

## In the Name of Ephraim and Menashe Rabbi Daniel Fridman

Much of contemporary discourse regarding challenges confronting Jewish education concerns itself, and justly so, with economic sustainability. Mindful, as we try to be, of Chazal's rejoinder, **אם תורה אין תורה**, we take ongoing discussions regarding the utterly prohibitive cost of day school education with the highest level of seriousness.

Yet, it seems that there is an equal need for discourse concerning both the grand strategy and assorted tactics involved in Jewish education. While an intricate discussion of the latter is beyond the scope of this brief reflection, I wanted to take a few moments to reflect on a question concerning the broadest agenda of Jewish education in our community; a question, I think it fair to say, of fundamental strategy. I would like to, through the lens of the conclusion of Sefer Bereishit, attempt to determine whether there is a Torah ideal of Jewish education which can be applied to our community.

There is a certain mystery at the conclusion of Sefer Bereishit, which makes its way into many Jewish homes on a weekly basis. Why is it that Yaakov Avinu enjoins us to bless the Jewish people in successive generations in the names of Ephraim and Menashe? Truth be told, the verses of the Torah themselves convey very little direct information about them. And yet, our minimal understanding of their personas notwithstanding, much seems to be at stake. We link nothing less than our children's destiny to this pair of siblings.

While the written Torah is scant concerning this point, there is much within the world of Midrash which, when woven together, constitutes a compelling argument for Ephraim and Menashe's candidacy as archetypes for successive generations of Jews.

In their mind's eye, Chazal envision Menashe working as a translator in Yosef's court, conveying messages back and forth between Hebrew and Egyptian when the brothers first arrive. Ephraim, conversely, finds his calling studying with Yaakov in Goshen. When Yaakov falls ill, Ephraim is the one who returns from Goshen to the capital to inform Yosef.

It seems to me that there are two critical points which emerge from the Midrashic depiction. First, Menashe and Ephraim have different areas of strength. Menashe finds his calling in the realm of politics, in the Egyptian court, whilst Ephraim is most comfortable in the Beit Midrash. This, in its own right, serves as a driving force of an important educational value, ensconced in Sefer Mishlei, **חנוך לנער על פי דרכו**. Once one embraces the long term prospect of divergent results for our different children, one becomes open to education each child to maximize their potential, as opposed to fitting them to a cast mold.

We deeply hope that some of our children will become Ephraim's, and enter the profession of learning and teaching, of writing *chiddushei Torah* and transmitting the *mesorah* to the next generation. Uniquely, perhaps, as compared to our brethren of a different ideological stripe, we also embrace the prospect of an even larger percentage of our children becoming Menashe's; at once, deeply rooted in Mesorah, but vocationally, finding their calling outside of the Beit Midrash. To my mind, this is the essential question of observant Jewish education; does one accept, a priori, the validity and legitimacy of entry into careers in medicine, the sciences, law, finance, and elsewhere.

Consequently, does one invest a considerable amount of time and effort in preparing one's children and students to be able to perform those vocations at the highest level? No one is questioning, or should question, the *sine qua non* of Jewish life, a rigorous education toward *yirat shamayim*, *Limmud Torah*, and *ma'asim tovim*. Yet, for reasons both pragmatic and spiritual, we ought to maintain the duality of Ephraim and Menashe for our children, presenting both of them as legitimate ideals for different types of children.

The second, more subtle, and in my view, more important lesson to extract from the rabbinic portrayal of Ephraim and Menashe has to do with a certain balance which they both demonstrated. Menashe isn't only interested in worldly affairs per se, but retains the knowledge and ability to converse fluently in the Hebrew language, in the tradition of ancestors whom he had not even met. Menashe is not consumed by the world of politics, but he manages to synthesize it with the world of the Mesorah. It is highly symbolic that this child, born to royalty in the sands of Egypt, is fluent in the language of Avraham and Yitzchak. Likewise, Ephraim, committed as he is to learning, is not unhealthily blinded by it. When his grandfather falls ill, he knows that it is time to close the gemara, so to speak, and travel to his father, to reunite the family at a critical juncture.

To my mind, it is precisely these two reasons which are most important in blessing our children in the names of Ephraim and Menashe. First, we want to educate our children to identify their areas of true strength, as Menashe and Ephraim apparently both did, and to seek to utilize these strengths to make a contribution to the Jewish people and the world. Yet, we don't wish for them to be narrowly excellent whilst remaining wholly unbalanced. Rather, it is our hope that our children, like Ephraim and Menashe, will demonstrate the type of balance which allows them to transcend their area of excellence. As parents and educators, it is this vision of excellence, balanced and whole, which Ephraim and Menashe represented, that serves simultaneously as our inspiration as well as our aspiration.