

On the seventh day, the Nasi of Bnei Efraim, Elishama ben Amihud. (7:48)

The *Torah* devotes the end of the *parsha* to detailing the *korbanos* and gifts brought by the *Nesiim* for the *Chanukas Ha'Mizbayach*, dedication of the Altar. Each of the twelve *Nesiim* brought an identical set of presents. The *Midrash* addresses the connotations of each of the gifts.

Chazal make an intriguing statement concerning the gift of Elishama, the *Nasi* of *Shevet Efraim*. They cite the *pasuk* in *Tehillim 60:9*, in which it is stated, "*Efraim is the strength of my head.*" This is considered a reference to the *Nasi* of *Shevet Efraim* who brought his offering on *Shabbos*. The *Shem Mishmuel* explains that the *pasuk* relates to the incident at the end of *Yaakov Avinu's* life, when he blessed *Efraim* before *Menashe*, the older brother. The *pasuk* implies that in favoring *Efraim* over *Menashe*, *Yaakov* legitimized *Elishama* for offering his *korban* on *Shabbos*. Under normal circumstances, no *korban yachid*, offering of an individual, could override the laws of *Shabbos*. Somehow, *Yaakov* invested *Efraim* with a power so unique that it enabled his descendant to offer his *korban* on *Shabbos*. What was that power?

What makes this *Midrash* even more enigmatic is the fact that the *Sifri* claims that any of the *Nesiim* had the ability to "push aside" the laws of *Shabbos* or *tumah*, ritual contamination, and offer his *korban*. How are we to understand this? What was the attribute of *Yaakov Avinu's* blessings that gave such strength to *Efraim* -- and to all the tribes -- that their *korbanos* superseded *Shabbos*?

The *Shem MiShmuel* begins by analyzing the characters of *Menashe* and *Efraim*, as well as the symbolism of their names. One's name reveals his essence. Thus, the name *Menashe*, which was given to him, "*for Hashem has made me forget all of my trouble and all of my father's house,*" denotes forgetting or distancing oneself from the past. This represents a form of serving Hashem in which one divests himself of his prior bad habits in his quest towards achieving perfection before the Almighty. *Efraim's* name has another implication: "*For Hashem has made me fruitful in the land of my oppression.*" With its root in the concept of fruitfulness, *Efraim's* name denotes a positive approach towards serving Hashem, in which one focuses upon developing good character traits and takes a more affirmative attitude toward *mitzvah* observance.

David Ha'Melech in *Sefer Tehillim (34:15)* says, "*Sur meira va'asei tov,*" "*Depart from evil and do good.*" In the context of *Menashe* and *Efraim's* names, *Menashe* alludes to "departing from evil," while *Efraim* will signifies the more positive act of "doing good."

Yosef's desire to have *Menashe*, the older brother, blessed first, and *Yaakov's* confusing choice to bless *Efraim* first, is symbolic of the continuing dialogue between father and son concerning the most correct manner to approach the Divine and serve the Almighty. *Yosef* wanted to follow the pattern of the *pasuk* in which a departure from evil precedes *mitzvah* performance. Hence, he felt that *Menashe*, the symbol of "*sur meira,*" should be blessed first. Indeed, *Yosef's* entire life was a

struggle with evil, constantly battling to ward off the obstacles set before him by his *yetzer hora*, evil inclination.

Yaakov *Avinu's* perspective was different. He felt one should concentrate on performing *mitzvos*, rather than waiting for the evil from within to dissipate. The holiness engendered by *mitzvah* performance would serve as the vehicle for the evil to be expunged. Yaakov's approach is the accepted path. The general rule in Jewish life is to begin by serving Hashem, performing *mitzvos*, doing good deeds and assigning a secondary role to eradicating evil. If the *mitzvah* observance is truly sincere, the evil will self-destruct.

It is evident from the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos* observance that Yosef's approach, first dispelling evil, is not effective. *Shabbos* is the epitome of *kedushah*, holiness. Consequently, one might never feel "competent" enough to observe it. Is one ever truly ready to greet *kedushas Shabbos*? The inevitable result of this perspective is that one would never observe *Shabbos*! According to Yaakov's approach, we just do whatever we can during the week to prepare ourselves as well as possible to greet the holy *Shabbos* - and it just comes! If we follow Yosef's approach, we will be stuck in the "*sur meira*" mode and never observe *Shabbos*. Yaakov instructs us to get on with a life of *Torah* and *mitzvos*, and the rest will just happen.

Yaakov's selection of Efraim over Menashe constituted a statement. He was telling us that the emphasis in Jewish life must be on the "*asei tov*," doing good. It was, therefore, appropriate that the *Nasi* of *Shevet Efraim* offered his *korban* on *Shabbos*. By doing this, he underscored the significance of starting the Divine worship of one's tribe with a positive act. Even though it was *Shabbos*, the Divine imperative guided this departure from *halachah* in order to emphasize the importance of the "*asei tov*" perspective in Jewish life.

The *Sifri* supplements this idea by saying that any tribe could have taken the initiative and brought the *korban* on *Shabbos*. Once Yaakov had administered the blessings, it became a universal rule for all of *Klal Yisrael*. Once the correct path for serving Hashem had been established, any one of them could have brought the *korban* on *Shabbos*.