

Vayechi

Lying upon his death bed, Jacob eagerly awaited the opportunity to bless his children. So overwhelmed by the spiritual height attained by his grandchildren, Menasheh and Ephraim, Jacob wished to bless them first. He saw in them the courage and fortitude so necessary to the survival of the Jew in *Galut*. Two children, raised in the midst of the spiritual and cultural decadence of Egypt, and who yet maintained their individual identity and proudly proclaimed their affinity with the G-d of Jacob, was indeed a wonder to behold.

Yet, as Jacob was to begin his blessing, he noticed the positions in which Joseph set them, causing a hesitation which resulted in "*Vayevarech es Yosef*." Instead of blessing his grandchildren first, he blessed Joseph.

What caused the hesitation? The Torah explains that Ephraim was placed at Jacob's left, and Menasheh to his right. To Jacob, they were placed incorrectly, and when "the right and left" are confused, or easily interchangeable, the results are often destructive.

Menasheh and Ephraim were symbols of Joseph's priorities. Though they both turned out well, their very names prompted speculation as to their father Joseph's motives.

The Torah tells us, "Joseph called his first-born Menasheh because G-d had made me forget all my hardships and my father's entire household."¹ Thus this child became the symbol of Joseph's de-Judaizing. In order to become rich and powerful, Joseph felt the need to shelve his past and lay it to rest on the mantle of history, to be dusted off at some future time.

With the birth of his second son, Ephraim, a change of heart was apparent. ". . . And the name of the second he called Ephraim:"² Here Joseph reestablished his link with G-d, recognizing he was indeed in *Galut*.

When blessing his grandchildren, Jacob wanted Ephraim at his right, and Menasheh at his left, establishing forever priorities indispensable for Jewish survival. Only by the admission that we

are indeed in *Galut*, and by attaching ourselves to G-d and G-dliness, can we hope for a Jewish future.

Living in the Southern U.S.A. and witnessing first-hand the sprouting of Jewish seeds, the continuing growth of personal commitment and observances of mitzvot, I can appreciate Jacob's message via Ephraim. Build Yeshivos and Day Schools; study Torah regularly; and use the alien environment as a challenge to prosper spiritually, paving the way for generations of Ephraims who will prepare for the "*yemay Ha-Moshiach*"—the reality of complete redemption—thus ending the long, hard exile.

FOOTNOTES

1. Bereishith 41:51
2. Ibid. 41:52