

So he blessed them that day, saying, “By you shall Yisrael bless.” (48:20)

Yaakov *Avinu* assured his son, Yosef, that, for all time, Jewish parents would remember that he was the father of sons – Ephraim and Menashe -- who achieved *shevet*, tribal, status equal with Yaakov's sons. Parents will strive to see their sons reach such a level. The commentators, each in his own inimitable manner, offer explanations for the elevation of Menashe and Ephraim to tribal status. Most focus on their characters and the fact that they were able to maintain their extraordinary commitment to Torah and *mitzvos*, despite the spiritual bankruptcy of the society in which they lived. Nothing of these expositions explain the inclusion of the word *becha*, “by you.” What does Yosef have to do with it? If anything, the Torah should have written *ba'chem*, which is plural and would intimate Menashe and Ephraim.

Perhaps the answer to understanding the significance of Menashe and Ephraim can best be understood when we step back and study their parents' background and history. Both Yosef and Osnas (his wife) hailed from backgrounds that could have easily bred bitterness and despair. Yosef grew up in a home in which he was no one's favorite other than that of his father, who treated him differently since he was his *ben zekunim*, child of his old age. His brothers eventually sold him into slavery where he was cast in a foreign land and compelled to endure years of harsh misery and loneliness in prison.

Osnas, Yosef's wife and mother of Menashe and Ephraim, also had a difficult upbringing. She was conceived through the tragic violation of Dinah by Shechem. The family refused to accept her, claiming that the circumstances of her birth tainted the family lineage. She was sent away from Yaakov's home, but not until the Patriarch gave her a golden pendant identifying her as his granddaughter. *Pirkei D'R'Eliezer* (38) teaches that the *malach*, angel, Gavriel, escorted her to Egypt where Potifar and his wife, Zuleika, adopted her. They had no children of their own, so it was a perfect match. During the time that Yosef languished in prison, Potifar and Zuleika were raising Osnas in their home, which was pagan-oriented under the direction of Potifar, her adoptive father, who was a pagan priest. Many years later, when Yosef rose to power in Egypt, Pharaoh presented him with potential wives. His excuse was that a ruler must be married. He did not mention that a Jew who was married to a pagan would have difficulty returning “home” and would better be accepted by -- and become part of -- Egyptian society. Osnas was aware of the mad rush to marry off the handsome Jewish viceroy. She revealed her pendant, identifying her as Yaakov's granddaughter. As such, the destiny of Yosef's and Osnas's marriage was fulfilled. (It should be noted that, originally, Leah *Imeinu* had conceived Yosef, and Rochel *Imeinu* had conceived Dinah. Leah prayed to Hashem that her sister should be blessed with two sons. Hashem listened, and the fetuses were miraculously switched. Thus, Yosef married the daughter of the woman who was much more than a sister to him. Menashe and Ephraim were the products of Osnas and Yosef, who descended from Leah and Rachel.)

From such murky beginnings, one might expect a home scarred by trauma, a marriage overshadowed by anger, resentment, or recrimination. In modern psychology, it is often noted that, when parents carry unresolved pain, they unintentionally transmit it to their children; messed-up parents produce messed-up children. Yosef and Osnas, however, were different. They rose above their pasts. They built a home in which the air was filled, not with animosity, but with *emunah*; not with bitterness, but with joy. They taught their children that everything comes from Hashem and that, no matter the circumstance, one should live with faith and serenity.

This is the secret of Efraim and Menashe. Despite the seeming moments of darkness from which their parents had emerged, they never sensed anything amiss in their home. They never witnessed anger or discord; they experienced only warmth, stability and happiness. Yosef and Osnas had transformed diversity into strength, and that strength became the legacy of their children. This is why Yaakov said *becha*, “by you.” You have shown parents how to separate their personal past and present lives from the manner in which they raise their children.

A couple in New York, both husband and wife Holocaust survivors, decided that they wanted to live in a manner that did not call to mind their past, that the treachery which was wrought by a nation which represented the worst of humanity would not follow them around as it did so many others. They had every reason to be filled with hate. Their parents, siblings, relatives, and close friends had all been murdered. They had every reason to live a life of bitterness, anger and despair. So many survivors struggled under this heavy burden of hate. They knew that, if they gave in to despair, it would destroy them and their family.

They made a conscious decision: their home would not be a continuation of Auschwitz. They would fill it with laughter, with *Shabbos* songs, with stories of hope, rather than horror. They raised children who never once heard their parents complain about what they lacked; they only expressed gratitude for what they had. Their house was the “happy home” in the neighborhood, always open to guests, always radiating warmth.

Years later, one of the children reflected, “People tell me my parents were survivors. I never knew it from them. All I saw was joy, faith and love. Only later, did I discover the pain they had carried silently. They give us a home with no shadows.”

Horav Yisrael Meir Lau, Shlita, former Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*, is one of the most famous child survivors of the Holocaust. As a little boy, he was smuggled out of Buchenwald by older inmates who protected him. He had every reason to grow up broken, detached, embittered, living from one hate-filled day to the next. Instead, he became a distinguished, Rabbinic leader – loved and admired by all. He was known for his signature smile, the warmth that he exuded and his ability to inspire Jews from all walks of life.

When asked how he managed to survive the trauma and grow up without anger or resentment, he explained that his older brother, Naftali, who raised him after the war, had made a deliberate

choice: “We will not allow our house to be ruled by hate. We will live with faith and joy.” This decision gave *Rav* Lau and his children a heritage of optimism and *emunah* – not trauma.

Yosef and Osnas had every reason to turn their backs on their past. Indeed, so many who had suffered like them would have transformed their marriage into an arena of despair, a marriage founded in bitterness and nurtured in hate. Instead, they built a home of serenity and joy, a house in which their two sons, Menashe and Ephraim, grew up untouched by anger or recrimination. This is the blessing we confer upon our children.