

## Yisrael saw the sons of Yosef, and he said, “Who are these?” Yosef said to his father, “They are my sons, who Hashem gave me with this” (48:8,9)

Most of *Parashas Vayechi* is occupied with Yaakov *Avinu*’s final moments on earth, his last will and testament to his children, and the various messages implied by his choice of words. The *parsha* opens with Yaakov’s becoming ill and calling for Yosef to come to his bedside. Yosef did not come alone. He brought with him his two sons, Menasheh and Ephraim. When Yaakov saw them, he asked, “Who are these?” Yosef replied, “They are my sons, whom G-d gave me with this...” *Rashi* presents an in-depth explanation of their conversation. Yaakov was about to bless Yosef’s sons when, suddenly, the *Shechinah* left him, due to the evil descendants that would emerge from Yosef’s sons. Yeravam and Achav would descend from Ephraim, and Yeihu and his sons would descend from Menasheh. Sensing this emergence of evil, Yaakov wondered from where these people would emanate: They were certainly not fit for blessing. Perhaps there was something amiss about Yosef’s marriage. This could be the source of his tainted lineage. Yosef immediately showed his father his *kesubah*, document, attesting to the integrity of his marriage. Yosef begged for mercy, and *Ruach HaKodesh*, Divine Inspiration, returned to Yaakov.

The dialogue presents us with two questions. First, Yaakov’s question concerning the source of his descendants’ evil remains unanswered. Menasheh and Ephraim remain the progenitors of their evil grandchildren, but Yaakov’s *Ruach HaKodesh* returns, regardless. How does Yosef’s response mitigate the problem raised by Yaakov?

The **Shem MiShmuel** addresses this question, but first explains another lineage-related anomaly. Later in the *parsha*, when Yaakov blesses Shimon and Levi, he declares, B’kehalam al teichad kevodi, “And in their congregation, do not join, O’ my honor, (do not write my name)” (Ibid. 49:6). *Rashi* explains that this is a reference to Korach’s congregation, his assembly of 250 mutineers against Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen*. Korach was a descendant of Levi. Yaakov implored that when the Torah delineates Korach’s ancestry, it should not include the Patriarch. Let the *yichus*, genealogy, end with Levi. Later on, in *Divrei HaYamim* (6:22,23), it does trace Korach’s pedigree to Yisrael.

What significance is there to whether or not Yaakov’s name is mentioned? Everyone knows that Yaakov is Levi’s father. By ceasing the genealogy with Levi, nothing is accomplished. The *Shem MiShmuel* explains that Yaakov was concerned, lest the character defect present in Korach be attributed to him. The flaw that produced a Korach could not be traced to Yaakov. While Levi’s descendants must have been carriers of this spiritual defect, neither Yaakov nor any of the tribes were “infected” with it. Had the flaw reached back to Yaakov, it would have meant that the entire *Klal Yisrael* was contaminated. Therefore, when the Torah records Korach’s ancestry, Yaakov’s name is omitted. When the chronicles in *Divrei HaYamim* traces the Priestly descent, then Yaakov/Yisrael is mentioned, since the *Kohanim*’s holy and pure elements were clearly

derived from Yaakov.

With this idea in mind, we return to Yaakov and the *berachos* he gave to Menasheh and Ephraim. The *Shem MiShmuel* suggests that Yaakov's concern was regarding the "mistaken identity," which may present itself when his descendants – emerging from Menasheh and Ephraim – would be thought to have defective character traits stemming back to them. This would then disenfranchise their entire tribes. When Yosef begged for mercy, he was effectively praying that this not be the case. Rather, the sins perpetuated by Yaravam, Achav and Yeihu, would be considered to be isolated incidents indicative of their own personal failings, but not related to their tribes. When Yosef showed his father his *kesubah*, he intimated, "We are good. What you see prophetically has nothing to do with us. It is a weakness in the descendants – not in their origins." Then, the *Ruach HaKodesh* that had left Yaakov returned. He was vindicated of any blemish.