

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES

The Portion of

Mikeitz

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Dedicated
L'neshmat

Harav Yosef ben Harav Aaron
by his grandchildren Devora and Yossi Perlow
May his neshama have an aliyah

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. G'd Setting the Scene for One's Rise to Greatness

The Torah states, **"It happened at the end of two years to the day: Pharaoh began dreaming..."** The Midrash asks, "Is Pharaoh the only one who dreams? (Why is it important to mention that Pharaoh dreamed?) But rather, when a king has a dream its significance pertains to the entire world. Why were two years added to Yosef's imprisonment? It was so that he should become elevated and exalted. He should remain an additional two years in confinement so that he should ultimately be released from prison to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh."

Chazal tell us that Yosef needed to remain in prison an additional two years as a punishment for a lack of faith. When Yosef had interpreted the wine steward's dream, Yosef had made a request of him, **"If only you would remember me with yourself when he (Pharaoh) benefits you, and you will do me a kindness, if you please, and mention me to Pharaoh, then you would get me out..."** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that because Yosef had expressed his request to the wine steward through two expressions; **"remember me"** and **"mention me,"** he was destined to spend an additional two years in prison for those two statements. As the Midrash cites the verse in Psalms, "Fortunate is the one who has faith in G'd and does not go after the heathens (referring to the Egyptians.)"

How do we reconcile this Chazal with the Midrash that states that Yosef was retained in prison for an additional two years only to elevate him through the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams?

It is true that Yosef needed to be punished for his lack of faith; however, G'd could have meted out the punishment in another manner. Because G'd wanted Yosef to be elevated and to ascend to the position of Viceroy of Egypt, He chose that Yosef should be atoned through remaining an additional two years in prison.

Why was Yosef worthy of meriting the position of Viceroy of Egypt? One could say that because he was the

most gifted son of Yaakov, our Patriarch, he was put in a position to prepare the Jewish people for the bondage of Egypt. However, the Midrash indicates that this was not so. The Midrash cites a verse from Psalms, " 'He (Yosef) was afflicted with shackles on his feet and iron came upon his soul...' As it states, 'Yosef was the ruler over all of Egypt...' When Pharaoh had said to him, **'Now I heard it said that you comprehend a dream to interpret it.'** Yosef responded to Pharaoh saying, **'That is beyond me; it is G'd Who will respond with Pharaoh's welfare.'** Yosef said to Pharaoh that he himself did not have the innate ability to interpret dreams, but rather he is only the conduit for G'd's communication.

One would think that after being imprisoned unjustly for twelve years, Yosef would have taken advantage of this unique opportunity to validate himself in the eyes of Pharaoh. Yet, Yosef chose to acknowledge the source of his ability with no interest to glorify himself. G'd said, "Because you, Yosef, had exalted Me as being the One who gives you the ability to interpret dreams, you will be exalted over Egypt by becoming its Viceroy." G'd had chosen to punish Yosef through extending his prison stay for an additional two years to ultimately give him the opportunity to ascend to greatness. However, simultaneously as it is clearly indicated from the Midrash, the outcome was not inevitable but rather based on Yosef's choice. If he had chosen to respond with humility by acknowledging the true nature of his ability, he would succeed. However if not, he would fail.

2. Through Your Mouth My Nation Will be Sustained

The Torah states after Pharaoh had appointed Yosef to be Viceroy, **"Pharaoh said to Yosef, 'Since G'd had informed you of all of this, there can be no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace and through your mouth my people will be sustained; only by the throne shall I outrank you.'"** What is the meaning of **"through your mouth my people will be sustained?"** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the Egyptian people would be sustained through the dictates of Yosef.

Baal Haturim explains, **“through your mouth...”** to mean, “As King Solomon writes in Proverbs, ‘Lips which speak proper words deserve to be kissed...’ Because Yosef had spoken proper words advising Pharaoh how to deal with the years of bounty and the subsequent years of famine to ensure the existence of Egypt, that same mouth that spoke those words will sustain the Egyptian people through its expression.” Seemingly, Yosef was rewarded measure for measure – because his mouth had given the proper advice to Pharaoh, he thus merited to assume the position of Viceroy to sustain Egypt through his dictates.

The Torah tells us that the wife of Potiphar attempted to seduce Yosef. She unceasingly approached him every day to cohabit with her. When he initially rejected her, she threatened him. Eventually, when she had succeeded to entrap Yosef, and they were all alone, he did not succumb to temptation. The Gemara tells us that Yosef initially was intended to father twelve sons, which would have been the equivalent of the tribes of Israel. However, because he had lost ten droplets of semen during his encounter with his master’s wife, he only fathered two of the tribes - Ephraim and Menasha. The Gemara in Tractate Sotah tells us that if Yosef had transgressed, his name would not have been inscribed on the breastplate of the High Priest. Meaning, he would have been disqualified to be one of the Tribes of Israel.

The Midrash states, “Reb Shimon Ben Gamliel said, ‘Yosef received what he deserved. (He deserved to assume the position of Viceroy). This is because the mouth that did not kiss in sin (engage with the wife of his master) deserves to be the mouth that will sustain the entire Egyptian people, (as its Viceroy).’” Yosef merited Divine clarity that enabled him to express profound insight and wisdom to Pharaoh because his mouth was not defiled by sin. Because Yosef’s mouth was untainted and retained its consecrated status, it expressed wisdom that even Pharaoh, who was a heathen, responded by saying, **“Could we find another like him – a man in whom is the spirit of G’d?”**

Chofetz Chaim in his introduction to his work *Chofetz Chaim* writes that man was created with the power of speech, which differentiates him from the unintelligible species. Man only became a speaking species when he was infused with a soul. Meaning, speech emanates from a spiritual source. Speech is a potent force that allows one’s prayer (tefillah) and Torah study to have an unlimited effect. However, if one befouls his mouth with lies, slander, and evil speech he damages and thus limits the effectiveness of his speech. Consequently, the

quantification of Yaakov by his father Yitzchak that **“The voice is the voice of Yaakov...”** becomes very limited. If the Jewish people did not putrefy their power of speech, their prayers and Torah study would have a phenomenal effect on all existence.

We say in the Tefilah Zaka which is recited before the Kol Nidrei on Yom Kippur, that the senses and abilities which G’d has endowed us with have not been utilized appropriately. (Whether it is our eyes, our minds, hands, feet, etc.) However we do say that we sanctify our mouths by kissing the Torah Scroll. If one would engage in continuous Torah study, which is the ultimate (*Talmid Torah keneged kulom*), one would sanctify and intensify his power of speech.

Sefer Yiraeim states that when one engages his physicality in mitzvah activity, whatever part of the body that is involved, becomes sanctified. For example, when one gives charity or puts tefillin on one’s arm, his hand and arm are sanctified. When one sanctifies himself and refrains from succumbing to temptation, he will merit to be drawn to a setting that will bring about good. Yosef merited Divine clarity that was expressed through his mouth, because he did not succumb to temptation with his mistress, thus his mouth remained pure and holy.

3. The Basis for Yaakov’s Unique Spirituality

The Midrash states, " King David writes in Psalms, 'Fortunate is the one who has the G'd of Yaakov to assist him.' Why does King David only identify G'd as 'the G'd of Yaakov?' Why not 'the G'd of Avraham' or 'the G'd of Yitzchak'? It is because G'd did not associate Himself with any of the Patriarchs as He had done with Yaakov. As the verse states regarding Yaakov's dream on Mt. Moriah, **'...G'd (neetzav alov) stood upon him (Yaakov).'**"

The Midrash continues, "Reb Semon states, 'When does a king go out to see his field? It is not when it is being plowed and cultivated. It is not when it is being seeded. It is only when all the harvest has been reaped and the grain is piled up, does the king go out into the field. Similarly, Avraham was the one who had prepared the field for planting. As the verse states, **'G'd said to Avraham, 'Walk the length and breadth of the Land...'** Yitzchak sowed the Land. As the verse states, **'...Yitzchak sowed.'** (The Torah tells us that there was a famine in the land. Despite the famine, Yitzchak's plantings yielded a crop that was a hundred fold of what was the norm). The king did not come until Yaakov came into being who was

the equivalent of the pile of harvested wheat. As the verse states, **'Israel (Yaakov) is sanctified to G'd - the choicest of His wheat ...'** Thus, the king (G'd) stood upon Yaakov."

There were various stages of development of the spirituality of the Jewish people. On a simple level, if one were to read the narrative of Avraham's "walking the length and breadth of the land" and Yitzchak's "sowing" the field during the famine, one would understand the significance of their actions purely to be physical and mundane. Avraham walked the land to demonstrate his ownership over the land. It was considered an act of acquisition. Yitzchak planted the field in Gerar for the sake of sustenance. However, the Midrash allows us to understand the significance of Avraham's and Yitzchak's initiatives in a context that goes beyond the material. Their initiatives were meant to set in motion certain spiritual influences that would allow a person of Yaakov's dimension of spirituality to come into being.

In order to merit the Wisdom of G'd which is contained within the Torah, Yaakov needed to have special Divine Assistance. That level of clarity and understanding could have only come about because it was predicated with the initiatives of Avraham and Yitzchak.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that Reb Yochanon had heard that there were elderly people in Babylon. He was taken aback by this fact because the second paragraph of the Shema concludes, **"In order to prolong your days and the days of your children upon the land that G'd has sworn to your ancestors..."** Meaning, that one only merits longevity if one lives in the Land of Israel. However, if one were to live elsewhere, then one would not merit longevity. If this is so, then how were there elderly people in Babylon? Reb Yochanon was told that in Babylon the Jewish people rise early to study Torah in the study hall and leave late in the evening when they conclude their studies. Seemingly, Reb Yochanon was satisfied with their explanation. If however the basis for Reb Yochanon's difficulty was the concluding verse of the Shema, which states clearly that one only merits longevity by dwelling in the Land of Israel (and nowhere else), why was Reb Yochanon satisfied with their response?

Maharsha in his commentary explains that wherever a Jew engages in Torah study, that location assumes the status of the Land of Israel. Meaning, when a Jew studies Torah it causes the Divine Presence (Shechina) to come upon that location. Just as the Divine Presence is present in Land of Israel, identically when one engages in

Torah study wherever he may be, G'd's Presence is upon him with the same level of intensity. Therefore, since the Jewish people in Babylon were dedicated to Torah study, the Divine Presence was upon them as if they were in the Land. Thus, they merited longevity.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that since the time of the destruction of the Temple, G'd's only location in the world is "within the four cubits of Halacha (normative Jewish law)." Meaning, the location in which people engage in Torah study in a manner that leads to the elucidation of the Torah Law, G'd's relationship with that location is no less than His relevance to the Temple Mount.

Yaakov, is the Patriarch of exile (golus) because none of the other Patriarchs suffered or were displaced to the degree of Yaakov. Chazal tells us that exile is analogous to the nighttime period. During the period of darkness one's perception of reality is very often distorted. Because of the lack of illumination there is no clarity. Thus, the nighttime period is fraught with confusion. Yaakov, being the Patriarch of exile, enacted *arvis*, the nighttime Amidah (prayer service). Although Yaakov is the Patriarch of exile, he is also the Patriarch who personifies and is the embodiment of Torah. The only way that one can contend with confusion and be resilient to the pitfalls of exile is through the study of Torah. As it states, "Neir mitzvah v Torah ohr, The mitzvah is the receptacle and the fuel that is contained within it and the Torah is the fire that offers light." Torah is the ultimate illuminator, which gives one clarity.

The Torah tells us that during the Festival of Sukkos one must dwell in the Sukkah for a period of seven days. However, on Shemini Atzeres, which is an adjunct to Festival of Sukkos, one does not dwell in the Sukkah. The Gemara in Tractate Sukkah tells us that the Sukkah commemorates and is a reenactment of the Clouds of Glory that protected the Jewish people in the desert for forty years. Why does the Torah only require that one should be within the confines of the Sukkah for seven days and not on the eighth day, although Shmini Atzeres is an extension of the Festival of Sukkos?

The number seven throughout the Torah connotes the natural order- as expounded upon by Maharal of Prague. The number eight represents the supernatural. It is beyond seven. (Creation was a seven-day process.) Shemini Atzeres, which is the eighth day, represents a relationship with G'd at the most intimate level- thus causing one not to be in need of any protection. The representation of the Clouds of Glory are only within the

context of the natural order, which is seven. When one is so enmeshed with G'd, one is beyond harm. Yaakov, because he was so deeply rooted in Torah, which is the source of life, represents the ultimate of one who is protected from harm. He was thus insulated from the evils of exile. This is the reason King David writes, "Fortunate is the one who has the G'd of Yaakov to assist him." If one is truly attached to the Torah, as Yaakov was, G'd will be with him.

4. Yaakov – Bringing An End to the Famine

The Torah tells that famine had also affected Yaakov and his family in Canaan. He therefore instructed his ten sons to go down to Egypt to purchase grain. The Torah states, **"So Yosef's brothers – ten of them went down to buy grain from Egypt."** Why did Yaakov send ten of his sons to Egypt, exposing them to both physical and spiritual harm? He could have sent only a few of them. If there was a question of their safety, Yaakov could have sent others to accompany them for protection.

The Midrash explains, "Ten men together as a group have the ability to dispel tragedy. As we see regarding the destruction of Sodom. When G'd had informed Avraham that He was about to destroy Sodom, Avraham immediately began supplicating G'd on their behalf. He began by saying "Maybe there are fifty righteous people in Sodom. In their merit, Sodom could be spared and avert the Attribute of Justice." However, G'd informed him that there were not fifty righteous people in the community. Avraham continued to supplicate G'd on their behalf to the point that he had requested, "In the merit of ten righteous people, let Sodom be spared." Once G'd had informed him that there were not ten righteous people in Sodom, Avraham remained silent. Consequently, Sodom was destroyed. Yaakov had understood from the dialogue between Avraham and G'd that ten righteous individuals have the ability to dispel the Attribute of Justice. Thus, he sent his ten sons to Egypt."

Yaakov understood that since Egypt was the location where the famine that seriously impacted the world had begun, in order to dispel it/the Attribute of Justice, he needed to send ten of his sons, who were devoutly righteous, down to Egypt. Why could not ten sons of Yaakov remain in Canaan and pray to G'd on behalf of the plight of Egypt? Why did they need to physically visit the location of tragedy? Seemingly, their going to Egypt and being there is unrelated to their supplication of G'd. It was necessary for the ten children

of Yaakov to go to Egypt in order to activate the Attribute of Mercy to cause the famine to cease.

Factually, Yaakov's initiative did not affect the famine. To the contrary, the painful situation had intensified. The Viceroy of Egypt had requested of Yaakov's sons that they needed to bring their youngest brother Binyamin back to Egypt. If they would not do so, they would perish in the famine. He had taken Shimon, the son of Yaakov, hostage until they would return with Binyamin. Yaakov did not understand that G'd only brought the famine upon Egypt and all the surrounding lands so that Yaakov himself would ultimately come to Egypt to see his most beloved son Yosef before he passed away. The intensification of the circumstances only came about to facilitate Yaakov's departure from Canaan.

5. Understanding the Culpability of Yaakov's Children

The Torah tells us that after Yaakov was informed by his children that Yosef was killed by a beast, he believed it to be true. Consequently, Yaakov rent his garments and grieved over the loss of his son. The Torah states, **"Yaakov had said, 'For I will go down to the grave mourning for my son.' And his father bewailed him..."** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that **"And his father bewailed him"** is referring to Yitzchak, our Patriarch- the father of Yaakov. Yitzchak cried for his son because he saw him in distress. However, Yitzchak did not mourn for Yosef because he was aware that he was alive.

Sforno explains that the reason Yitzchak cried for his son was because Yaakov was denied a relationship with the Shechina (Divine Presence)/prophecy because he had accepted upon himself a state of mourning. The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra tells us that the Divine Presence only rests upon one who is in a state of joy and not one who is in a state of depression. Yitzchak was pained not because he had witnessed his son's anguish over the death of Yosef, but rather because Yaakov was denied a special relationship with G'd for 22 years.

Since Yaakov's children were responsible for his loss of prophecy, they were culpable for denying their father, the most special of the Patriarchs, a relationship with G'd. The loss of one moment of Yaakov's relationship with the Divine Presence is an unquantifiable loss for the entire Jewish people. How much more so was Yaakov deprived of prophecy for 22 years. The Midrash states, "Reb Mada says, 'As a result of selling Yosef, the Tribes were punished and they were not atoned for their

sin until they died. As it states, **‘Your sin will only be atoned when you die.’**”

Rambam writes in the Laws of Repentance that one can be atoned for every level of transgression in one’s lifetime, regardless of its liability. Even the most severe transgression can be atoned through repentance, the mercy of the day of Yom Kippur, and through various types of suffering. The only sin that cannot be fully atoned for during one’s lifetime is the desecration of G’d’s Name (Chilul Hashem). Chilul Hashem can only be fully atoned when one dies. If Yosef’s brothers could only be atoned for their sin of selling him into slavery by dying, seemingly their sin must touch upon Chilul Hashem. How was the sale of their brother into slavery considered to be a desecration of G’d’s Name?

According to Sforno’s interpretation, Yaakov was denied prophecy for 22 years as a consequence of selling Yosef into slavery. The Midrash states regarding the Patriarchs, *“Hein, Hein HaMerkava – they are the Chariot (for the Divine Presence).”* Meaning, the Patriarchs were the location for the Divine Presence in this world. The existence of the Patriarchs was the equivalent of the Divine Presence in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. If Yaakov was not able prophesize because of his state of depression, then the Divine Presence was uprooted from its location, which is the ultimate Chilul Hashem. This was the equivalent of the destruction of the Temple. Thus, Yosef’s brothers could only be fully atoned for their sin through their death.

The Midrash continues, “Why was there a famine in Canaan for a period of seven years? When Yosef’s brothers went down to Egypt to purchase grain, they nullified the decree of excommunication if one should reveal the fact that Yosef was alive.” After the sale of Yosef, the sons of Yaakov established an excommunication upon anyone who would reveal the true fate of Yosef. This is the reason Yitzchak was not permitted to reveal to his son, Yaakov, the true nature of Yosef’s predicament. G’d Himself did not reveal the fact of Yosef’s whereabouts because G’d was included in the excommunication that was established by Yosef’s brothers. As a result of the famine in Canaan, Yaakov’s children needed to go to Egypt to purchase grain, where they came upon Yosef. They were thus compelled to undo the excommunication and inform their father Yaakov that Yosef was alive. When Yaakov became aware that his son was alive the Torah states, **“... the spirit of Yaakov became alive.”** Meaning, that because he was extricated from his state of depression to a state of joy, his ability to prophesize was reinstated. Thus, the seven years of

famine and suffering that came upon Canaan were only as a means to ultimately restore Yaakov’s relationship with G’d.

The Midrash tells us that as a result of the famine, all of the wealth of the world came to Egypt. Every nation needed to purchase its grain from Egypt because they were affected by the famine. Yosef had stored enough grain throughout the years of plenty to be able to sustain the surrounding lands during the years of famine. Although Egypt had become the repository of all the wealth of the world, it was the only safe keeper of the wealth for the Jewish people. G’d had promised Avraham, our Patriarch, during the covenant between the parts that after the long and painful bondage, the Jewish people would leave with “great wealth.” In order to fulfill that promise, Egypt needed this immense wealth to facilitate G’d’s Word.

The Midrash indicates that the wealth that had come to Egypt was only a byproduct of something much more significant. Since Yaakov’s children had to locate Yosef in order to annul the excommunication, G’d had brought a severe famine upon the entire region. Egypt had been chosen to be the provider of grain for them to discover Yosef. In terms of fulfilling the promise to Avraham, our Patriarch, that the Jewish people would ultimately leave with great wealth, it could have been fulfilled in other ways. The primary reason for the famine was to re-establish Yaakov as the location for G’d’s Presence and restore him to a prophetic level.