

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES
Parshas Vayeishev

December 22, 2005

Refuah Shaleima to
Yaakov Gideon Ben Leah and
Simone Bat Eva

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
<i>1. Yosef's Birth – A Milestone in Jewish History</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>2. The Jew's Claim to Existence</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>3. The Challenges of Life</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>4. The Consequences of Yosef's Tale Bearing</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>5. Yaakov's Internalization of G'd's Promise</i>	<i>5</i>

Last Week's Edition:

The Infrastructure of the Jewish People
How does One Deal with the World Despite its Unlimited Pitfalls?
Yaakov's Sensitivity to His Own Spirituality
The Uniqueness of Yaakov
One's Perspective of Life Determines One's Happiness
Infusing the Physical with the Spiritual
The Secret to Jewish Survival

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
December 22, 2005

B"H

Parshas Vayeishev

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*
Dean

1. Yosef's Birth – A Milestone in Jewish History

The Torah tells us that after the birth of Yosef, Yaakov was no longer threatened by his brother Esav. As the verse states, **“The house of Yaakov is fire, the house of Yosef is a flame, and the house of Esav is straw.”** The Midrash explains that although Yaakov is compared to fire and Esav to straw, there needs to be something that draws the fire to the straw – to consume it. This was Yosef, who is compared to the flame. Meaning that with the birth of Yosef, Yaakov was certain that he would defeat Esav because with their combined spiritual energy they would consume Esav.

After Yosef was born, Yaakov wished to leave Charan and the household of his father-in-law Lavan. Until the birth of Yosef it was not even a consideration for Yaakov to leave Charan.

It is interesting to note that when Yaakov had received the blessings from his father, Yitzchak, he had said **“The voice is the voice of Yaakov and the hands are the hands of Esav...”** The Midrash explains that as long as the voice of Yaakov prevails (the sound of Torah study is heard in the synagogues and study halls), the hands will not be the hands of Esav. Esav is incapacitated in the face of Torah. However, if the Jewish people are not sufficiently engaged in Torah study then they will be vulnerable to the domination of Esav. If this is so, then why was Yaakov concerned about confronting Esav before the birth of Yosef? Yaakov was the epitome of one who was fully immersed in Torah study as the verse states, **“He was the perfect man who dwelled in the tent (tent of Torah).”** One would think that the Torah study of Yaakov would have been sufficient to protect him against Esav. Yaakov had sent a message to his brother Esav, that although he had spent many years in the household of his father-in-law Lavan (who was evil), he had meticulously observed all of the precepts of the Torah. Yaakov was communicating to Esav that he was not vulnerable to him because he was not spiritually diminished. If this is so,

then what is the added dimension of protection brought about by the birth of Yosef?

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra states, **“The progeny of Esav could only fall by the hands of the progeny of Rachel.”** In every battle throughout history between the Jewish people and the descendants of Esav, the progeny of Rachel were involved - either the descendants of Binyamin or Yosef. If Rachel's children were not involved, the Jewish people could not have been victorious. With this we can perhaps address our difficulty.

Regarding the general well-being and existence of the Jewish people, as long as the voice of Yaakov is heard (the Jewish people are fully engaged in Torah study), then Esav is subordinated to the Jewish people. However, regarding confrontations and battles with Esav/Edomites/Amalek, the blessing given to Yaakov by Yitzchak is not adequate to protect the Jewish people from defeat. The descendants of Rachel need to be engaged in the battle to consume Esav – as the verse states, **“...the house of Yosef is a flame”** which consumes **“the house of Esav (which is) straw.”** The only way Esav can be defeated and vanquished is when there is a representation of the descendants of Rachel.

2. The Jew's Claim to Existence

The Midrash states, **“When Yaakov had seen the many princes of Esav he became frightened. He had said, ‘Who could defeat these princes?’ It is analogous to many camels that were laden with flax trying to enter the shop of the blacksmith. The blacksmith wondered, ‘How could all of these laden camels enter into this limited location?’ A person with great wisdom responded, ‘If only one spark should go out from your bellows, it will consume all the flax.’** Similarly when Yaakov was concerned about defeating the many princes of Esav, G'd responded, **“One spark of yours will destroy them – that spark is Yosef.”** As the verse states, **“The house of Yaakov is fire, the house of Yosef is a flame, and the house of Esav is straw.”** When Yaakov had seen the many princes of Esav, what was the basis for his fear?

The Torah tells us that when Rivka was pregnant with Yaakov and Esav, “there were rumblings within her innards.” She had gone to Shem, the prophet, to understand the nature of these rumblings. Shem had said, “There are two nations in your womb engaged in battle...” Chazal explain that Yaakov and Esav were battling over the dominance over the physical and spiritual worlds. Ultimately, an agreement was reached between them – Esav’s dominance will be in the physical world and Yaakov’s dominance will be in the spiritual world.

The Midrash tells us that when Yaakov had met Esav after leaving the home of Lavan, Esav had noticed the tremendous wealth that Yaakov possessed. Esav was taken aback and said to Yaakov, “Did we not agree that my domain is the physical world and yours is the spiritual? How is it that you have accumulated so much material wealth? You have taken from my portion!” Yaakov responded, “Your portion of the material world is for the sake of material itself, whereas my portion in the material world is solely to accommodate the spiritual. It is only a means to an end.” Esav responded, “If that is the case, then we should reconsider our initial agreement. Let us divide equally the material and spiritual domains.” Yaakov did not agree.

The essence of Yaakov is spirituality. Any material assets are completely invested in spiritual pursuits. However, if the material of Yaakov is not solely for the sake to advance his spirituality, then he has failed.

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra states, “The progeny of Esav could only fall by the hands of the progeny of Rachel.” We see that the power to dominate and subordinate Esav emanates from Rachel. Why is this so?

Esav was the embodiment of pure physicality. He is referred to by the Torah as “The hunter, the man of the field.” Rachel, our Matriarch, although she is depicted by the Torah as a woman who possessed exceptional beauty had consecrated that physicality to serve G’d. She had subordinated her physicality to serve her spirituality. In fact the Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that Rachel, our Matriarch, was one of the most beautiful women who ever lived. She was a person who fully dominated her physicality. Yosef, the son of Rachel had possessed an exceptional level of beauty and genius. Although he could have pursued material aspirations, he like his mother chose to consecrate his physicality for the service of G’d. He also fully dominated his physicality. The Midrash states, “Yosef merited the blessing to be not subject to the evil eye because as Viceroy of Egypt his eye did not benefit

from any flesh that was not his. So too no eye is able to diminish him.”

Esav was the one who was dominated by the material/his physicality. Rachel, our Matriarch dominated and subordinated her physicality. Therefore Esav, who represents the material, is dominated by the descendents of Rachel – who dominate the physical.

When Yaakov saw the many princes of Esav he was frightened. The basis for his concern and fear was that the influences of Edom, who epitomize the material for its own sake, may to some degree affect his children/the Jewish people. Thus it would cause them to be vulnerable to Esav. The Jew’s portion in existence is only to utilize the material purely for the sake of the spiritual. It is only a medium for spiritual advancement. How does one dispel this influence? G’d responded to Yaakov by giving him a child by the name of Yosef who is able to create a force that will insulate the Jewish people from that influence. He is the one who fully dominates the material. Yosef is the equivalent of the spark that consumes the enormous amount of flax. Yosef provides the clarity to understand that the only value of the material is its accommodation of the spiritual. Yosef’s representation defuses the allure of the physical world.

3. The Challenges of Life

The Torah states, “**These are the offspring of Yaakov, Yosef...**” The Midrash explains the reason the Torah mentions only Yosef as the “offspring of Yaakov,” “Yosef resembled his father in every respect. Whatever Yaakov experienced in his life, his son Yosef also experienced. Yaakov was despised by his brother Esav. Yosef was despised by his brothers. Yaakov was exiled to Charan. Yosef was exiled to Egypt. Yaakov had said, ‘I have paid for what was stolen during the daytime and during the nighttime.’ (Meaning, Yaakov had assumed responsibility for shepherding the flocks of Lavan. A shepherd has limited liability and is not responsible for thefts that occur during the nighttime period. Yaakov assumed full liability although he was not obligated to do so.) Yosef had said (to the wine steward while in prison), ‘I was stolen from the household of my parents and sold into slavery.’” Why was it necessary for Yosef to experience almost identical circumstances as his father Yaakov?

The Gemara in Tractate Sukkah tells us that Abaye had witnessed a man following a woman into the marshes in order to commit adultery. He stood at a distance and overheard the conversation between them.

The man had explained to the woman that it was too complicated to carry on a relationship under such difficult circumstances. He chose not to commit adultery. Although he could have carried out his initial intention, he chose to extricate himself from the relationship. After witnessing what had transpired between these two individuals, Abayei returned to the study hall in a depressed state. He stood near the study hall and sulked. One of his associates asked him, "Why are you sulking?" Abayei responded, "I the great Abayei would not have been able to resist such temptation that this ordinary person was able to resist. Evidently this does not reflect well for me." His colleague replied, "Do not be concerned, the greater you are from your fellow, the inclination is greater." In order for one to have the power of free choice one must always be in a context where choice is necessary. If this is so, then as one advances spiritually, his evil inclination must continuously intensify to maintain a state of choice.

Every individual possesses a unique potential regarding his spirituality that must be developed and perfected. One must experience many trials and tribulations in life to bring that potential to fruition. These experiences are tailored to accommodate the potential of every individual.

The Gemara in Tractate Sotah tells us that Yosef had the spiritual dimension of being able to father twelve tribes of Israel as his father Yaakov. We see that Yosef not only resembled his father in the physical sense as Chazal tell us, in addition his spiritual dimension was also similar to that of his father. Just as Yaakov needed to experience a unique set of circumstances in order to develop and perfect his potential, so too did Yosef need similar experiences to develop his potential.

The Midrash concludes, "...Yaakov had said, 'I have paid for what was stolen during the daytime and during the nighttime...'" Yosef had said (to the wine steward while in prison), 'I was stolen from the household of my parents and sold into slavery.'" Regarding Yaakov, he was referring to sheep that were stolen during his watch as a custodian. However, the statement of Yosef is referring to himself being kidnapped from the household of his parents. If the Midrash was comparing the events of the life of Yosef with that of his father, what is the basis of comparison regarding the stolen sheep and Yosef being kidnapped? Seemingly, they are two unrelated events.

Whenever one experiences an infringement on his life, it is a disruption that could either diminish one's focus or have no effect whatsoever. Yaakov was continuously cheated and victimized by his father-in-law Lavan, yet he

remained unaffected. He retained his cognizance and focus on his spirituality despite the environment that was contrary to all that he represented. As Chazal tell us, Yaakov had communicated to his brother Esav that despite his association with Lavan (who was evil) for 20 years, he adhered meticulously to all the precepts of the Torah. Similarly Yosef's life was disrupted by being abducted from his parents' home and sold into slavery. He was taken from an environment of spiritual purity and placed in Egypt, which was a society that represented spiritual impurity at the most exaggerated level. Although Yosef had experienced upheaval and disruption in his life, he maintained his status as a tzaddik (righteous). He was totally unaffected. In fact, Yosef when he wanted to reveal to his father that he was still alive, he had sent him wagons, which alluded to the last Torah subject matter that they had studied together. The point of this was to communicate to his father that he had not forgotten any of the Torah that he had studied with him.

It is true that every Jew has the same level of obligation as dictated by the Torah. However, each individual has a unique spirituality that needs to be developed and perfected in its own way. Therefore, G'd provides every individual with a unique set of challenges and circumstances in life in order to create the setting for those choices. One very often questions why his circumstances are different from that of his peers. However when one understands that life presents itself in a way which is truly beneficial to one's own uniqueness – the question is no longer a question.

4. The Consequences of Yosef's Tale Bearing

The Torah tells us that Yosef spoke negatively (lashon harah) about his brothers to his father Yaakov. Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "Yosef told his father that his brothers had violated the prohibition of eating a limb from a living animal (eiver min ha'chai). He claimed that his brothers referred to the children of the maidservants as slaves (avadim). In addition, Yosef claimed that his brothers had engaged in forbidden sexual relations. In every one of these three areas in which Yosef had spoken lashon harah about his brothers, he was punished. For claiming that his brothers had eaten the limb of a living animal Yosef's special garment was dipped in the blood of a goat (and sent to his father). For claiming that his brothers had referred to the children of the maidservants as 'slaves,' he himself was sold into slavery. For claiming his brothers were involved in forbidden relations, Yosef was subjected to the sexual advances of the wife of his master, Potifar." Thus, according to Chazal the reason the wife of

Potifar was attracted to Yosef was because he had spoken lashon harah about his brothers regarding forbidden sexual relations.

Another Midrash tells us that the reason the wife of Potifar took notice of Yosef was because he had beautified himself. G'd had rebuked Yosef saying, "Your father Yaakov is grieving over you, how could he be preoccupied with self-beautification?" As a result of this claim, Yosef was subjected to the advances of the wife of his master. If this is sufficient reason for the wife of Potifar to take notice of Yosef, then how do we reconcile this with the earlier Midrash cited which states that it was because of Yosef had claimed that his brothers had been involved with sexual impropriety?

If Yosef had not accused his brothers of engaging in illicit relations, G'd would have punished Yosef in another manner for being insensitive to his father's pain (by grooming himself). However because he had accused his brothers of engaging in forbidden relations, the punishment manifested itself through the advances of his master's wife.

The Gemara in Tractate Sotah tells us that Yosef had the potential of fathering twelve tribes of Israel. Even though Ephraim and Menasha were the grandchildren of Yaakov, they had assumed the status of tribes because they were the sons of Yosef. The Gemara tells us that the reason Yosef only fathered two tribes and not an additional ten was because when the wife of Potifar had made sexual advances towards him, he had lost ten droplets of semen. Thus, he forfeited the ability to father ten tribes.

It is interesting to note that if Yosef had not spoken lashon harah about his brothers, in this particular area of sexuality, he would have fathered twelve tribes. In addition, we are able to learn something profound regarding the punishment of Yosef. In addition to violating the prohibition of speaking lashon harah, he was also subject to punishment within the context of measure for measure - consequently, altering the infrastructure of the Jewish people.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that because King David had believed the lashon harah that was communicated to him about Mifiboshes, the son of King Shaul, the kingdom of Israel was destined to be split. Thus, in addition to King David's violation of the law of believing something inappropriate, the consequence altered the future of the Jewish people.

5. Yaakov's Internalization of G'd's Promise

(From *Vayishlach*)

The Torah states after Yaakov had spent 20 years with his father-in-law Lavan and had defeated the archangel of Esav, "**Yaakov arrived complete (*shaleim*) to the city of Shechem...**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain the term "*shaleim* (complete)": "Yaakov was physically complete because he was healed from his injury (sustained while wrestling with the archangel of Esav). He was complete in his assets – although he had given a valuable gift to Esav it was not considered a diminishment of his wealth. Yaakov was complete in his Torah – despite the fact that he was exposed to negative influences in the house of Lavan, Yaakov's Torah remained intact (he did not forget any of his Torah study)." How was it possible that Yaakov did not forget any of his Torah study despite the fact that he had endured such extraordinarily difficult circumstances?

One normally forgets when he loses focus as a result of distractions infiltrating his thought process. Although Yaakov was continuously financially victimized by his father-in-law Lavan and was subject to many negative influences he did not allow himself to be distracted for a moment. Thus, he was able to fully retain all of the Torah that he had studied. When Yaakov left Charan, G'd had promised him, "**I will protect you...**" Yaakov's belief in G'd's promise of protection was not something that he merely intellectualized but rather it was his reality. Thus, despite his difficult circumstances, he continuously maintained an inner peace. When the Torah attests to the fact that Yaakov had returned "*shaleim* (complete) in his Torah" it is a confirmation of his absolute faith in G'd.

It is interesting to note that after Shimon and Levi destroyed the community of Shechem, Yaakov said to them, "**You have disrupted me...**" Rashi explains the "disruption" to mean, "I (Yaakov) have lost my clarity of mind because of what you (Shimon and Levi) have done. My inner peace has been disrupted." The basis for Yaakov to be able to maintain his advanced level of spirituality was only because of the retention of his Torah. Now that he had lost his clarity of mind, as a result of Shimon and Levi's irresponsible behavior, Yaakov's Torah was in jeopardy – thus putting the future of the Jewish people in danger. If Yaakov was unaffected by all of the difficulties that he had faced, why was his clarity diminished as a result of Shimon and Levi?

Yaakov was not concerned about the threat from Lavan and Esav because G'd had guaranteed him his safe return. Consequently, nothing was able to undermine his

peace of mind. However, regarding the possible consequences (the destruction of his family by the nations of Canaan) of the actions of Shimon and Levi, there was no such guarantee from G'd. Yaakov's tranquility and clarity was thus compromised.

Chazal explain that until Yaakov passed away in Egypt, his family was protected from the negative influences of Egypt. Maharal of Prague z'tl explains that despite the intense level of impurity of Egypt the Jewish people were insulated from those influences because of Yaakov's spiritual dimension. His spirituality countered all the impurity that surrounded them in Egypt. Yaakov's unusually dimension of spirituality emanated from his own level of holiness and purity. This was achieved and maintained only through his uninterrupted immersion in Torah study. If Yaakov's Torah had been compromised, his family would have been vulnerable both in the spiritual and physical sense. This is the reason Yaakov, before his passing, had cursed the wrath of Shimon and Levi.

When one has peace of mind and tranquility, one is able to maintain his focus. However, if one is distracted with concerns and worries, his clarity will be diminished. The lack of focus makes the Jew vulnerable. The basis for one's immunity from distraction is his faith in G'd. Meaning, one only needs to be concerned with that which is within his direct control- the areas within his life that he can make a difference. Beyond this, one must believe that he is in the hands of G'd.

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5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30- 7:25 am	Halacha
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi

2:00pm Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
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12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Pesachim**
Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue
Between E.51st and E.52st

Tuesday

12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
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Wednesday

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
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1:00—2:00 pm Derech **Hashem**
Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**
Location: Yad Avraham

12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
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