

## **Bring them to me, if you please, and I will bless them. (48:9)**

Yaakov *Avinu* wanted to bless Yosef's sons. We do not find him blessing any of his other grandchildren. Perhaps, since it was his plan to grant Menashe and Ephraim *Shevet/Tribe* status, it was necessary to meet in order to bless them. *Chazal* give many explanations for Yaakov's decision to make Menashe and Ephraim the paradigms of Jewish blessing: "*Yesimcha Elokim k'Ephraim v'k'Menashe*. Something was special about these two young men and the manner in which they were raised, special enough that Yaakov wanted every Jewish father throughout the millennia to bless his children in a similar manner. Why?

The continuity of *Klal Yisrael* is based upon our success in transmitting the *mesorah*, tradition, from generation to generation. Avraham *Avinu* succeeded in doing so with Yitzchak *Avinu*. He did not succeed in imbuing his many students in a like manner. Therefore, their commitment did not endure past the first generation. Our educational role as parents is of paramount significance. No one is able to transmit the *mesorah* as effectively as a parent. When a child grows up in an environment in which not only do his parents educate him, but he has the added support of grandparents, he sees the *mesorah* playing itself out in a multi-generational setting. When a child who has not had the benefit of having the educational impact of a grandparent (such as Menashe and Ephraim) grows up to be a consummate *ben Torah*, it is a tribute to his parents (who received their education from their parents). This is what impressed Yaakov about his "Egyptian born and bred" grandsons. Apparently, what Yosef had imbibed from his father prior to his being sold as a slave was sufficiently compelling to carry over to Menashe and Ephraim. Yaakov *Avinu* knew that in the future bitter exiles to which our people would be subjected, there would not always be grandparents, or even parents, who would be capable of readily transmitting the *mesorah*. Thus, he established the blessing, *Yesimcha Elokim k'Ephraim v'k'Menashe*; "May Hashem make you like Ephraim and Menashe," because they represent a more challenging level of commitment.

*Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita*, posits that marriage, procreation and passing down our tradition to the next generation comprise the essence of our nation's survival. He quotes the *Tzvi l'Tzaddik, zl*, who related the following parable prior to his son's marriage. There was once a person who had a fierce love for his king. He sought an opportunity to develop a closeness with the king, but this could not be done unless he had an opportunity to be in the palace. One day, he saw an ad that announced that the palace was in need of a skilled worker to manage the wood fireplace. It was not a difficult job. One had to place the wood in the fireplace when needed, and one had to know how much wood to place at a time. He took the job and threw himself into it with zeal, to insure that it would always be his.

The king eventually heard about the palace's devoted fireplace worker, and why he had taken the job. The king was impressed with this man's devotion, so he summoned him to his private chamber. After praising his devotion, he asked how he could reward him. The man's response was unusual, but quite easy to accommodate. He wanted access to a small window that looked into the king's room. This way, whenever he could, he would gaze at the king whom he loved so

much.

No one remains young forever. As the fireplace worker aged, the job that used to be so simple became increasingly difficult for him. In due time, he realized that he required a qualified replacement. He interviewed a number of applicants. While many of them seemed satisfactory in terms of performance, none of them manifested an exuberance toward doing the job. It is one thing to work, it is totally another to maintain a zest for the job throughout the day. They each had requirements which precluded them from accepting the position. One sought higher pay; another said he would rather heat his own house. The worker finally realized that in order to find a proper replacement who would have the correct attitude, he would have to marry and have a son. He would then educate his son from the very beginning to love the king and, thus, understand the importance of serving him. In this manner, he would ultimately cultivate the right replacement.

After concluding the story, the *Tzvi L'Tzaddik* turned to his son and said, "This is the purpose of marriage. We marry and raise children, instilling within them the importance of loving and serving Hashem." We are the only ones who can imbue the next generation with the feelings that have been imbued in us. We receive from the previous generation, and then we serve as the link to pass it on to the next generation.

We must underscore one caveat. In order for all of this to work, for the son to adhere to and accept his father's lessons, it is crucial that he develop a strong sense of *Kibbud av v'eim*, honor for his father and mother. One can hardly learn from – nor accept – the lessons transmitted by parents whom he does not respect. One must honor parents, even if he finds it difficult to respect them. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, explains that this is the meaning of *kabeid* (*es avicha v'es imecha*), honor (your father and mother). *Kabeid* is the same spelling and is related to *kaveid*, heavy. One must "add weight" to his parents. Even if in his estimation there is "little weight" / light weight (very little about them to respect); he must make it his business to build them up, raise their esteem in his eyes, thus lending /adding weight to them. This is how one fulfills the *mitzvah* of *kabeid*/honor.

Stories abound concerning the significance of – and the reward for – honoring parents. I recently came across the following inspiring story concerning *Horav Yehoshua Neuwirth, zl*, author of the highly acclaimed and widely-read *Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah*. *Rav* Neuwirth had an elderly mother who spent her twilight years as a resident in *Shomrei Hachomos*, a home for the aged, in Sanhedria. *Rav* Neuwirth lived in Bayit V'Gan, which was quite a distance by foot. Nonetheless, he would take the one-hour walk every *Shabbos* to make *Kiddush* for her, and to take her for a short walk. She cherished these Friday night visits with her illustrious son. Indeed, the visit transformed her entire week.

One Friday night, Yerushalayim was inundated with torrential rain. It might be a great blessing for the world (*Vayikra* 26:4, *Rashi's* commentary), but, for *Rav* Neuwirth, it presented a dilemma. On the one hand, how could he walk one hour (each way) in this weather? On the other hand, his visit meant so much to his mother. How could he disappoint her?

He asked *Horav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zl*, for advice. What should he do? *Rav Shlomo Zalman* said that he was not obligated to go, and it would be best that he visit *Motzei Shabbos*. *Rav Neuwirth* was very forward, so he asked whether the *Rav's halachic* decision was a command or whether he could take it as good advice. *Rav Shlomo Zalman* replied that he was simply offering his advice, emphasizing that he was by no means under any *halachic* obligation to go.

*Rav Neuwirth* mulled it over and decided that disappointing his mother was more important than getting wet (soaked). Despite the pouring rain, he set out toward Sanhedria. He later attributed this specific act of honoring his mother as the possible reason for the widespread acceptance of his *sefer* on *Hilchos Shabbos* throughout the ranks of *Klal Yisrael!*

Perhaps I might add that the reward for honoring one's parents is *arichas yamim*, longevity. What greater form of longevity is there than one's *chiddushim*, novellae, being read and reread by generations of Jews. This is the epitome of *sifso sav dovevos ba'kever*, "his lips speak in the grave."