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With
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ב"ה

Parshas Vayechi

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A Fish Out Of Water

One of the most precious moments of the week occurs every Friday night at the Shabbos table, when fathers get up and give a beracha to their sons. They lean forward, place their hands on their son's head and say, "*Yesimcha Elokim K'Ephrayim U'Menashe.*" They lovingly tell their sons that Hashem should make them like Ephraim and Menashe. They then give their child a kiss. So sweet. So beautiful.

Ever wonder for a second why we tell our sons to be specifically like Ephraim and Menashe? Why not Levi and Yehuda? Or Yissachar and Zevulun? Or Reuven and Shimon? Why, out of all the illustrious Shevatim, do we choose to evoke Ephraim and Menashe's names to bless our children?

The answer generally given is that there is a fundamental difference between Ephraim and Menashe and the rest of the Shevatim. Ephraim and Menashe were not **born** Shevatim, they **became** Shevatim. The other sons grew up in a home enveloped in holiness. Gigantic spiritual figures like Yaakov and Yitzchak towered over them. They grew up in the shadow of their great-grandfather Avraham and the famous Yeshiva of Shem V'Ever. Ephraim and Menashe grew up in Egypt. They grew up in exile. They grew up alone. They grew up as the lonely Jews in a sea of Egyptian immorality. They grew up in an environment where one had to choose to be good, for the standard was bad. And grow up they did. They fought and they climbed and they persevered. They not only made it through alive, they climbed to be on the level of a Shevet.

Soar

When we bless our children, we know that they may not have a father like Yaakov or a grandfather like Avraham, but we tell them that we know deep inside, they have the ability to be like Ephraim and Menashe. They have the fighting spirit deep within, so that no matter what the world offers, they can choose good. They can soar the same way Ephraim and Menashe soared.

In the history of Jewish lullabies there is one that reigns supreme. There is one that has been sung since way back and we can accurately label it the mother of all Jewish lullabies. It is the song of *Hamalach Hagoel Osi*. It is those soft words Yaakov said to Yosef's sons, Ephraim and Menashe, upon blessing them. The end of the pasuk is peculiar. It concludes, "*Veyidgu Larov Bikerev Ha'aretz.*" Translated, this means, "You should multiply like fish within the land." Why fish? Didn't Hashem previously tell Avraham we were going to be like stars and sand? Why now is the blessing to be like fish? And what does it mean that we should be like fish *within* the land? Last time I checked, fish don't live on land!

Reb Shamshon Rafael Hirsch gives an enlightening explanation. He says that we are blessing our children that the same way one can stand near the ocean and see only water, utterly unaware of the unbelievably dazzling sea world that exists beneath the surface similarly, we tell our children, outsiders will look at you and

be completely, utterly unaware of the beauty and purity hidden beneath the surface. We are telling our children that the life of Torah is the greatest life. It is the purest life. It is the holiest life. It is the most harmonious life. We may be in ghettos and in cattle cars and in DP camps, but if you were to look into a crack in the ghetto walls, what would you see? You'd see purity and holiness. You'd see integrity and love. You'd see honesty and kindness. You'd see virtually zero domestic abuse or violence or crime. You'd see the radiant light of a Shabbos candle. You'd see the unparalleled holiness of Yom Kippur. You'd see the unbridled happiness of Purim. You'd see the supreme joy of Succos. You'd see children, sweet children beyond compare. You'd see that all through a crack in the ghetto wall. All unbeknownst to the outside world. We are like fish in the sea. We go about our business and outsiders are naively unaware of the beauty that lies deep within. Fish, within the land.

The Iron Lady

Margaret Thatcher, commonly known as the Iron Lady, was the longest serving Prime Minister in Britain's history. She had a weekly meeting with the Queen of England in which they would discuss various political happenings from around the country and the world. One week, Margaret walked into the Queen's inner chamber and froze. She looked at the Queen, she looked at herself; she looked at the Queen, and she looked back at herself. She realized that she had just committed one of the most egregious sins one could commit in the British Empire: She was wearing the same dress as the Queen. Mortified, she sat down and sweated her way through the meeting.

Afterwards she quickly ran home, took out a pen and paper and wrote a letter to the Queen, apologizing profusely for her deep disrespect of the kingship. A few days later she got a knock on her door. A messenger of the Queen was bearing a letter. She opened it up and read: "Dear Miss Thatcher, no need to apologize, no need to feel sorry, for the Queen does not notice what the simpletons are wearing!"

We bless our children that they should not be deterred by those who live on land and can't see our world within the ocean's blue. We bless our children that no matter where they are in life, they can become an Ephraim and Menashe. We stand over our child's crib and hope and cry and dream and pray that they, too, come to the recognition that a life of Torah is the best life and that anyone who tells them otherwise is merely "living on land".