



Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFKA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

In memory of R' Shmuel Shmelka ben HaRav Moshe Kizelnik z"l

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DIFFERENT ONES

Before Yaakov gave berachos to his children, he assembled them together to tell them about Moshiach's coming. The medrash tells us that sensing the absence of the Shechina, Yaakov suspected that something was amiss until his children reassured him of their absolute faith by declaring 'Shema Yisroel, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad'. Once Yaakov was reassured, he went on to bless each of his children.

While it seems that Yaakov Avinu's concern stemmed only from a supernatural realization that he was lacking ruach ha'kodesh, HaRav Eliyahu Meir Bloch zt"l explains that Yaakov Avinu's suspicion actually stemmed from calculated logic. As Yaakov Avinu prepared to bless each of his children, he realized how different each of them were. Fearing that their unique natural qualities had divided them not only in their approach to serving Hashem, but in their relationship with Him or lack thereof as well, Yaakov hesitated before giving them their berachos. When the shevatim realized their father's fear, they addressed him in unison, affirming their belief in the unity of the Ribono shel Olam, and that their differences only add to Hashem's honor.

R' Eliyahu Meir explains further that this is indeed our daily proclamation of shema; that we call out to Yisroel (Yaakov Avinu) as he rests in the Maaras Hamachpeila, and reiterate the promise of his sons generations ago. So it turns out that our daily proclamation is our pledge to follow in the ways of our fathers. The only problem with this understanding is that Chazal tell us that when Yaakov was reunited with Yosef after twenty-two years, while the latter wept, Yaakov Avinu said krias shema. HaRav Bloch explains that as Yaakov crossed the border onto Egyptian soil, he foresaw all that would transpire his children in the golus of Mitzrayim and was worried how they would maintain their faith in the unity of Hashem, which is the base and foundation of the Jewish people. In reciting shema, he sought to teach his descendants to remain loyal to his beliefs, despite the challenges ahead.

There is a lot that we can learn from the Shevatim's response. They understood just how different they were from one another. They likely also realized Yaakov's fear of what this could lead to and responded in unison that no, this actually brings greater kavod shomayim. Often we compare our differences and rate people or categorize them. We fail to realize that our differences stem from our different natures and the very fact that we are different and serve Hakadosh Boruch Hu in different ways only adds to His honor. Perhaps if we internalize this message, we will be able to survive the darkness of golus that Yaakov worried about when he stepped into Mitzrayim, and then we can let Yisroel sabba know that he no longer need worry about his children.

זרעא דיוסף לא שלטא ביה עינא בישא, דקתיב {בראשית מ"ט:כ"ב} "בן פורת יוסף בן פורת עלי עין", ואמר רבי אבהו: אל תקרי "עלי עין", אלא "עולי עין". רבי יוסי ברבי חנינא אמר מהקא: {בראשית מ"ח:ט"ז} "וידגו לרוב בקרב הארץ", מה דגים שבים מים מכסין עליהם ואין עין הרע שולטת בהם, אף זרעו של יוסף אין עין הרע שולטת בהם: (ברכות כ.)

Yaakov's beracha to Yosef was that he should reproduce like fish. Since he didn't simply bless him to be fruitful and multiply, this implies an additional beracha in that his descendants should be hidden from the public eye, the result of which is that they shouldn't be susceptible to ayin hara. The take-away from this is that one who conceals himself and his accomplishments is deserving of beracha.

TORAH TEMIMAH



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the Rosh Kollel...

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Sugyas ha' Sedra

PROBLEMS WITH [BENTCHING] YOUR CHILDREN

As Yaakov's life drew to an end, he called in Yosef and his two sons to and placed his hands on their heads to bless them. This incident has become somewhat of a model for how to give berachos. Indeed, it has become common practice for a father to bless his children, that they should be like Yosef's sons, Ephraim and Menashe. There is a widespread custom to do so every Friday night when the impure powers can't interfere (seforim ha'kedoshim) and there is an abundance of blessing that pours down from Heavens. (R' Yaakov Emden) Although it is then especially appropriate to bless small children who haven't sinned, one should bless his grown children as well. (Yaavetz). Still, some avoid blessing their children every week as this cheapens the beracha. Indeed the custom of many Chasidic courts to only bentch their children on Erev Yom Kippur, claiming that Yitzchok Avinu only gave out berachos on Pesach, since it was a most auspicious time.

Although some place only one hand on the child's head as Yaakov did when he blessed Yosef's sons, R' Yaakov Emden explains that one should use both hands as this shows a greater will for beracha. It was for this reason that Moshe Rabeinu put both hands on Yehoshua and the only reason why Yaakov used one hand was in order to bless Ephraim and Menashe at the same time.

The prevalent custom is to follow with the pesukim of birkas kohanim (Yevarechecha etc...). Theoretically this should be problematic especially for one who is not a kohein. (Even a kohein has to deal with the prohibition of adding to the mitzvos). The Mishna Berura / Biur Halacha suggests several possible explanations why this might not be a concern:

According to many opinions, mitzvos require intent and if one does not intend to do a mitzvah, he hasn't fulfilled it. By the same token, he cannot transgress the prohibition of a non-kohein reciting birkas kohanim if he does not intend to fulfill a mitzvah in doing so. This approach however, doesn't satisfy all opinions as many hold that one can fulfill mitzvos without intent.

Another approach is to consider to words of the Yerushalmi that birkas kohanim is only said at a time of tefillah. Although this assumed to be a Rabbinic enactment, one could offer that when one recites these pesukim at a time other than davening, he intends NOT to fulfill the mitzvah of birkas kohanim, even though he recites it as a beracha. (It should be noted that reading the pesukim itself is not a problem, and the only issue is when they are uttered as a beracha to someone else, which is the case when it comes to birkas ha'banim. However, since it is widely accepted that one cannot be forced to do a mitzvah, if one has 'negative kavana' - i.e. he intends not to fulfill a mitzvah - he doesn't. Therefore, intending such would preclude him from the transgression as well.

SPARKS OF SHABBOS

Chazal tell us that one who is "mekayim" three meals on Shabbos will be spared from the birth pangs of moshiach and is guaranteed a place in Olam Haba. R' Benzion Bruk points out that this gemara appears in connection with the halachos of what to do if a fire chas v'shoom breaks out on Shabbos; then, not only is one not allowed to save more than three meals' worth of bread, but he is actually obligated to do so. It makes no difference, whether the person is wealthy or destitute, in the midst of Shabbos, he not only must put his full trust in Hashem, and watch his possessions go up in flames, but he also must be focused enough to continue on with his avodas ha'yom by worrying about what to eat for seudas shelishis. If a person reaches such a level that he can do so with complete menuchas ha'nefesh, he has reached a very high madreigah and truly earned this reward. Based on this understanding, R' Matisyahu Solomon zt"l explains that by approaching all of hilchos Shabbos with a proper balance of emunah and menuchas ha'nefesh in proper observance of its halachos will merit the same.

L' maaseh...

A bochur spent a Shabbos in the home of Rav Shimshon Pinkus zt"l. At some point while they were sitting around the table, the Rav pointed to a broken clock on the wall and asked his guest if he knows why it is broken. After a shrug of the shoulders, R' Shimshon explained that one of his kids had thrown a plate at it and it broke. "Do you know what I said to him?" After a pause and another shrug of the shoulders, he added "nothing". He explained that he only commented on spiritual damage which his kids caused, but anything that didn't fit into that category wasn't important in their development and overall chinuch. The lesson was clear: He won't grow up to be a plate thrower, and the goal is to ensure he becomes a yarei shomayim with good midos

The Bach and Gra maintain that spreading out both hands is an integral part of birkas kohanim and but spreading out only one hand is not. If so, one who uses only one hand for birkas habanim need not be concerned. (See Torah Temimah Bamidbar). (The fact that he doesn't spread his fingers in the way the kohanim are accustomed to doing is inconsequential since doing so is not an integral part of the mitzvah.)

Rav Moshe Shternbuch shlit"a raises another issue with our customary birkas ha'banim, which is seemingly problematic even if one doesn't use his hands and does so only on erev Yom Kippur. Quoting Yaakov Avinu, we bless our sons "yisimcha Elokim k'Efraim u'k'Menashe" - that Hashem should make them like Yosef's two children. This however is not the full posuk; only the latter half of a much longer posuk. The problem is that Chazal tell us that we are only permitted to say pesukim as Moshe Rabeinu said them, meaning in their full sense, not cutting a single posuk into two.

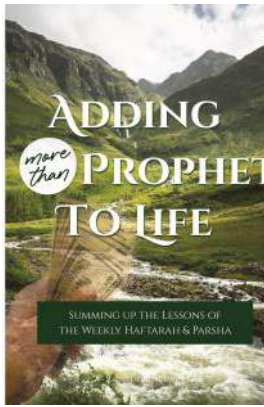
The gemara in fact gives a special dispensation to rebbeim of small children to teach partial pesukim, because otherwise they would never retain the taught material. Clearly, the issue is not restricted to krias ha'Torah and is so much of a problem that the Chasam Sofer protested the custom of those who begin Kiddush on Friday night with the words "vayehi erev vayehi boker", since it is mid-way through a posuk.

As a partial aside, Reb Moshe Feinstein zt"l writes that even if someone reads an entire posuk but says "Hashem" or "Elokim" instead of reading them properly (i.e. by saying the names of Hashem), he is in violation of "kol pesuka d'lo pasak Moshe, anan lo paskinan" - making up new pesukim. So how then do we begin bentching our sons with Yaakov's beracha "yisimcha Elokim..."?

In his final analysis, Rav Shternbuch concludes that although the prohibition is not to be taken lightly, the prohibition is only to say a partial posuk where he says it as a posuk. Here however, one is borrowing the phraseology of Yaakov Avinu as recorded in the Torah and integrating it into a beracha; since he has not intent of stating it as a posuk, there is no problem whatsoever. Seemingly, this would also explain several parts of davening and selichos which almost mimic pesukim from Tanach but are not only partial, but inaccurate. Since one is not saying it as a posuk, there is no problem borrowing the phraseology of pesukim.



In shemoneh esrei, we say "zocheir chasdei avos u'meivi goel livnei b'heim l'maan sh'mo, b'ahava". Simply, this means that Hashem will redeem us in the merit of the avos; while we ourselves might not be worthy of redemption, the zechus of our forefathers makes us "deserving" of geulah. Yet, according to some opinions (Shaabos 55a), any remnants of zechus avos was finished up long ago. Accordingly, the Tur understands the words of our tefilah to mean that He recalls the merits of the avos, but finds them to be insufficient, and will redeem us anyway, for His own sake, and because of His tremendous love for us. The Akeidas Yitzchok offers a different approach, that even according to the opinions that maintain that we still have zechus avos even today, those merits help us in our day to day lives, but are still not enough to bring the final geulah. Ultimately, we will only be redeemed out of Hashem's tremendous love for K'lal Yisroel.



DIVREI HA'NAVI - ADDING PROPHET TO LIFE

In his first derasha of Shovavim, the Chasam Sofer tells us that Yosef was memaleh makam aviv – that he was a fitting replacement for Yaakov. It had to be that way; otherwise, Yaakov could never have been brought to Eretz Yisroel for kevura. One of the reasons why Moshe Rabeinu didn't merit burial in Eretz Yisroel, is so that Jews in golus should always be able to connect to him. Before Moshe, we connected with Yaakov Avinu and therefore the only way his body could be transported out of Mitzrayim was if he left over a fitting successor, and that was Yosef. Perhaps this is what Chazal mean when they say that Yaakov lo meis – he didn't die because he left over Yosef who was an almost identical replacement.

There is just one problem: Yaakov we know, lived a life of suffering. He even expressed this to Pharoah when asked his age. Yosef, on the other hand, aside from the first few years he spent in prison in Mitzrayim, lived a relatively easy life. He was the apple of his father's eye, and became the second most powerful person in the most powerful country in the world. How then, could Yosef possibly fill Yaakov's colloquial shoes?

The answer, explains the Chasam Sofer, is that what Yosef did for the masses by sustaining them, is equal to all the suffering Yaakov endured through his entire life. This is what Yaakov meant when he said "sim na yadcha tachas yereichi": The thigh symbolizes suffering. We know this from Yaakov's battle with the sar shel Eisav, but the Chasam Sofer cites other proofs as well. The hand is the giving hand which represents tzedakah and chesed. So Yaakov told Yosef, place your hand, meaning your ability to give and sustain, tachas yereichi, in place of my suffering. Then, you won't have to bury me in Mitzrayim and will be able to take me up to Eretz Yisroel.

But how does this work? We understand that the suffering of tzadikim can somehow be mechaper for the tzibur at large. How this works is not our topic right now, but Chazal are very clear that the death and suffering of tzadikim can atone for the Jewish people at large, but why should chesed accomplish the same thing?

It seems that the answer is that through doing for others we connect to each other and it is through achdus that we merit so much beracha.

Before Yaakov bentched his children, he called them together to tell them what will happen at the end of days. The wording of the posuk there is "hei'asfu v'agidah lachem...". However Chazal tell us that Yaakov sensed that the shechina was absent and continued instead to give over the berachos. The posuk there reads "hikavtzu" v'shimu b'nei Yaakov..." – that Yaakov called his sons together. First "asifa" and then "kibut". Both the Kli Yakar and the Rav Hirsch are bothered by the difference in wording, and they both say very similar answers. "Asifa", is together close together, as one would do to a group that was in front of him, and he just wants them to edge a bit closer. "Kibutz" on the other hand, connotes an ingathering of people who are spread apart and very separate, like kibutz galuyos. Yaakov understood that his sons were twelve separate shevatim who were very different, but he thought there was achdus between them. When he sensed the Shechina leave, he realized that they weren't so united and told them "hikavtzu", because in order to merit the Shechina, you must first get together.

The Targum Yerushalmi tells us that when Yaakov expressed his suspicions about his children not being worthy, they declared "shema Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad!". We say it every day, but it doesn't mean that Hashem is one and not two, but rather that Hashem is unified. Chazal tell us that the corresponding posuk to this is that Hashem remarks "mi k'amcha Yisroel goy echad ba'aretz" which therefore also means that we are unified and not just one as opposed to two. When Yaakov heard this, says the Targum, he exclaimed "yehei shmei rabah m'vorach l'olam..." which we say all the time, but the medrash records these words as "boruch sheim k'vod malchuso l'olam va'ed". These words recognize the glory of Hashem's malchus, but we always say in a whisper except in the beis HaMikdash and on Yom Kippur when Hashem's presence is clear. Otherwise, we can only scream it out in Aramaic which is the language of golus. We await the day when we will truly unite as a goy echad ba'aretz and loudly proclaim boruch sheim k'vod malchuso in the Beis HaMikdash, shehyibaneh b'mheira b'yameinu.

Every Shabbos at mincha, right before krias ha'Torah we say "v'ani tefilasi eis ratzon...". It is the only time we say it as a stand alone unit. Why now? We don't say it on yom tov or before krias ha'Torah at Shacharis. In his siddur, R' Yaakov Emden writes that in the end of times, K'lal Yisroel will be in a terribly frightening situation on Shabbos, and we will gather together at mincha and scream out to Hakadosh Boruch Hu. Hashem will answer us and immediately after Shabbos, "ben Dovid ba" - Moshiach will arrive. It is because of this that Shabbos mincha is considered an eis ratzon and we say this posuk every Shabbos.

We can't know for certain, but perhaps it doesn't have to be this way. If we instead come together as a nation, and fulfill the words of the Shabbos mincha shemoneh esrei, "mi k'amcha Yisroel goy echad ba'aretz" we will be zocheh to "Hashem echad u'shmo echa, aters yeshuah and the ultimate yom menucha of the asid lavo!"