

All these are the twelve tribes of Yisrael... and he (Yaakov) blessed them. Everyone according to his blessing did he bless them. (49:28)

Changing one's direction in life is difficult. Once one has either chosen a specific path, or has ended up living a certain lifestyle because it just evolved, he finds change difficult. Many factors are involved. Complacency often prevails; and depression, the mounting feeling that "change" is something one cannot handle or in which will not be successful, is a powerful deterrent. Therefore, we often remain in a bind, doing the same thing, sticking to the same mold – and being miserable. **Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl**, derives a lesson from Yaakov *Avinu* which will invariably save the day for many of those who cannot seem to gather the strength of character with which to alter their lifestyles and opt for a more spiritually productive way of life.

The last few words of the above *pasuk* are enigmatic. How many blessings did each *shevet*, tribe, receive? First, the Torah says that Yaakov blessed them all – collectively. Then it says that each one individually received his own blessing. *Rashi* explains that he gave each tribe the blessing suitable and specific for it. He also gave a comprehensive, inclusive, blessing to his sons. *Rav Yeruchem* explains that a blessing is a stimulant, allowing and encouraging an individual's growth. It is based upon a person's innate potential, enhancing and bringing it to fruition. One who blesses is acutely aware of his subject's potential, understanding how he works and what makes him tick. By addressing his specific talents and character traits, he encourages his growth. Each one of the *Shevatim* had its dominant character trait. Yaakov pointed to it as if to say, "Take that specific G-d-given talent and develop it. Your unique talent is yours alone. Only you can bring it to realization. Only you can develop it to its ultimate fruition. While there was a comprehensive "family" blessing, Yaakov's primary emphasis was on the uniqueness of each tribe.

The *Mashgiach* employs this as a stepping stone for character development. Indeed, by focusing on his unique character trait, one catalyzes himself to achieve greater success. It is these specific character traits that should receive our greatest emphasis. Why? Because success usually begets success! In the process of succeeding in one area of our lives, we create a ripple effect for other character traits which do not lend themselves as easily to success. Once we have succeeded at something, we feel the inspiration, the courage, and motivation to continue the upward climb to total success.

Character development is a formidable undertaking, but it becomes much simpler when developing one character trait at a time – beginning with one's natural tendencies which are obviously more conducive for success. The self-confidence and reassurance one gains from perfecting that first *middah*, character trait, encourage and facilitate him to go the whole way.