

A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANOCH YERES
RAV, BEIT KNESSET BEIT YISRAEL, YEMIN MOSHE

"Of the children of Yosef, namely of the children of Ephraim (1:32) ...Of the children of Menashe" (1:34) - לבני יוסף לבני אפרים (א:לב)...לבני מנשה (א:לד).

When counting the tribes in this week's Parsha, Ephraim is enumerated before Menashe and yet in the second reckoning of the tribes in Parshat Pinchas (26:28), Menashe is numbered first. Why? Is there significance to the order mentioned?

The Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman 1194-1270) answers that as per Yaakov's blessing, Ephraim was to be deemed the first born, giving him initial priority over Menashe. However, at the second counting of the tribes, Menashe is counted first since at this time, Menashe had more descendants than Ephraim, giving him preference over the two.

However, in the narrative of the spies, the tribe of Ephraim is once again mentioned first (13:8;11), seemingly, due to the praised role of Yehoshua Bin Nun, the spy from the tribe of Ephraim who actively interfered with any evil tidings about the Land of Israel, giving his tribe precedence in the counting.

The Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin 1816-1893) explains that the ordering of Ephraim before Menashe is based on the spiritual and physical reality of the Israelites at that time. In the first census, the tribe of Ephraim represents the spiritual greatness which the Israelites owed to a miraculous existence in the desert, completely relying on G-d's open daily participation. The change to Menashe leading, in the second census, demonstrates the transition from relying on miracles to working within the laws of nature upon entering the Land of Israel.

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