

Vayechi Torah Thoughts

5779:

This week Cantor Larry and I had the great joy of officiating at the conversion of a young girl. What made this occasion especially touching was the presence of not only her father and grandparents, but also her great-grandmother. Watching the 4 year-old talk to the 90-something year old, we witnessed what can only be called time travel. To see the bubbe, who was from Odessa, and still does not speak English, who grew up in the 1930s, talking to her descendant, who will grow up in the 2020s, was miraculous.

The same kind of connection between past and present occurs at the end of parshat Vayechi this week. The now aged Joseph lives to the age of 110, long enough to see his children's grandchildren born. By one accounting, those great-grandchildren are of the same generation of Moses. They will grow up in slavery and then, in old age, live to see the exodus and approach the Promised Land. Their lives overlap those of both Joseph and Moses, connecting one to the other.

What must that elderly lady at the conversion, or Joseph's great-grandchildren at the end of their lives, think of all those they once knew, and all they have lived to see? The memory of those born a hundred or more years before, and the childhood of those who will live a hundred years into the future: 200 or more years of lives past and future, tied together by those in the middle who knew both. When the very old and the very young meet, we are reminded of how far we have come as families and as a people. The lived experiences of the older generation are like stories from a history book, yet one in which we know participants. At the same time, those who are themselves lucky enough to have very long lives see their own future come to life. It is at these moments that we understand our role as the bearers of tradition, values, and precious memories that we are responsible to pass on.