

And now, your two sons who were born in Egypt... Ephraim and Menashe shall be mine like Reuven and Shimon (48:5)

Yaakov *Avinu* underscores the fact the Menashe and Ephraim were Egyptian-born. He could just as easily have said, "your two sons, Ephraim and Menashe," without adding their origins. *HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky, zl*, explains that Yaakov was concerned about his grandsons' origins because of the harsh, foreign spiritual influences they might have sustained. In order to include them among the *Shevatim*, they had to have remained on a spiritual plateau in some way equal to the *Shevatim*. Yaakov intimates that he was bringing Ephraim and Menashe close because, since they were born and raised in Egypt, they needed that spiritual TLC. This is why Yaakov put Ephraim before Menashe. Ephraim was at greater risk of being affected by the moral turpitude of Egyptian life and culture, as he was born when Yosef had distanced himself more from his upbringing and was already ensconced entirely in Egyptian life. It did not affect him personally, but who was to know where his young sons stood with regard to their spiritual affiliation? Menashe, who was born earlier, still knew how to speak *lashon Kodesh*, Hebrew. Thus, he was better prepared to rise above the negative spiritual climate.

HoRav Binyamin Mendelson, zl (*Rav* of Komemiyus, quoted by *HaRav Elimelch Biderman, shlita*), is asking why Yaakov crossed his hand when he blessed Ephraim and Menashe. He could easily have had them change positions, with Ephraim on his right and Menashe on his left. *Rav Mendelson* explains that a debate ensued between Yaakov and Yosef concerning which was the proper and most effective manner in carrying out one's *avodas haKadesh*, service to Hashem. Yaakov intimated that one should not compel the individual with whom he differs to alter his position and to agree with him; rather, he should work around their differences. Yosef felt that Menashe represented the paradigm of *avodas haKadesh*. He was *frum*, *erudite*, G-d-fearing, but also worldly and involved in mundane affairs affecting the community. He was, in fact, Yosef's assistant. Yaakov preferred Ephraim, the *yeshivah* man, whose days and nights were subsumed in total *Torah* study. (Obviously, this paper is not the forum for addressing the debate. Suffice to say that, throughout the generations, *Klal Yisrael* has employed the vital services of both schools of thought. Certainly, full-time *Torah* study is critical for the future of *Klal Yisrael*. Thus, for those who are able to commit and adhere to and navigate this way of life successfully, it is the optimum choice. Those who, for whatever reason, are unable to do so, should make every effort to align their daily time allotment with *Torah* study.)

Yaakov Avinu's blessing, Yesimcha Elokim k'Ephraim u'ki'Menashe, serves as the paradigmatic blessing with which parents bless their sons. In their respective positions and choices for their life endeavor Yosef's sons represent the two ideals intrinsic to all parents, aspirations for their children. It is, thus, enigmatic that Yonason ben Uziel writes that this blessing should be recited at the bris, circumcision, of a Jewish boy. The Netziv explains that one blesses a person to succeed in his choice of endeavor. One who chooses to engage in a mundane livelihood is, likewise, blessed with Mendelson explains that a debate ensued between Yaakov and Yosef concerning

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