

Yosef called the name of the firstborn Menashe, for “G-d has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s household.” (41:51)

Is it possible that Yosef lauded forgetting his father’s home, the home of Yaakov *Avinu*, the *b’chir haAvos*, chosen of the Patriarchs? Certainly not. Yosef *HaTzaddik* would certainly not be so crass as to name his firstborn with a name that indicated the severance of his relationship with the past. *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, explains that Yosef lauded his self-imposed amnesia concerning his brothers’ hatred toward him and their consequent selling him to the caravan of Arabs that brought him to Egypt. It was a great challenge to look to the future while ignoring the past. He wanted to remember only Hashem’s present kindness to him. This is the meaning behind Menashe’s name. Yosef did not simply erase that painful phase of his life; he concretized the severance with the name he gave his son. Indeed, as *Horav Shmuel Yudelevitz, zl*, (*Meil Shmuel*) adds, even Ephraim’s name had an important purpose: to remind Yosef that because of his brothers, he descended to Egypt, where he was “fruitful” (Ephraim – *hifrani*). As a result, he owed them a debt of gratitude. Furthermore, Ephraim’s name is even greater, more positive, than that of Menashe, since his name denotes love and gratitude, while Menashe’s name eschews enmity toward his brothers.

Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl, offers an alternative understanding of Yosef’s seeking to “forget” his past life at home. As a result of his extraordinarily close relationship with his father, Yaakov *Avinu*, he was afforded an outstanding *chinuch*, Torah education. His father transmitted to him everything that he had learned in the *yeshivah* of Shem and Ever. He was suddenly torn from his father’s home, from the idyllic Torah environment to which he had been exposed, and flung into the hedonism and cruelty that defined Egyptian culture (especially in the confines of prison life), where the (spiritual) air that he breathed was the antithesis to what he had experienced at home. Life for him as a Jew, to whom spirituality was everything, began anew. He now found himself without a mentor, without a guiding spirit to inspire and show him the way. No longer did he have the protective barrier that sheltered him from evil. He now had to serve Hashem on his own (based upon what he had imbibed at home), applying his own acumen, employing his own guidelines and protecting fences and barriers to shelter himself from the moral profligacy which challenged him at every turn. The simple protection to which he had been accustomed at home would not suffice here in Egypt.

When Yosef realized the extraordinary merit that he had which enabled him to withstand the blandishments of Egyptian culture, coupled with the debased environment in the dungeon, he was filled with gratitude to Hashem for allowing him to forget the exemplary lessons that he had learned from his father. Hashem had granted him new strengths, and that carried him through the challenges of Egypt. Otherwise, he would not have survived spiritually with what he had brought with him from home, because it would have been in a constant clash with his newfound challenges.

In his commentary to the *pasuk* in *Shiras Haazinu*, *Binu shenos dor va'dor*, "Reflect upon the years of each generation" (*Devarim* 32:7), the *Chidushei HaRim* explains that Hashem grants each historical epoch a new outlook, a fresh perspective on the Torah, a new insight that is in tune, coincides, with the spiritual climate of that generation. (It is the same Torah, but He gives the members of each generation insight to adapt the Torah's lessons to that particular juncture in time, with its specific issues. In other words, the generation that preceded the Holocaust was unlike the "baby boomers" that followed.) This idea continues throughout the generations. The *gedolei Yisrael*, spiritual leaders, of each ensuing generation are sensitive to the particular needs and problems that confront the young people of their generation. They bring the Torah to life (they show the young people the length and breadth of the living Torah), interpreting its words in terms of the trends that are presently in vogue, thus satisfying the young people's spiritual yearning. "The years of each generation." Every year, a new energy and vitality to each person's perceptions unfold. The word *shenos* is usually translated as years, but it can also mean *shinui*, change, or *shoneh*, different.

We are living in a generation that we may best describe as transitional; it is constantly changing in accordance with the whims of its manipulators, who transform chaos into a lifestyle. They answer to no one (not even to themselves), with terms like justice, integrity, spirituality, values and purpose relegated to antiquity. While we can make every attempt to protect our children from the outside world, we would be myopic to think that nothing seeps in. We thus have a moral obligation to do whatever we can to protect our future with a strong present based upon the foundation of the past.

Horav Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv, zl, presents a thoughtful and inspiring exposition of a well-known *Chazal*/passage in the *Talmud*, which is certainly worthy of constant review. We are taught that a father must teach his son to swim. The directive seems almost superfluous. What makes swimming so unique that it becomes a father's obligation to teach his son to swim? If it is due to the danger, this danger can be present under other circumstances as well. If it is the benefit, this, too, can be obtained from other sources. What is it about swimming that makes it stand out?

Rav Eliyashiv explains that swimming demands active participation. If one were to drop a piece of wood onto the water, it might remain above the surface for some time, but certainly not because it was swimming. It simply floats along until it fills with water and submerges. Furthermore, it follows the current, since it is not active. In order to swim, one must be actively engaged in skillfully counteracting the physics of the water which are pulling him down. If one does not fight the water current, its gravitational pull, he will sink or be pulled away. Swimming entails actively fighting the current.

A Jew must learn to "swim," to actively swim/challenge the currents that threaten to undermine our *Yiddishkeit*. We cannot be passive in today's world, because we will not merely stay afloat – we will sink! Or, be dragged wherever the prevailing current drags us. To live a Torah-life means to swim against the currents that seek to disenfranchise us from our heritage.

In every generation we must follow the leadership, whom, as the *Gerrer Rebbe* says, are able to reveal the Torah's guidance for that generation. During the Second World War, when the *Gerrer Rebbe*, the *Imrei Emes*, was compelled to leave Poland, he saw that it would be impossible to take all of his manuscripts of the *Chidushei Torah*, original thoughts, that he had written on Torah and *Talmud*. He decided to dig a deep hole in the ground not far from his home and buried them there. He hoped that after the war he would be able to retrieve his *kesavim*, manuscripts. After the war, he sent a number of agents with exact directions to dig up the manuscripts – to no avail. Three times he sent reliable people to do the job, and they returned unsuccessful; they could not locate the spot in which they were buried. He sent one last agent. This time he drew an exact map with perfect measurements. There was no way he would not be able to locate the hiding place. They searched back and forth and were once again unsuccessful. The *Rebbe* decided that it was a Heavenly sign that the novellae that he had taught prior to the war were specific to that period. Now that the war had ended, with a major portion of *Klal Yisrael* brutally murdered, a new understanding and explanation of the Torah was required. New challenges – new Torah directives. His approach had to be altered.

Parashas Ki Savo includes within it the ninety-eight maledictions which Moshe *Rabbeinu* issued forth to *Klal Yisrael* prior to their entering into *Eretz Yisrael*. These curses are read quickly and quietly by the *baal korei*, Torah reader, due to the nature of their message. *Chassidic* thought suggests a different approach to these curses, which they feel have serious negative overtones only when viewed externally/superficially. When viewed on a deeper level, however, they are actually unrestricted blessings. Thus, what might be viewed on the surface as negative in nature can be quite positive and a source of consummate blessing to the thinking person.

This metamorphic understanding is reflected in a vignette told concerning *Horav Dov Ber, zl*, the *Mittler/Lubavitcher Rebbe*, son and successor to the *Baal HaTanya*. He once heard the reading of the curses and fainted. He remained ill for weeks. He was a sensitive person whose delicate nature could not tolerate the harshness of the curses and their intended implication for the Jewish People. He was asked why he had this reaction at this time. What about the many times he had heard it read before? He explained that in the past "I heard the reading from my father, and, when he read the *tochachah*, I only heard blessing." Only a holy person of his stature is able to discern the blessing within the *tochachah*, and only one of the *Baal HaTanya's* spiritual status can read it in such a manner that someone like *Rav Dov Ber* would hear blessings. With each ensuing generation we hear less, because we are exposed to more.