



## The Blessing of Self-Knowledge

**T**he Sages tell us that Ya'akov wished to reveal the *keitz*, the time of the final redemption, to his sons, but it was concealed from him. So he blessed them instead.

The Midrash gives the following analogy. A confidant of the king was dying and called his children to his bedside to reveal the royal secrets the king had confided to him. As he was about to begin, he saw that the king too was standing at his bedside. Instead of his intended message, he immediately substituted an exhortation to his children to be careful to honor the king properly. Similarly, Ya'akov wished to reveal the secrets of Mashiach, but saw the *Shechina* at his bedside and substituted the blessings out of embarrassment.

This Midrash seems to imply that Ya'akov did not forget the *keitz* but simply suppressed it due to embarrassment. Further, how do Ya'akov's blessings compare to an exhortation to obey the king and honor him?

The Talmud (Yoma 20b) says that prior to death, the soul gives a scream that is heard from one end of the world to the other. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin explains that before one passes from this world, G-d shows him a picture of what he could have been had he developed all his potential and contrasts it to what he actually achieved. When the soul sees the chasm between these two images, it screams.

Why is that scream described as going "from one end of the world to the other end," and not "from the beginning of the world to the end"? There is a dispute between Rav and Shmuel in the

Talmud (Megillah) as to whether the provinces of Hodu and Kush were at opposite ends of the world, or right next to each other. The Vilna Gaon explains that both are true, for any two points on a globe that are next to each other when traveling eastward are at opposite ends of the world when traveling westward. Hence if a point on the globe is only seen as a point, it is insignificant, but if it is seen as the beginning of a far-off end, it encompasses an entire world.

Talents, abilities and capabilities are points of potential. But if they remain an end in themselves, they are insignificant points. The soul cries for the failure of these points to grow and traverse entire worlds.

The development and perfection of this world depend on the realization of each Jew's individual potential. It is in this perspective that the world was created for the names of the Jewish people.

The confidant reflected that if he told his children the king's mysteries, they would know this information only secondhand. But if he could inspire them to be careful in honoring the king, they would merit to become confidants of the king themselves and hear his secrets firsthand. Similarly, Ya'akov wished to reveal the *keitz* to his children. But after realizing their inherent potential, he chose to impart to them that which would obviate the *keitz* and bring the redemption closer.

The greatest blessing one can bestow is to enlighten another and acquaint him with himself. The Mishnah (Avot 3:18) says: "Man is precious, having been created in G-d's image, and even more

so for having been informed he was created in G-d's image." Self-knowledge of one's abilities and talents, as well as one's shortcomings and limitations, is the greatest blessing. It enables us to realize our Divine mission in this world.

Ya'akov realized the ultimate redemption depended on the development of his sons' potential. Rather than reveal the deadline for redemption, he opted to bless them with self-knowledge that could help them bring the redemption at a much earlier date. In this vein, knowledge of the capabilities they possessed was itself a blessing.

The Midrash relates that every person has various names: the one G-d gives him, that which his parents give him, the name he is called by his friends, and above all the one he earns for himself. Everyone is endowed with a variety of talents and skills. Some are directly endowed by Heaven. Some are the result of heredity and environment. But the most significant are those that come by virtue of developing and actualizing one's potential.

As we end the Torah, may we strengthen ourselves to develop the unique potential inherent in our names for the furtherance and enhancement of Torah and the Jewish people, and thereby bring the Final Redemption speedily in our days.

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