

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentary Series
Portion of Vayechi

January 8, 2009

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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Yad Avraham Institute
New York
January 8, 2009

B"H

Vayechi

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita
Dean

1. Yaakov's Depth of Sensitivity to G'd's Glory

The Torah states, **“The time approached for Yisroel to die, so he called for his son, for Yosef, and said to him - Please – if I have found favor in your eyes, please place your hand under my thigh... please do not bury me in Egypt.”** The Midrash explains that Yaakov requested of Yosef and adjured him that he would not be buried in Egypt. One of the reasons that is offered by the Midrash as to why Yaakov was opposed to being buried in Egypt was because he was concerned that he would be deified by the Egyptians after his death. The Egyptian people perceived Yaakov as a spiritual and holy person because of the many miracles that had occurred since his coming to Egypt. He had blessed Pharaoh that the Nile should rise in his presence and irrigate the land. When Yaakov came to Egypt the famine ceased. If the Egyptians had deified Yaakov, why would Yaakov have any degree of culpability? Their initiative to deify him would be unrelated to Yaakov himself.

If one truly loves G'd and dedicates his life to serving Him with the understanding that the objective of existence is only to Glorify Him as the Omnipotent Being, then to allow circumstances to come about that would be contrary to this objective would be considered a serious failing. Although Yaakov would have not initiated or encouraged the decision of the Egyptians to deify him, allowing it to evolve would be something objectionable and unacceptable.

The Torah tells us that there is a negative commandment, **“Do not place a stumbling block before a blind man.”** Meaning, one is not permitted to be the cause of another to violate something that is forbidden to him. For example, one of the seven Noahide laws, which applies to non-Jews, is the prohibition of eating a limb that was removed from a living animal. If a Jew were to offer a gentile this limb, he would be in violation of the negative commandment of placing a stumbling block before a blind man. However the Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah tells

us that in a situation where one was able to violate the law without the assistance of a third party, if the third party availed the forbidden item to the transgressor, he would not be in violation of the Torah prohibition of placing a stumbling block before a blind man.

Conceptually speaking, although the Torah may not prohibit one from availing the forbidden object to the one who will transgress regardless of the other's participation, nevertheless facilitating another's transgression against G'd's Will would be considered a spiritual failing. Therefore it is Rabbinically forbidden for one to contribute to another's transgression.

If one is a habitual transgressor in a particular area of Jewish law and is classified as an apostate, the rabbinical prohibition of facilitating a setting for him to transgress in that area is not applicable. However, based on the conceptual understanding of the objective of existence, this participation would be classified as something that is contrary to the Will if G'd. It was because of Yaakov's selfless dedication and love for G'd that he did not want to allow a possibility for G'd's Glory to be desecrated through him. However, seemingly based on the Midrash, we see that this was not the reason that Yaakov was opposed to being buried in Egypt.

The Midrash tells us that the reason Yaakov did not want to be buried in Egypt was because it would lead him to being deified and as a result of this G'd would not only punish the idolaters but would also bring retribution upon the object of idolatry, namely Yaakov himself. As we find at the time of the plague of the killing of the first born in Egypt, G'd not only brought about destruction upon the first born, He also had brought judgment upon the deities of Egypt. The Midrash continues, **“After Daniel had interpreted the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (the Babylonian Emperor), he wanted to deify and bow to him. However Daniel fled because G'd's retribution comes upon the idolater as well as upon the object of worship.”**

The Gemara in Bava Metzia tells us that Reish Lakish was identifying and marking the graves of the rabbis. Rashi in his commentary explains that the purpose of marking the graves was so that the Kohanim (Priests) should not unknowingly pass over the graves and contaminate themselves. (It is a Torah violation for a Priest to contaminate himself by coming into contact with the dead). Rashi states, "This was so that a pitfall should not come about through the tzaddikim." This indicates that the tzaddikim who were buried there would have some degree of culpability for the sin of the Priest contaminating himself. We see from this that even if one is not actively responsible for bringing about a spiritual failing, one would still have a degree of culpability. Just as the idols of Egypt did not actively cause the Egyptians to engage in idolatrous behavior, but rather it was their choice, they nonetheless were destroyed by G'd. In the same vein, Yaakov, although he would have not initiated and precipitated his own deification, he would still have a degree of culpability because he would be the object through which the Name of G'd was desecrated. Therefore Yaakov had requested of his son Yosef to remove him from Egypt and not allow this desecration to come about.

2. The Jewish People, the Totality of Existence

The Torah states, "**And it came to pass...someone said to Yosef, 'Behold- your father (Yaakov) is ill...'**" The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia tells us that Yaakov, our Patriarch, was the first person to ever contract an illness. Until Yaakov, mankind did not experience illness. Illness was introduced to the world because Yaakov had requested of G'd to do so. He understood that illness was pertinent to one's preparing for his inevitable passing. If one is aware that he is soon to pass on, he would act responsibly vis-à-vis himself and his family, regarding the distribution of assets and responsibilities. When Yaakov became ill he was made aware of his impending passing and thus had the opportunity to determine the future of his family.

Similarly we find, Avraham our Patriarch, had asked G'd to introduce aging to humanity. Prior to Avraham's request one would retain a youthful appearance until his death. Since Yitzchak had identical facial features as his father Avraham, people would confuse the two of them. They would refer to Yitzchak as Avraham and Avraham as Yitzchak. In order for Avraham to be acknowledged and recognized for who he was, G'd introduced the aging process to humanity. Consequently, the Torah states, "**Avraham became aged advanced in**

days..." Why did Yaakov pray for illness and not Avraham, who preceded him? It would seem that Avraham would have also want to have a sense of his own passing so as to put his family and estate in order. Additionally, although Yaakov understood the value of illness vis-à-vis his own interest and objective in life, why G'd allow all humanity to be affected by this malady?

The blessings that Yaakov had given to each of his children before his passing had eternal value regarding each of them and would determine the status and potential of the Jewish people until the end of time. The blessings that he gave to each of his children established a direction and capacity that allowed the world to meet its objective.

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra states, "Whoever claims to be a descendant of the house of Chashmonaim, is nothing more than a slave." This is because Herod, who was a Canaanite slave in the house of the Chashmonaim (a family of Priests who assumed the kingship of Israel after the miracle of Chanukah), murdered his masters (and their families) and assumed their mantel as king. Had it not been for the initiative of the Chashmonaim to precipitate the battle against the Greeks and the Hellenistic culture, the Jewish people would have assimilated and become extinct. They were the ones who, despite their small numbers and inadequacies, waged a war against the mighty Greek armies for the sake of the spirituality of the Jewish people. Ramban asks, "If the survival of the Jewish people is truly attributed to the selfless sacrifice of the Chashmonaim, why did G'd allow them to become destroyed?" Ramban answers, "Because they had violated the blessing of the elder (Yaakov)." Yaakov had blessed and quantified Yehudah as the royalty of the Jewish people. Thus, the mantel of kingship should have remained within the tribe of Yehudah. Since the Chashmonaim, who were from the tribe of Levy, had violated the dictate and blessing of Yaakov, they deserved to become extinct.

The blessing of Yaakov established and determined the capacity and function of each of the tribes of Israel until the end of time. It was only because of Yaakov's blessings that the tribes were able to meet their potential to fulfill their objective as a Jewish people. If Yaakov would have not had a sense of his own passing, through illness, he could have missed the opportunity to bless his children as he had. This would have had a detrimental effect upon the spirituality of the Jewish people- thus not allowing all existence to meet its potential. The Midrash explains based on the opening verse of the Torah, that the entire world was created for the sake of the Jewish people because it is only through them

that existence is able to achieve perfection. G'd created the world for the sake of the fulfillment of His Torah. The Jewish people, because of their dimension of spirituality (descending from the Patriarchs) were the only nation who were qualified to receive the Torah at Sinai. Given the magnitude of importance for the Jewish people to receive the blessing from Yaakov, it was imperative that Yaakov should ask G'd to introduce illness into existence. Yaakov was the Patriarch who was responsible for establishing the eternal people- his own children. However, Avraham, was not; therefore, he did not request of G'd to introduce illness into existence.

The Midrash tells us that the stones that Yaakov had taken and placed around his head when he had slept on Mt. Moriah were twelve in number. When he had awoken, the twelve stones had been fused into one – indicating that he was qualified to be the father of the Jewish people. The Midrash asks, “What did G'd do with this one stone?” The Midrash answers that G'd had sunk it into the depths of the earth - establishing it as the corner stone of existence. The Midrash continues to explain that the reason there are twelve months in the year, twelve signs of the Zodiac, and twelve hours of day and night is because the Jewish people number twelve tribes. Their imprint and profile is evident in all existence. Thus, the value of illness regarding the rest of humanity, regardless of their appreciation for it, is irrelevant because all existence is contingent upon the Jewish people.

3. *Ephraim and Manasheh, the Quantification of Yosef*

The Torah tells us that when Yosef had taken his sons, Ephraim and Manasheh, to Yaakov, his father, to receive his blessing, Yaakov had asked, “**Who are these? ...**” The Midrash states, “Is it possible that Yaakov did not recognize Yosef's children? Ephraim and Manasheh had studied Torah with Yaakov every day for the seventeen-year period they were together in Egypt. How could he not recognize them? Rather, Yaakov had foreseen through his prophetic vision that Ephraim and Manasheh would bring forth evil progeny in the future. He had seen that Yeravam Ben Nevat and Achov, who were evil idolaters would descend from Ephraim. It is because of what he had foreseen, that the Divine Presence removed Itself from him. At that moment, Yaakov was not able to bless Yosef's children. When Yosef had realized what had happened, he prostrated himself and supplicated G'd for mercy. Yosef had said, ‘If in fact my sons are worthy of my father's blessing, please do not allow me to be in a state of disgrace.’” It would seem that if Yosef was pleading with G'd on behalf of his children, he should

have said, “If in fact my sons are worthy, please allow them to be blessed.” Rather, Yosef adds, “...please do not allow me to be in a state of disgrace.” It is indicated from Yosef's closing supplication that if the Divine Presence does not return to Yaakov to allow his children to be blessed, it is an indication that a deficiency lies within himself. Meaning, he would be the one responsible for their lack of worthiness.

We find that when Yaakov had given the blessing to Levy he had said, “**...my glory should not be associated with his congregation.**” The Midrash explains that since Yaakov had foreseen that Korach would descend from Levy, he did not want his name to be associated with this evil descendant. Korach and his congregation challenged Moshe's authenticity as G'd's spokesman and attempted to usurp his authority by leading a revolt against him. Because Yaakov had requested not to be associated with Korach, when the Torah delineates Korach's lineage, it does not trace his pedigree back to Yaakov. Despite the fact that Yaakov had foreseen an evil descendant emanating from Levy, the Divine Presence did not remove Itself from him. Why did the Divine Presence only depart from Yaakov when he attempted to bless Yosef's children Ephraim and Manasheh, and not his own?

Before the Divine Presence departed from Yaakov, he had said to Yosef, “**Ephraim and Manasheh shall be mine like Reuvain and Shimon.**” Meaning, that although Ephraim and Manasheh were only his grandchildren, Yaakov nevertheless classified them to be the equivalent of his own sons Reuvain and Shimon. Thus they were also established as the tribes of Israel. Before Yaakov established Ephraim and Manasheh as tribes, he had said to Yosef, “**The children that were born to you before I came to Egypt...**” Why was it necessary for Yaakov to predicate his establishing of Ephraim and Manasheh as tribes on the fact that they were born to Yosef before he had come to Egypt? It is clear that Yaakov was quantifying Yosef as being the equivalent of himself. Just as he was able to father the tribes of Israel in the spiritual vacuum of the community of evil Lavan (his father in law), so too was Yosef able to mentor his sons Ephraim and Manasheh in the depraved society of Egypt. Therefore Yaakov valued his grandchildren no less than his own sons Reuvain and Shimon.

Although Yaakov had seen that Korach would descend from his son Levy, the Divine Presence did not depart from him because regardless of the deficiency that lies within the progeny of Levy, he was still the son of Yaakov. His status of being a tribe of Israel was not contingent on anything other than that reality. In contrast,

the only reason Yaakov established Ephraim and Manasheh to be the equivalent of his own children was because he had valued and quantified Yosef as being the equivalent to himself. Thus, if the Divine Presence should depart from Yaakov, it would be an indication that there lies a deficiency within Yosef. Consequently, Ephraim and Menasha could not be equated to Reuvain and Shimon. This is the reason Yosef had requested of G'd that if in fact his children were worthy of Yaakov's blessing he should not be disgraced. Meaning, that Yaakov's understanding of his son Yosef was mistaken – that in fact he was not the equivalent of his father Yaakov.

4. 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 explains, **“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 Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh's interpretation 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.

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 *Chashmonaim* (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 Levy, 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 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 Levy, 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, Levy 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.

YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos (Maharal)
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar – Derech Hashem
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Chulin –Kisui Hadam
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi- Bava Kamah
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:30 – 12:30pm	Talmud: Megilah Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
1:00-2:00 pm	Ramchal: Derech Hashem Location: Cedarview Capital 1Penn Plaza (45 th FL.)

Tuesday

12:10 - 1:10pm	Torah Insight Based on the Parsha Location: Yad Avraham
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Wednesday

11:30 – 12:30 pm	Talmud: Megilah Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
1:00—2:00 pm	Daas Tevunos Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

11:00 –12:00pm	Duties of The Heart Location: Yad Avraham
12:30 – 1:30 pm	Talmud: Megilah Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL)