

By you shall Yisrael bless saying, “May G-d make you like Ephraim and Menashe.” (48:20)

Yaakov *Avinu* assured Yosef that, throughout the ages, Jewish parents would bless their sons that they grow up to be like Ephraim and Menashe. Why should these two grandsons of Yaakov, children raised in the pagan, hedonistic society that Egypt epitomized, be the paradigms of Jewish parents' hopes for their children? At first blush, the mere fact that they “made it” in Egypt speaks volumes about them and their upbringing. If so, Yaakov would be speaking only with regard to the *galus* Jew, who is challenged by the non-Jewish, assimilationist environment. This is obviously not the case. Yaakov spoke to all Jews, under all conditions, whether they are living in Yerushalayim with the *Bais Hamikdash* extant, or in *galus*. Ephraim and Menashe are the exemplars of the *ben Torah* for whom every parent wants his son to aspire to become. Why? What made them so special – even more than the *Shevatim*, Tribes, that included the greatest leaders of *Klal Yisrael* from whom the nation is nurtured?

Horav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel, zl, explains that Ephraim and Menashe exemplified the Torah Jew who overcame the phenomenon of *yeridas ha'doros*, the decline of the generations. This general concept posits that the further removed we are from *Har Sinai*, the weaker we are spiritually. *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 112b) state the inevitable rule: If the previous generations were like angels (we perceive them to be angels), then we are humans (we may call ourselves human beings). If the previous generations were humans, then we are like donkeys.” (Obviously, this *Chazal* begs explanation.) On the surface, maintaining our spiritual status quo is an uphill challenge. This becomes even more challenging when we view our lives through the lens of the previous generations. They achieved so much despite the many challenges and obstacles which they had to confront. Ephraim and Menashe not only remained totally committed and wholly observant in a spiritual climate that was anything but conducive to spiritual growth, but they were able to achieve tribe status. They were counted as Reuven and Shimon. Concerning their spiritual growth, they experienced no generational decline. This is the blessing that we give our children: Be like the great leaders of the previous generation. Let them be your models; let them be your lodestar and inspiration.

How did Yosef merit not one, but two sons, who triumphed over the malady of *yeridas ha'doros*? *Rav Elya Baruch* explains that Yosef lived with *d'mus d'yukno shel Aviv*, an image of his father, constantly before him. Even in the cesspool that was Egypt, in the dungeon, against the seductive force of Potifar's wife, his father's image was always present in his mind. He was never alone. Surely this is how he raised his sons. When Ephraim and Menashe grew up, they saw Yaakov *Avinu* before them at all times. He was not merely their grandfather, he was their father, their *Rebbe*. Their father presented everything that they learned as coming from Yaakov. Is it any wonder that they achieved tribal status? They lived as Yaakov's sons!

This is the form of *chinuch*, Torah education, we received in *Telshe Yeshivah* sixty years ago. My

Rebbeim and *Roshei Yeshivah* were, for the most part, survivors of the Holocaust. They had themselves been students in Telz, Lithuania, and the scene of learning, coupled with the image and intensity of their saintly *Rebbeim*, was fresh in their minds. When we had *shiur*, it was almost like a group of young, American boys being transported to the little classroom in the *mechinah* of Telz Europe. Our *Rebbeim* spoke about their *Rebbeim* as if they were present. The image they presented to us was palpable. We were imbued with love for Torah and a competitiveness to excel. We were competing, however, with *talmidim* from Kamenitz, Grodno, Slabodka, Baranowitz. We were in a different milieu. Our *Rebbeim* had never left; so they invited us to join them.

With regard to the *d'mus d'yukno shel aviv* (or *imo*) (*Yeurshalmi Horiyos* 2:5) that saved Yosef from falling prey to Potifar's wife's advances, I wonder how many of us are concerned regarding the personal *d'mus d'yukno* that we present to our children. Yosef was saved from disaster due to the image his father presented to him. Our children grow up with the values we impart to them through instruction and by our demeanor. They might forget the instruction, but the demeanor will remain with them throughout their lives.