

Parshas Vayechi – Blessing of the Children - Avi Friedwald

י"ב טבת תשע"ה – 2 January 2015 – שבת פ' ויחי

"ויברכם ביום ההוא לאמר כך יברך ישראל לאמר ישמך אלקים כאפרים וכמנשה ..." (בראשית מח:כ)

"And he blessed them on that day saying - through you Yisrael will bless saying 'May G-d make you like Ephraim and like Menashe...'"

There are a number of questions that can be asked on this posuk, which is the basis for the bracha given by parents to their children. I wanted to discuss two of them in this week's sedra sheet:

1. Why does Yaakov say that בך - "through you" (*singular*) Yisrael will bless. If Yaakov is speaking to Yosef about his sons (hence the singular tense), then he should say – בבניך – "through your sons" (*plural*) Yisrael will bless?
2. Why are Ephraim and Menashe used as the basis of blessing to our children, rather than anyone else? Surely we have lots of other important personages in the Torah who could be used as in the brocha instead?

In answer to the first question, Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin in his commentary on Chumash (Oznaim LaTorah) explains: Yaakov was actually saying – 'through Yosef people will bless their sons'. This is because Yosef was able to bring up righteous sons who were faithful to Torah values, in a completely alien and immoral environment. This he explains, is a credit to Yosef's Chinuch methodology – as children being brought up in Mizraim would not naturally have these values. So the Bracha actually being given by Yaakov here is that *parents* are given the strength to bring up children as righteous as Ephraim and Menashe, even when living in an environment that runs contrary to most of their religious beliefs and ideals.

This idea links in nicely to the unusual translation that Targum Yonasan gives on this posuk – בך יוסף ברי – through you, Yosef my son, the Bnei Yisrael will bless their children on the day of their Bris Milah. This indicates that this blessing is actually the source of the blessing given to the parents – that they should bring their son up in the Derech of the Torah (... יכנס לתורה...). (כשם שנכנס לברית, כן יכנס לתורה...).

(עי' אמת ליעקב שם)

However, the simple reading of the Posuk is still that this brocha is given directly by parents to their sons – as many people do on a weekly basis. Perhaps, using Rav Sorotzkin's reasoning – we can understand where the blessing for the daughters come from (ישימך אלקים כשרה רבקה רחל ולאה) – even though this wording doesn't appear to have a source in the Torah. Ephraim and Menashe were the first children, from the generation of the Ovos that were brought up in a completely alien environment – and hence they are the most appropriate role models for bringing up children in Golus. The *Imahos* were all brought up by parents who did not believe in Jewish ideals – and yet they were able to go against the tide and maintain Torah values. Hence, similar to Ephraim and Menashe – they are most appropriate role models for Jewish women.

In regards to the second question, Rav Yosef Sorotzkin in his sefer Meged Yosef explains in the name of his father (Rav Eliezer Sorotzkin, son of the Oznaim LaTorah) that Ephraim and Menashe were the first siblings in the Torah who were fully at peace with each other. Yaakov saw this illustrated when blessing Ephraim before Menashe and Menashe didn't object. Similarly, when Yosef stood up for Menashe, Ephraim didn't object. Yaakov therefore decided these are most appropriate personalities to use for blessing one's children. (A similar idea is brought in the sefer Mayanah Shel Torah in the name of דכ"ה.)

Again, we can use the idea suggested above to understand where the bracha for daughters comes from. The *Imahos* also were all selfless personalities who always looked to help each other, as is illustrated by the famous midrash brought down by Rashi (Ber 29:25) where Rachel gave Leah her code to prove who she was, so that Leah wouldn't get embarrassed on the wedding night. Hence they are all appropriate role models for Jewish women.

י"א טבת תשע"ה (בתיא מלכה) to mark her first birthday on