

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Mikeitz

December 17, 2009

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
1. G'd's Love for the Tzaddik	2
2. Yaakov, the Embodiment of All	3
3. The Spiritual Heartbeat of the Jew	4
4. The Intangibility of Holiness	5
5. One's Focus on Chanukah	6

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.

If you would like to receive this Weekly Torah Commentary Series by email

Please call 212-371-9555 or email:

info@yadavraham.org

TUNE IN TO OUR LIVE VIDEO BROADCAST OF CLASSES

And over

60,000 online classes 24 hours a day

Mikeitz

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita
Dean

1. G'd's Love for the Tzaddik

The Torah states, **“Hashem was with Yosef and he became successful. And he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. His master perceived that Hashem was with him. And whatever he did Hashem brought success to his hand.”** The Torah is informing us that although Yosef was in the house of his **“master the Egyptian,”** who was a pagan, he retained his spirituality and remained unaffected. The Egyptian people did not believe in a monotheistic Universal G'd. Rather, they believed that everything was bound to the physical realm. If Yosef's master was a heathen who was immersed in all the depravities Egypt, what capacity did he have to recognize G'd and to attribute all of Yosef's success to Him?

Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “Potiphar was able to recognize G'd because he observed that the Name of G'd was always in his mouth.” Yosef never attributed his great level of accomplishment and success to his own initiative, but rather to G'd. Yosef continuously enunciated the Name of G'd and praised Him. This was basis for his pagan master to be able to recognize that Yosef's success was due to the fact that “G'd was with him.”

Ramban rejects this understanding and explains, “Our Rabbis tell us that Yosef murmured various incantations and whatever he wished came to be in the most perfect manner. His Egyptian master said to him, ‘Is there a lack of sorcerers in Egypt? It is because of your sorcery that you are successful?’ Ultimately, Potiphar came to see that the Divine Presence rested upon Yosef.”

The Torah tells us that when Avraham had taken his son Yitzchak to the Akeidah they were accompanied by Ishmael and Eliezer. The Midrash tells us that Avraham understood that they had arrived at the designated location of the Akeidah when he had seen a cloud formation on top of the mountain. He had asked Yitzchak, Ishmael, and Eliezer if they had seen anything. Only Yitzchak was privy to the cloud formation that represented the Divine Presence. Only he was worthy and privileged to see it. If this is so, how was Potiphar who was steeped in

heathenism and other abominable behavior able to see the Divine Presence upon Yosef?

Ramban explains, “The Egyptian did not know G'd. He only saw that Yosef had an exceptional level of success that was unparalleled. He initially attributed his success to sorcery. However, for the honor of the righteous man, Yosef, G'd allowed His Presence to be seen by Potiphar, although in his own right he was not worthy to gaze upon It.” What is the honor that is brought upon Yosef if Potiphar is made to understand that the basis for Yosef's success is G'd Himself?

The Torah tells us that the wife of Potiphar accused Yosef of raping her. The Gemara tells us that Potiphar investigated the matter and Yosef's innocence was verified. Potiphar understood that it was his wife who had attempted to seduce Yosef and was not successful. However, in order not to publicly embarrass her, he had Yosef incarcerated in a dungeon. Seemingly, if his wife had accused Yosef of rape, Potiphar's immediate reactions should have been to put Yosef, who was a mere slave, to death. Why did he hesitate or even bother to verify the matter? It was only because he had seen the Divine Presence upon Yosef that it was incomprehensible that a person of Yosef's spiritual dimension would attempt to commit such an unconscionable act. Ultimately it was for the sake of Yosef's survival, that G'd allowed Potiphar to gaze upon His Presence, although he was unworthy. This was the honor afforded to Yosef.

Similarly, G'd allowed Bilaam who was the personification of evil, be a prophet, despite the fact that Bilaam was a representation of spiritual impurity. The Midrash states, “G'd appeared and communicated to Bilaam so that the nations of the world should not claim that they had spiritually failed because they did not have a prophet. The Jewish people had Moshe as their leader and prophet.” For the honor of the Jewish people, G'd allowed Himself to be disgraced by being associated with such a level of impurity, Bilaam the evil one.

Ramchal explains in his work, *The Way of G'd*, that G'd allows man to be able to perpetrate the greatest

levels of evil for the sake of giving the human being the power of free choice. G'd wished to create a setting of free choice so that man can be the beneficiary of his own actions, should he chose to do the Will of G'd. For the sake of the human being, G'd is willing to allow himself to be disgraced and desecrated on the most extreme level.

2. Yaakov, the Embodiment of All

The Torah tells us that there was a famine in the Land of Canaan. The verse states, **“Yaakov had perceived that there were provisions (*shever*) in Egypt...”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “The term *shever* (provisions) can also mean ‘hope’. Through a holy vision Yaakov had a sense of hope in Egypt. (Yosef may still be alive).” 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 sowed. It is not when it is being cultivated. It is only when all the harvest has been reaped and piled in the field does the king go out into the field. Similarly, Avraham was the one who 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 field. As the verse states, ‘...**Yitzchak sowed.**’ (The Torah tells us that there was a famine in the land where Yitzchak lived. Despite the famine, Yitzchak’s field gave forth a crop that was a hundred fold yield.) The king did not come until Yaakov came into being, who was the equivalent of the 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.”

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” of the field during the famine, one would understand the significance of their actions were purely for their material consequence. Avraham walked the boundaries of the Land to demonstrate his dominion over it. Yitzchak planted the field in Gerar in order to harvest a crop. The Torah tells us that despite the famine, the yield of his planting was a hundred fold of a normal year. It would seem that G’d’s blessing to

Yitzchak was within a material context. However, we see from the Midrash that the value and significance of Avraham’s and Yitzchak’s initiatives in the land extend beyond the present and the material.

Chazal tell us that there is a principle – “The actions of the Patriarchs are a sign for the children.” Meaning, the actions of the Patriarchs created a dynamic that would determine situations that would be experienced by their descendents.

Chazal tell us that Yaakov was the most special of the Patriarchs. One would think that descending from someone as holy as Yitzchak and having a person such as Avraham as a grandfather, it is understood that Yaakov would be the most special of the three Patriarchs. However, we see from the Midrash that it was only because Avraham and Yitzchak had taken specific initiatives that created a spiritual momentum that gave Yaakov the ability to evolve to become the most special of the Patriarchs - the “choicest of His wheat.” When Avraham walked the length of the land and Yitzchak sowed the field, their actions was coupled with an intent that went beyond the physical. Yaakov’s potential for development was only as a result of what his antecedents had provided for him to draw upon. With this we can understand why King David identifies G’d as “the G’d of Yaakov” – it is because Yaakov is the spiritual yield of the efforts of Avraham and Yitzchak.

We find that when Yitzchak and Rivka beseeched G’d in prayer for a child, Chazal tell us that G’d responded to the prayers of Yitzchak. Why was this so? The Midrash states, “It is because the prayer of a tzaddik who is the child of a tzaddik is greater than the prayer of a tzaddik who was the son of an evil person (*rasha*).” Although Rivka was in her own right no less holy than Yitzchak, her husband; however, because he was the son of Avraham, his prayer assumed a greater dimension of value. Yaakov inherited the spiritual achievements of Avraham and Yitzchak. They had inculcated within their souls a special level of holiness. Thus, G’d stood upon him to protect him as no other Patriarch. He was the equivalent of the three Patriarchs embodied into one person.

The three Patriarchs are the foundation of the Jewish people as the Midrash cites a verse from Proverbs, “A three-ply thread does not tear ...” These three spiritual pillars together encompass the totality of everything. The sum total is greater than its individual parts. When G’d wanted to destroy the Jewish people after the sin of the Golden Calf and create a new holy people who would descend from Moshe, Moshe said to G’d, “If a table that is

supported by three legs could not stand, how could a table that rests on one leg have a chance to maintain its stability?" Meaning, if the merits of the three holy Patriarchs are not sufficient to sustain the Jewish people, how could the merits of only one person sustain them.

It is true that Yaakov's personal spiritual achievement was due to his own initiative/proper choices and exceptional dedication to G'd throughout his life; however, the context and potential to implement those choices was due to the efforts of his father and grandfather.

3. The Spiritual Heartbeat of the Jew

Every day during the festival of Chanukah, we insert into the Amidah (Silent Prayer) the paragraph of *Al Haneesim* (on the miracles). It recounts how the Greeks oppressed the Jewish people and how ultimately they were defeated, despite the fact that they were great in number and mightier than the Jewish people. It is stated in the *Al Haneesim*, "...The wicked Greek kingdom rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah and compel them to stray from Your Statutes (*Chukim*)..." The Greeks had decreed that Torah study a capital crime punishable by death. Seemingly, the Greeks understood that if they prevented the Jewish people from studying Torah they would ultimately cease observing the Statutes (*Chukim*), which are laws that have no rational basis within the human context. They are laws that one cannot fathom their innate value. What is the relationship between the study of Torah and the adherence to Statutes? If a Statute is a law that one cannot be fathomed, how does Torah study give one an appreciation of something that cannot be understood?

One can be committed to Mishpatim/rational laws purely based on one's appreciation of their value to society and to oneself. One does not steal because one understands the unethical and immoral behavior associated with harming another and taking something that is not rightfully yours. One may do an act of kindness, such as being charitable, because one senses another's lack, deprivation, and pain. However performing a Statute is based solely on one's belief in G'd. One observes the mitzvah of circumcision, dietary laws, the prohibition of combining wool and linen (*shatnez*), and the laws of the Red Heifer only because G'd said to do them. These are classical examples of Statutes. The Greeks understood that in order to undermine the belief and faith of the Jewish people in G'd, they needed to detach them from the study of Torah. By not allowing the Jew to engage in its study, it would

cause his emotion and spirituality to remain dormant. The Jew can only have a sense of his Maker and have a relationship with Him through the study of Torah. The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos explains that the only reason the Jewish people had declared at Sinai, "Naaseh V'nishma, we will do and we will listen," was because they had absolute trust in G'd. This was rooted in their sense of Him.

The Torah has the innate ability to impact upon a Jew when it is coupled with the fear of G'd. One will come to value, esteem, and revere laws that are beyond the human intellect through the study of Torah. The Greeks understood and realized the paramount value of Torah study and its far-reaching effect and ramifications. They wished to nullify and purge every vestige and representation of spirituality from the Jewish community. Thus, by decreeing that the Jewish people were not permitted to engage in Torah study, it would ultimately cause them to lose their faith in G'd. Consequently, their observance of mitzvos would be limited to only those that are rational, rather than the Statutes, which are rooted on one's faith.

We supplicate G'd every day in our prayers (*u'vah l'tzion*), "Open our hearts with Your Torah..." The key to open the spirituality of the Jewish heart is only through Torah study. If the heart is closed and shut down, there is no sensitivity for spirituality. The heart needs to be penetrated. As the Torah tells us, at the end of time G'd will circumcise the heart of all mankind. Meaning, G'd will remove the blockage, which prevents the heart from sensing the value of spirituality. Since the time has not yet come for the spiritual circumcision of the heart, we pray to G'd that He open our hearts through our Torah study.

We mention in the *Al Haneesim*, "G'd delivered the wanton into the hands of the diligent students of Your Torah..." We see from these words that although the Greeks had prohibited Torah study under the threat of death, there were those who nevertheless continued to be engaged in it. Because of their involvement, they gained a sense of clarity that did not allow them to compromise on G'd's Dictate to any degree. The victors of the battle were individuals who had sensed and internalized their obligation to G'd to the point that they were willing to die to uphold the Torah and its values. G'd thus performed the miracle of handing the multitudes into the hands of the few, the mighty into the hands of the weak, the impure into the hands of the pure, the evil into the hands of the righteous, and the wanton into the hands of those engaged in Torah.

The Torah tells us that the wife of Potiphar attempted to seduce Yosef. She unceasingly made advances to attract his interest in her. When he initially rejected her, she threatened him. Eventually, when she did succeed to entrap Yosef, when they were alone, he still did not succumb to temptation. 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 and the world at large.'" Yosef's dictate became the law of the land. He merited Divine clarity that enabled him to provide profound insight and wisdom to Pharaoh because he did not succumb to sin. Because Yosef's essence was pure and untainted, he was the equivalent of a consecrated vessel that contained within it the spirit of G'd. As Pharaoh expressed himself to his servants saying, "**Could we find another like him - a man in whom is the spirit of G'd?**"

Yosef was only able to sense his own spirituality and thus was not overwhelmed by his physical drives and inclinations because he was continuously engaged in Torah study. He was able to maintain himself as the son of Yaakov, despite the fact that he was in a pagan environment in Egypt, which was steeped in all levels of depravity.

In our times, when the Jewish people are engulfed in an environment of impurity and the material that is the antithesis of the Torah way of life, one must gather strength by engaging in Torah study. In order to prevent acculturation and ultimately assimilation, the Jew must have a sense of G'd, which can only be attained in this manner.

4. The Intangibility of Holiness

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states, "When the Greeks entered into the Covered Sanctuary they contaminated all of the oil that was to be found. After the *Chashmonaim* were victorious over the Greeks they wanted to re-dedicate the Temple with the kindling of the Menorah in the Temple. They searched for the oil that was spiritually pure and were only able to locate one small vial of pure oil bearing the seal of the High Priest. There was only sufficient oil to burn for one day; however, a miracle occurred and it continued to burn for eight days. The following year, they designated it as a holiday that is celebrated through thanks and praise (to G'd)."

Maharal of Prague in his work on Chanukah, *Neir Mitzvah* cites the Gemara in Shabbos and explains the reason the Greeks intentionally contaminated the oil that was needed to kindle the Menorah. The Greeks believed that all existence was limited to the realm of nature. Only what the human mind could comprehend had relevance to existence. Because spiritual concepts could not be fathomed or processed by the human intellect, they were rejected and shunned. Rambam writes that Aristotle, who was the greatest genius to ever live, had the ability to understand everything from the earth into the galaxies. Because of Aristotle's relatively unlimited intellect, he concluded that nothing exists outside of what the human can comprehend. The only thing within nature that he could not understand or explain was light because it was intangible. This was the basis for the Greek perspective and culture.

In contrast, the Jewish people believe in the existence of G'd and the spiritual realm. Light, which is something that Aristotle could not comprehend, although it exists within nature connotes spirituality. The Torah and its holiness is compared to light. The Gemara in Tractate Hureos equates olive oil with light/clarity. Therefore, if olive oil is part of one's diet its effect is positive because it allows one's intellect to develop. The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra tells us that the light of the Menorah symbolizes the Oral Law, which is the elucidation of the Written Law. One is only able to comprehend and process the Written Law with special Divine Assistance, which is a spiritualization of one's intellect. The kindling of the Menorah enabled the Jewish people to have the capacity to comprehend the meaning and significance of the holy Torah.

We find that the High Priest was initiated and installed through the anointing oil. The vessels of the Temple only had the capacity to bring about a spiritual result if they were anointed with the anointing oil. The affect of the anointing oil was greater than a verbal consecration, as one would normally consecrate the ordinary to be holy. Through the application of the anointing oil a physical entity is transformed and elevated into a spiritual one. This is the reason the Greeks wanted to contaminate the oil in the Temple because it represented the antithesis of their entire purview of the world.

Maharal of Prague explains that the numerical value of "Covered Sanctuary (*heiychal*)" is "65." The numerical value of "*Yavan (Greek)*" is "66." The Greeks believed that their name, which reflected their essence, confirmed to them that they were superior to the covered Sanctuary and could thus dominate it. The High Priest,

however, has relevance to something that is beyond the Covered Sanctuary, which is the Holy of Holies. He can only enter into it on one day a year, which is Yom Kippur. It is the location of the ultimate holiness, which is the location of the Divine Presence. They therefore could not affect the sanctity that is specific to the High Priest. This is the reason the small vial of oil that was preserved from spiritual contamination bore the seal of the High Priest.

In Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin, tells us that when the general of the Babylonian Emperor entered into the Temple to destroy it, heavenly voice said to him, "You fool! The only reason you were able to destroy Temple is because My Presence has departed from the Temple Mount. The edifice that you see is only stones and wood. It is the equivalent of grinding flour that had already been ground." Meaning, when the Divine Presence is no longer present on the Temple Mount became only a material/physical entity. The Babylonians could not comprehend the spiritual. Similarly, the Greeks could not affect the spirituality of the Jew, because they had no relevance to anything that was beyond the physical.

Throughout history, the Jewish people have been the subject of pogroms and holocausts only because they are the representation of the infinite within the finite, which is physical existence. Despite the ongoing attempts by the nations to annihilate the Jewish people, they continue to exist because they represent G'd in this world.

5. *One's Focus on Chanukah*

Rambam writes in the Laws of Chanukah, "When the Jewish people overpowered and destroyed their enemies it was on the twenty-fifth of the month Kisleiv. They entered into the Sanctuary and they were unable to locate pure oil that would qualify for the kindling of the Menorah. They had come upon one vial of pure oil that had enough oil to burn for only one day. However, miraculously they were able to kindle the lights of the menorah for eight days until they were able to produce more oil from the pressing of the olives. The Rabbis of that generation legislated that there should be an eight-day period of rejoicing and praise which begins on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kisleiv." What is the significance of the joy that the Jew experiences during this period of time?

The Code of Jewish Law (Shulchan Aruch) rules, "Although during the days of Chanukah there is an increase of festivities and meals, it is not obligatory as with other holidays. The Rabbis did not designate these

days as 'days of celebration and rejoicing' (as they had legislated regarding Purim)." Ramah writes, "There are those who say that there is a degree of mitzvah regarding the festive meals of Chanukah. If during these meals of Chanukah one sings the praises of G'd, the meal assumes the status of a seudas mitzvah (festive meal when one celebrates the fulfillment of a mitzvah)."

Maharal asks, "If the days of Chanukah were designated as a period of rejoicing and praise, why does one not celebrate them in a similar manner as one celebrates the miracle of Purim, which is also a day of rejoicing (by partaking of a feast)?" On Purim there was a decree to annihilate every Jewish man, woman, and child, regardless of their belief. Because of G'd's miraculous intervention the Jewish people were spared and their enemies were destroyed. During the period of Chanukah, the Greeks did not want to annihilate the Jewish people, but rather wanted them to assimilate and Hellenize, by accepting their beliefs and culture. If they had embraced the pagan beliefs of the Greeks, the Jewish people would have been treated as equals. However, because the Jewish people adamantly rejected this consideration, the Greeks wanted to destroy them. The physical destruction of the Jewish people was only a consequence of the Jew not willing to forfeit his spirituality. Therefore, on Chanukah one celebrates the spiritual survival of the Jewish people, which is expressed through the praise of G'd; while on Purim one celebrates the physical survival, which is expressed through feasting.

The joy that the Jew is meant to experience on Chanukah is based on feeling fortunate that he has a special relationship with G'd. G'd did not want that relationship to be compromised or jeopardized. As we say in the *Aleinu* (conclusion of the prayer service), "It is our duty to praise the Master of all...for He has not made us like the nations of the lands...He has not assigned us our portion like theirs...For they bow to vanity and emptiness...But we bend our knees, bow, and acknowledge our thanks before the King Who reigns over kings..." Although it is true that one must feel fortunate every day for being a Jew and having a special relationship with G'd, on the days of Chanukah one should focus and rejoice about the fact that G'd brought about a miracle in order to continue and secure the special relationship with His Children. One must understand and appreciate that G'd is willing to "deliver the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure..." in order to preserve His intimate relationship with His people.