

"And Yisrael stretched out his right hand and placed (it) upon Efraim's head . . . and his left (hand he placed) on Menashe's head . . . and he (Yosef) held up his father's hand to remove it." (48:14,17)

Why did Yaakov not change Menashe and Efraim's position, thereby avoiding the necessity of criss-crossing his hands over them? The commentators cite various responses to this question. *Horav Chaim M'Volozhin z.t.l.* offers a profound insight into Yaakov's behavior. The nature of a person is to minimize his friend's virtues, while simultaneously exaggerating his failings. This represents an unconscious attempt to allay one's own insecurities.

One foolishly thinks that he improves himself by denigrating others. This characteristic becomes manifest when two people stand facing each other. The right hand of one is across from his friend's left hand and vice versa. One's right hand, the stronger one, stands in readiness, focusing upon his friend's weakness, symbolized by the left hand. Conversely, one's left hand, the weaker side of man, confronts his friend's virtue, implying man's lackadaisical attitude towards appreciating his friend's good qualities.

Yaakov *Avinu*, the proverbial *ish emes*, man of truth, desired to maintain the status quo in which the older son coincided with his left side. His goal was to teach his children not to exaggerate their friend's shortcomings and to avoid detracting from their friend's good deeds. One should train himself so that his right side parallels his friend's "right side," and his left side coincides with his friend's "left side."