

מאמרי תורה—Torah Talk



The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat Vayechi

December 26, 2015

פרשת ויחי

י"ד בטבת תשע"ו

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 47:28-50:26

In this *parasha*, Yaakov blesses his sons on his deathbed and asks them to bury him in Canaan.

Many of us know the story of the blind patriarch who, ostensibly due to his lack of sight, gives the younger son the blessing of the firstborn and vice versa. Of course, this scenario describes Yitzchak's blessings of Yaakov and Esav, outlined in *Bereshit*, chapter 27.

It also describes an episode in this week's *parasha*. Chapter 48, verses 10-14:

וַעֲיַי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּבָדוֹ מֵזֶקֶן, לֹא יוֹכֵל לִרְאוֹת; וַיַּגֵּשׁ אֹתָם אֵלָיו, וַיִּשָּׂק לָהֶם וַיַּחֲבֹק לָהֶם. וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יוֹסֵף, רְאֵה פָנֶיךָ לֹא פָלָלְתִּי; וְהִנֵּה הִרְאָה אֹתִי אֱלֹהִים, גַּם אֶת-זֶרְעֶךָ. וַיּוֹצֵא יוֹסֵף אֹתָם, מֵעֵם בְּרָכָיו; וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לְאֶפְיוֹ, אַרְצָה. וַיִּקַּח יוֹסֵף, אֶת-שְׁנֵיהֶם--אֶת-אֶפְרַיִם בְּיָמִינוּ מִשְּׁמָאל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאֶת-מְנַשֶּׁה בְּשְׂמָאלוֹ מִיְּמִין יִשְׂרָאֵל; וַיַּגֵּשׁ, אֵלָיו. וַיִּשְׁלַח יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-יָמִינוֹ וַיִּשֶׁת עַל-רֹאשׁ אֶפְרַיִם, וְהוּא הֹצֵעִיר, וְאֶת-שְׂמָאלוֹ, עַל-רֹאשׁ מְנַשֶּׁה: שְׂכָל, אֶת-גִּדְיוֹ, כִּי מְנַשֶּׁה, הַבְּכוֹר.

Now the eyes of Yisrael [Yaakov] were dim from age, so that he could not see. And he [Yosef] brought them [Yosef's sons, Ephraim and Menashe] near to him; and he kissed them, and embraced them. And Yisrael said Yosef: 'I had not thought to see your face; and, lo, God has let me see your seed also.' And Yosef brought them out from between his knees; and he fell down on his face to the earth. And Yosef took

them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Yisrael's left hand, and Menashe in his left hand toward Yisrael's right hand, and brought them near to him. And Yisrael stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Menashe's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Menashe was the first-born.

The noted Bible scholar and author, Judith Klitsner, posits in her book, *Subversive Sequels in the Bible: How Biblical Stories Mine and Undermine Each Other*, that later stories parallel or echo earlier ones in language and ideas, often to amend something that went wrong in the earlier story. For example, Adam got himself into trouble by listening to his wife; conversely, Avraham was told by God to listen to his wife in the matter of sending Hagar and Yishmael away.

In our case, Yitzchak, being blind, mistakenly blessed Yaakov instead of Esav with the first-born's blessing. Yosef now thinks that due to Yaakov's diminished vision, he is committing the same error by giving Ephraim the firstborn's blessing despite Menashe being the older son. Yaakov assures Yosef, though, that this switch is intentional:

וַיֵּרָא יוֹסֵף, כִּי-יָשִׁית אָבִיו יָד-יְמִינוֹ עַל-רֹאשׁ אֶפְרַיִם--וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינָיו ; וַיִּתְּמֹד יָד-אָבִיו, לְהַסִּיר אֹתָהּ מֵעַל רֹאשׁ-אֶפְרַיִם--עַל-רֹאשׁ מְנַשֶּׁה. וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף, אֶל-אָבִיו, לֹא-כֵן אָבִי : כִּי-זֶה הַבְּכֹר, שִׁים יָמִינְךָ עַל-רֹאשׁוֹ. וַיִּמָּאן אָבִיו, וַיֹּאמֶר יָדְעָתִי בְנִי יָדְעָתִי--גַּם-הוּא יִהְיֶה-לָעַם, וְגַם-הוּא יִגְדֹּל ; וְאוֹלָם, אַחֲיוּ הַקָּטָן יִגְדֹּל מִמֶּנּוּ, וְזָרְעוֹ, יִהְיֶה מְלֹא-הַגּוֹיִם. וַיְבָרְכֵם בְּיוֹם הַהוּא, לֵאמֹר, בְּךָ יְבָרֵךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר, יִשְׁמַךְ אֱלֹהִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וְכְמְנַשֶּׁה ; וַיֵּשֶׂם אֶת-אֶפְרַיִם, לִפְנֵי מְנַשֶּׁה.

And when Yosef saw that his father was laying his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head onto Menashe's head. And Yosef said to his father: 'Not so, my father, for this is the first-born; put your right hand upon his head.' And his father refused, and said: 'I know it, my son, I know it; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; howbeit his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.' And he blessed them that day, saying: 'By you shall Yisrael bless, saying: God make you as Ephraim and as Menashe.' And he set Ephraim before Menashe.

Yaakov corrects what Yitzchak bungled; instead of inadvertently reversing the blessings, he does so on purpose, perpetuating the line of younger sons (Yitzchak, Yaakov, and now Ephraim) carrying on the tradition of the father. In addition, Menashe and Ephraim are the first set of brothers in these scenarios who develop no animosity between them due to the given blessings. What went wrong in the previous generations has now been set right in more ways than one.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Have you ever experienced an opportunity for a “do-over” where you could correct something that you had done incorrectly previously? If so, how did it go?
- What lesson is the Torah trying to teach us by having succeeding generations correct the mistakes of previous ones?