

Parshas Vayechi

This week's Parsha, Vayechi, marks the end of the first book of the Torah. It is Shabbos Chazak. With the culmination of Bereishis, we enter into the first exile, which is the final yerida before the Jews were formalized into the nation and given the Torah in a revealed way.

Yakov blesses Yosef's sons, Efraim and Menashe, and counts them among the tribes. Yakov asked Yosef who the sons were, which didn't make sense given that Yakov had lived with Yosef and knew them once he arrived in Egypt. The Midrash explains that Yakov was reluctant to bless Efraim and Menashe as they had later offspring that brought evil into the nation. Yet, we know that Efraim and Menashe were necessary because their offspring included Gideon and Yehoshua Bin Nun, who were great leaders.

Why would Yakov focus on the negative and possibly not want to bless Efraim and Menashe when their heritage had great leaders? Why was Yaakov so concentrated on the bad?

The answer stems from Yosef's response, Bonay Heim, they are my sons, and you should bless them as they are now.

Even though Yaakov saw terrible actions to come, Yosef guided him to remember the good. Yes, in hindsight, we know that Yaakov's prophetic vision was true (Rashi, who explains it, came after the episodes were recorded in Tanach); there was a chance that people could have done good. More than that, even if a destiny seems predetermined because the

Berachos were given, we know we can overcome this.

In this way, Yakov's Berachos focuses on all his children's strengths and how they can use them to be strong and overcome their challenges. All these years later, we still say Yaakov's blessing for a boy right before his bris, and some people even bless their children and draw on Yakov's blessing to Efraim and Menashe.

Some criticize others or try to quell people's nature because they are made to feel bad about themselves instead of seeing their nature as a point of strength. The challenge in life, and with Yakov's blessing, is to optimize and harness these strengths, ultimately to be used in the service of Hashem.

Just as Yakov blesses Efraim, Menashe, and all his sons, so too he blesses us. In terms of chronology, we are coming out 10 Teves, fast, which is a reminder of the Golus we are in, like the Golus the Jews began in Shemos. But there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and the strength Yakov imbued in each one of us to change the destiny and bring the good, with the ultimate good, the coming of Mashiach.

Good Shabbos.