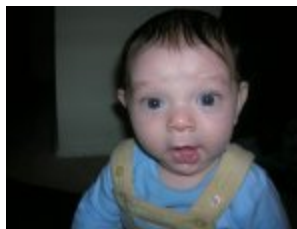


VAYECHI (GENESIS 47:28-50:26)

A Grandfather's Blessing

2009 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

G-d has sent a bundle of blessing to our family. My daughter, Chaya Miriam Goldenberg, just gave birth to a little boy. We have now been blessed with two grandsons, בלי עין הרע.



"Baby Boy" Goldenberg His "big" cousin, Moshe Dov Rudin

What words of praise can I offer to G-d for His precious gifts? What blessings can I offer to my two grandsons? I am, I'm afraid, painfully inadequate to the task.

Therefore, I will let Father Jacob, from this week's Torah Portion, do the talking.

Two of Jacob's grandsons, the sons of Joseph, were brought to him for a blessing:

"... O G-d, before Whom my forefathers Abraham and Isaac walked,-- G-d Who shepherds me from my inception until this day: May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads, and may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they proliferate abundantly like fish..." (Genesis, 48:15-16)

What does that blessing mean? What is the significance of applying the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to their grandchildren? And what's with the fish???

The Ksav Sofer analyzes Jacob's words:

"...may my name be declared upon them..." G-d changed Jacob's name to *Yisrael—*Israel. That name implies holiness and closeness to G-d. (See "Name that Angel") Jacob was praying that his grandsons should achieve the level of being worthy of being called the well-regarded name Israel.

"...and the names of my forefathers Abraham..." The name Abraham, or *Avraham*, is a combination of the words, **"*AvHamon (Goyim)—Father of many (nations)."** Abraham was known and respected as a leader. Jacob prayed that his grandsons will reach the level of being leaders like Abraham. He wanted

the world to see the greatness of his offspring, through whom the Name of G-d would be sanctified.

However, when one achieves greatness, that can cause envy and resentment. (As we have seen all too often in Jewish history, when our enemies resented our accomplishments, and used it as an excuse to persecute us.) Therefore,...

“...and Isaac...” Isaac was named “*Yitzchak*” from the word “*Tzachak*—to laugh.” Sarah said, “G-d has made laughter for me; whoever hears will laugh for me!” (Ibid, 21:5) People were happy for her good fortune; there was no jealousy.

And therefore, ...

“...may they proliferate abundantly like fish...” Fish, we are told by the Talmud, are not subject to “*Ayin Hara*—The Evil Eye.” (The most understandable definition of “Evil Eye” that I have heard is quoted in the name of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler. When people are recipients of good fortune and act in a way that shows off that good fortune, it sometimes causes jealousy and pain to those who are less fortunate. When G-d sees that this person’s blessings are a source of anguish to others, He may re-evaluate the issue of whether the recipient is entitled to those blessings. As a result, the blessings COULD BE retracted.) Since fish live calmly beneath the surface of the sea, unseen by man, they are not subject to the Evil Eye.

IN OTHER WORDS, Jacob’s blessing to his two grandsons was, “May you be a *Yisrael*, one who is holy and close to G-d. May you be an *Avraham*, a leader and inspiration to those around you. And may you be a *Yitzchak*, one who is loved and admired; one whose success is appreciated by those around him; one about whom no one is jealous, because everyone recognizes that he is deserving of greatness.

Has a greater blessing ever been given by a grandfather to his grandchildren?

Well spoken, Father Jacob. Amen. May my grandchildren--no, may OUR grandchildren, be so blessed. Mazel Tov.

Have a great Shabbos. Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz