

THE BLESSING OF EXCEEDING ONES POTENTIAL

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 399 - Baruch Shem K'vod Malchuso L'Olam Voed. Good Shabbos!

The Blessing of Exceeding Ones Potential

In this week's parsha our patriarch Yaakov blesses Yosef's children with the words "By you shall Israel bless saying, 'May G-d make you like Ephraim and like Menashe'" [Bereishis 48:20]. This has become the blessing that fathers give to their children [for girls, using "... Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah"]. Jews of German descent -- and others as well -- bless their children with this blessing every Friday night. Even communities that do not have the custom of blessing children every Shabbos evening, use this formulation when blessing children on Erev Yom Kippur.

There have been many attempts to explain why it is that of all the great personalities from the Torah and of all the illustrious personages of Jewish history, it is specifically Ephraim and Menasheh who were chosen to be the eternal role models for Jewish male children. Why not Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov? Why not Moshe and Aharon?

Rav Yaakov Weinberg, zt"l (of blessed memory) once said that every parent hopes to see the blessing that their children reach their full potential in life. But Ephraim and Menasheh did something that was better than that. They exceeded their potential. They became more than that which their father could have reasonably expected from them. They achieved a status equal to that of the twelve children of Yaakov.

Part of Yaakov's blessing to these grandchildren was that the two of them would replace Yosef, and assume a status equal to that of Yaakov's other sons in the Tribal divisions of the Jewish people. This affected the encampments in the wilderness, their representation among the Spies sent to investigate the Land of Israel, their geographical allocation in the Land of Israel, and a variety of other issues. All these things happened because of this anomaly that Yaakov gave Ephraim and Menasheh the status of his own sons.

Rav Weinberg taught that the meaning of the blessing "May G-d make you like Ephraim and

Menasheh" is "may you exceed your potential beyond anyone's wildest expectations."

Unfortunately, most of us live our lives not only without exceeding expectations, but without even meeting them. I recently saw a frightening thought from the Zohar. The Zohar teaches that immediately before a person's death, his soul gives a scream that can be 'heard' (spiritually) from one end of the world to the next. What is the soul screaming about? At that moment, G-d shows the soul an image of what it was supposed to become during its sojourn on earth. The soul is traumatized by the gap between what it was supposed to become and what actually became of it. The Soul lets out this shriek which is heard through the entire universe: "Woe is me. I did not even come close!"

Ephraim and Manasseh did not have to let out that scream when they left this world. Not only did they become that which they were supposed to become, they even became members of the Tribes of G-d (Shivtei Kah). The biggest blessing a father can wish to his children is exceeding their full potential in life.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#); Yerushalayim.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas VaYechi are provided below:

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