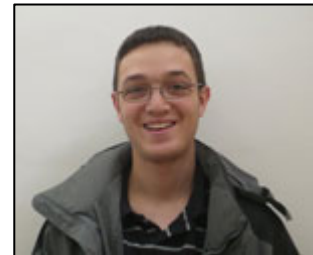




## THE ALUMNI PERSPECTIVE

by Eitan Cooper

The story of Yosef's rise to power in Egypt dominates last week's *parsha*. We read about Paroh's dream, Yosef's interpretation, his promotion to second in command, and his emotional encounter with his brothers. In the midst of this exciting narrative, a series of four *pesukim* (41: 50-53) seem particularly out of place. It is in these *pesukim* that we learn of the birth of Menashe and Efraim. We are told that Yosef named Menashe because "*nasheni elokim*," or "G-d has made me forget my affliction and my father's house" and Efraim because "G-d has made me fruitful in this land."



This description of Yosef's two sons is awkwardly sandwiched in the middle of the story of Egypt and the famine. Right before we learned of Menashe and Efraim, we heard about Yosef's new position as second in command. We learned that his Hebrew name was changed to "*Tzophnat Paneach*" and that Paroh gave him an Egyptian wife named "Poti Pera." Indeed, Yosef seems to be a full-fledged Egyptian; he has outgrown the ways of his old family (in fact, later in the *parsha* we learn that he does not even speak the same language as did his brothers and father- he requires an Egyptian translator). Right after the description of Efraim and Menashe, we learn of the continuation of the story: the famine in Egypt and Yosef's continued rise to power. All this begs the question: What are these *pesukim* about Efraim and Menashe doing here? Why must the story pause to tell us this seemingly random fact about Yosef's lineage?

In addition to this seemingly out of place mentioning of Menashe and Efraim, a few questions may be raised: If Yosef has become an Egyptian, and he has "forgotten" the house of his father, why has he chosen to use the traditional Hebrew language to name his sons? Why not the Egyptian language? Furthermore, has Yosef really forgotten his father's house? Don't we witness his emotional encounter with his brothers later in the story?

Perhaps the answer is that Yosef really hasn't forgotten anything. In the depths of Egypt, the society that is so contrary to everything that is Jewish, the place that is a spiritual desert, Yosef is attempting to hold on to what he knows is his true calling. It is for this reason that Yosef chooses to use the traditional Hebrew to name his sons, rather than the Egyptian language.

Yosef understands that a man's name says a lot about his character, and that an Egyptian name would have truly put an end to what Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov had started.

The meaning of Menashe's name might point to this understanding of the text. The simple reading of his name is "G-d has made me forget my affliction and the house of my father." One might initially read this *pasuk* to mean that Yosef has forgotten the suffering and sadness that he associates with his time in Canaan. The "affliction" and "house of my father" are related; the latter was the cause of the former. However, one may read these words differently. It's not that G-d has made Yosef forget the affliction of his home, but rather G-d has made him forget the spiritual affliction of Egypt. He has grown to feel comfortable in a strange land. Yosef's success in Egypt has caused him to forget the values he holds dear. Therefore, Yosef's naming of Menashe serves to remind him of what he is afraid to forget. Menashe's name, in a way, serves as a warning to Yosef. He is saying, to himself, that G-d has made him temporarily forget what his father's house was all about- but he won't let himself forget it permanently.

The placement of the *pesukim* confirms this understanding of the naming of Menashe and Efraim. Right in the middle of the description of all of the good of Egypt (or what may seem good about Egypt), the Torah pauses to tell us that Yosef has had two sons. And even though their mother is Egyptian, and Egyptian culture surrounds them, they are still Jewish babies, who have names that remind Yosef of this fact.

May we all strive to remember who we truly are, no matter where we are.

Shabbat Shalom,  
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