



## Rabbi Keller's

### Shabbat Message



Shalom Everyone,

Our secular year is coming to a close and our thoughts turn to endings. The year 2018 is ending, academic semesters are ending, and for us in the Jewish community, the book of Genesis is ending. As we do annually, we began reading the Torah from the beginning just a few months ago, and now we conclude our first book. Throughout our journey in Genesis we encountered Adam and Eve, Noach, Abraham and Sarah, as well as many of our patriarchs, ending with the complicated story of Joseph and his brothers.

In this week's Torah portion, Vayechi, we find Jacob at the end of his life. He summoned all of his children and gave each of them a specific blessing. At the end of Jacob's long speech, the Torah states:

"And when Jacob finished commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and expired, and he was gathered to his people."

The specific word 'expired' in the text is Vayig'va which specifically means "to expire" and does not literally mean "to die." If the Torah wanted to express that Jacob had died, the ancient rabbis argue, it would have used a different word. By stating that Jacob expired (instead of died), we can learn that he lived on after his death; meaning: there are no "real" endings.

In fact, when we look at our lives, there are actually very few final endings. If we think about our relationships between friends, family and/or partners, we see that our feelings never truly end. The experiences we share with the people in our lives and the impact that they make on us are always part of us. When we complete a part of our education in high school, college, or graduate programs, these are not really endings either. The educational culmination is merely a preparation for the next challenge, the next job, and the next step in our lives.

When we finish reading a book that we have enjoyed or found challenging, we may think about it for years afterwards. That book impacts how we read every book that follows, how we watch every movie, or even how we interact with other people in our lives.

At the conclusion of each book of the Torah, we recite "*chazak, chazak, v'nitchazek*" meaning "strength, strength, and we shall be strengthened." This last portion in the book of Genesis provides us with a lesson of how we should respond to the perceived endings in our lives. We should feel strengthened and emboldened from our experiences.

When we look at endings, with the complexity that they bring up in us and with the finality that they appear to play in our lives, we should remember that they are not final endings. They are always with us, empowering us and teaching us.  
Strength, strength, and we shall be strengthened!

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi Rony Keller