even one's own child!

It is therefore good for us to examine Jacob's conduct towards Joseph, to analyze both his weak points and his strong points, in order to learn for ourselves how to be sure, to the best of our ability, that our children will carry out our mandate and fulfill our most cherished dreams and prayers.

Jacob made one great mistake -- and we are prone to repeat that same error. Sometimes we are so enamored of a child, so over-anxious for his welfare, so much in love with him, that we develop a sense of overconfidence. We take the wish for the reality, we substitute the dream for its own realization. Thus we take a young promising child -- and treat him as if he were a fully safe and completely mature adult. That is the gist of Jacob's error: he so loved his Joseph that he treated him as an equal, and he sent this young and impressionable lad of 17 into the company of brothers who were ready to devour him and sell him down the river!

Indeed, the Malbim analyzes Jacob's reaction to the bad news of Joseph's reported death and finds that Jacob realized his mistake. For when the brothers presented to their father the bloodied shirt of his favorite child Joseph, we read that va'yikra Yaakov simlotav, Jacob rent his garments, and va'yasem sak be'matnav, he placed a sackcloth on his loins. These, says the Malbim, are two separate acts. The first one, that of keriah, the rending of the

garment, is the traditional sign of avelut, mourning. It is a Jewish expression of grief upon the death of a loved one. But the second act, that of wearing the sackcloth, is an act of teshuvah, of penitence. In our Responsa literature we read that if a man sends a deputy into a condition of sakanah, or danger, and the agent is injured as a result, then the sender must feel himself at least morally responsible to the extent that he is required to perform repentance or teshuvah. Jacob realized that he had no right to expose young Joseph to such danger; hence the sackcloth as a sign of teshuvah.

We, too, tend to the sin of over-confidence, and expose children to danger prematurely. I do not fail to be amazed when sensible, intelligent, and religious parents will take a child of 8 to 10 and send him to a summer camp which will, by omission and commission, destroy every shred of religious upbringing which we try to give to a child during the remaining ten months of the year; or when parents will send a child of 14 or 15 on a cross-country trip or to Europe in the company of others his own age, when he has not yet learned the art of self-control; or when parents will send a young lad of 17 to an out-of-town college where there is no Jewish community, no Jewish environment whatsoever, when he is not yet prepared for it. Of course, such determinations largely depend on the individual child and his special circumstances. Of course, too, it is possible to be over-protective and harm a



child in that manner; no young man or woman should forever remain tied by the apron strings of mother or father. But we usually sin in the opposite direction. And when we are over-confident and expose the children to danger, we risk the tragedy of receiving that calamitous report: tarof toraf Yosef, "Joseph is devoured," all our work is in vain, all we have put into the child has been undone because of one foolish move. And when that happens -- we must do teshuvah.

If we seek our own spiritual fulfillment in the lives of our children, we must not only, negatively, refrain from exposing them to risk prematurely, but we have a sacred obligation to prepare them well for the confrontation with a hostile world. It is our holy duty to intensify the religious training of our children. I am therefore amazed when certain parents send their children to Day Schools that have superb departments of general education, superior to all public schools and to most private schools -- and yet they complain that the school is "too religious!" I have yet to hear a patient complain that the hospital pays too much attention to health, or a businessman complain that his accountant saves him too much money. Yet there are some parents, otherwise fully intelligent and perceptive, who bitterly complain that the Day School takes its job seriously.

Speaking to parents of such children, permit me to give you some unsolicited advice and prediction: do not worry about your children becoming too "frum." They will not remain that way



for too long! May God grant that ultimately they will be as religious as we are -- and God knows that we are not pious enough! In the kind of world in which we live, there is an inexorable attrition, an inevitable erosion and corrosion of religious loyalty and steadfastness. Our main task is to prepare our children well not only intellectually, but, primarily, emotionally. Before we turn them loose into the world, in the company of enemies and even of brother-Jews who are ready to strip them of every vestige of Jewishness, our task is to concentrate not so much on an extra portion of Humash or another page of Talmud, but more than anything else -- to "daven." Is it conceivable that parents should complain that children are given too much inspiration to pray? What is the purpose of studying Humash and Talmud and everything else if not that we shall thus thereby raise a child who will be ready for the sublime religious experience of contemplating his own mortality in the face of the Infinite God of all the universe? Of course, we must give them as much information as possible; but the experience of piety, the sense of religion, is far more important.

Finally, let us learn also from Jacob's strength, from his great merit -- though he was not conscious of it at all. Jacob thought that Joseph had died. He mourned for him for much longer than the one year than the Jewish tradition prescribes. When his sons and the rest of his family tried to console him after this year, he proved disconsolate. Va-yema'en le'hitnabem --

Jacob refused to be consoled. His mourning continued unabated, his grief without cease. Why so? Is it not normal and advisable to allow one's mourning to abate after a year? The Rabbis, quoted by Rashi, answer that ein mekablin tanhumin al ha-hai, one does not accept consolation for the living. It is possible to listen to the advice of friends and dear ones who ask us to reconcile ourselves to the loss of a dead relative, but no one can reconcile himself to the loss of one who still lives. And Jacob knew, by virtue of his ruah ha-kodesh, his Holy Spirit, by some prophetic intuition below the level of his consciousness, that Joseph was still alive! In his bones, in his heart, in his soul -- though not in his mind -- he knew that his spiritual posterity, his beloved Joseph, his favorite child, was eclipsed -- but not forever lost. That is why he refused to be reconciled to the eternal loss of this child.

Many of us find ourselves, unfortunately, in a similar situation. We do all we can for children, we try our very best. We sacrifice comfort and convenience, and express our devotion in every way we know. But then we find that we have failed. The Josephs leave, and they are gone -- seemingly forever. We spend our lives in all kinds of difficulties in order to continue the tradition of our forebears, only to discover that our children have betrayed our way of life. Shall we give up hope? Shall we, in our heart of hearts, declare them lost to Judaism? The answer

is: No! Change techniques, try a different method, above all use the advice and counsel of the sainted Baal Shem Tov: "love him more!" Do not give up hope for any child. We do not have the moral right to do so. Of course, it happens often, much too often, that these Josephs are lost to us, and do not return. But there are some who do. For their sake, we must never give up hope in our own individual cases as they touch our lives.

If we wait, if we try, if we hope, if we pray -- we may yet hear those blessed words after all the years: ode Yosef hai, "Joseph still lives!" We may find that, miracle of miracles!, Joseph will seek reconciliation with Jacob, and that if Joseph does not then Joseph's children will. Somehow, sometime, somewhere, they will return and we will find our fulfillment in the generations that follow us. Ki lo yidab mimenu nidab -- we do not give up hope for any Jew! We are stubborn in our love and relentless in our loyalty and stubborn in our refusal to succumb to despair.

It is this hope which must give us the strength to continue. For it is this hope and this prayer and this dream which defines the v'eleh toledot of each and every one of us.