

”ויברכם ביום ההוא לאמר בך יברך ישראל לאמר ישימך אלוקים כאפרים וכמנשה” בראשית מח:כ

“And he blessed them on that day saying, through you shall Yisrael be blessed saying, ‘May Hashem make you like Ephraim and Menashe’.” Bereishis 48:20

Rashi says that when a person comes to bless his children he should bless them with this very bracha that Ephraim and Menashe received from Yaakov Avinu right before his passing. He should bless his children that Hashem should help them to grow up to be like Ephraim and Menashe.

We need to understand, what exactly was the bracha that Yaakov Avinu was relaying to Ephraim and Menashe? What was Yaakov’s intention with this bracha, and why is this the ultimate bracha with which to bless our own children.

The Targum Yonason on the spot says that the appropriate time to impart this blessing to a Jewish baby boy is on the day of his Bris. One of the reasons for this is because that is the time when we say “זה הקטן גדול יהי”. I heard from my Rebbe this week, (happens to have been during a drosha at a bris), that the גדול of לשון אפרים ומנשה כראובן ושמעון יהיו לי represents a המשך, a continuation. When Yaakov said earlier he meant that Ephraim and Menashe should be considered as belonging to the previous generation. We know that there is a certain ירידת הדורות; a generation gap as it were, that occurs with each passing generation. Yaakov Avinu gave them a bracha that they should not get pulled down by the gravitational effect of ירידת הדורות and they should instead remain connected to the higher level of the generation that preceded them. This is the bracha that we would want to give a baby on the day of his bris, that he should stay connected to the preceding generation and because of that possess the strength to remain steadfast in his belief in Hashem while living by and by in his current generation.

But nothing in this world is for free. Ephraim and Menashe only merited to receive this special blessing because Yaakov Avinu saw what was important to them, how they fought to remain true to their beliefs while growing up in the decadence of Egypt. Like we find many times in our lives, it is often the things we value or hold to be of import that we are in turn blessed with. This may be because we are the chosen nation of Hashem and He takes our thoughts seriously. It is a scary concept, and a responsibility to make sure that we have our priorities straight, knowing that we may very well end up receiving what we hold to be dear deep down inside. (Think of King Midas להבדיל, if you will).

The Brisker Rav quotes his grandfather who explains that all of the שבטים were raised and grew up on the lap of Yaakov Avinu in ארץ כנען and therefore merited to become the Holy Tribes, whereas Menashe and Ephraim did not merit this upbringing. Not only that, they grew up in Egypt, the World Capital of impurity through idol worship and illicit relationships. Despite all this, they merited to reach the level of the שבטים. This was the intention of Yaakov Avinu and the blessing that we should deliver to every Yid in כלל ישראל; that they should not be influenced by their surroundings, just as Ephraim and Menashe managed to navigate the temptations of מצרים and emerge untainted and unscathed.

Moshe Rothenberg

