



# SCHECHTER

## A Grandparent's Blessing

Daniel R. Weiss

Middle School Judaics Principal

[dweiss@grossschechter.org](mailto:dweiss@grossschechter.org)

[www.grossschechter.org](http://www.grossschechter.org)

[Rabbi Tovia Singer](#) once said in a guest sermon at B'nai Jeshurun that “the best way to know if you are a good Jew is if your grandchildren are Jewish”. This incredible statement has stayed with me since I heard it nearly a decade ago.

I find inspiration on a daily basis from my children. They never cease to amaze me. Like most parents, I struggle with the day to day grind of being a parent. I second guess nearly every decision I make regarding my kids. I strive to make sure that the examples I set for them are positive. Some days I am more successful than others. Some days I am surer of myself than others. Yet each day, I continue to try to ensure that I am raising my kids in a good way.

Often we do not see how truly blessed we are until it is too late. We don't know our successes until they seem to pass us by.

I am lucky. I have a great partner in raising my children. We have great models in our parents and our grandparents.

During the past few weeks I have been reminded by my children just how lucky I am and just how good our grandparents are.

I try to take my sons to shul with me on Friday nights for Kabbalat Shabbat. It is often a hard sell. They would rather stay home and read or play than trudge through the snowy cold night. My son Yaron decided to join me a few weeks back, though I warned him that we were going to be going to a synagogue over a mile from our house. As we walked home he told me that I don't need to ask him to go to synagogue with me each week – I should never have to go alone, he would always go with me.

This week Yaron celebrates his Hebrew Birthday. This week's Parsha, VaYechi, will be his Bar Mitzvah Parsha.

In the heart of the Parsha, we find Yaakov blessing his grandsons and his sons. Incorporated in his blessings are the famous verses with the nighttime song, **HaMalach HaGoel Oti** – “The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm – bless the lads. In them may my name be recalled, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they be teeming multitudes upon the earth. (Gen. 48:16)”. It also contains the verses that we say each Friday evening when we place our hands on our children in order to bestow upon them a blessing – “God make you like Ephraim and Menashe (48:20)”.

My sons each anticipate their blessing. My youngest son, Dotan, puts his hands on his head waiting for us to come to him. He smiles when he sees us approach, though he has no true understanding of the words we are saying.

This past week, while working on a First Grade program, I came upon a quote from my oldest son. In his quote about T'fillah, Nadav remarked that his "favorite prayer is HaMalach because it talks about angels and kids". Though we sing the words each night, he has truly taken the words to heart. While he knows that he is not always an angel, he knows that he is watched over.

As Yaakov blesses his descendents, he brings Efraim and Menashe (Yosef's) sons into the fold as his own sons. When Yaakov first sees Efraim and Menashe he does not recognize them. This is not due to his diminished eyesight. Yosef held a high position in Egypt. Included in this position was wearing the royal regalia. His children also had to look their part. Throughout the 17 years of Yaakov living in Egypt, how can we believe that he would not recognize his own grandchildren? The [Malbim](#), Rabbi Meir Leibush, suggests that in order to show respect to their grandfather, Efraim and Menashe never appeared in front of him in anything other than the typical Israelite outfit. They wore no makeup or jewelry. As Yaakov was dying, the boys rushed to his bedside and did not have time to change their clothes.

Though the boys grew up in Egypt and were part of Egyptian royalty, Yosef gave them Hebrew names. He never assimilated. Their names were an integral part of their identities (we continue this tradition today by giving our children Hebrew names and by naming them after loved ones whose qualities we hope that they may emulate).

In his blessing to the boys, Yaakov says "may they be like fish, becoming many within the land". This verse has always confused me. I have tried to come to a conclusion as to the connection of becoming many and the idea of fish. In every other instance of talking about many descendants it uses the word *Pru*, why in this case, *V'yidgu*?

Rabbi Yaakov Culi, in his works, [Me'am Loez](#) gives a wonderful explanation. He writes "*Just as the Evil Eye has no power over fish, so may it have no power over your offspring. May your children be like fish also in another manner? Fish grow in water and are totally surrounded by it, yet when a raindrop falls, they drink it with thirst, as if they had never before tasted water. Your children are immersed in Torah, which is likened to water. When they hear a new thought, may they drink it with such thirst as if they had never before heard a word of Torah... The blessing of Joseph's children was also considered Joseph's blessing. When a man has good children, no one is more blessed than he.*"

To expand on Rabbi Tovia Singer's words, no one is more blessed than the grandparent.

#### **AS A FAMILY:**

- Have your children invite their grandparents/great-grandparents to a family dinner, school program, or play date.
- Tell your children about your grandparents and the influence they had on your life.
- Teach your children about their Hebrew name. Tell them for whom they were named and special qualities that they had.

- Sing HaMalach HaGoel Oti with your children before they go to sleep at night.

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, TRY TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:**

1. How does Yosef attempt to change the way in which Yaakov is blessing Efraim and Menashe?
2. Why does Yaakov bless them the way that he does?
3. Where does Yaakov request to be buried?
4. How is each of Yaakov's sons blessed?
5. After burying Yaakov, why are the brothers afraid of Yosef?
6. How does Yosef reassure his brothers?
7. What happens to Yosef when he dies? Why?