



Sicha Summary

Chelek 15 | Vayechi | Sichah 2

The Context:

Yosef brought his sons to receive the blessings of his father, Yaakov, before his passing. Yosef positioned Menashe, his firstborn, on Yaakov's right side and Efraim, his younger son, on Yaakov's left. Yaakov, however, switched his hands, placing his right hand on Efraim and his left hand on Menashe. Yosef protested, but Yaakov assured him, "I know, my son, I know; he [Menashe] will also... become great; however his younger brother [Efraim] shall become greater than he..." (*Bereishis* 48: 12-19)

The Question:

A "firstborn" expresses his father's deepest aspirations and is usually showered with his father's attention. What quality did Menashe possess as firstborn? And what quality did Efraim possess that made him Yaakov's preferred child, more important than Yosef's actual firstborn?

The Preface to the Explanation:

Menashe and Efraim represent two different approaches to surviving in exile. The name Menashe means, "G-d has made me leap away from forgetting... my father's home" (*Bereishis* 41:51; see Rashi, *Bereishis* 32:33). Meaning, by finding himself in a hostile environment that threatened to extinguish any memory of his "father's home," Yosef was inspired to hold on tighter to those memories and remain tenaciously committed to his father's values.

Efraim, on the other hand, means, "G-d has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering" (*Bereishis* 41:52). This refers to the possibility of thriving

specifically in a hostile environment. Efraim does not merely cling to memory like Menashe; he grows and develops from the experience of exile itself.

The Explanation:

Exile can elicit spiritual growth in three ways. These three levels correspond to Yaakov, Yosef, and Yosef's children.

- a) When a person remains committed to G-d despite the pressure of exile, his soul's obduracy and strength is expressed more than it would have been in a time of tranquility.

Yaakov is associated with the attribute of "truth," which is consistent and unwavering in any context (See *Tanya, Likkutei Amarim*, ch. 13; *Zohar* II:175b). Thus, the soul's strength to withstand and transcend exile's temptations relates to Yaakov.

- b) The soul's strength is further expressed when a person not only remains unaffected by exile, but rather, when he is able to influence his surroundings, lighting up the darkness of exile with the light of the soul.

The name Yosef means to proliferate, to add. Thus, the ability of the soul to not only survive in exile but to transform its darkness into light relates to Yosef. Yosef accomplishes this, however, due to his enduring connection to Yaakov. He does not truly experience the darkness of exile, because he is always tethered to the light of Yaakov.

- c) But exile does not only elicit the soul's preexisting strength. By transforming the darkness of exile into *light*, the soul attains an even deeper achievement, revealing a *light* that can only be born out of darkness. [This is similar to a penitent who transforms his sins into merits through his passionate return, thus surpassing, in a sense, the stature of a perfectly righteous person.]

Menashe and Efraim were both born in the darkness of exile and confronted it in their own ways. They represent the ability of the soul to reach deeper than its own preexisting strength and transform the darkness of exile itself.

We can now understand why Yosef is closely associated with Menashe, and Yaakov with Efraim.

Yosef's ability to withstand exile and transform it came from his connection to his father's home. Menashe, who represents the soul's ability to remain connected to its source even when in exile, is thus a reflection of Yosef's spiritual work.

Yaakov, however, ultimately desires that the darkness of exile itself becomes a source of inspiration and *light*. Efraim, who represents the soul's ability to be productive and fruitful within the "land of my suffering," is thus a reflection of Yaakov's ambition to transform exile itself.

The Lesson:

In the end, Menashe is the "firstborn" because the initial focus a person must have in exile is ensuring that he is connected to his roots, preserving his identity in the face of persuasive cultural influences. Once this connection is secure, the task becomes to prosper and grow through exile itself, as alluded to in the name of the second son, Efraim.