

The Importance of A Positive Self-Image

פרשת ויחי

In this week's Parsha, Yaakov blesses Yosef, and says, "The angel that redeemed me from all bad should bless the children, and it should be called on them my name, and the name of my fathers." The Seforno explains Yaakov's request as follows: "It should be called on the children the names of Avrohom and Yitzchak, and not the names of Terach and Nachor. This is because Tzadikim are not called by their ancestors who are wicked, and vice versa. As it says in Sanhedrin, "We call wicked people, even those who are the children of Tzadikim, wicked people the son of wicked people." Meaning their lineage is not linked to their fathers who are Tzadikim, but their ancestors who are wicked. Since Yaakov knew this he davened that they should be positioned and assisted to the service of Hashem in a manner that they will be linked to Avrohom and Yitzchak. This idea is expressed in the Pasuk (Tehillim), "Focus my heart so that I can fear your name."

At first glance, it sounds like the Seforno is saying that Yaakov was davening that his descendants should be Tzadikim, and he expressed this request through saying, "My name should be called on them." However, through a more careful and meticulous reading of

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the Seforno it appears that there is more going on here. The Seforno in explaining Yaakov's request says, "Their lineage is not linked to their fathers who are Tzadikim, but their ancestors who are wicked. Since Yaakov knew this, he davened that they should be positioned and assisted to the service of Hashem in a manner that they will be linked to Avrohom and Yitzchak." It sounds like the end goal of Yaakov's Tefillah was not that they become Tzadikim, but rather that they be called the son of a Tzadik, and not the son of a wicked person. It seems that the request for righteousness was so that they would not be linked to a wicked person.

Yaakov's primary concern was that his descendants remain connected to Hashem. From his Tefillah we can derive what he felt was most critical to ensure this. Being positioned and assisted to serve Hashem was only secondary to the more powerful ingredient of being called the son of Tzadik. Yaakov must have understood that a most powerful factor influencing one's behavior is their self-image, and being called the son of wicked person would devastate their self worth. He therefore davened that his children should always be linked to their righteous ancestors so that they will be positioned for success.

A further insight into the power and impact of a positive self-image can be learned out from the end of the Seforno. The Seforno connects this idea to a statement made by Dovid, "Focus my heart to fear your name." The Seforno on that Pasuk comments that Dovid was requesting not to be distracted by financial difficulties so that he will be able to focus his entire heart on Hashem. It seems that the Seforno is equating the distraction of financial burdens to being called the son of a wicked person. What do these ideas have in common? It must be that the Seforno holds that a negative self-image will create an inability to focus, and not allow one to focus his heart on Hashem.

From the above we can glean powerful insight into the importance of a positive self-image. Yaakov felt that it was this quality that would ensure the transmission of the Torah, and allow his descendants to focus on Hashem without distractions. As it says in Pirkei Avos, "Don't look at yourself as a wicked person."

BASED ON THE WEEKLY SHMUSS GIVEN BY HARAV SHAYA COHEN, ROSH HAYESHIVA ZICHRON ARYEH

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