

# MAY YOU BE LIKE EPHRAIM AND MENASHE

*by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner*

This week's parsha of Va'y'chee contains the blessing that is given each Shabbos to one's sons: "Y'simcha Elokim k'Ephraim v'k'Menashe [May Hashem make you be like Ephraim and Menashe]. [48:20]" Menashe and Ephraim were the two sons of Yosef that were born in Mitzrayim. They were granted the same status as the tribes that were born to Yaakov.

The blessing given to girls on Shabbos is that they should be like the Matriarchs--Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah. The boy's blessing, however, passes over the Patriarchs and the twelve tribes and instead focuses on these sons of Yosef.

What special qualities did Ephraim and Menashe manifest that made them worthy of our blessing our sons to be like them?

The Mikdash Mordechai explains that the brother relationship had always been associated with strife and jealousy. The first brothers, Kain and Hevel, seemed to set the stage for what was to follow; Yitzchak and Yishmael, Yaakov and Esav, Yosef and his brothers.

Ephraim and Menashe had the potential and setting for a similar type of strife. Yaakov had placed his right hand on the head of the younger Ephraim and had also placed Ephraim's name first in the blessing. Although this could have caused Menashe, the first-born, to feel animosity toward Ephraim and could have soured their relationship, there remained a true brotherly camaraderie and love between them.

We too bless our children that they and their relationships should, in that respect, be as Ephraim and Menashe--filled with understanding, respect and love for others.

The Eved HaMelech offers another explanation. Ephraim and Menashe were the only tribes that were born in Mitzrayim. As opposed to the other tribes who were in the constant company of Yaakov and their grandfather Yitzchak, it was the officers and advisors of Egypt who frequented Ephraim and Menashe's home.

They nevertheless managed to resist those influences and temptations and stayed true to the teachings of their father Yosef. Thus, Yaakov found them worthy of being counted amongst the twelve tribes.

The blessing instituted to brace our generations of children through the arduous path of exile and foreign influences was that they should be like Ephraim and Menashe--strong, confident and secure

in who they are and the mission they have in life.

Although intellectually we know we shouldn't be, we're often a bit ashamed about performing our mitzvos [commandments] publicly.

On a flight from Europe, my wife and I were the only apparent Jews on board. This was made very clear when the stewardess approached us, saying, "You must be the Ciners! Your kosher meals are all ready for you!" The time left me no option but to don my horns, er... my tefillin [phylacteries] on the flight. Thinking that I was going to be a real focus and conversation piece for the other passengers, I decided that I wouldn't look around at all until I had finished the entire prayer service. I knew that people staring would cause me to feel self-conscious and would disturb any concentration on my prayers. When I finished I allowed myself a curious look around to see the reactions, but instead of videos rolling and cameras flashing, all I saw was the normal array of passengers sleeping, reading and listening to their headphones...

I then clearly realized that with all the strange people in the world doing their own thing, we who are simply following Hashem's commands don't really cause much of a stir and certainly have nothing to be ashamed of.

Before Rav Yaakov Weinberg zt"l and his wife moved to the Ner Israel Yeshiva campus, there were missionaries who, seeing the mezuzah on their doorpost, would knock on their door and offer to teach them Prophets. The first few times Rav Weinberg wasn't home and his wife would send them away.

One time they made the mistake of coming when Rav Weinberg was home and they brazenly offered to teach him the words of the Prophets. His response was quick and sharp: "While your great, great grandparents were painting themselves blue and running around the trees, my great, great grandparents were sitting by the feet of the Prophets and absorbing their words. And you want to tell me what the prophets meant!?!?!?"

The clear knowledge of who we are and where we come from will allow us to make it through the travails of our odyssey, firm, secure and committed like Ephraim and Menashe. This, coupled with the warmth and camaraderie exemplified by Ephraim and Menashe will allow these travails to speedily, in our days, come to an end.

Good Shabbos,  
Yisroel Ciner

*This week's parsha-insights are dedicated to the refuah shlaimah of a friend. Though I can't publicize his name, I ask that he be included in your prayers and blessings.*

The author teaches at Neveh Tzion in Telzstone (near Yerushalayim).

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