

GREAT FOR SHARING
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

בשבת



אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

PARSHAS
VAYECHI

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN

MIDDOS MAKE THE MAN

Our great forefather *Yaakov Avinu* was nearing the end of his life. It was only a matter of time before he joined Avraham and Yitzchok in the *Me'aras Hamachpelah*. Knowing this, Yosef brought his two sons, Menashe and Ephraim, for a blessing. Yosef placed his children facing Yaakov, the older Menashe to Yaakov's right, and the younger Ephraim to Yaakov's left. However, Yaakov crossed his hands, placing his dominant hand on Ephraim's head. Yaakov explained that although Menashe is exceptional, Ephraim is even greater, and therefore deserves this greater blessing.¹

In what fashion was Ephraim greater than Menashe? Rashi² explains that Yaakov knew that the great Yehoshua would descend from Ephraim, but Rashi doesn't explain *why* Ephraim merited that Yehoshua would come from him. The *Medrash*³ explains that Ephraim warranted this outstanding grandchild because of his excellent *middos*. He humbled himself, and because of that quality, he deserved to have Yehoshua come from him, and that Yaakov should treat him as the elder, giving him the preferred *brachah*.

When put in context, this is astounding. Menashe, the older brother and rightful heir to the preferred blessing, was not a simple person. Out of all of Yaakov's grandchildren, only Menashe and Ephraim were included as peers to the twelve *Shevatim*. Clearly, Menashe was a humble and refined human being, and an incredible *talmid chochom*. Yet, Ephraim's humility was what made the difference.

We all know that *middos* are important, but perhaps we may think that the importance of focusing on growing in our character traits is relegated to second class. Maybe we think that people can't change, or that the changes are not worth the effort.

Yet, we see the opposite to be true. Forever, the formula parents use to bless their children has Ephraim before Menashe. And why? Because of Ephraim's excellent character.

1 Bereishis 48:13-20

2 Rashi on Bereishis 38:19 s.v. ואולם אחיו

3 Bereishis Rabbah 37:7

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

How to change? That's the question, isn't it? Specifically, how does one take the knowledge one has regarding the right thing to do, and turn that into action?

There are different ways to accomplish this. One way is to learn all of the *halachos* regarding a particular area.¹ Having trouble with anger? Learn the laws of when one is allowed or not allowed to get angry. A difficulty with *davening*? Learn the laws of *tefillah*.

Another method is to learn a *mussar sefer* with emotion and feeling. As R' Yisroel puts it, "With lips aflame, an appropriate frame of mind, and broad visualization to enrich each idea and bring it close to one's heart with fitting analogies."²

Lastly, if a particular phrase strikes deep, it is worthwhile to repeat the idea throughout the day to the point where it doesn't leave one's mind. This way it is always mentally available, and will be a constant reminder of the path which one desires to walk.³

1 *Ohr Yisrael*, Letter 7

2 *Ohr Yisrael*, Letter 2

3 *Shaarei Ohr*, Chap. 8



Someone who possesses Torah but not *Yiras Shomayim*, is like a treasurer who possesses the keys to the inner vault, but not the keys to the outer treasury building; how can he possibly access the treasure?

- Rabbah bar Rav Huna, Talmud Bavli
Maseches Shabbos 31a

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THE REAL DEAL

"Hey Tzvi! Hi!"

Tzvi Fischer* looked up in surprise as his brother-in-law walked into the fast food restaurant he was sitting in. Dinner in yeshiva that evening just wasn't doing it for Tzvi, so he decided to go to a local eatery. Sitting alone at a table, he was surprised to see Donny Newman, his brother-in-law, walking in the door. Donny didn't live locally, so it was quite the shock to see him.

"What brings you here?" inquired Tzvi.

"Just some real estate deals. Had something going on in Queens, so I had to come in. I figured I'd grab something to eat, and look at that, here you are!" Donny had gotten into real estate over the past couple of years, and had been doing nicely.

"Tell me," Donny continued, "have you ever thought of joining me? I can use a talented fellow like yourself."

"You mean, have I ever thought of it besides the other fifty times you've asked me?" Tzvi said with a smile. This wasn't the first time Donny broached the subject.

"Like I said before, right now I'm in yeshiva. I'd prefer to focus on yeshiva, if the time comes where I feel I need to move on, you'll be the first one I call."

Donny nodded, like he always did. "I understand." Then Donny turned thoughtful. "Tzvi, what are you trying to get out of life? Like, what's the plan, the big plan? What are your goals?"

Tzvi paused. It wasn't like Donny to ask, but it was a fair question nevertheless. After a moment, "What are my goals? The big plan? It's not real estate. It's not finance, or anything of the sort. I want to be an *eved Hashem*. I want to have *yiras Shomayim*. I want to work on my humility, on my anger, and my desires. I want to learn Torah. Yes, I very well might need a job someday, but you asked about the big picture. Those are my goals."

Now Donny was thoughtful. "Tzvi, I hate to tell you this, but you'll never be perfect. It's just not possible. Those are fine goals, but simply unattainable!"

Tzvi smiled. "Donny, I know that! Don't think I'm aiming for perfection; I'm aiming for 'better.' If I can move my arrogance from one hundred points down to ninety-five points, it would be an amazing accomplishment. My goal is not to be perfect, it's to better my *middos*. Every little bit is valuable, and if I can change just a bit, it's well worth the investment."

Donny nodded again, this time a bit slower. "I understand. Well, Tzvi," Donny said as he got up to leave, "if I can be of help, give me a call. See you!"

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

"My goal is not to be perfect, it's to better my *middos*. Every little bit is valuable, and if I can change just a bit, it's well worth the investment."

DID YOU KNOW?

- Yosef named Ephraim after Avraham and Yitzchak. Avraham, who referred to himself as "עפר ואפר", and Yitzchak, who was considered "אפר על גבי המזבח".¹
- One reason we bless our children, "To be like Ephraim and Menashe," is because we want them to have the material and spiritual success that both Ephraim and Menashe represent.²

1 *Da'as Zekeinim* on *Bereishis* 41:52 s.v. קרא אפרים

2 *Toras Moshe HaShaleim* on *Bereishis* 48:20 s.v. בך יברך