



From the desk of
MORDECHAI MALKA
Chief Rabbi of Elad, Israel
Founder and President of Or Hamelech Institutions
Member of Chief Rabbinate of Israel



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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

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TORAT

Parashat Vayehi

HAMELECH

Switch of the Wrist

In this week's *parashah*, Yaakov Avinu wishes to bless his grandsons, Menashe and Efrayim. Their father Yosef brings them to his father Yaakov, whose eyes already dimmed, due to seniority. Yosef placed Menashe, the elder of the boys, at his left, so that he would be at Yaakov's right. Efrayim was on the other side. Both boys were to be blessed, but it was understood that the one on Yaakov's right would receive a stronger blessing.

Now, Yaakov did something quite peculiar. He crossed his hands and placed his right hand upon Efrayim's head and conferred the blessing. Yosef tried to reposition Yaakov's hands, explaining that Menashe was older and deserved the right hand. Yaakov would not hear of it. He let Yosef know that he was well aware of exactly what he was doing. Although Menashe and his progeny will achieve greatness, Efrayim's offspring will outdo them.

What message is Yaakov imparting with this hand scheme?

Efrayim and Menashe

Efrayim and Menashe were the two sons of Yosef. Menashe, the firstborn, was involved in palace activities. He was the translator for Tsafnat Panei'ah (Yosef's Egyptian name). (Rashi to Bereishit 42:23) He was active on the political scene.

Efrayim was the Torah scholar. He spent his days learning *Talmud* with his grandfather Yaakov. When Yaakov became sick in *Eretz Goshen*, it was Efrayim, who was always at his side, who went to tell his father Yosef in Mitzrayim (Rashi to Bereishit 48:1).

So when Yaakov makes a point of placing Efrayim before Menashe, now and for the future, he is conveying the message that those who toil in Torah are to be given precedence over politicians, as righteous as they may be.

Getting it Right

We are dealing here with the foundation and roots of our nation. We have three forefathers: Avraham, Yitshak and Yaakov. All of Yaakov's children were righteous; all were part of the chosen Nation. Efrayim and Menashe were Yaakov's grandchildren. Nonetheless, they were given the status of *shevatim* as if they were Yaakov's own children.

When Yaakov wishes to bless Efrayim and Menashe, his right hand plays a significant role. But so does his right foot! One may wonder, if Yaakov really wanted Efrayim to receive the primary blessing, why did he not demand that Yosef reposition the two. Some explain that he did not want to make such a big tumult so as not to embarrass Menashe (Hizkuni).

The Netziv (He'emek Davar) explains that hands represent spiritual matters whereas feet, which stand upon the earth, represent involvement in



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the physical world. Therefore, while Yaakov wanted Efrayim to be the recipient of the spiritual blessings in a superior manner; at the same time, he wanted Menashe exactly where he was, by his right foot. Since Menashe was more involved in physical matters, Yaakov blessed him to this end. At the same time, Yaakov mentioned Efrayim's name first, establishing the prominence of Torah scholars over politicians.

Post-Pension

Rabbi Nehorai said: I put aside all possible professions and occupations and I teach my son only Torah. A profession can be helpful only until a certain point in time. Once a person ages, it is no longer there for him. Torah is there for a person in his youth and in his seniority. Torah scholars often receive a new dose of energy in their old age, a rejuvenation of sorts. (Kidushin 82b)

Rabbi Shimon ben Akashia says: Unknowledgeable people get old and senile. Torah scholars age and become wiser (Masechet Kinim 3:6).

We see this all the time. People who never made Torah their favorite pastime or career, get old and no longer think straight. They quickly become a burden for their family members, who cannot wait to see them go, so that they can get a grab on whatever is left of the inheritance, after Medicare bills have been paid. Their funerals are often poorly attended.

Those who chose the path of Efrayim fill their days with Torah study. Even as they age, they

continue to enjoy more and more gems of Torah wisdom. Torah refines them and earns them respect. They become good-natured people and get along well with those in their surroundings. Their family respects them and takes counsel from them. When they finally pass on, they are honored and respected. No funerals in the world come anywhere near matching the attendance level of that of Gedolei Yisroel. Tens of thousands show up to pay respect, their demeanor is somber, their hearts are heavy. They seriously feel the loss. At the moment of truth, façades melt away and the truth speaks for itself.

Man was created to toil (Iyov 5). Fortunate is one whose main toil is in Torah study (Sanhedrin 99b).

Who's Up First?

The *Kohein* gets the first *Aliyah*. Then the *Levi*. Who's next? Whomever the *gabbai* chooses, right? Not exactly. In Gittin 60a, we are taught that the third *Aliya* is given to a *Talmid Hacham* who has a position of authority (often the Rav of the *Beit Haknesset*). The fourth *aliyah* is given to a *Talmid Hacham* who is on a level that he could function in a position of Rabbinical authority. The fifth *aliya* is reserved for sons of *Rabbonim*. Only subsequently do we give *aliyot* to other community leaders such as the *rosh kahal*, and then to the general populace. This order is delineated in Shulhan Aruch as well (O.C. 136). [Often, other factors are taken into consideration. Nonetheless there is much to be gleaned from



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being aware of the basic order of precedence delineated by the *Talmud* and *Poskim*.]

This Torah-ordained order of affording honor is a real eye-opener, especially for those who are accustomed to thinking that politicians deserve more honor than Torah scholars.

Torah First

Now, it is interesting to note that the *pasuk* starts off saying that Yaakov blessed Yosef. Yet, we only find a blessing here to Yosef's two sons. Ramban explains that the best blessing that Yaakov could give Yosef is to bless Yosef's sons. This can be compounded by the fact that through this blessing, Yaakov was impressing upon Yosef this most fundamental ideal, that of giving precedence and honor to *Talmidei Hachomim*.

In day-to-day life, we are often presented with choices of whom to prefer. If there is a job to get done, will we disturb our son at work or the one in *Yeshiva* or *Kollel*? If someone has to stay home with a sick child, is it the working mother or the *Kollel*-man father? When someone of prominence pays a visit to our institutions, who is given more pomp and to-do: the politician or the Torah scholar?

Let us pay attention to Yaakov Avinu's lesson to us in this *parashah* and may it help us make the right decision in the aforementioned and similar scenarios.

Rolling Out the White Carpet

One winter day, Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman found himself trudging towards the large

extravagant home of one of the supporters of his *Yeshiva*. Instead of knocking on the front door, Reb Elchonon chose to approach the back door. Why? It was a rainy day and the outdoors were full of mud puddles. Reb Elchonon did not want his muddy shoes to leave their mark upon the wealthy man's fine carpets.

When he knocked on the back door, the philanthropist immediately understood Reb Elchonon's considerations. Nonetheless, he insisted that Reb Elchonon be ushered in through the front door, in a respectable manner. "Never mind the carpets," he said. "Let my children see that Torah scholars deserve more respect than carpets."

At this, Reb Elchonon blessed the man that he merit to have sons-in-law who would be *Talmidei Hachomim*. The blessing met with fruition. Indeed, in *Masechet Shabbat 23b* we are taught: One who respects *Talmidei Hachomim* will merit to have sons-in-law *Talmidei Hachomim*.

Let us pray to Hashem that all of *Klal Yisroel* should become aware of the extreme importance of Torah study and Torah scholars. Please, Hashem, help us all understand that Torah study is what keeps our nation going. May we merit to have true *nachat* from all of our children and grandchildren, they type of *nachat* which Yaakov Avinu would appreciate.

Fondly,
Mordechai Malka