



Act With Seichel

Yosef brought his sons, Ephraim and Menashe to his father Yaakov, to receive blessings. "Yosef took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Yisrael's left, and Menashe in his left hand toward Yisrael's right, and brought them close to him. However, Yisrael stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, though he was younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head. He maneuvered his hands; for Menashe was the first-born" (Bereshis 48:13,14).

"Abba, Yaakov Avinu did a strange thing when he blessed his grandchildren, Ephraim and Menashe. He crossed his hands. He wanted his right hand to rest on the head of Ephraim, who was on his left side, and his left hand to rest on the head of Menashe, who was on his right side. Why didn't Yaakov just move the boys around, putting Ephraim on his right and Menashe on his left?"

"That is an excellent question, Avi. Many of our *meforshim* ask that question. I would like to share with you the answer of Rav Chizkia Ben Manoach, who is known to us as the Chizkuni. He focuses on a particular phrase in the verse. Yaakov *'secal es yadav'* – he guided his hands wittingly. The word *'secal'* is the same as *'seichel'* – common sense. Yaakov acted with *seichel* when he crossed his hands."

"In what way, Abba?"

"Yaakov Avinu was a man of great wisdom. There were many times in his life when he needed to switch things around. He had to buy the *bechora* (firstborn rights) from his brother Eisav, because he would use it properly, whereas Eisav would spurn it (Bereshis 25:34). He also needed to use trickery to get Eisav's brocho from Yitzchak, because Klal Yisrael needed that brocho in order to survive. Lavan, his father-in-law switched his *kallah* (bride) on the night of the *chassanah* (wedding), and he had to work and extra seven years to get Rachel, the wife he truly wanted. At the end of the employment period, Hashem made a big switch in the flocks of Yaakov and Lavan, giving our holy forefather the wages that he deserved. So you see, Yaakov Avinu was no stranger to switching things around to make them right."

"What did he straighten out when he switched his hands in giving the blessings to Ephraim and Menashe, Abba?"

"Menashe was the *bechor* (firstborn). He apparently deserved the blessing with the right hand, which is the primary hand. However, the Torah itself relates that Ephraim, the younger brother would become greater than his older brother, Menashe (Bereshis 48:19). The superior

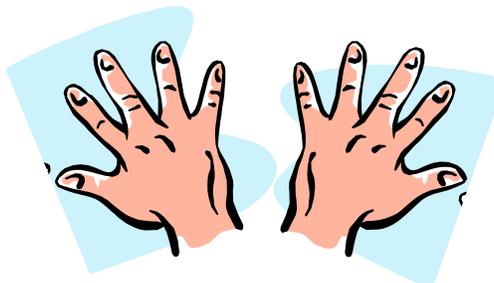
brother the brocho should get the stronger hand. Therefore, Yaakov blessed with the Ephraim with his right hand."

"Now we are left with the original question, Abba. Why did Yaakov Avinu switch his hands instead of switching the boys around?"

"Let us return to the answer of the Chizkuni, Avi. Yaakov Avinu acted with *seichel*. He did not want to embarrass Menashe. It was bad enough that Menashe would be getting a left-handed blessing. It would be even more humiliating to ask him to move over to the left side. Yaakov saved him this shame by allowing Menashe to stay where he was, and just crossing his hands. This minimal amount of *kovod* (honor) was due to Menashe because he was the *bechor*."

"What sensitivity! What wisdom! What *seichel*!"

"Yes, Avi. Yaakov Avinu, our holy forefather, personified the *middah* of *seichel* – understanding what needs to be done, and doing it in a way that is a pleasing as possible to other people. We can all learn from his example to use our *seichel* to be sensitive to the feelings of our fellow man."



Kinderlach . . .

Do you need to give someone some bad news? Do it with seichel. Say it in a time, place, and a way that is as pleasant as possible. Is someone doing something wrong that should be corrected? Act with seichel. First, determine if he is prepared to listen. Then see if you are really the right one to tell him. If so, approach him gently, explaining the problem, and giving him as much help as possible correcting it. Let us consider a third case. Do you have to give someone some good news or a blessing in the presence of another person? May this hurt the other's feelings because he is not the recipient of the good thing? Use your seichel. Praise the other person's good qualities also. Make the blessing as low-keyed as possible. Kinderlach, be sensitive to other people's feelings. Act with seichel.

It Comes Back

"Avi, do you want to come with me?"

"Where are you going, Abba?"

"To Saba and Savta's house."

"Sure, Abba. I love going to Saba and Savta's house. What are we going to do there?"

"Saba just bought a new bookshelf. I want to help him put it together and arrange his books."

"That is so nice of you, Abba."

"It's the least that I can do, Avi."

"What do you mean, Abba?"

"My mother and father raised me from birth. They fed me, clothed me, educated me, and gave me practically everything that I have in life. Now I have an opportunity to pay back a little something by helping them. How can I pass it up?"

"Abba, it is a real honor to help you and Saba. We were learning about this very subject in our parashas ha'shavuah class."

"Really Avi. That is so interesting. Please tell me about it."

"The parasha begins by informing us that Yaakov lived in Mitzraim for seventeen years. The Chizkuni points out that this verse was written to praise Yosef."

"That sounds perplexing, Avi. How does Yaakov's presence in Mitzraim praise Yosef?"

"Because Yosef supported his father, Yaakov, for those seventeen years."

"That is real *Kibbud Av* (honoring your father)."

"The Chizkuni adds that Yaakov had fed Yosef for seventeen years, before he was sold. Yosef merited supporting his father just as many years as his father had supported him."

"Yosef was very fortunate. Not everyone has such a *zechus* (merit)."

"Abba, may we all be blessed as he was."

Kinderlach . . .

Our parents are so good to us. They do everything for us. Every morsel of food that we eat, every stitch of clothing that we wear, comes from them. Where would we be without them? Nowhere. Therefore, when we see an opportunity to do something for them, we should jump. "Let me help you with your coat, Abba." "Can I pour you a drink, Abba?" "Let me carry your bag, Abba." Kinderlach, if we show enthusiasm in this mitzvah, perhaps Hashem will give us the same opportunity as Yosef. To help our parents as much as they helped us.

Parasha Questions:

- Which fruit was plentiful in Asher's land? (49:20 and Rashi)
- In what way was Yaakov's bracha greater than Avraham's and Yitzchak's? (49:26 and Rashi)
- "Binyomin...will divide up the spoils." Which descendants of Binyomin is this referring to? (Rashi 49:27)