

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
**WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES**  
*Parshas Vayechi*

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**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita***

| <b><i>Inside This Week's Edition</i></b>                                  | <b><u>Page</u></b> |
|---|--------------------|
| <b><i>1. The Source of Yaakov's Blessing</i></b>                          | <b>2</b>           |
| <b><i>2. The Unlimited Value of Learning from One's Mistake</i></b>       | <b>3</b>           |
| <b><i>3. The Special Linkage Between Every Jew and the Patriarchs</i></b> | <b>3</b>           |
| <b><i>4. The Ripple Effect of a Mitzvah</i></b>                           | <b>4</b>           |
| <b><i>5. The Qualification that is necessary for Kingship</i></b>         | <b>5</b>           |

***Last Week's Edition:***

Yosef's Spiritual Posture as Viceroy of Egypt  
 The Convincing Element of the Tears of Yosef  
 The Hidden Message of the Wagons  
 Yosef's Qualification as the Guarantor for Torah  
 Egypt- the Provider to the World

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## Parshas Vayechi

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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### 1. The Source of Yaakov's Blessing

After Yaakov had defeated the archangel of Esav, Yaakov was named "Yisroel." The Torah explains that the basis for naming Yaakov, "Yisroel", is because "(he) lorded over man (Esav and Lavan) and G'd (archangel of Esav)..." After assuming the name "Yisroel" we find a continuous interchange of references between the names "Yaakov" and "Yisroel" regarding identifying Yaakov in particular contexts. Sforno explains that whenever Yaakov is confronted with an issue regarding the spirituality and future of his children and the Jewish people, the name Yisroel is employed. Otherwise, he is identified as "Yaakov." Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the name "Yisroel" is applied when he functions as the spiritual father of the Jewish people. He is referred to as "Yaakov" when he functions in a lesser capacity – a physical person.

When Yaakov designated Ephraim and Manasheh, the sons of Yosef, to have equivalent status to his own children as "tribes" the Torah states, "**Yaakov said to Yosef '...Ephraim and Manasheh shall be mine like Reuven and Shimon...'.**" It is interesting to note that the reference the Torah uses in this context is "Yaakov" rather than "Yisroel." Meaning, Yaakov functioning in his capacity as the father of his children considered the sons of Yosef as his own children (although they were his grandchildren). However, when Yaakov chooses to bless Ephraim and Manasheh, the Torah refers to him as "Yisroel."

The Torah states, "**Then Yisroel saw Yosef's sons and said, 'Who are these? ...'**" Rashi cites the Midrash which explains that the question of Yaakov was, "Why are Ephraim and Manasheh not worthy of my blessing?" He asked this because when he initially attempted to bless them the Shechina (Divine Presence) removed Itself from him. The Midrash tells us that in fact the cause of the lapse of Divine Presence was because evil people were meant to descend from Ephraim and Manasheh. Since Ephraim and Manasheh had this spiritual deficiency Yisroel was not able to bless them. When Yosef

understood that Yaakov sensed that there was a spiritual deficiency within his children, he had shown him the marriage certificate proving that they were conceived within a proper context of Jewish Law. Yosef subsequently beseeched G'd to return His Presence to Yaakov. If Yosef had not prayed for the reinstatement of the Shechina, Yaakov would have not have blessed his grandchildren Ephraim and Manasheh.

It is interesting to note that "Yaakov" had designated Ephraim and Manasheh to be considered "tribes" despite the deficiency that ultimately manifested itself in their descendents. However, as "Yisroel," the spiritual Patriarch, he chose to withhold the blessing from his grandchildren because the Shechina departed from him. If he was not able to bless his grandchildren as "Yisroel" why then did he designate them as "tribes?"

Rambam explains that a Kohen is obligated and qualified to give the priestly blessing (Birchas Kohanim) to the congregation, although he may be an evil person (rasha). It is because the Kohen is only a conduit for G'd's blessing. As the verse states, "**And I (G'd) will bless them (the Jewish people) ...**" Yaakov, our Patriarch was the location of the Divine Presence in existence. His blessing was not something that emanated from himself; but rather, he was only a conduit for G'd's blessing which was transmitted through him. Consequently, when the Shechina departed from him, he was no longer able to give the blessing. Although he could have articulated the blessing to his grandchildren, it would have not had the eternal value upon those for whom it was meant. It was only because Yosef supplicated G'd that the Shechina should be reinstated to Yaakov that he was able to transmit G'd's blessing upon his grandchildren.

The blessing that Yaakov had given Ephraim and Manasheh was, "**O G'd before Whom my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak walked- G'd Who shepherds me from my inception until this day: May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads...**" Sforno explains that Yaakov blessed Ephraim and Manasheh with the blessing that they should have the capacity to serve G'd properly. They should be able to

identify with Avraham and Yitzchak as the verse states in Psalms, "My heart should be exclusively designated to fear G'd..." Just as Avraham and Yitzchak had the capacity to exclusively devote themselves to G'd so too should Ephraim and Manasheh have a similar capacity. Yaakov prayed for the spiritual potential of his grandchildren. He fully understood that if their spirituality was addressed in this manner, they would have a greater chance to succeed as tribes.

## 2. *The Unlimited Value of Learning from One's Mistake*

The Torah tells us that before Yaakov passed away, he blessed his sons. He blessed Reuvain saying, **"Reuvain, you are my firstborn, my strength and my initial vigor, foremost in rank and foremost in power..."** The Midrash explains, "Yaakov had said to Reuvain you as my firstborn had three crowns in your hand— priesthood (kehunah), kingship (malchus), and that of getting a double portion (bechorah) and you were qualified to have all three...However you have forfeited them. What was the cause of this? You were impulsive (like water/unrestrained). Therefore you will be no different than any of your brothers...Reb Eliezer explains that Reuvain was impulsive and he sinned. He had moved the bed of his father Yaakov from the location that he had designated it without his permission. This act is considered by the Torah to have the equivalent seriousness of Reuvain cohabiting with his father's concubine..."

Very often the most valuable and profound lessons in life are learned through one's mistakes. The Torah tells us that after Yosef recounted his (prophetic) dreams to his brothers, his relationship with them became tenuous. When he was sent by his father to seek out their welfare, his brothers wanted to kill him. The Torah states, **"Reuvain heard (what his brothers were planning), and he rescued him (Yosef) from their hand; he said, 'We will not strike him mortally!...Shed no blood! Throw him into this pit in the desert...intending to rescue him from their hand, to return him to his father.'" The Torah attests to the fact that Reuvain's intent was not to leave Yosef to die in the pit, but rather to save him.**

Sforno explains the verse **"...and he rescued him from their hand..."** Acting on a sudden impulse can bring about a wrong (tragedy) that can never be corrected. Such as the incident of Reuvain and Bilhah (when he moved the bed of his father) – as it states in the verse, **"(he) was impulsive as water..."** Reuvain was able to act upon the moment in saving Yosef as a result of his personal failing. He had moved the bed of his father

Yaakov from its location without consulting with him. He thus saved Yosef's life.

Had Reuvain not interceded, Yosef would have been killed. Consequently there would not have been a Jewish people. Yosef was an integral part of the infrastructure of the Jewish people. Yaakov, through tradition that was transmitted to him, knew that if one of his children were to pass away during his lifetime, there would be no Jewish people and he would thus suffer eternally in *gehenom*.

Although Reuvain's impulsive behavior had caused him to forfeit the three crowns that were rightfully his, the lesson that he had learned from his mistake caused him to save his brother Yosef and thus guarantee a Jewish people.

## 3. *The Special Linkage Between Every Jew and the Patriarchs*

The Torah tells us that Yaakov gave a special blessing to Ephraim and Manasheh, the sons of Yosef. The Torah states, **"...May my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak...By you (Ephraim and Manasheh) shall Israel bless saying, 'May G'd make you like Ephraim and like Manasheh.'" As a result of Yaakov's blessing, every Jew throughout the ages has blessed his children to be like Ephraim and Manasheh. What is the special value of the blessing given to Ephraim and Manasheh- that it is so integral to every Jewish child?**

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains Yaakov's blessing **"...may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak..."** to be that Ephraim and Manasheh should be valued no less than the three holy Patriarchs - Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Thus, when the names of Ephraim and Manasheh are mentioned they will evoke the equivalent level of love from G'd as that of the three Patriarchs. As the verse in Yirmiya states, "...Ephraim My precious son..." Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh states, "The name of Ephraim is esteemed and seen as precious in the Eyes of G'd and therefore it is mentioned with exceptional love." Just as G'd has special love for the holy Patriarchs, who brought His Name into existence, so too will He have special love for the one blessed to be like Ephraim and Manasheh.

When G'd identifies Himself in the Torah, it is not as "I am the Creator of the world," or "the Infinite Being" but rather, "I am the G'd of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov." G'd quantifies Himself in this existence through

His relationship with the holy Patriarchs. His level of love for them is beyond human comprehension. Therefore Yaakov's blessing to Ephraim and Manasheh is truly unique and special – that the level of love that G'd has towards them should be no less than the holy Patriarchs. Consequently, when one blesses his children to be as Ephraim and Manasheh, in essence the blessing is that G'd's love towards them should no less than His love for the holy Patriarchs. When one is loved by G'd to this degree he will merit the ultimate level of mercy and blessing.

The blessing of Yaakov to Ephraim and Manasheh concludes, **“and they should be prolific as fish in the midst of the land.”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that firstly fish are not susceptible to the evil eye (because they are hidden from the eye of man). Secondly, fish multiply in unlimited numbers. One could interpret Chazal to mean that it is only because fish are not susceptible to the evil eye that their blessing is unlimited. Similarly, the blessing to Ephraim and Manasheh was that they should not be limited/diminished by the evil eye – therefore they will multiply in unlimited numbers.

According to the interpretation Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh of Yaakov's blessing, we are able to understand the conclusion of Yaakov's words (to be as prolific as fish) not as part of the blessing itself but rather as an outgrowth of his blessing. When one is valued and loved to the same degree as the three holy Patriarchs combined, one is a beneficiary of the unlimited blessing of G'd. One is therefore not susceptible to the evil eye and thus proliferates in unlimited numbers.

In the beginning of the Amidah (Silent Prayer) we identify G'd as “Our G'd (Elokeinu), the G'd of our Forefathers. The G'd of Avraham, the G'd of Yitzchak, and the G'd of Yaakov.” We begin the Amidah by addressing our personal relationship with G'd as “Elokeinu,” which is rooted in our connection to our Patriarchs (Elokei Avoseinu). The Jew's intimate relationship with G'd only exists because of the spiritual dimension of the Patriarchs with whom G'd chose to identify Himself. The Jewish people only ascended to be the “Chosen people” because they were the only nation to accept the Torah unequivocally at Sinai with the declaration of, “Naaseh v' Nishma – we will do and we will listen.” The Jewish people would not have had the spiritual capacity and clarity to make such a declaration had it not been for our holy Patriarchs – Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Without those spiritual genes, which every Jew possesses through inheritance, he would not have relevance to an unlimited spiritual potential.

The blessing that Yaakov gave to Ephraim and Manasheh and that one gives to every Jewish child has truly infinite value- that one's children should be valued no less than Ephraim and Manasheh who are loved to the same degree as the Patriarchs.

#### 4. *The Ripple Effect of a Mitzvah*

The Torah tells us that when Yosef was informed that his father Yaakov was ill he immediately went to see him. The Midrash states, “Reb Meir says, ‘The dead of the non-Jew are considered dead. However, when a Jew passes away, although he is physically deceased he is considered alive. It is because in his merit the living are maintained. (Although those who are alive do not have sufficient personal merit to continue to exist, they are maintained because of the merit of those who passed away before them.) Where do we find such an example? When the Jewish people failed with the sin of the Golden Calf, G'd decreed that they should be destroyed. It was only because Moshe supplicated G'd in the merit of the Patriarchs that He annulled the decree. Moshe had said to G'd, **‘Remember Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yisroel Your servants...’** As a result, the Jewish people continued until this day...”

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos discusses the question whether we continue to draw upon the merit of the Patriarchs or it is possible that their merits have been depleted. If one were to combine the lifespan of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, they lived for 292 years. Did they over their lifetimes generate enough merit to sustain the billions of Jews that have come into existence since their passing? We mention every day in the Amidah (Silent Prayer) that G'd remembers the kindness (*zocher chasdei avos*) of the Patriarchs. How is it possible that the accomplishments of the Patriarchs have unlimited value-seemingly never to be depleted? The text of the first blessing of the Amidah states that when the merits of the Patriarchs are depleted G'd will bring Moshiach to redeem the Jewish people.

There is a principle that is cited by Chofetz Chaim in his writings that if one provides what is needed to give a child a proper Jewish education and that child develops to be a true Torah observant Jew who establishes a family, the one who contributed to his education will receive the merit of all the generations who will descend from the one who he assisted until the end of time. It is through the one act of providing initially for the child's education that the benefactor becomes the beneficiary of unlimited merit. Had it not been for his initiative there would not have been generations of Torah observant families.

We find this principle stated in the Mishna in Tractate Bava Metziah, "If one finds the lost article of one's father and the lost article of one's rebbe (the one who mentored him in Torah), the lost article of the rebbe takes priority over the lost article of the father." Meaning, the child must first return the lost item to the rebbe before he return's his own father's lost article. The Mishna explains that the reason for this is, "The rebbe is the cause of bringing the child into the world to come (eternal existence) and the father his only responsible for bringin the child into the physical existence."

If Moshe had not invoked the merit of the Patriarchs after the sin of the Golden Calf, there would be no Jewish people. Had the Jewish people been destroyed, the world would have reverted back to a state of pre-existence. G'd created existence only so that the Jewish people should accept the Torah at Sinai and fulfill it. If there is no Jewish people then existence has no purpose. All the kiddush Hashem (sanctification of G'd's Name) and the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvos that has come about since G'd annulled the decree of destruction due to the merit of the Patriarchs, accrues to the Patriarchs. Had it not been for the merit of "Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yisroel Your servants..." there would be no Jewish people and consequently no fulfillment of Torah. Thus, every aspect of spirituality that came to be from that moment going forward until the end of time is attributed to the Patriarchs. Therefore, although the Patriarchs no longer exist in the physical world, their account of merit is continuously being replenished by the mitzvah deeds of the Jewish people. In turn, the unlimited accrued merit of the Patriarchs who have passed away continues to maintain existence.

If the Jewish people however do not continue to bring about kiddush Hashem and G'd forbid cause chilul Hashem (desecration of G'd's Name) then the merit of the Patriarchs will be depleted. At that time, G'd will need to bring Moshiach to redeem the Jewish people.

### ***5. The Qualification that is necessary for Kingship***

The Torah tells us that before Yaakov passed away he blessed his children. The blessing which he gave to his son Yehudah was one of "kingship." As the verse states, "...the scepter shall not part from Yehudah..." All the princes and leaders of the Jewish people descend from Yehudah. Ramban explains that the reason the family of the *Chashmanaim* (family of Kohanim who initiated the battle against the Greeks) were destroyed and became extinct was because that had violated the blessing of

Yaakov. After defeating the Greeks they assumed the position of "king" (of the Jewish people) on a permanent basis (not as an interim government). Although, had it not been for their initiative and selfless sacrifice the Jewish people would have assimilated, it was not sufficient merit for them to prevent their destruction. Why did Yehudah, the fourth son of Yaakov, merit that his descendents should be designated to be the kings of Israel?

The Torah states, "**Then Yaakov called for his sons...Yehudah your father's sons shall prostrate themselves to you. A lion cub is Yehudah; from the prey, my son, you elevated yourself. He crouches, lies down like the lion, and like the awesome lion, who dares rouse him?**" Yaakov compares Yehudah to the lion that despite its enormous strength it is able to restrain and exercise complete control over all its faculties. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Yehudah exercised this level of control regarding Yosef, his brother. As it is stated in the Midrash, "When Yehudah's brothers had initially wanted to kill Yosef, he interjected, "What would be the purpose of shedding our brother's blood?" Yehudah convinced them to sell him into slavery instead.

The Midrash continues, "It is also the case that Yehudah exercised restraint regarding the incident of Tamar. When Tamar intimated that Yehudah had fathered the children that she was carrying, rather than ignoring her plea in order to protect his honor and avoid disgrace, Yehudah openly admitted that he in fact fathered her children by saying, "**She is more righteous than I am.**" Despite his dimension of person, and enormous strength and ability, Yehudah was able to keep things in perspective and not allow his conflicts of interest to interfere with what is truly correct. This is a fundamental characteristic of "kingship" and leadership. A king/true leader does not allow his personal agenda and conflict to interfere to any degree with what he needs to do.

The Torah tells us that Leah initially had difficulty conceiving. After Leah had given birth to her first son Reuvain she said, "**Because Hashem has seen my humiliation, for now my husband will love me.**" After Shimon, her second son was born, Leah declared, "**Because Hashem has heard that I am unloved...**" After the birth of Levi, her third son, Leah said, "**This time my husband will become attached to me for I have borne him three sons...**" However after she conceived and gave birth to Yehudah, her fourth son, Leah proclaimed her thankfulness to G'd by saying, "**This time let me gratefully praise Hashem. Therefore she called his name Yehudah.**" If G's had allowed Leah initially to conceive despite her difficulty, why did she not express

her thankfulness to G'd after conceiving her first child? Why was it only after Yehudah that she declared her thankfulness to G'd?

It was only after Leah's personal issues were addressed by the birth of her first three sons that she was able to give thanks to G'd. Leah was consumed with her personal need to be accepted and loved by Yaakov and was not able to focus on being thankful that she was able to conceive. However, after bearing three children, Leah came to a level of understanding and clarity that enabled her to express her gratitude to G'd. Leah should have come to this realization when she gave birth to her first child, which she did not. However, after she gave birth to Yehudah she appreciated that she had received more than her share of children. (There were to be four wives of Yaakov and Twelve Tribes of Israel that were meant to be born. Thus, three children would have been her proper share of the total number.)

If one expresses his thankfulness, it is an indication that he appreciates what he received. However, if one does not express himself in an appreciative manner, when he should have done so, it is a clear indication that his conflicts did not allow him to see what he received in its proper light. Similarly, a qualification that is an imperative to be a true leader/king, is that one must have the ability to rise above personal conflict and see things as they truly are. This was Yehudah

Yehudah did not allow his own feelings regarding Yosef to interfere with doing what was proper and correct. Despite the strained relationship that existed between himself and Yosef, he was able to suppress those negative feelings towards his brother. He was endowed with this special ability only because Leah, his mother, had achieved this level of clarity and understanding that allowed her to express her thankfulness to G'd. Thus, Yehudah possessed this trait, which qualified him to be chosen as king.

The language and terminology, which the Jewish people employ to communicate with and supplicate G'd, are the words that were set forth by King David, the Psalmist. King David was a conqueror and a King of Israel. What qualified him to be the one to understand how to supplicate G'd? Tehillim (Psalms) is the expression of King David's yearning, understanding, appreciating, and internalization of G'd. One would think that Levi, who was chosen to be G'd's officiant, should have authored such a text.

Tefillah (prayer) is classified as the service of G'd. It is only when one subordinates and negates himself and his self-interests that he has relevance to understanding

who G'd is. Tefillah is not simply beseeching Him for one's own need. We ask Him for our needs only because the request itself is an acknowledgement of recognizing Him as the Omnipotent Being. Making the request is only a confirmation that one fully recognizes who G'd is.

King David displayed and exemplified all of the characteristics of his forbearer Yehudah. He was able to rise above his own issues and fully invest his life to the consecration and sanctification of G'd's Name. King David was the most qualified to be the king of Israel/leader because he had the ability to subordinate and transcend his own self-interest. Thus, he was able to lead the Jewish people as G'd had wanted him to do. King David had inherited the characteristic of "kingship" from his forbearer Yehudah, and therefore is the one who authored the book of Tehillim. However, Levi although he was chosen to be the officiant of G'd, he did not possess the characteristic of negation and subordination of his own personal feelings.