

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)

After years of overcoming challenges and adversity, pain and enslavement, Yosef is freed and overnight catapulted to undreamed of leadership, luxury and dignity. He marries and is blessed with his firstborn son whom he names Menashe. He chooses this name because of its relationship with *nashoh*, forget. Thus, Yosef declares: “This name (which implies forgetting) is my declaration of gratitude to Hashem for allowing me to be able to forget my hardship and my father’s household (which was, for Yosef, the beginning of his hardship). A cursory reading of the name and its implications leaves the reader perplexed. Is this the way a leader of *Klal Yisrael*, a *tzaddik*, righteous person, speaks? Why would he want to forget his home, and (adding insult to injury) why would he thank Hashem for this opportunity? One would think that Yosef would have focused on the positive, thanking Hashem: for saving him from his brothers’ machinations to rid themselves of him; for his liberation from prison; for delivering to him a wonderful, suitable wife; for a son to carry on his legacy. He had so much more for which to thank Hashem. Why focus on the negative, and why praise forgetting his home?

Horav Ben Tzion Bruk, zl, suggests that we can derive much concerning the character and *shleimus ha’nefesh*, perfection of the soul, of Yosef from his naming of Menashe and its underlying reason. Let us begin with imagining the pain Yosef experienced when he was forcibly extricated from his father’s home. Each of the homes of the *Avos*, Patriarchs, was a veritable *Mishkan*, Sanctuary (*Ramban*, Preface to *Sefer Shemos*). Furthermore, Yosef’s relationship with *Yaakov Avinu* was extraordinary in terms of the spiritual legacy that *Yaakov* was transmitting to his son, Yosef. To be flung from a spiritual utopia to the cesspool of society, to be forced to live with society’s moral profligates, was a major shock for Yosef. Who was responsible for all of Yosef’s spiritual and physical trauma, if not his brothers? One would think that Yosef had every reason to want to cause his brothers to suffer as he suffered. He did not. *Ramban* explains that whatever appears to be an act of vengeance (based upon his ill-treatment of his brothers) as Yosef’s self-imposed mandate to see the fruition of his dreams. In no way did Yosef bring up the troubles and pain they had caused him when they threw him into a pit filled with poisonous snakes and scorpions, taking him from the pit only to sell him to *Yishmaelim*, which led to the adversity that accompanied him during the following years of his captivity.

Thus, the *Rosh Yeshivah* explains Yosef’s *nashani*, forgetting, as applying to the pain of leaving his father’s home. He was able to expunge from his heart any vestige of anger that he might have harbored against his brothers for all of the *tzaros*, troubles, that befell him after he left his father’s home. Yosef not only did not forget the home, its sanctity and the spiritual purity that permeated it, but he sorely missed it. Nary a day passed that Yosef did not long for the home of his youth.

How was Yosef able to expunge any ill will against his brothers? He certainly could not be blamed

if, in the back of his mind, he harbored a vestige of negativity towards his brothers. He did not become morose, because he trained himself to focus on pleasant distractions that would assuage his feelings of negativity. By diverting his attention from the gloom and doom, he was able to maintain a sense of dignity and grace under circumstances that would have destroyed a lesser person. Yosef engaged in *gashmius*, physicality, because it made him feel good about himself, thus diverting his emotions from his brothers. When he saw that he had succeeded in purging himself of any negative feelings towards his brothers, he declared, *Nashani*, "I forgot the pain of being turned away from my father's house." The only emotional baggage that he still carried with him was missing his home. Hashem allowed him to forget this pain.

Maintaining dignity and grace in the face of challenge and adversity is not a simple feat. It takes enormous courage and self-confidence, but, above all, it requires that a person have strong convictions and pride in his commitment. A Jew must sense that he is part of something much greater than himself, that he is part of *Klal Yisrael*; thus, his purpose in life is to glorify Hashem. He is a member of *ligyono shel Melech*, the legion of the King. This should engender within him a feeling of stateliness, at all times demanding of himself an impressiveness of character and a solemn, lofty bearing.

The biography prefacing the commentary to the *Siddur* of *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, contains a well-known story which characterizes the *Rav's* dignity and grace in the face of adversity. Under the greatest challenge, he never for a moment lost sight of who he was, what he represented, and to Whom he maintained his true allegiance. It was *Shushan Purim* 1936; *Rav Schwab* was then the District Rabbi of Ichenhausen, Bavaria, an ancient *kehillah* in Southern Germany. His position included ministering to the needs of a number of small *kehillas* in the area. The Nazis were growing in power and support, and, as a result, the Jewish communities of Germany did their best to maintain a low profile. The Nazis infiltrated the communities with their own sympathizers who would spy on the Jews and report any infraction – real or imagined – to the authorities. No courts existed at that time. Thus, an "offender" was picked up and most often was never heard from again. The *Rav* was the subject of a libelous accusation that in one of his sermons (*Parashas Ki Sisa*) he had publicly maligned Hitler, *y.m.s.* He was brought before the Gestapo and called on the carpet to explain his seditious behavior. With dignity and nobility, he looked into the eye of the commandant and said that the claim against him was an outright lie. He had used the German word *vermittler*, which means medium, but sounds like Hitler. He was speaking in regard to the sin of the Golden Calf, whereby the Jews sought an intermediary to replace Moshe *Rabbeinu*. The *Rav* said, "We Jews do not require a *vermittler* to serve Hashem. He is a personal G-d to whom we can speak directly." It goes without saying that the *Rav*, while maintaining his innocence with aplomb, actually feared for his life.

The commandant listened to his explanation and said he would get back to him concerning the charges. Two months passed before *Rav Schwab* was exonerated. During this time, he slept fitfully, wearing his full rabbinic garb. He did not don his bedclothes for two months because he feared that he would be arrested in the middle of the night (which was common) and dragged to jail

or to the woods, to be beaten or shot and left to die. This had already been the fate of others. *Rav Schwab* conjectured that if this were to be his fate, he would confront it with dignity, wearing his rabbinic garb, as befits a Jewish leader. He understood that he represented Judaism, its people and the Creator, our G-d.