

"And Yosef saw that his father had placed his right hand on Efraim's head ... and Yosef said to his father, 'Not so, my father, this one (Menashe) is the first-born. Place your right hand on his head.' And his father refused." (48:17-19)

Prior to blessing his grandsons, Yaakov placed his right hand upon Efraim and his left hand upon Menashe. In Yosef's eyes, this seemed inappropriate, since Efraim was the younger son. Consequently, he attempted to move his father's right hand and place it upon Menashe's head. Yaakov immediately resisted, insisting upon keeping his right hand on Efraim's head.

The *Midrash* lends an amazing insight into the dialogue between Yaakov and Yosef at this time. Yaakov told Yosef, "You want to push aside the hand that fought off one third of the world!" This reference is to Eisav's angel who fought with Yaakov, reflecting *Chazal's* view that an angel represents one third of the world. What is the meaning of Yaakov's retort? Why did Yaakov specifically choose to place his "fighting hand" upon Efraim?

We suggest that Yaakov was imparting a valuable lesson. The two brothers, Menashe and Efraim were not only disparate in age. They each embodied different qualities and represented different roles in life's endeavors. Menashe, who was the supervisor in Yosef's palace, was inclined towards temporal matters. He was assistant to his father and devoted much of his time to the functions of commerce, politics and the management of the country. Menashe, his spiritual and moral observance notwithstanding, was more inclined to the mundane. Efraim, on the other hand, devoted himself entirely to studying *Torah* with his grandfather, Yaakov. It would, therefore, seem that Efraim had a greater proclivity towards spirituality.

Yaakov placed his right hand upon the head of Efraim, the *ben Torah*. Yaakov's hand symbolizes dissension; it is the hand that has no fear of challenge, that goes forward to fight for the just cause, regardless of the adversary. We Jews are to engage in dispute, struggle in controversy, and confront challenge with contentiousness -- only for *Torah* causes and for the sake of upholding the moral fibre of *Klal Yisrael*. When our concerns become purely secular, it is essential to place our complete trust in the Almighty. The Jewish people are not prone to violence. Therefore, we should apply our intensity and passion only to the pursuit of eternal goals.