

# Who will be the Zaide if not me?

*Who is the first Jewish Zaide? The story of this week's parsha tells us something very interesting about the role of grandparents in raising their grandchildren.*

## Who Was the First Zaide?

Zaide.

Every Jew knows the Yiddish word for grandfather, Zaide.

In Russia, under Soviet rule it was forbidden for Russian Jews to have any contact with the free world in the west, particularly with Chabad Chassidim and especially with the Rebbe himself. Nonetheless, the Rebbe remained in constant contact with these unfortunate Jews through letters sent with secret messengers. The Rebbe's code name with which he signed these letters was "Zaide."

Who is the first one in the Torah to be called Zaide? Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are known primarily as the fathers of our nation. But in regard to Jacob, in addition to being called Yaakov Avinu (our father Jacob), we find a number of places in the Midrash where Jacob is called "Yisroel Sabah" (Grandpa Yisroel).

Perhaps the reason for this is that Jacob was the first man to raise Jewish grandchildren. Abraham passed away on the day of

his grandsons' (Jacob and Esau's) bar mitzvah. Isaac never saw his grandchildren until it was too late to take part in their upbringing, because Jacob married in Charan and lived there for many years. Only Jacob himself merited to have all of his children and grandchildren living with him and to train them in the ways of the Torah. Even Manasseh and Ephraim, who were born in Egypt, grew up in their grandfather's lap.

## **Must We Honor Grandparents?**

It is a mitzvah to honor your father and mother; that command is one of the Ten Commandments. Is there a mitzvah to honor your grandparents?

The Ramah, a chief authority on Halacha writes, "Although some authorities say that there is in fact no mitzvah for Jews to honor their grandparents, I cannot agree to this. It is, however, true that one must honor his own father more than he would his father's father."

We find many times throughout the Torah that grandchildren are considered children to their grandparents, and perhaps it is this fact that obligates one to honor his grandparents.

Nonetheless, I wonder if there isn't a better reason why we must honor grandparents. We are commanded to honor our parents because they gave us life. As the Talmud states, "there are three partners in the creation of a child: G-d, the father and the mother." In that case, your grandparents obviously have a hand in this too. If not for them, two of the partners would be missing. They should be deserving of equal respect!

## Jacob's Cry

We find an answer in this week's parsha.

This week, we read about Jacob on the run from Esau. He reaches Charan, and there at the well he finds Rachel, his basherte, the girl of his dreams. They become engaged on the spot and he kisses her and then begins to cry.

Why did he cry?

[Rashi explains that he cried because he saw prophetically that he would not be buried together with her. As we all know Jacob was buried together with Leah in the Cave of the Patriarchs while Rachel has her own equally famous tomb, Kever Rachel.

But this explanation isn't practical because if she would ask him why he was crying he couldn't tell her that she's going to die young and they wouldn't be buried together!

So Rashi offers a second explanation.]

When Jacob escaped from Esau and began his trek to his uncle in Charan, Esau sent his son Elifaz to pursue Jacob and kill him. Elifaz was young and quick and he easily caught up to Jacob. When they met, Jacob implored Elifaz not to kill him, but Elifaz challenged that he had his father's instructions to carry out. Jacob came up with an idea. He gave everything he had with him to Elifaz since "A poor person is as good as dead." Having "killed" Jacob, Elifaz was able to return to his father with the claim that he had fulfilled his wish.

Now, Jacob cried at the well because he was empty handed. He

remembered the story of how Rebecca, his mother, was greeted by Eliezer with many wonderful gifts from Abraham. But now he, Jacob, who himself came from an extremely wealthy family, meets his bride with nothing to give her. No diamond rings, not even a simple gift; he had given Elifaz everything in exchange for his life.

## **Grandpa Jacob vs. Grandpa Esau**

But why did Elifaz not actually kill Jacob?

Rashi says it was because Elifaz grew up in the home of his Zaide, Isaac, and Isaac had a good influence on him. Therefore, he couldn't get himself to carry out his father's instructions and actually begged his uncle to find him a way out.

Here you see the power of a Zaide! Although Elifaz was the son of Esau who was filled with hate and was evil to the very depths of his soul, the education he received in his grandfather Isaac's house rendered him unable to harm his uncle Jacob.

You can also see the power of a Zaide from Amalek, the eldest son of Elifaz.

Every Jewish child knows the name Amalek. Amalek is the chief enemy of the Jewish people, so much so that until today, any enemy of our people is called Amalek. However, Amalek was not raised by his father to hate the children of Israel. According to the Midrash, Elifaz was a righteous man and he tried to train his son to love or at least respect the Jewish people.

The Midrash tells that Elifaz would say to his son, "The children of Israel inherit this world and the next. But you should go out

and dig their wells for them and prepare roads for them. If you will do so, you will earn a portion along with them.

But Amalek didn't listen to his righteous father. Instead he set out to destroy the world.

Why?

The Midrash explains that Amalek was raised in the home of his grandfather, Esau. Esau ingrained in the heart of his grandson a profound hatred for Jacob's descendants. He used to tell little Amalek, "I tried so hard to kill my brother, but alas, I never succeeded. Put it in your mind to collect my revenge!"

Here again we see the power of a Zaide's influence. In the end, Zaide Esau had a stronger influence on Amalek than the boy's own father.

### **Who Will Be the Zaides...**

This then, is the real reason that Jews must respect their grandparents. Our people have survived with one goal in mind - to continue the line of Torah true Jews, a nation which survives only because the torch of our tradition was successfully passed from generation to generation. Is it a wonder that there is a mitzvah to honor one's grandparents? Grandparents play a very big role in the education of their grandchildren, sometimes even greater than that of the parents.

We all remember our grandfathers sitting at the Seder table. Many will remember our grandmothers lighting the Shabbat candles. We remember the Shabbat and holiday meals at our grandparent's home. Many will remember going to synagogue

on the High Holidays and sitting next to Zaide in shul. And everyone can remember a time or two when they did something “very Jewish” just to make Bubbe happy. Many people married Jewish girls only to Grandma’s credit. And so on and so forth – so many sweet Jewish memories were made together with Zaide and Bubbe.

I think it is safe to say that Judaism has survived this long only because of the Zaides and Bubbles who worried and worked tirelessly to ensure that the Torah would not be forgotten.

There is a well-known song, in which the songwriter describes how his Zaide who lived together with him in his parent’s home and brought Judaism into the house. He would teach the children Torah and tell them stories of Jewish suffering and heroism. Zaide would make a Kiddush every Friday night and a Seder on Pesach.

And the song ends, “Who will be the Zaides of our children, if not we?”

It is now our responsibility to play the role of Zaide and Bubbe in the lives of our children. True, we’re not nearly that old... but my friends, it’s too hard to learn to make Kiddush when you really are seventy. So, if you want to be a good Zaide or Bubbe you’re going to have to start now.