

Friday Night, Parshas Vayechi, 5765

On Friday night, at the first meal, Mohorosh Shlita spoke inspiring words based on the teachings of Rebbe Nachman in Lekutei Mohoron, Part I, Lesson 97, on the topic of Menashe and Ephraim.

Mohorosh began: Rebbe Nachman says there are two types of impediments in the service of prayer. One is prior to praying, that is, one stands ready to pray with a feeling of greatness because he knows he has very good ancestry or because he has toiled very much in the service of the Creator. Because of this, it is impossible for there to be complete devotion to his prayer. Therefore, he needs to forget all of this, and it should seem to him as if he had just been created today and as if he were the only one in the world. This is the concept of Menashe, from the word “neshiyon” – to forget – as it is written (Bereishis 41:51): “For G-d has made me forget (*neshani*) all my toil and all my father’s household.” “All my father’s household”, this is yichus or excellent ancestry. And “all of my toil,” this is previous toil in the service of the Creator.

The second impediment is during prayer - that because of prior intentional sins, or having willfully entertained evil thoughts - foreign thoughts enter his mind during prayer. And because of these foreign thoughts, it is also impossible for him to be totally devote in his prayer. Therefore, he needs to break the foreign thoughts by means of holy thoughts of prayer and through this, the willful sins, that is, the foreign thoughts, become for him like merits. And this is the concept of Ephraim as it is written (Bereishis 41:52): “For G-d has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering (*anyi*),” which means the things that had been impoverished (*aniyus*) before – desolate and dried up – by means of holy thoughts become like merits (i.e. fruitful). See all this in the words of Rebbe Nachman in Lesson 97).

Mohorosh explained that what comes out of Rebbe Nachman’s words in this lesson is that Menashe and Ephraim hint to two different ways of serving Hashem. Menashe is the concept of forgetting and driving away – to forget and cause to be forgotten the evil and the negative character traits, such as arrogance and pride – and to humble oneself before

Hashem. Ephraim is the concept of being fruitful and multiplying the holy and pure thoughts, mitzvos and good deeds, through which the bad traits and the sins will automatically become nullified. When one does true Teshuva, the sins are transformed into merits. These two types of divine service are alluded to in the verse (Tehillim 34:15): “Turn from evil and do good.” “Turn from evil,” is the concept of Menashe, to turn from evil, to do battle with it and to cause it to be forgotten. “Do good,” is the concept of Ephraim, to do good, to be fruitful in good deeds, and to turn the bad into good. We find in the words of the Tzaddikim, a difference of opinion regarding which of these two modes of service takes precedence. The masters of Mussar held that “Turn from evil” comes first, for one has to do much work in breaking bad character traits, and to cause the evil to be forgotten from oneself, before he comes to the gates of holiness. For it is written (Tehillim 50:16): “But to the wicked, G-d said, ‘what does it avail you to recount My statutes, while you bear my covenant (only) upon your mouth, “ that is, if you do not nullify the evil first, this will blemish and invalidate the good. Therefore, one needs to first stop the evil and to turn from it. Afterwards, one can come to “do good,” to be fruitful and multiply in mitzvos and good deeds. On the other hand, the masters of Chassidus and students of the holy Baal Shem Tov, held that if a person occupies himself first with “turn from evil,” he will not complete it because the war is very heavy and long. Therefore, the primary thing is to begin with “do good”, to be fruitful and multiply in mitzvos, good deeds, and holy and pure thoughts. And then, though the power of these mitzvos and thoughts, the evil and impurity will of itself fall away and be nullified. From the greatness of the light, the evil husks will flee, as Rebbe Nachman once said to someone (Chayei Mohoron #447): “You do much good. Your bad will automatically fall and be nullified.” Therefore, certainly, both of these paths of serving G-d are proper and holy. The difference of opinion between the Tzaddikim was only over which one of them should have priority in order for a person to be successful in his service.

According to this, we can understand very well the dispute between Yaakov and Yosef in this week’s Parsha, when Yaakov blessed Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov Avinu blessed Ephraim before Menashe and placed his right hand upon him to show his importance. But Yosef HaTzaddik wanted his father’s right hand to rest upon

Menashe's head, to give priority to Menashe with regard to the blessings. Seemingly, it is hard to comprehend what the dispute between them was and what we are supposed to learn out from it. But according to all of the above we can understand it well. Yosef HaTzaddik who was tested in the power of the immorality of Egypt, and there he fathered Menashe and Ephraim, held that certainly the mode of service of "Menashe" has the status of the firstborn, as he actually called his firstborn Menashe (Bereishis 41:51:) For he first needed to forget all the evil and bad character traits – the concept of "turn from evil" and to assure that the evil and impurity of Egypt would not enter into him. Only afterwards could he be fruitful and multiply in mitzvos and good deeds in the proper way, which is the concept of "Ephraim", the concept of "do good". But Yaakov Avinu who saw the tremendous length of the exile, and the greatness of the tests that pass over people when they are doing battle with evil and impurity, and that not everyone merits to properly subdue the impurity – if so, when will a person begin to do good. Therefore, he placed Ephraim before Menashe and placed his right hand upon Ephraim, to teach the subsequent generations that they must begin with "do good", to be fruitful and multiply in mitzvos and good deeds. And then all the evil and impurity will fall away by itself and he will merit the proper holiness and purity. And may Hashem help us merit to occupy ourselves in His service in truth and simplicity all our days till we merit to be "Turn from evil and do good" in truth, rising and cleaving to Him with a true and eternal attachment now and forever. Amen and amen.