Jewish Tribune – Vayishlach

**The Power of Tefilla**

After listing the sons of Yaakov Ovinu in this week’s sedra, the possuk (Bereishis 35,26) says:

אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב, אֲשֶׁר יֻלַּד לוֹ בְּפַדַּן אֲרָם

These are the sons of Yaakov who were born to him in Padan Aram.

The Meforshim are troubled by the accuracy of this statement; after all Binyomin was born in Eretz Canaan and not in Padan Aram. How can the possuk state that all the sons were born in Padan Aram?

The Ibn Ezra simply answers that the possuk means that the majority of Yaakov sons were born in Padan Aram.

However, the Chizkuni offers a different answer, the ramifications of which are quite simply electrifying.

והרי בנימין לא נולד בפדן ארם? אלא הכי קאמר אשר ילד לו על פי התפלה שנתפללה רחל בפדן ארם שאמרה יוסף ה' לי בן אחר ומתוך כך מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו נולד בפדן ארם.

After Yosef was born, whilst still in Padan Aram, Rochel Immeinu prayed to have another child. Even though he was physically born in Eretz Canaan, the Torah attributes the birth of Binyomin to Rochel’s prayer and therefore lists it as if he was born in Padan Aram, the location of the prayer.

This is astounding. We know the Torah reflects a deep and true reality, which is not always the way we see things. The reality is that the birth of Binyamin ***does*** take place in Padan Aram, the place where Rochel Immeinu davened for him and not the physical place of his birth.

This theme is reiterated in a Mishna in Berachos (perek 9, mishna 1). The Mishna states:

הרואה מקום שנעשו בו ניסים לישראל אומר ברוך שעשה ניסים לאבותינו במקום הזה

One who sees the place were miracles happened to Klal Yisroel, says Blessed is Hashem who performed miracles in this place.

Rav Ovadiah MiBartenura who gives examples of such locations:

כגון מעברות ים סוף ונחלי ארנון ומעברות הירדן **ואבן שישב עליה משה ע"ה כשעשה מלחמה בעמלק** ודומיהן

Such as the place where Klal Yisroel crossed the Yum Suf and the stream of Arnon (see Bamidbar 21), and the fords of the Jordan River (where Klal Yisroel crossed - see sefer Yehishua perek 3) and the stone on which Moshe Rabbeinu sat on when he fought the war against Amalek (see Shemos perek 17) and other similar occurrences.

The stone on which Moshe sat!? Surely the miracle of the victory over Amalek took place at the battlefield!?

No, the reality is that the actual location of the victory was at the place where Moshe Rabbeinu davened. That is where the miracle really took place.

Just like the reality that the birth of Binyamin takes place in Padan Aram, where Rochel Immeinu davened for him.

Perhaps this concept explains a difficult Gemoro.

The Gemoro in Berachos (10b) tells us that King Chizkiyahu hid the “sefer refuos”, the book of remedies. This book contained instructions regarding the natural healing properties of all the various herbs and vegetation in existence.

On the surface, this seems very hard to understand. Imagine we had a book today which contained the cures for all ailments. Aside from the benefit to the world at large, the book would be priceless.

And yet, King Chizkiyahu had such a book and hid it away. What’s more, the Gemoro tells us that the Chachomim acquiesced to his act. What is behind this difficult Gemoro?

Perhaps the answer is this. Chizkiyahu saw that those who were ill relied on these natural remedies and refrained from davening to Hashem for healing. Rabbeinu Bachaye says that HKBH made these healing remedies known to man in order to test us. He wanted to see whether we would recognise that all healing is from Him or would we place our trust in the “sefer refuos”.

Is this any different to our relationship with doctors today?

Chizkiyahu hid the book when it began to lead people astray. Since the act of hiding the book demonstrated Chizkiyahu’s faith in Hashem’s healing and the power of tefilla, the act was accepted by Chazal.

The message is very clear. Tefilla has always been the most effective tool in our armoury. Of course, we need to do our hishtadlus, but we must never forget or underestimate the power of tefilla.

**Rabbi Jeremy Golker is the Menahel of Hasmonean Boys School and Hasmonean Girls School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**