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The Second Blessing

**David
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Before Yaakov blessed the twelve Shevatim, he blessed Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov said, "By you shall Yisrael bless, saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and like Menashe', (48:20). Our parents bless us every Erev Shabbos with these words, and some parents even give over this blessing on Erev Yom Kippur. What is so special and unique about Ephraim and Menashe, that parents would wish their children to be like them? Also, a few Pesukim earlier, it says that Yaakov blessed Ephraim and Menashe, saying, "May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the children..." (48:16). Why would Yaakov give them an additional blessing if he had already had given them a more meaningful one earlier?

Rav Chaim Shapiro, zt"l, quotes an answer from the Baalei Mussar of Navardhok, who say that there is a valuable message hidden in the second blessing of Yaakov. Right before Yaakov says the brachah of "May God make you like Ephraim and like Menashe", the Torah adds that he put his right hand on Ephraim, and his left on Menashe. This showed that Yaakov felt Ephraim was the more important brother, even though he was younger than Menashe. Very often children complain when their parents (or even grandparents) do not treat them equally or fairly. Whether these complaints are justified or not, children, especially brothers, will always find something to complain and be jealous about. Menashe was really the first born, and it was seemingly unjust of Yaakov to place his right hand on Ephraim. Menashe could have complained, but he did not; he was fine with his younger brother getting the greater honor. Even when Yosef decided to switch Yaakov's hands back to the way he thought was correct, Ephraim could have complained that Yaakov had already put his hand on him first, and it would not be fair to switch. Even though that may have been a legitimate argument, Ephraim did not utter a single complaint. Yaakov saw how destructive jealousy and hatred among brothers could be, and wanted to make sure that every child of Klal Yisroel got along. He wanted every child to ignore any real or perceived inequitable practices of their parents, where one child would be favored over another. Thus, when he saw how well Ephraim and Menashe got along, he blessed them, saying that all children should be like them. Their greatness was unique, and needs to be recognized.

The Greatness of Yaakov

**Rabbi
Yotav
Eliach
Principal**

Yaakov Avinu is truly the father of Am Yisrael. Unlike Avraham or Yitzhak, he is successful in bringing up all his sons to be part of Bnei Yisrael. There is no Yishmael or Esav among his 12 sons. Though it is true that they on occasion display questionable judgment, as in the case of Levi and Shimon in Shechem, and that they act terribly when ten of the brothers turn on Yosef and sell him into slavery, they still remain committed members of Am Yisrael. This is not a small accomplishment!

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דברי תורה מתלמידי מתיבתא רמב"ם

Talmud Torah in Chinuch

**Jacob
Bernstein
Senior**

The Gemarah in Kiddushin (29a) discusses mitzvos that the father must perform for the sake of his son. One of the commandments listed there is that the father should teach his son Torah. The Biblical source for this chiyuv are the words “v’shinantem l’vanecha.” A similar discussion appears in Gemarah Succah (42a), where it says the father’s role is to teach his son specific pesukim of the Torah once the child learns to speak. There, the obligation seems to be created under the category of chinuch (teaching a son under the age of bar-mitzvah to perform certain mitzvos).

The first question raised on these two Gemarah’s is the following: Why does the Gemarah in Kiddushin seem to imply that this obligation is Biblically prescribed (based on the pasuk cited above), while the Gemarah in Succah seems to fix this obligation to be one of chinuch?

Additionally, we can ask another question, based on a general principle of chinuch. A child should only be taught mitzvos if he will perform them in the correct way, the way that adults would do that mitzvah (at least according to the Sha’ar Hatziyon). For example, if a child wants to make kiddush on wine, but cannot possibly finish most of the cup (which is the way the mitzvah is supposed to be done), the child should not be given the kos to begin with, because since he is not going to perform the mitzvah the same way that an adult would, chinuch does not apply. Based on this, we can ask another question on the Gemarah in Succah. If a child cannot understand what the pesukim truly mean when he is being taught them, how could we consider this a kiyum of chinuch?

To answer the second question, we must better understand the actual mitzvah of learning Torah. According to all, if someone were to learn or read Torah Sheba’al Peh without understanding that which he reads, he has not fulfilled the mitzvah. However, if someone were to begin reading the pesukim of Torah Shebichsav without understanding their meanings, would he fulfill the mitzvah of Talmud Torah?

The Shulchan Aruch Ha’Rav states that there is a fulfillment of Talmud Torah if one just reads the pesukim, without any understanding at all. This fits well with the famous concept introduced by the Grach (Gaon Reb Chaim), who says that the words of Torah Shebichsav are the actual cheftza (object) of the Torah, and therefore even if one does not understand them, he has still fulfilled the mitzvah. This contrasts with Torah Sheba’al Peh, where the words are just the medium for understanding the concepts, and therefore one must understand what he is reading to fulfill the mitzvah.

In response to the first question posed above, as to the apparent contradiction between the two Gemarachs discussed earlier, the Griz (Gaon Reb Yitzchak Zev: “Brisker Rav”) differentiates between the ages of the son being discussed in both contexts. In Kiddushin, the son is at the age when he can understand that which he is being taught, and therefore the father is commanded to teach him Torah. In Succah, the son being discussed is at the age at which he can speak, but not understand what he is being taught. The father here is therefore commanded by the Rabbis to teach his son words of Torah Shebichsav, under the framework of chinuch. This seems to imply that the mitzvah of chinuch comes into play even if the child will not be able to do the mitzvah in the best possible way (to understand what he is being taught), as he still can completely fulfill the mitzvah of learning just by saying the words.

It is All About Achdus

**Aaron
Kattan
Junior**

“ועתה שני בניך הנולדים לך בארץ מצרים...כראובן ושמעון יהיו לי” - “And now, your two sons who were born to you in Egypt...like Reuven and Shimon they will be to me” (48:5). According to many commentators, Yaakov is trying to tell Yosef that just as Reuven and Shimon both constitute different Shevatim, and receive separate portions of Eretz Yisrael, so too Ephraim and Menasheh will be separate Shevatim, and receive their own portions in Eretz Yisrael.

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The Greatness of Yaakov

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Yaakov is keenly aware of the double edged sword that Mitzrayim represents to Am Yisrael. On the one hand, it would be a place of bounty and security in a time of famine, due to the fact that Yosef is the viceroy of Egypt and is looking out for his people. On the other hand, Am Yisrael has left Eretz Yisrael, and they can be tempted into complacency or, worse, assimilation. After all, Mitzrayim is the most advanced, powerful and wealthy country of the ancient world. Yaakov understands that as the leader of Am Yisrael it is his obligation to set certain parameters for the Jews' stay in Egypt. Furthermore, he realizes that it is only him who has the authority to do so.

Being a great leader with great foresight, Yaakov does several things to send clear messages to Am Yisrael that though they find themselves in Egypt, they are not to become Egyptian in their beliefs and actions, for Egypt is a Pagan, immoral society. In Vayigash, when Yaakov finally meets Yosef, Rashi tells us that although Yosef falls on Yaakov's neck and begins to weep, Yaakov does not cry. In fact, he uses the opportunity to say Kriyas Shema! The Omek Hadavar asks: could Yaakov not find another time to recite the Shema? Rav Grilek comes up with a wonderful answer: at the moment of the reunion between Yaakov and Yosef all of Bnei Yisrael are present, along with Pharaoh and the rest of the Egyptian leadership. What an audience! Yaakov wants to make the point to all who are present that he is a Jew, and that he is proud and open about his belief in the Almighty. Hence he recites the Shema at that very moment as a reminder to Am Yisrael and a proclamation to the Egyptians – we are proud believers in Hashem, and that is what defines us!

In Parshas Vayechi Yaakov goes to great pains to make sure that Yosef understands that he has no intentions of being buried in Egypt even temporarily, and that Yosef must promise him that he, Yosef, will bring him back to Ma'aras Hamachpela in Eretz Yisrael to be buried with his fathers. The language used by Yaakov is very clear and uncompromising; why? The Midrash tells us that Yaakov has two great fears regarding being buried in Egypt: one, that the Egyptians would turn his gravesite into a holy site, which would encourage Avoda Zara, and blur the line between a Kever Avos and a Pagan holy site, and two, that Bnei Yisrael would interpret his burial in Mitzrayim as his approval of Egypt as a Holy Land like Yisrael. That would lead to the end of Am Yisrael, since they would never be interested in returning to Eretz Yisrael – assuming they don't assimilate! Hence, he insists on being buried in Ma'aras Hamachpela, for it would serve as a powerful reminder that Eretz Yisrael is the one and only Eretz Hakodesh! Yaakov is a genuine Jewish leader, always thinking of the future and destiny of his people. May we emulate and learn from him!

It is All About Achdus

continued

The Torah never wastes words. Everywhere in the Torah where it seems something is repetitious or unnecessary, there is a reason for it. Thus, the Mesech Chochmah asks why Yaakov begins his words to Yosef with “and now.” Why could he not just start off the pasuk with “your two sons”?

The Meshech Chochmah answers by citing a Tosafos in Bava Basra (122a), which says that when Yaakov says “now” in the pasuk, he is referring to the world as it was in his times. Only in our days, Yaakov implies, do Ephraim and Menasheh have their own portions of land in Eretz Yisrael. When it is no longer “now”, however, meaning when Mashiach comes, Ephraim and Menasheh will no longer have two separate portions of land. Rather, they will share one combined portion.

We can learn a very important lesson from this explanation. Although both Ephraim and Menasheh were great Tzaddikim, and their children would definitely follow in their footsteps, this alone was not enough. Mashiach, and the era he will bring in, will only come when Ephraim and Menasheh are sufficiently united. Mashiach will only come when everyone feels comfortable relinquishing their individual benefits for total unity. We understand from Yaakov's message that without achdus within Klal Yisrael, Mashiach will not come, no matter how great the people of a particular generation are. We must always feel united with the Jews all around us, no matter who they are or where they are from. Only once true achdus is achieved will we merit the coming of Mashiach.

Chazak Chazak, Venitchazek

**Reb Noam
Horowitz
Rebbe**

There is a well known minhag that when we finish laying each of the five books of the Torah the entire congregation exclaims, “Chazak, chazak, venitchazek” - “Strong, strong - we shall be strengthened!” The Orchos Chayim (Hilchos Sheni Vachamishi 15, cited in part by the Beis Yosef O.C.139) observes two customs as to whether this declaration should be pronounced upon the conclusion of each of the five Chumashim, or only when the entire Torah is completed. Clearly, common practice today has adopted the first view. In Medieval Italy, however, the minhag was only to say “chazak” on Simchas Torah, when the entire Torah was finished.

There is a controversy which surrounds the precise syntax of this exclamation. While our custom is to declare, “Chazak, chazak, venitchazek,” the Chasam Sofer was accustomed to announcing simply, “Chazak, chazak, chazak.” The difference in syntax most likely reflects two different positions as to whom this proclamation refers. The Maharam Mintz (85) suggests that this declaration parallels the blessing of “yasher koach” customarily conferred upon a chazan when he finishes conducting the service. This greeting essentially congratulates the cantor on a job well done and wishes him continued performance of mitzvos. This comparison indicates that the exclamation of “chazak” serves as a congratulatory greeting to the one who just finished reading the Torah (the sefardic custom to wish “chazak u’baruch” to the reader after any time the Torah is read may very well reflect this idea). Indeed, the aforementioned passage in the Orchos Chayim explicitly states that the congregation would say “chazak” to the reader. If so, the Chatam Sofer’s version would seem more correct. Our text, which concludes in the first-person plural - “ve-nitchazek,” appears inappropriate for a blessing directed towards a single individual. Apparently, our version of the proclamation sees it as a blessing to the entire community, who collectively prays for continued achievement in Torah.

These two perspectives - whether “chazak” is a blessing to the reader or of the congregation as a whole - may impact an interesting and very relevant halachik question. Namely, should the one receiving the final “aliyah” of the sefer exclaim “chazak”? The one receiving the “aliyah” is essentially the reader; the one we call the “ba’al korei” merely fills his place. Therefore, if we view “chazak” as a blessing to the reader, then it would seem inappropriate for the individual himself to confer upon himself this blessing. By contrast, if “chazak” is a communal prayer, then the one receiving the “aliyah” should join in, as well. Our practice is for the person who is actually reading to repeat the line after the congregation, which of course would show us that it is indeed a congregational exclamation of communal accomplishment (the community in Medieval Italy may have felt that only the completion of the entire Torah was considered a true communal accomplishment to the degree of such public acknowledgment).

It should be noted, however, that another issue may arise regarding this question: the problem of “hefsek.” Some authorities have forbade the recipient of the final “aliyah” from participating in the declaration of “chazak”, since his participation constitutes an unlawful interruption between the reading of the Torah and the berachah he recites upon the conclusion of reading (“asher natan lanu Torat emet...”). Since the berachah relates directly to the reading, the individual may not speak in between them. An opposing view is cited in the name of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe. He claims that “chazak...” constitutes an integral part of the concluding reading, and therefore should not be considered an interruption. As such, the recipient of the “aliyah” should also declare “chazak” along with the congregation. This idea may actually explain the practice of the reader to repeat the line after the congregation- if “chazak...” is indeed considered part of the reading itself, then the reader would have to say it aloud for the congregation to hear.

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