

BLESSINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS IN DISGUISE

by Rabbi Label Lam

All these are the tribes of Israel, twelve, and this is what their father spoke to them and he blessed them, he blessed each according to his appropriate blessing. (Breishis 49:28)

How did Yaakov know how to bless each child with the appropriate blessing? That's the \$64,000.00 question. If we knew the answer to that question and could bottle it we'd be rolling in Brochos. Of course Yaakov was imbued with Divine Inspiration. That always helps. However, when we look closely at the blessings we find that that in many cases the future is forecasted from some event in the past. It's never some vague promise based on wishful thinking. Evidence of what's to come is rooted in the behavior manifested in their lifetime, whether good or not. I suppose the trick, then, is to figure out what was the defining trait or choice a person made. Aha! There's the rub. That's hard to know in one's lifetime and sometimes it takes generations to determine which move one made, made the biggest difference for his future.

I remember when Jordy walked on to the campus of Ohr Somayach in Monsey. He still credits me with being one of the first friendly faces to greet him. I'm glad I was in a good mood that day. I don't know if anyone could have seen the future for this fellow or any other for that matter. One of the main keys may have already been embedded some fifty years earlier.

After being in the Yeshiva for a while Jordy, now referred to as Yaakov, went back to Toronto to be with this family. His old European grandfather took a surprise interest in what he was learning. Yaakov told him that he was learning a tractate in the Talmud called, "Bava Kama" not expecting he would know at all what he was talking about. To Yaakov's amazement, his grandfather started to rattle off the entire Mishne of "Hamaniach" and then the Gemora word for word and by heart. Yaakov asked his grandfather where he had learned all that. His grandfather told him that he had gone to Yeshiva-Cheder as a young boy in one of the capital cities of Torah learning in Europe, in a city named Brisk.

Then, in seeming casual conversation, Yaakov's grandfather revealed a chilling piece of information. During the 2nd World War there was a Rabbi in Toronto, a Rabbi Kaminetzky that approached him about a certain matter. (Little did the grandfather know but this Rabbi that started his rabbinical career in Toronto was later to become one the most famous and influential Torah leaders and teachers of the generation.) The Rabbi knew that he was from Brisk and he therefore made a special emergency appeal to gain the money necessary to help the Brisker Rav to exit Europe. Yaakov's grandfather gave him the money and the Brisker Rav was saved from certain death.

Not only did the Brisker Rav survive the war but he was able to revive his Yeshiva and his family. It would still be a gross understatement to say that an entire generation of Torah scholarship has been brought back to life thanks to that single act of generosity by Yaakov's grandfather but it doesn't end there. This summer, after many years apart, I had the pleasure and honor to join my good friend Yaakov for an inspiring Shabbos in Texas where he is the father of a sizable family of budding scholars and the Rabbi of a burgeoning community. His influence is felt far and wide and so is his grandfather's. Sometimes in not so mysterious ways blessings are not always in disguise. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).