

**And Yisrael saw Yosef's sons and he said, "Who are these?"
And Yosef said to his father, "They are my sons whom
Hashem has given me here." He said, "Bring them to me if
you please, and I will bless them." (48:8,9)**

The *Midrash* explains that Yaakov obviously knew the identity of Yosef's sons. He was in Egypt for seventeen years. He certainly had the opportunity to interact with them during this time. Also, Yaakov studied Torah with Efraim. *Chazal* explain that when Yaakov was about to bless Yosef's children, the *Shechinah* departed from him. He foresaw that evil kings would descend from them: Yaravam and Achav from Efraim; Yehu and his sons from Menashe. This vision shocked Yaakov so that he asked Yosef, "*Who are these?*" meaning, from where did these sons, who are apparently unworthy of blessing, come? Yosef assured his father that they were begotten from a union which was holy and *kosher* according to the demands of *halachah* and were consequently worthy of blessing.

We may question the words of the *Midrash*. If Efraim and Menashe are not worthy of blessing based on their own merit since their descendants would be evil, how would the *kashrus/halachic* acceptability of their parents' union change this reality? They are either worthy or they are not! Also, why did Efraim and Menashe become the standard for blessing with which every parent blesses his sons, "May Hashem make you like Efraim and Menashe?" What was so unique about these two sons in contrast to the other tribes?

Horav Avraham Kilav, Shlita, describes a major difference between Efraim and Menashe and the other tribes. The *shevatim* were all born in exile when their father worked for Lavan. When they finally left Lavan's home, it was not in a dignified manner--they were forced to flee from him. While they were yet on the road prior to settling in *Eretz Yisrael*, the tragedy that befell Dinah occurred. This preceded the tragedy of *mechiras* Yosef, which left their father a broken man, bereft of his favorite child. One may submit that even after they settled in Egypt under Yosef's protection, they were still "unsettled" as they were fully cognizant that they were responsible for creating tragedy in Yosef's life. Thus, we may suggest that the sons of Yaakov were filled with anxiety. They never could call themselves "free men" in the sense that they were never released from the cloud of fear which loomed over them.

Conversely, Yosef's sons were born to him when he was already the viceroy over Egypt. Eminently successful and powerful, Yosef was able to provide a lifestyle of royalty, dignity, and freedom for his sons. His sons were revered. While Efraim and Menashe knew their roots, the ambiguities and anxieties that plagued their grandfather did not really affect them. They were raised as free men with incredible self-confidence. They were aware that, as Yaakov's grandsons, they were the scions of the Patriarchs, replete with *kedushah* and *taharah*, holiness and purity. They were also the sons of Yosef, the powerful leader of Egypt, the man to whose word the entire

world listened. Indeed, Yosef's sons had the characteristics necessary to become great leaders.

Something happened, however. Yaakov saw disaster in the future. He saw how Efraim and Menashe's resolution and spiritedness backfired many generations later through the evil which their descendants perpetrated. The qualities that were so desirable for national leadership and blessing actually became a catalyst of downfall. The self-confidence turned into gross *chutzpah*; the courage was transformed into audacity and shamelessness. Yaakov questioned Yosef, "Who are these?" He saw the roots of evil in Efraim and Menashe. How could this be? Yosef responded, "They are my sons which Hashem has given me here." They were born in Egypt, so that our people would have leadership that was not raised amidst anxiety, depression, and exile. They were born into and raised throughout their lives in the comfort of freedom and autonomy--not beholden to anyone. Their self-determination was a valuable asset for *Klal Yisrael*. Yehoshua, the leader who took *Bnei Yisrael* into *Eretz Yisrael*, was a descendant of Efraim. One who is free, one who is filled with self-confidence and resolve, can serve Hashem without fear or anxiety. Yes, there is a possibility that self-determination can lead to disaster. Without it, however, *Klal Yisrael's* leadership would have been limited. The two must serve together, Efraim and Menashe, each enhancing the other's qualities. Efraim represents the spirit while Menashe symbolizes material pursuit. Together, they create an unparalleled leadership. Only when Menashe acquiesces to Efraim is there no fear of the consequences of material endeavor. On the contrary, this relationship sublimates the material, engendering it with sanctity. This is the blessing that we give our children: "*May they be like Efraim and Menashe.*" Efraim's devotion to the spirit permeates and imbues Menashe's material enterprise.