Points to Ponder

Vayechi 5780

**וַיִּשְׁלַח֩ יִשְׂרָאֵ֨ל אֶת־יְמִינ֜וֹ Yaakov sent forth his hand (48:14)** – Why didn’t Yaakov just simply ask them to change their standing places? **Rav Shimon Schwab ztl** explains that Yosef demonstrated 2 individual aspects of leadership. On the one hand, he was a leader in action and at the same time he was a spiritual leader. Yaakov was showing that both were important and deserving of the “right” to be on the “right”. Menashe represented the feet on the ground aspect of Yosef’s leadership. Thus, he got to stand on the right. Ephraim was representative of the spiritual Mesorah and was handed the continuity by receiving the right hand.

**לֹא־כֵ֣ן אָבִ֑י You are incorrect father (48:18)** – The Talmud (Kiddushin 31b Sanhedrin 81a) notes that a child may not contradict a parent. How could Yosef tell his father that he was wrong? **Tzafnas Paneiach** says that this rule applies only to Torah law. One can offer a different position in other matters. But the **Be’er Sheva (Sanhedrin 110)** says exactly the opposite. **Aruch Hashulchan** (YD 240:13) is skeptical as to whether one may contradict a parent on a non-Torah matter. **Maadanei Asher** suggests that the argument of Lo Kein was that I have never done that, is it mutar. Yosef was asking – not correcting.

**בְּךָ֗ יְבָרֵ֤ךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל֙ With your name Bnei Yisrael will bless (48:20)** – Why do we give Berachos using the names of Ephraim and Menashe? Why not the Avos or the Shevatim? **Rav Zalman Sorotzkin ztl.** explains that Ephraim and Menashe were unique. They were born princes and had every reason to assimilate. They did not. They preferred the life of Torah and Mitzvos. Halevai our children should be so Bentched and directed. (See a similar idea from Rav Moshe Feinstein on the Possuk V’Ata Shnei Boneicha)

**הֵאָֽסְפוּ֙ וְאַגִּ֣ידָה לָכֶ֔ם Gather and I will tell you (49:1)** – The Midrash explains that he spoke to them about Machlokes. Yaakov told them to be in a united group. **Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky ztl.** noted that their job was to live as one community with 12 different jobs within the community – but with the realization that all 12 jobs are needed. No single Shevet is supposed to overshadow or cut boundaries into another Shevet’s turf or job. He told the Shevatim to work together in the service of Hashem. **Rav Aharon Lichtenstein ztl.** added that this was Yaakov’s intent in giving them 12 different Berachos. The Achdus of the brothers was not because of their unanimity but rather their diversity in personality and unity in purpose.

**יֶ֥תֶר שְׂאֵ֖ת וְיֶ֥תֶר עָֽז: Superior in rank and in power (49:3) – Rashi** explains that Reuven should have merited Kehuna and Malchus. **Rav Schachter Shlita noted in the name of Rav Soloveitchik** ztl. that he lost those rights because he demonstrated that while he had good intentions, he could not seal the deal. He had the idea to save Yosef but was not able to make it happen. Thus, he was not the person to be the leader.

**וּלְבֶן־שִׁנַּ֖יִם מֵֽחָלָֽב And white toothed from milk (49:12)** – The Gemara (Kesubos 111b) posits that one who whitens his teeth toward his friend is greater than he who gives the friend milk to drink. **Rav Pam ztl.** explained that the WAY we perform Chessed is often more important than the Chessed itself (compare to Kibbud Av V’Im in Kiddushin). This is perhaps an additional level of explanation to the Possuk in Nishmas about our eyes shining like the sun and the moon. – When we demonstrate excitement in our eyes as we see our friends there is excitement.

**הַנֹּתֵ֖ן אִמְרֵי־שָֽׁפֶר Who offers beautiful words (49:21)** – The Midrash (Tehillim 89) explains that this refers to words of Torah offered by Shofar. Naftali was identified as a disseminator of Torah. We know that Yissoschar and Levi had special rights to the Torah but not Naftali? **Rav Yisrael Reisman Shlita** explained that in Shir HaShirim Rabba (8:10) we find that those who learn under pressure get 1000 portions of reward. The proof is from Naftali. Rabbi Reisman explained that Naftali went to work and still took time out of their schedule to learn They were the working guys who still made their Torah study primary. Their Sachar was greater than that of the Poskim of Levi and Yissochar. On a different occasion, Rabbi Reisman added that when you get to a Siyum HaShas Shevet Yisochar may be the one getting up to speak but it is Shevet Naftali who make it possible.

Haftarah:

**וְחָזַקְתָּ֖ וְהָיִ֥יתָֽ לְאִֽישׁ You will be strong and be a man (I Kings 1:2) – Rashi** explains that Shlomo was but 12 years old and Dovid HaMelech was telling him that he would become a Bar Mitzvah. **Rav Yitzchak Sorotzkin Shlita** wondered why Dovid HaMelech needed to state the obvious. He answered, citing Rav Chaim Soloveitchik ztl. that the issue is not about chronological or biological age. It is about Yiras Shomayim. Being an “Ish” is about showing Yiras Shomayim. Sometimes this required a bit of strengthening. However, if one wants to be a wise leader, he needs clairvoyance. That clairvoyance comes with Yiras Shomayim. **Rav Schachter Shlita** added that to achieve destiny too, one needs the faith that comes with Yiras Shomayim.