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Eradicating Baseless Hatred

Realizing that his father, Yaakov, is deathly ill, Yosef brings his sons Ephraim and Menashe to him for a blessing: "So [Yaakov] blessed them that day, saying, "By you shall Israel bless saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and like Menashe'" (*Bereishis* 48:20).

Throughout history, Jewish fathers have blessed their sons every Friday night at the Shabbos table to be like Ephraim and Menashe. Jewish daughters, on the other hand, are blessed to emulate the ways of our matriarchs, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah.

Blessing our daughters to be like the matriarchs, the greatest women in Jewish history, is quite understandable. But why don't we bless our sons to be like our patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov? Why do we bless them to be specifically like Yosef's sons, Ephraim and Menashe?

No Resentment

The relationship of Ephraim and Menashe epitomizes the way brothers should love and trust each other. When Yaakov gave the younger brother Ephraim the favored blessing (represented by Yaakov's right hand), Menashe, the firstborn, could have protested and resented his brother for taking what was rightfully his.

But Menashe said nothing. He understood that what matters most is not his position or status, but rather

what is best for the Jewish people. If Yaakov saw that favoring Ephraim was what the Jewish People needed, then Menashe accepted that with a full heart.

We bless our sons to emulate Ephraim and Menashe because their relationship was without any trace of resentment. They are our role models.

Seeds of Hatred

In the beginning of Parshas Vayigash, Yosef rebuked his brothers powerfully when he revealed himself. The Torah says, "Now Yosef could not restrain himself in the presence of all those who stood before him, so he called out, 'Remove everyone from before me!' Thus no one remained with him when Yosef made himself known to his brothers... And Yosef said to his brothers, "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him because they were left disconcerted before him" (*ibid* 45:1, 3).

After hearing Yehudah's impassioned plea that he be imprisoned in Binyamin's stead in order to save his father the crushing pain of losing Rachel's only remaining son, Yosef could no longer restrain himself and continue to mask his identity. This implies that if Yosef could have held back longer, he would have. Why was this not the right time to reveal himself? What was missing from the process Yosef had put his brothers through in order to prompt them to do *teshuvah*, repentance?

Yosef disclosed his identity before the brothers realized on their own that they had misjudged him entirely. This robbed them of the opportunity to perform the truest form of repentance, which is *teshuvah* that is prompted purely by an internal recognition of one's misdeed. Because Yosef told them who he was, their subsequent *teshuvah* was based on an external catalyst, and was therefore slightly deficient.

Yosef's modus operandi all along was to get his brothers to realize their mistake on their own. Had he restrained himself longer, they would have had the chance to discover their mistake and completely eradicate their tendency towards *sinas chinam*, baseless hatred, forever.

Since they did not do that, the seeds of hatred remained, creating a defect in the spiritual DNA of the Jewish people that dramatically affected the course of Jewish history. *Sinas chinam* became the Jewish people's cancerous growth.

History has unfortunately demonstrated the horrific results of this cancer. The Talmud (Yoma 9b) pinpointed *sinas chinam* as the cause of the destruction of the Second Temple and our 2000-year exile. It is also the source of the tremendous internal strife and disunity our nation experiences today.

Yosef almost succeeded in exterminating this fatal flaw, which had caused him so much pain. He did not manage to do so, however, because he was overcome by emotion and could no longer hold back from revealing himself to his brothers.

Yosef himself managed to raise two children who recognized the destructive consequences of baseless hatred. Ephraim and Menashe built a relationship of love and mutual respect that left no room for any misjudgments or resentments, even when the younger was favored over the older. That is why Ephraim and Menashe, and not our patriarchs, are the role models we bless our children to follow. They represent the ultimate antidote to the most profound weakness of the Jewish people, and serve as a hopeful reminder that *sinas chinam* can indeed be eradicated from our nation.



Some of the One

A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity. An optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.
Winston Churchill

In this week’s Torah portion, we see the positive outcome of Yosef’s and Yaakov’s perceptions of how apparently bad experiences were springboards to a greater good. What could have been viewed as totally negative, in actuality, set into motion a trajectory of far-reaching goodness.

Yosef was able to transcend the anger that most would have felt toward his brothers’ cruelty. Likewise, as discussed in the previous chapter, Yaakov had suffered throughout 22 years, not knowing whether or not his beloved Yosef was alive.

At their reunion, Yaakov perceived a greater Divine plan meant to save his family from famine. During this moment of great clarity, he spontaneously recited the *Shema* out loud. Finally, Yaakov could comprehend the significance of everything he had endured. Overcome by emotion, his first response was to channel his great appreciation toward God, the one who made it all so. But why recite the *Shema* at this time?

The *Shema* declares that “*Hashem echad*—God is one.” The perception of oneness must not be a spiritual one alone but one that permeates one’s whole view of the physical world. The belief in one God acknowledges the oneness within seemingly fragmented pieces of our lives. In truth, they are unified. We cover our eyes when reciting these words to emphasize that things are not necessarily as they seem. Even what appears to be bad can conceal unrevealed good.

A cryptic statement in the *Zohar* states that God promised Yaakov that He would accompany him down to Egypt and bring him up again, and that “Yosef will place his hand over your eyes.” The *Zohar* states that the life story of Yosef—presumed dead but, instead, ruling over Egypt—would serve as a “hand over Yaakov’s eyes,” enabling him to look away from what seemed bad, and recognize that it was ultimately meant to develop into a greater good.

The Book of Genesis models for us not just how to survive as Jews but how to thrive, no matter where we are. It is natural to become enveloped by the minutiae of our lives. Awareness of the greater picture of which we are all a part, however, is essential. Each individual is a piece of one expansive puzzle, a musical melody in a complex symphony, a single star in the darkness. Although at times we may feel small and insignificant, truly our thoughts and actions can affect others for generations.

I’d like to share a novel idea with you that I heard from Rabbi David Aaron. Humanity is made up of many individuals, each of whom is considered to be just one. However, each of us is “someone”—meaning “some of the One,” the one Creator of all in existence. As some of the One, each person has inherent Divine potential to actualize goodness into the world. We each have a unique role to play in a multidimensional existence. As every star in the night emits light, each of us possesses an inner light. Don’t allow the darkness of negative thoughts to overcome your inner light. Strive to develop and maintain a positive perspective. Recognize that your past, present, and future affect so much more than just

yourself. View the events of your life as part of a far-reaching trajectory through which ultimate good will emerge. The future can be bright when you shine your inner light outward. Strive to shine brightly.

An Enduring Bond

In this final portion of the Book of Genesis, we come to the end of the patriarchal era. At its apex, the continued belief of four generations coalesce. As Yaakov's twelve sons surround the patriarch's deathbed, the Midrash tells us that they say, "*Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem echad.*" They profess their belief in the one God of

Israel. The unity of purpose expressed at this moment symbolizes their commitment to their father's belief at the end of the patriarchal era. Yaakov was now assured that the belief entrusted to him by his father and grandfather had effectively been transmitted to the entire next generation. Although each of Yaakov's sons was different from one another, their shared belief united them.

This transmission of belief from one generation to the next exemplifies what is called in the Torah a *morashah*. Usually translated as "heritage," a *morashah* is actually so much more. The Hebrew meaning of *morashah* connotes a process of actively giving something over. A *morashah* is the fully intact transmittal of our Jewish heritage, including historical narratives, laws, and ethical values. It affects one's beliefs and actions and is acquired through ongoing efforts. A Jew's dedication to their *morashah* enables and ensures the continuity of the Jewish People.

In addition, our *morashah* contains two gifts, Divinely bequeathed to every Jew: the Land of Israel and the Torah. Regarding the Land of Israel, the Torah states that "I shall bring you to the land about which I raised My hand to give it to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and I shall give it to you as a *morashah*, for I am God." The final parashah of the Torah (*V'zos Haberachah*) relates that "the Torah that Moshe commanded us is the *morashah* of the congregation of Yaakov."

The Torah does not belong exclusively to scholars and rabbis, but to every single Jew. It is our birthright and heritage. Our *morashah* is an eternally binding transference of possession. Every Jew holds a portion in both the ancestral land and the Torah of Israel.

Every Jew is considered a child of our holy Patriarchs and Matriarchs, with equal right to their spiritual heritage. Even those who may feel themselves to be

distant from a Jewish life and a meaningful Jewish identity always belong to the family.

A similar sounding word to *morashah* is *yerushah*, meaning "inheritance." A *yerushah* is a bequest to be used any way the beneficiary chooses. It can be used wisely, squandered foolishly, or simply discarded. In contrast, a *morashah* must be protected and preserved. It is a vital link in an ongoing chain of transmission. Its source is the Divine wisdom of the Torah, promulgated in the teachings of its role models, past and present. Our *morashah* openly speaks to the challenges of every generation with nuanced sensitivity. Inspiring, individualized learning sessions set the gold standard for the effective transmission of the *morashah* to students of all ages. Consequently, lives are imbued with meaning and purpose. Finally, the beneficiary of the *morashah* becomes a fiduciary—entrusted to make good use of it, protect it, and pass it, fully intact, to their descendants. More than passing down family recipes and heirlooms, our *morashah* perpetuates our most cherished beliefs and time-honored traditions.

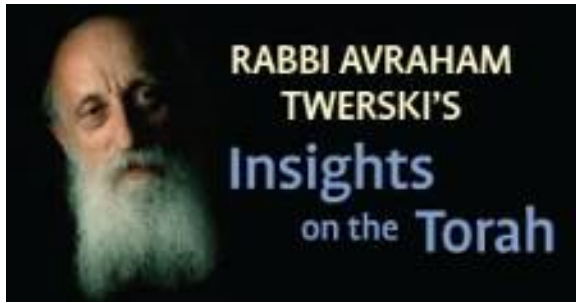
As the adage goes, "A picture is worth a thousand words." A recent magazine advertisement features a father and son. The father is lovingly showing his son the valuable watch that he is wearing. The caption reads: "You never really own a [*name of the brand*]. You merely look after it for the next generation."

The message is clear and touches your heart. How much more so, a Jewish soul can be inspired by a living picture of generations learning and celebrating their timeless *morashah*—the Torah.

Making it Relevant

1. Identify events in your life that seemed to be very negative but, in retrospect, had a positive impact on you or others.
2. When you encounter a negative experience, try to view it within the context of a greater vantage point.
3. Try reframing your life's narratives from negative to positive, by revealing glimpses of good.

Think about specific values, beliefs, and rituals that you would want to transmit to the next generation. What are they?



The Blessing of Fulfilling One's Potential

Jacob called for his sons and said, “Assemble yourselves ... Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father” (49:1-2) This is what their father spoke to them and he blessed them, each according to his appropriate blessing (49:28)

The Talmud says that the only vessel that can contain blessings is shalom (peace). Prior to giving them his blessings, Jacob twice indicated the importance of togetherness: assemble and gather. Fragmentation and divisiveness can undo even the greatest blessings.

It is significant that in blessing them, Jacob referred to both his names, Jacob and Israel. He was named Jacob (Yaakov) because when he was born he held onto the heel (*ekev*) of Esau. The name, Jacob, thus represents the person at birth, the genetic endowments and the potential. The name, Israel, was given to him after he wrestled with an angel and triumphed; Israel meaning, “You have striven with the Divine and with man and have overcome” (Genesis 32:29). Israel, therefore, represents Jacob's achievements, his ability to be master over both human and superhuman forces.

It is of interest that we do not find manifest blessings in Jacob's words. He seems, rather, to be describing the character traits of each of his sons. The Torah tells us that indeed, “He blessed them, each according to his appropriate blessing.”

Jacob knew his children. He instructed them to each fulfill his unique potential, maximizing the particular talents, skills and character strengths with which he was created. This is the greatest blessing of all. Jacob did not bless them with wealth or other external acquisitions. The latter may not be a blessing at all.

The true blessing is for a person to become everything that he can be.

This is an important teaching for parents. Sometimes parents set their minds on what they would like their child to be, not taking into consideration the child's interests and abilities. All parents want the best for their child. However, they may think they know what is best for the child, whereas what they really desire is that the child fulfill their aspirations for him. The patriarch teaches us that we must get to know our children and help them develop and realize their own unique potential.

In these few words, Jacob conveyed the essence of blessings: brotherhood, working at achievement (Israel) and developing one's innate endowment to its fullest (Jacob).



The Secret of Jewish Educational Success

What would you do with your last moments on earth?

In this week's Torah portion, Jacob uses his last breaths to bestow a blessing upon each of his 12 sons. This wasn't merely a father's parting gesture - it was the blueprint for Jewish continuity.

The transmission of wisdom from one generation to the next stands at the core of Torah, from the Passover seder to the passages in the Shema. A fascinating Midrash¹ illuminates why education matters so deeply: Before giving the Torah, God asked Israel for a guarantor who would uphold the Torah. The people first offered their ancestors - rejected. Then their prophets - rejected again. Finally, they offered their children, and God exclaimed, "The children are certainly good guarantors!"

But how can children guarantee something they haven't yet committed to themselves? The answer lies in education - not just any education, but an education that ensures the direct experience of our ancestors could translate into the learned legacy of all

subsequent generations. Today, we see its impact in stunning statistics: while Jews represent just 0.2% of the world's population, they account for 22% of all Nobel Prize winners. Even more remarkably, in an age of declining educational engagement, Orthodox Jewish communities maintain near-universal rates of daily study across all ages and professions, creating a model of lifelong learning unprecedented in human history.

But these statistics are mere outgrowths of something far more fundamental - a revolutionary principle of Jewish education that Jacob demonstrated in his final moments. This principle doesn't just create extraordinary students; it transforms our very understanding of human potential.

Nurture Their Nature

Before we can understand the Torah's educational method, we must grasp one of its fundamental truths. According to the Talmud², every human being carries a unique divine imprint: just as Adam was created alone in the world, God stamped each of us with the same divine seal, creating a singular combination of traits and potential that has never existed before and will never exist again. So much so that each person has a daily obligation to say, "The world was created for me!"

This principle illuminates the deeper meaning of Jacob's blessings. Jacob doesn't give one blessing - he gives 12. The Torah describes his blessings with a seemingly redundant phrase: "He blessed every man according to his blessing."³ The 18th-century sage, the Ohr HaChaim, reveals the profound meaning behind these words: "Each son received a blessing in keeping with his individual personality and achievements. Jacob endeavored to match his blessings to what he perceived to be the nature of each of his sons' special attributes."

Jacob wasn't merely blessing his children - he was identifying and affirming their unique gifts, showing each son how his distinct qualities could benefit the nation and the world. His twelve sons, with their twelve distinct paths, would become the twelve tribes of Israel, each contributing its unique strength to the nation's collective mission.

This approach crystallized into a timeless principle, later articulated by King Solomon: "Educate a child according to **his way** and he will not swerve from it even in old age."⁴ True education isn't about molding children into a predetermined shape, but about recognizing and nurturing their inherent qualities. As

the verse concludes, when we educate each person according to their unique path, we guarantee continuity. It is precisely through honoring individuality that we ensure the transmission of our tradition.

Discovering Your Blessings

While not everyone is a teacher or parent, we are all students in the School of Life. The principle that guided Jacob - recognizing and developing individual potential - applies to our own growth as well. Let me share a simple yet powerful exercise that helped me discover my unique gifts, and can help you discover yours:

- Create a document or journal entry titled "I am great"
- Each evening before bed, write down two things you did that day that reflect your greatness. Focus on different types of activities and traits - perhaps today it's your patience with a difficult colleague, tomorrow your creative solution to a problem
- After five weeks, you'll have a rich catalog of your strengths. Categorize your list into major themes (e.g. Compassionate, Determined, Balanced) - aim for 3-5. Then rewrite a simplified version of your list with those themes as headers, including a variety of individual examples within each. This is your personal blueprint for greatness
- Spend the next few months reviewing your list before bed, thinking about how you can align your life to match your personal greatness

Just as Jacob recognized and blessed the unique potential in each of his sons, this exercise will help you identify and nurture your own divine gifts. When we align our lives with these gifts, we don't just achieve personal success - we become links in the eternal chain of Jewish tradition, each contributing our irreplaceable blessing to the world.

Shabbat Shalom! Avraham

1. Midrash Rabba Shir HaShirim 1:4
2. Sanhedrin 37A
3. Genesis 49:28
4. Proverbs 22:6