



Where there's a 'will' there's a way: Leaving a spiritual legacy

Torah Reflections on *Parashat Vayehi*

Genesis 47:28 – 50:26

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At the end of Abraham's life he leaves 'everything he has to Isaac.' It is left to God to bestow spiritual blessing on Isaac after his father dies. Isaac, however, is keen to ensure his children are appropriately blessed in his lifetime (he intends to emphasize material blessings with Esau and spiritual blessings with Yaakov). In this week's *parashah* we read Jacob's last will and testament to his children and grandchildren, delineating words of wisdom (and caution) for the unique path that each of his children is destined to take. It is remarkable that there is no mention of how - or if - Jacob divides up his considerable material possessions for his offspring. He does, however, take time to appreciate the blessings in his life (48:10-11). In an evocative statement the Talmud tells us that "Jacob never died." Through the love, wisdom, and blessings that he imparted, and his life-story that we review and learn from each year, his values and legacy live on in each successive generation into perpetuity.

What will be your legacy? So many of us expend time and precious resources creating and refining our legal will. Many take the praiseworthy step of making a 'living will' or advanced directive to give vital guidance and avoid imposing the potential burdens of medical decision-making on our loved ones in the event that we are no longer able to make decisions for ourselves. But how many of us have considered following in Jacob's footsteps and making a record of our values, hopes, and the wisdom that we wish to transmit to the next generation? In Hebrew, this is known as a *tzava'ah*, from the word 'tzav'— meaning to connect (related to *mitzvah*). A *tzava'ah* - an Ethical will - connects and conveys the values and spirit of one generation to another. These concerns may be heightened as we age and especially as we confront serious illness or mortality – whether ours or someone close to us. However, there is no wrong time to start making one and, as with a regular will, many choose to revise their ethical will over time.

Examples of issues addressed in ethical wills include:

What values, teachings, or people are important to you? What were the most significant events in your life? What do you most regret? How, when, and in what way do you want to be remembered? What are your hopes,

dreams, and goals for the next 6 weeks? 6 years? 60 years? For your children? What (moments) are you proudest of?

The famous adage that weaves its way through the Book of Breishit teaches: *maaseh avot siman l'banim* – the narratives of the patriarchs & matriarchs influence what will happen to the children. Families are complex, drama abounds, and some things never change. Let's count the blessings they give us and not hold back from blessing and thanking those closest to us. This will be a truly lasting legacy.

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This Torah Reflection was written by Rabbi Daniel Coleman BCC, a board member of the National Association of Jewish Chaplains, and Staff Chaplain at North Shore University Hospital in Manhasset, NY. Archived Torah Reflections and other healing-oriented resources can be found at www.jewishhealingcenter.org. Bay Area Jewish Healing Center is a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties.



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