

**MORASHAH**  
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Rabbi Yaakov Siegel

*Parashat HaShavuah Series*

**Parashat Vayechi**

In this week's parashah, we have the very memorable, yet very puzzling story of Jacob blessing Joseph's sons (Genesis 48:8-20). Joseph brings his sons to Jacob for a final blessing before Jacob's death. Joseph places his first born, Menashe, to Jacob's right, and his younger son, Ephraim, to his left, thereby indicating that the greater blessing belongs to Menashe. Jacob crosses his hands, placing his right hand on Ephraim's head. When Joseph protests, Jacob informs him that both will be great, but Ephraim will be greater.

Why didn't he bless them individually, each with an appropriate blessing?

Many of the later commentaries understand this incident as a basic difference in Jacob's and Joseph's psyches. Each was "showing the way" for national and individual survival. Joseph names his first son Menashe "for God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house" and his second Ephraim "for God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction" (Genesis 41:51-52).

Joseph had suffered persecution, betrayal, and wrongful imprisonment. He had every right to be bitter. When contemplating his children's future, as well as all future generations, he felt that one must first learn to deal with and forget past troubles. Only then could one be fruitful. Jacob had suffered, too. Wherever he went, however, he prospered. He was forced to spend twenty years in Padan Aram, and his final seventeen years in Egypt, all far from his beloved homeland. The parashah begins with "*Vayechi Yaakov...*" Jacob lived. The Rabbis say that not only did he survive in Egypt, but he lived; they were his best years. Jacob therefore placed "Ephraim" - fruitful - before "Menashe - forgetting. He believed that one who has been through difficult times should first put his life together, and only later come to terms with the past.

On the level of Jewish Peoplehood, some might place the emphasis on the many woes that have befallen our People. Only once we heal can we think of rebuilding; Menashe before Ephraim. Others place the emphasis on building a bright and proud future, while putting aside appropriate space and time for remembering whence we came - Ephraim before Menashe.

On the individual level, we all go through periods and experiences of disappointment, frustration, bereavement, and suffering. Jacob is telling us that while we may justly

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feel self pity, let's first get up and get going. Be fruitful! Then, and only then, will there be time and strength to forget and put things in perspective. May God make us as Ephraim and Menashe!

*Shabbat Shalom!*

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