



Parshas Vayechi 2019, the blessing of knowledge

This week's Parsha Perspective is dedicated in memory of Shlomo Ben Edward and Edward Ben Shaul. May their souls be uplifted and their memories a blessing.

Our Parsha begins with Ya'akov Avinu asking Yosef to swear that he would bury him in the land of Israel. Ya'akov then blessed Yosef's two sons, Efraim and Menashe, elevating them to his own sons' status as tribes within the Jewish people.

Yaakov then calls his children together for the final time. Rashi explains that he wishes to reveal to them when Moshiach will come. But Hashem removed his divine spirit so we would continue to work and yearn for the ultimate redemption every day. Subsequently, Ya'akov began to bless each son and gave them their roles and responsibilities in the Jewish nation.

At the age of 147 years old, Ya'akov Avinu passed away in the land of Egypt. A funeral procession consisting of his children, grandchildren, and Egyptian ministers accompanied Ya'akov to his final resting place in the Meoras HaMachpelah, where he was buried next to his parents and grandparents.

However, a question comes to mind: When Ya'akov finished blessing his children, the Pasuk writes, (49:28) *"and this is what their father said to them, (for the last time) he blessed them, each one according to their blessings, he blessed them."* But we see that Ya'akov cursed his first three sons because of their past actions. How could the Torah write that he blessed each child?

Furthermore, why did Ya'akov give three of the eldest children strong criticism right before he passed away?! Wouldn't it have been for Ya'akov to leave his children with blessings and inspiration?!

Rashi writes that it seems that the Pasuk is repeating itself with *"he blessed each one according to their blessings he blessed them."* He explains that the Torah reiterates that it is a mistake to think that Ya'akov did not bless his three eldest children, for each of his blessings applied equally to all of his sons.

Although each son had a defined role within the Jewish nation, such as Shevet Levi - working in the Beis Hamikdash or Shevet Yeudah - leading the Jewish people. Each tribe had an element and detail of each other's blessings and purpose.

Hence, we see certain people crossover into jobs typically for other tribes, like Shaul Hamelech from Shevet Benyamin or Yeudah Hamaccabi from Shevet Levi leading the nation.

However, the Or Hachaim Hakadosh (*Rav Chaim Ibn Attar*) gives a deeper and more powerful explanation. He explains that although it may seem like Ya'akov cursed Reuven, Shimon, and Levi, he actually gave a profound blessing.

He told them what they needed to fix and change in their actions to reach their true potential. For Reuven, Shimon and Levi had essential and significant roles within the Jewish nation.

The tribe of Reuven is the firstborn and the inherent people that the others will look to for guidance and leadership. Shimon's tribe did not receive any land in Israel because they were the Torah Scholars and teachers that taught the Jewish nation. Levi's tribe was to serve as the Jewish people's representatives in the Mishkan and Beis Hamikdash.

But to obtain and hold these critical positions of influence, they needed first to work and change aspects of their character. For Reuven, it was about having more and deeper respect for others.

For Shimon and Levi, it was learning how to control and redirect their anger and energy into something productive and meaningful. Ya'akov gave them the knowledge of what needs to be corrected and the ability to do so. Ya'akov's blessings to Reuven, Shimon, and Levi was the capability to see their powerful potential and the road leading to it.

In our daily lives, we must understand that human nature is to become defensive when we are being criticized. When we feel threatened, we become protective of our ego, shutting down any possibility of improvement.

However, It is imperative to remember that although it is challenging to receive constructive criticism, try to see and hear the point of what is being told to you, even if it's being said harshly, for you are being shown something that is holding you back from accomplishing your goals.

More importantly, if you offer constructive criticism, you should only do so in a sensitive manner. You must clearly convey that you are critiquing their actions for their benefit alone. Your only hope and intention are to help them achieve their potential.

“The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism.”

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*