



The Certificate and the Consideration Parshas Vayechy

The two brothers studied Torah together, focusing on the issues of Kashrus. These are complex matters which require in-depth knowledge and expertise, and the siblings dedicated their days to acquiring this knowledge.

When they concluded their studies, they decided to be examined by leading rabbis, including my father, Rabbi Yisroel Grossman. Both faired well, but the younger brother did better than his older sibling, who made a few minor mistakes.

My father understood the complexity of the situation and asked the other rabbis that the younger brother be given the certificate attesting to his success only at a later date.

My father's colleagues could not understand why this should be done – did the younger brother not work hard and succeed?

My father explained that both brothers worked equally hard to pass the test, however one of them was more gifted than his sibling, and therefore the older brother must not be shamed, and the younger brother's certificate must be withheld.

The rabbis decided on withholding the certificate, but father was still not satisfied.

He found out where the older brother studied and contacted its faculty. He asked that the brother receive special help, which my father would pay for anonymously.

The older brother relearned the material and passed the test with flying colors. Both brothers received their graduate certificate at the same time.

In our weekly parsha we learn a fundamental issue regarding the basics of Judaism: When Yaacov blessed his grandsons Menashe and Efraim he crossed his hands, putting his right hand on the head of the younger brother. "But Israel stretched out his right hand and placed it on Efraim's head, although he was the younger, and his left hand he placed on

Menashe's head. He guided his hands deliberately, for Menashe was the firstborn."¹

seemingly discriminated against Menashe, the older brother, but a closer look reveals that Yaacov placed the brothers at almost the same level.

As parents and educators, we are often faced with the dilemma of the proper allocation of resources between siblings and peers, who gets what and when.

The issue is exemplified in the words of our Sages who say that on the account of a cheap striped coat that Yaacov gave Yosef, his brothers became jealous of him, and our forefathers subsequently were exiled to Egypt.²

Our Sages further teach us that the incident surrounding Yosef's coat clarifies that one should never favor one son over the other, as the coat caused the brothers to hate Yosef.³

Yaacov learned the lesson, and when he came to bless his two grandchildren he was careful not to show favoritism to one, over the other.

While the blessings have a deep and historic significance, a basic lesson on education can be learnt here as well – one should not favor one son over the other and one should always support the weaker party.

Yaacov expressed idea in his response to Yosef's protest:

"I know, my son, I know; he too will become a people, and he too will be great. But his younger brother will be greater than he, and his children's fame] will fill the nations,"

In his last days, as he sat at his home and studied Torah, my mother came into my father's room and told him that an important rabbi had come to see him.

When the rabbi saw my father, he hugged him warmly and said: "Rabbi Grossman, you have saved me." My father did not know him. The man explained that he was the older brother whom my father saved from disgrace many years ago.

Father, who remembered the episode his entire life, had suddenly "forgotten" it had happened. The rabbi tried to jar his memory, but my father had "a hard time" recalling it.

More than my father gave that rabbi ordination; he gave us a lesson in how to treat our fellow being.

¹ Beresheit 48:14.

² Talmud tractate Shabbat 10b.

³ Beresheit Rabba 84:8.