

Hodu L'Hashem Ki Tov, Ki L'Olam Chasdo. Thank you all for coming to celebrate the bris of our bechor, Yaakov Yehoshua Menashe Balk. You really find out who your friends are when you make a bris on a fast day morning, so it's a pleasure to share our simcha with you all. Before delving into the meaning behind our son's name, there are so many words of thanks that need to be offered. First and foremost, to Hashem for setting everything in motion and supporting us at every juncture. We must express our thanks to our doctor Rabbi Dr. Eli Rybak, who, in addition to being a talmid chacham, is a tremendously gifted clinician. He, Briana and our other nurses, and the entire staff of RMA of NJ, through the work they do guided by the Almighty, are the reason that we are standing here celebrating today. Similarly, there are not enough words to express our thanks to our parents who have guided us to reach this point as well. We are so lucky to have you as role models, and hope to be blessed with your guidance for many happy, healthy years to come.

Our son's first name is Yaakov, and is in memory of my great-grandfather, Jack (Yaakov) Balk. He emigrated to the United States, but as traditional channels had been all but blocked, he entered the country via San Francisco. He settled in St. Louis, the home of many Balk relatives, and worked as a butcher. Eventually, he rose among the ranks to become the manager of a large grocery store in downtown St. Louis. He was known to be very thorough in his work, only willing to stock the shelves with the finest quality meat. It earned him the moniker "Send 'em back, Jack", a nickname that he used in commercials for the establishment. I was not privy to know about these commercials until after he passed, but fortunately for me, I got to know my Grandpa Jack. There's a picture that hung on my bar mitzvah collage in the hallway of my (now old) house of Grandpa Jack holding me as a newborn, with a smile on his face as wide as the Mississippi River. I recall the trips we'd take to his apartment on our vacations in St. Louis. On one such journey, my mother had the foresight to bring along my siddur and mini-tallis from my first grade classroom. I stood in Grandpa Jack's living room and proceeded through my entire davening regimen, which as a 7 year old was not as extensive as our tefillah this morning. Nevertheless, the smile on his face that day was identical to the one from the picture taken years before.

Our son's second name, Yehoshua, is in memory of my mother's two grandfathers, Samuel Radman and Samuel Hornstein, who were both Yehoshua. I was not privileged to meet either of them, and do not know much about them. I can tell you that Samuel Radman and his family traveled on foot, across much of Russia before they were able to flee Europe and arrive on American shores. He was a simple man who had an enormous love for his family. He owned a grocery store and an ice cream parlor, and could often be seen sporting a coat and hat, even throughout the sweltering humidity that is a St. Louis summer.

In terms of the other Yehoshua, my great-grandfather Samuel Hornstein, he moved to the United States from Egypt and was married to Grandma Dena, my mother's grandmother. My sister is named after Gram, who lived with them, and shaped the lives of my mother and aunt. He had rich olive skin, which could be seen clear as day in the picture of him that was kept on the hi-fi in the foyer of our Lyman Blvd. home.

Grandpa Jack and Grandpa Sam Radman share a yahrtzeit, the 7th of Adar, only a day after the birth of our son. Grandpa Sam Hornstein's yahrtzeit falls just a few days after the date of what will be, with God's help, the Pidyon HaBen for his newest great-great-grandson.

His final name, Menashe, is one that has no particular familial leanings, but one that evokes an immense sense of meaning for us. In the Torah, when Yosef and his wife Osnat give birth to their first child, they name him Menashe, and the pasuk continues "ki nashani Elokim es kol amali, that God caused me to forget all the toil I endured." Here Yosef is referring to the less than stellar childhood at the hands of his brothers, later being sold into slavery, and being completely disenfranchised and broken as he was thrown in jail. While these experiences were numbing, Yosef is ultimately remembered as Yosef HaTzaddik, a righteous hero, who saved Egypt from the brink of disaster. Yet, the pasuk writes that "God caused me to forget." How is that fathomable? How is it possible that Yosef could forget all of these things, the entire makeup of his formative years of his life? These were not mere random occurrences that happened once or twice. Are we to believe that every trial and tribulation of Yosef's existence all at once slipped his mind?

I think the answer lies in the fact that while these events that peppered his upbringing and time in Egypt were unbelievable daunting, he was not defined by them. Yosef could have

surveyed his lot and decided that he was a lost cause, doomed for all eternity. Even when something fortuitous happened, it was often bookended by a more nefarious affair. Yet, with the help of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, his tides turned drastically and his story is remembered differently for all time.

While not on such an extreme level, this single pasuk speaks volumes to me and Estee. The path to having a child was not an easy one for us. It was roundabout, and we were met with twists, turns, forks in the road, and dead ends. Yet, despite the challenges and hurdles we faced, we are here today with our son. Does this momentous event negate the oceans of tears shed? The sometimes multi-weekly 5:30 AM doctor visits? The injections? Absolutely not. Those things don't just go away. Sadly for us, it also doesn't erase the fact that my mother, the person who probably wanted this child more than anyone, will never physically be here to play with him or watch him grow. But living in this moment, the feeling of shehechyanu v'kimanu v'higiyanu lazman hazeh, makes those events pale in comparison to the euphoria we feel today, and that we've felt since 6:19 PM on February 20th of this year. We are again so thankful to our doctors, but also to Bonei Olam which helps couples financially deal with the fertility treatments, and Yesh Tikvah and ATIME, for giving us the chizuk we needed to not remain inert. We hope that the individuals we've encountered from these unbelievable organizations are privy to the same palpable simcha that we feel at this very moment bimheira beyameinu.

I wanted to close with a note about my wife, Estee. Every single husband who gives a bris speech talks about how incredible their wife was during the pregnancy and labor, and how they love them. I don't want to give the wrong impression, as this is no doubt true for my wife as well. However, those words do not do justice to how incredible Estee is. She is literally the reason that our son is here today, and not just because she carried him inside of her. Since we began the journey of trying to have children, it was Estee who became a sponge and soaked up every single piece of information about the medicine she was taking and the course of treatment we were up to. It was Estee who would be on the phone with the insurance companies. It was she who would be calling the doctors, nurses, and pharmacies staying on top of what we were up to. There were times when her acumen saved our rounds of treatment from utter sabotage. She has been the biggest advocate for this child for over three years, before he was born. I have seen the

care and concern she exudes, and I know there are no better hands for our children to be in than hers. Estee, I do not know what I did to be zoche to having you as my wife, and I do not want to think about where I would be without you.

Thank you all again for making our simcha so special. While we are not 100% sure of what we will be calling our new son, we are certain that he is perfect and he is our miracle.

Have an easy fast, a freilichen Purim.