

BLESSINGS ARE "BETWEEN MAN AND HIS FELLOWMAN"

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 531, Burial In Eretz Yisroel. Good Shabbos!

Blessings Are "Between Man and His Fellowman"

Yaakov Avinu heard that his beloved son Yosef was coming to see him. Despite the fact that he was very sick -- indeed, on his deathbed -- he strengthened himself and sat up on the bed. [Bereshis 48:2] The Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosfos writes that he did not want to bless his son and grandchildren lying down so that people should not say it was a "deathbed gift" (matnas schiv m'rah) and that he was not of clear mind at the time.

The Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva analyzes this teaching. Rav Simcha Zissel asks, "Who cares whether or not people thought Yaakov was lucid or not at the time he gave blessings to Yosef and his children?" The mechanics of a Tzadik's blessing [that of a Holy person] is that G-d hears the blessing and by virtue of the "influence" the Tzadik has in Heaven, the blessing is effective. As long as G-d knows "what the story is," so to speak, it should be irrelevant what anyone else thinks regarding the state of mind of the Tzadik when he uttered the blessing.

Rav Simcha Zissel says we learn from here that there is a difference between a prayer (Tefillah) and a blessing (Beracha). When we pray, it is strictly a dialogue "between man and G-d." A blessing, however, is "between man and his fellow." A blessing only works if the recipient has the faith that the person who is giving him the beracha has the power and will and desire to give that blessing. Ultimately, the one who blesses is not the One who is dispensing the beracha. He is only a conduit. But the recipient needs to have faith in him.

When a person goes to a Tzadik or a great person for a beracha, there needs to be an implicit trust between "blessor" and "blessee". If the recipient feels that the "blessor" is "out of it" or is somehow not worthy or capable of giving a proper blessing, then it won't count.

It is for this reason, Rav Simcha Zissel says, that Yaakov Avinu had to sit up on his bed -- so that it not be said that it was the blessing of someone lying on his deathbed (matnas schiv m'rah).

Every Rule Has Its Exception

Yaakov Avinu told Yosef that his children -- Menashe and Ephraim -- would have the status of Yaakov's own children, Reuven and Shimeon. They would be considered like sons. Yaakov positioned Menashe opposite Yaakov's right hand, thinking that his firstborn should receive the "stronger" blessing. However Yaakov crossed his hands, placing his right hand on Ephraim who was at his left side and placing his left hand on Menashe who was at his right side. [Bereshis 48:13-14]

I saw an insight in the name of Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, zt"l. The Gemara says [Shabbos 10b] that a person should never show favoritism among his children, because the entire incident of the sale of Yosef and its entire aftermath -- leading to the exile in Egypt -- all came about because Yaakov showed favoritism to his son Yosef. If there is anyone who should have learnt his lesson from the pitfalls of such favoritism, it is Yaakov. Why does Yaakov appear to be making the very same mistake all over again on his deathbed? Was he not showing favoritism to Yosef's grandchildren over his other grandchildren, just as he had showed favoritism to Yosef over his other brothers those many decades earlier? Why is he now saying: "All other grandchildren are only grandchildren, but these grandchildren are like children?" History seems to be repeating itself!

And if it is not bad enough that Yaakov is not concerned about the jealousy between the cousins -- what about sibling rivalry? Even between Menashe and Ephraim, he singles out the younger son Ephraim for clear favoritism!

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky offers an amazing chiddush [novelty] in raising children: The rule is that a person should never show favoritism among children. But the Rule of Rules is that "to every rule there is an exception." Rav Yaakov insists that there are exceptions to the rule that one should not show favoritism to any of his children. There are some times that one child requires more time, more effort, or more concern than another child.

Anyone who has more than one child knows that different children require different things. When selecting automobiles, there are "high maintenance vehicles" and "low maintenance vehicles." The same thing applies with children. Some children are "low maintenance children". They go to school, they behave, they make their bed, they brush their teeth, they are respectful -- everything wonderful! However, some children are just the opposite.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky says that when a person sees that for whatever reason, be it physically, emotionally, psychologically, or just natural disposition -- one child requires more than another, the parent has to do what he has to do for whatever that child needs. One has to try to explain it to the other children and hope and pray that they will understand.

A person should not do this capriciously or without reason. That is the point of the previously cited Gemara. For whatever reason, the calculation Yaakov made vis a vis the favoritism he showed Yosef was in error. But Yaakov now saw clearly that Ephraim and Menashe had to be treated differently than the other grandchildren.

Why did they need to be treated differently? The other grandchildren grew up in a support system. They all had uncles and aunts and cousins. They all had a Zeida (grandfather). They had a reinforcing family environment. Ephraim and Menashe were out there alone, two children in Egypt. They were the only Jews in town. It's like trying to raise a Jewish family in Great Falls, Montana. There is nobody there. Kids that grow up in Great Falls, Montana are different than kids who grow up in Baltimore, Maryland.

This explains the special treatment given to Yosef's children over the other grandchildren. What about the special treatment given to Ephraim over Menashe?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky explains that Menashe was called Menashe "ki nishani es kol amali v'es kol beis avi" [Bereshis 41:51] (because G-d had made me forget all my hardship and all my father's household). He was a child that represented "the Old Country". When Menashe was born, Yosef was still sensitive to all that he had gone through. This child was a throw-back to my father's home. But Ephraim was given that name "ki hifrani Elokim b'erezt onyee" [41:52] (G-d has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering). He was a child of the new world.

Ephraim needed to be handled differently than Menashe. If he was not given this special kind of treatment, Yaakov Avinu suspected that something could happen to him. He therefore made the calculation and said that Ephraim had to be given added support. Consequently "he crossed his hands."

Justice has to be uniform, but chinuch (education; child-rearing) does not have to be uniform. It CANNOT be uniform. The Nesivos HaMishpat expands on a drasha found in Bava Basra [8b]. The Gemara there homiletically interprets the pasuk in Daniel [12:3] "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever." The Gemara says the first half of the pasuk refers to judges; the latter half refers to teachers of young children.

The Nesivos Hamishpat develops this thought: The judge is compared to a bright monochromatic light because Justice is the same for everyone. But the teachers of young children are compared to stars. Stars have different colors. There are blue, orange, and yellow stars. Likewise different lights must be shone onto different children. One cannot use the same methods of illumination for every child. The teacher (and all parents are teachers), unlike the judge dispensing justice, cannot dispense his teachings uniformly to all students. Chinuch has to be tailor-made.

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