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From Efraim and Menashe to Our Own Homes: Role Modeling Emunah

Last year, after a week of being sick with the flu, my four-year-old daughter turned to me and asked, “Mommy, why did Hashem want me to be sick?” At first, I was taken aback by the question, unsure of how to respond. But a moment later, I felt an overwhelming sense of pride. Here was a child, only four years old, who without hesitation, instinctively understood that everything she experiences comes from Hashem. It was a deep recognition that many adults still struggle to internalize. Somehow, at such a young age, she had absorbed a profound awareness of Hashem’s presence in her life.

In Parshat Vayechi, Yaakov blesses Efraim and Menashe, declaring that from that moment on, all future generations will bless their children to be like them:

וַיְבָרֶכֶם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, לְאִמּוֹ: בְּךָ יִבְרַךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְאִמּוֹ: יִשְׁמְךָ אֱלֹקִים, כְּאַפְרַיִם וּכְמִנְשֶׁה

The obvious question is: What was so special about Efraim and Menashe that, even thousands of years later, we still bless our children every Friday night to be davka like them?

Many explanations have been offered to answer this question, but let’s focus on one. Although the Torah doesn’t provide many details about Efraim and Menashe, one thing

is abundantly clear from the pshat: they didn’t fight. The book of Bereishit is filled with stories of sibling rivalry, jealousy, and conflict — from Kayin and Hevel, to Yaakov and Esav, to Yosef and his brothers. But when Efraim is placed before his older brother Menashe, Menashe says nothing. He doesn’t protest, doesn’t argue, and doesn’t feel slighted.

Why? What made Menashe so different?

I believe the answer lies in the home where Menashe was raised. His father, Yosef, was the paradigm model of recognizing Hashem’s hand in every situation. When Yosef was thrown into jail and encountered the butler and baker, he immediately told them that it was Hashem who holds the answers to all dreams. When Paroh asked him to interpret his dream, Yosef answered: “בְּלִעְדֵי אֱלֹקִים יֵעָנֶה” — “אֶת־שְׁלוֹם פְּרֻעָה” — “It is not me, but Hashem who will provide the answer.” Throughout his highs and lows, Yosef never lost sight of the fact that his success was due to Hashem’s will.

But perhaps the most significant moment comes when Yosef is reunited with his brothers. Fearing his wrath for the wrongs they had done to him, Yosef responds with remarkable grace: “כִּי לְמַחְיָה שְׁלַחְנִי אֱלֹקִים”

לפניכם.....ועתה לא אתם שלחתם אתי הנה כי
 "האלקים" — "Hashem sent me ahead of you to
 preserve life....it is not you that sent me here
 but rather Hashem". Yosef's message is clear:
 the events that transpired — the suffering,
 the separation, even the pain — were all part
 of Hashem's plan.

Yosef's unwavering Emunah, his ability to
 see Hashem's hand in every event, undoubt-
 edly influenced his children. **Rabbi Yaakov
 Kaminetzky** explains that the role of parents
 in Chinuch extends beyond mere instruction;
 it is also about being משפיע, the ability to
 influence through action. He says that משפיע
 is from the root שיפוע – slant. The way that
 parents act, talk and behave automatically
 flows down to their children.


Efraim and Menashe grew up hearing their
 father constantly recognize Hashem in every
 aspect of life. From the very start, even their
 names — Efraim (which means "Hashem has
 made me fruitful") and Menashe (which
 means "Hashem has made me forget my
 troubles") — were expressions of Hashem's
 influence on Yosef's life. So, when Menashe
 found himself in a difficult situation — watch-
 ing his younger brother receive the blessing
 which was rightfully his — he knew, without
 hesitation, that it was part of Hashem's plan.
 He may not have understood why, but he
 knew that Hashem was running the show.
 There was no need to complain, this is how
 things were meant to be.

This principle of role-modeling is essential
 in parenting. Much of parenting involves mod-
 eling behaviors and attitudes for children to
 absorb. Most of the messages that we convey
 to our children are not by what we say but by
 what we do. Without even trying, we are send-
 ing hundreds of messages to our children every

day by the way we speak and act. Children
 observe how we respond to life's challenges,
 how we express gratitude, how we recognize
 Hashem's role in our lives. These actions shape
 their understanding of the world.

This is true in all areas of parenting, but
 especially in giving over concepts of Emu-
 nah. The **Midrash** teach us (Sifri) "כשהתינוק
 מתחיל לדבר אביו מדבר עמו לשון הקודש ומלמדו
 תורה" - that from the moment a child begins to
 speak, we should begin teaching them Torah.
 But what does that mean in practical terms?
 It's not about teaching a toddler the intricacies
 of Halacha or Gemara. Rather, it's about speak-
 ing to them in the language of Emunah, in a
 language of Hashem-awareness. From a young
 age, they should hear things like: "Hashem
 helped us find a parking spot," or "Hashem
 made your boo-boo better." The **Shla** explains
 the words in **Gemara Shabbat** (122b) נקוּתָא
 כל מה שקונה בנפשו — כלילא דוורדא
 - בילדותו נשאר כן בטבע קיים כל ימיו
 - Whatever a person acquires in childhood remains with
 them for the rest of their lives." The way we
 speak about Hashem, and the way we bring
 Hashem into our daily lives, becomes embed-
 ded in our children's hearts and minds.

This is why we bless our children to be like
 Menashe and Efraim. What better blessing
 could there be than to have children who,
 from the earliest stages of their lives, imbibe
 together with their formula and baby food,
 deep beliefs of Emuna and a recognition of
 Hashem's presence in the world? ■



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