

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES

*The Portion of*

***Vayeishev***

November 29, 2007

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

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B"H

## Vayeishev

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

### 1. The Non-Essential for the Sake of the Essential

The Midrash states, "Why does the Torah mention the princes of Esav? Does G'd have a lack of information to record? Rather it is to teach us that from the beginning of existence, G'd was recording the pedigree of the world. (It is so that they should not have a claim for the glory that was destined for the Jewish people.) The Torah delineates the families and individuals of the nations of the world only to inform mankind of their detestable behavior. Where do we find this? When the Torah mentions the pedigree of the sons of Cham (son of Noah)...The Torah states, '**Nimrod defied G'd.**'...regarding these generations the Torah does not use the term 'fathered' but rather 'came forth' in order to communicate to us that they all came about through forbidden sexual relations...They are all illegitimate...However regarding the Jewish people, the Torah tells us how G'd brought them close to Him. When it speaks about the Jewish people it does so with the most praiseworthy references/appellations. As it states, '**they are My portion...**'"

The Midrash continues, "The manner in which the Torah deals with the lineage and pedigree of the nations of the world is analogous to a king who was seeking a precious pearl that was lost in the sand. The king searched for the pearl by sifting through the rocks and sand until he found the precious pearl. When he finally came upon the pearl, he discarded the worthless stones and retained the pearl as part of his treasure. Similarly, G'd sifted through the generations of history and discarded that which had no value until He came upon the lives of the Patriarchs Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov – who were revered and valued by Him. Thus, the Torah expounds on every aspect of their lives." Why is it important for the Torah to touch upon the promiscuity of the nations of the world in contrast to the revered status of the Jewish people? Why is it necessary to make known to all humanity who they are?

The Gemara tells us that at the time of the giving of the Torah at Sinai, G'd had offered the Torah to all the nations of the world before offering it to the Jewish people. They had all rejected it, each for his own reason. The Jewish people unequivocally accepted it upon themselves. However, according to the Midrash, G'd never offered the Torah to the nations of the world. Rather, after the Jewish people had accepted it, the nations had come with a claim to G'd, saying, "Why did you not offer Your Torah to us?" G'd responded, "Can you establish your pedigree as My children have established theirs?"

The Torah tells us after the plague, G'd told Moshe and Elazar, (the son of Aaron), to conduct a census of the Jewish people. When enumerating the paternal family names, the Torah adds to each name the letters "hey" and "yud." The reason the Torah adds these letters, which comprise the Name of G'd, is to demonstrate that G'd personally attests to the purity of the Jewish people. As King David writes in Psalms regarding the tribes of Israel, "*Shivtay K'AH aidus l'Yisroel* (the tribes of G'd - who attests to Israel)." In contrast, the nations of the world are the product of incest and adultery. After G'd had given them an understanding that the Jewish people were the only nation qualified to receive the Torah, because of their pedigree, they began to extol the Jewish people.

G'd recorded the pedigree of the all generations from the beginning of existence with a specific objective in mind. Since the purpose of creation was only for the fulfillment of the Torah, it is only that special people who qualify to be the ones to receive it. If there should be a question that other nations are as or more qualified than the Jewish people, the historical recording of existence will attest to the fact that this is not so. They are all products of incestuous and adulterous behavior. For the sake of the Jewish people, the information recorded regarding the nations of the world is pertinent. This is because it is only by contrasting the Jewish people to the other nations, regarding their purity, that the Torah will be glorified through them.

## 2. Seeing Oneself in One's Own True Light

The Torah tells us that after Yaakov was informed by his children that Yosef was killed by a beast, he believed this to be true. Yaakov rent his garments, mourned and grieved over the loss of his son. Yaakov's children attempted to console him; however, the Torah states, **"He refused to be consoled, and said: 'For I will go down to the grave mourning for my son.'"** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Yaakov could not be consoled because one can only be comforted if the person for whom he is grieving is in fact dead. However, if he were still alive, one could not be consoled because a living person is not forgotten from the heart.

Sforno explains that Yaakov refused to be consoled because, "Yaakov did not want the pain/worry to leave his heart." He could have embraced the consolation that was offered to him; however, he consciously rejected it because he did not want to forget his pain.

The Midrash states, "Yaakov had said, **'For I will go down to the grave mourning for my son.'** Meaning he was destined to go to *Geheinom*. G'd had given Yaakov a sign, 'If none of your sons would die in your lifetime, you will be guaranteed a share in the world to come. However, if one of them should die before you pass on, you will go to *Geheinom*.'" Since Yaakov had believed that Yosef had died, he would have been left with only eleven sons. Meaning, the Tribes of Israel would not be complete. Consequently, there would be no Jewish people. As tragic as it was to lose Yosef or as difficult as it was to believe that there would not be a Jewish people emanating from him, Yaakov could have been comforted if he had been receptive to the consolation of his children. However he "refused" because he did not want to forget the reality of his own situation.

Rambam writes in the Laws of Repentance that even if one had repented for specific sins on Yom Kippur, he must again repent for those same sins on every subsequent Yom Kippur. Why does one need to repent for the past if Yom Kippur had already atoned for them? Rambam cites the words of King David in Psalms, "My sin is continuously before me." What is the value of being cognizant of the failings of the past?

When one does not allow himself to forget his shortcomings of the past, he will be continuously in a state of introspection and remorse. This state of cognizance will allow the person to continuously realize his vulnerability

in the areas of the past failings. Yaakov had believed that Yosef had died. He understood this tragedy to be a reflection of his own spiritual shortcomings. Had he been spiritually sound, G'd would not have allowed Yosef to be taken from him. He therefore rejected the consolation of his children regarding his the death of his most beloved son because he understood that if he would, it would cause him not to appreciate and correct the areas in which he had failed.

Ramchal writes in his work, *Mesilas Yesharim*, that flattery, even if it were based in truth, is something that can be destructive and put one's spirituality in jeopardy. If one were continuously flattered for his accomplishments and attributes, it would cause him to no longer be sensitive to his shortcomings and focus on them. Thus, he would become vulnerable to sin. As Ramchal cites cases of great tzaddikim who had truly become evil because they had allowed themselves to be associated with a circle of people who continuously flattered them. King Solomon states, "There is no tzaddik in the land who does good and does not sin." Everyone has spiritual shortcomings that need to be addressed. If a person's focus is only on his positive attributes and accomplishments, his shortcomings will be glossed over.

If Yaakov had embraced the consolation of his children, the impact of Yosef's death revealing to him that he had failed would have been blurred. He would not have sufficiently introspected and thus corrected what needed to be addressed.

## 3. Addressing One's Spiritual Needs

The Torah states, **"These are the chronicles of Yaakov; Yosef..."** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the Torah is equating Yosef to his father Yaakov in the context of experiences. Whatever transpired in Yaakov's life, Yosef had similar experiences. Just as Yaakov's brother hated him and wanted to kill him, so too Yosef's brothers hated him and wanted to kill him. Just as Yaakov needed to flee the home of his parents and go into exile, so too Yosef was exiled from his parent's home. There are many parallels between the life of Yaakov and his son Yosef.

The Torah continues, **"Now Yisroel loved Yosef more than all of his sons since he was a child of his old age (*ben zikunim*)."** Rashi cites a number of interpretations of "*ben zikunim* - child of his old age (literal interpretation)." Another interpretation is that Yaakov loved Yosef more than all of his sons because he

was the "the wisest of them all." Another understanding of "*ben zikunim*" is that Yosef had the identical facial features as his father Yaakov - as if Yosef was the equivalent of his father. Is it possible that the basis for Yaakov's love for his son Yosef was that he resembled him more than any of his other sons? Yaakov loved Yosef because he understood and perceived his potential to be almost identical to his own - more so than all of his sons combined.

Since Yosef's potential was similar to that of his father Yaakov, the setting and context in which he needed to develop had to be similar to that of his father. One only evolves and advances his spirituality through the trials and tribulations of life that are presented to him. Yaakov was forced to flee to the Yeshiva of Shem and Aiver to study Torah at an uninterrupted level for fourteen years in order to prepare and fortify himself spiritually for the exile that he was meant to encounter. The Torah that Yaakov had studied in the Yeshiva of Shem and Aiver was only transmitted to Yosef and not to his other sons. He understood that only Yosef had the ability to deal with all of the negative influences of exile.

Yaakov had spent 22 years away from the home of his parents. Similarly Yosef spent 22 years in Egypt not under the influence of his father, Yaakov. In Egypt, Yosef ascended to the position of Viceroy and simultaneously retained his spiritual status as a devoutly righteous person "tzaddik. He remained unscathed despite the depraved environment in Egypt. The ability to remain resistant and insulated from negative influences, was inherited from his father Yaakov. Yaakov had spent 20 years in the community and home of his father in law Lavan, which personified everything that was evil. Despite this, he fathered 11 of the tribes of Israel in this environment. He was able to create an insular environment in which his family remained unaffected by their surroundings.

The Torah states, "**Yaakov settled in the land...**" Yaakov had experienced many hardships and succeeded despite his many travails. His primary wife, Rachel passed away as a young woman. His daughter Dinah was defiled by Shechem the prince of Canaan. He had been pursued by his evil brother Esav who wanted to kill him and destroy his family. On the return to Canaan, his two sons Shimon and Levy destroyed the community of Shechem - thus putting the existence of his family into jeopardy. They needed special Divine Protection from the tribes of Canaan who wanted to avenge the destruction of Shechem. Chazal tell us that after Yaakov had experienced all this grief, overwhelming pain, and distraction, he wanted to "settle" in tranquility. Yaakov's desire for tranquility and calm in his life was only for the sake of spiritual

development/focus. However, because he desired tranquility, he was confronted with the issue of the strife of Yosef and his brothers. This ultimately led to Yosef's disappearance for 22 years. The Midrash states, "Is it not enough that the devoutly righteous rest in tranquility in the world to come that they also want tranquility in this world? Therefore, Yaakov was subjected to turmoil that was caused by Yosef."

Yaakov understood that he had violated the wishes of his mother who had said to him that he should go to the home of her brother only for a "**short stay.**" He remained away from the home of his parents for thirty-six years (he was not punished for the 14 years he had studied in the yeshiva of Shem and Aiver). He thus did not perform the positive commandment of honoring one's parents for that length of time. Yaakov understood that this was a spiritual failing that needed atonement. Chazal tell us that the reason Yaakov was denied his most beloved son Yosef for twenty-two years was to atone for his own spiritual failing - measure for measure. If Yaakov understood that he needed atonement, why did he desire tranquility? Evidently, Yaakov must have believed that the untold suffering that he had already experienced was sufficient atonement.

When Yaakov saw that Yosef had been taken from him, he understood that the suffering that he had already experienced was not sufficient. The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that because Yaakov had shown special favor to Yosef by acknowledging him with a special garment, he caused jealousy among his children which ultimately led to the Jewish people's descent to Egypt. Why did Yaakov make such a serious error in judgment? It was because he had believed that he no longer needed any atonement and correction for his past failings. Therefore G'd caused him to have a lack of clarity - thus making this grave error.

#### **4. Seeing What is Unnoticed**

The Torah tells us that before Yosef was sold into slavery by his brothers he was cast into a pit by them to die. They had believed that the purpose of his tale bearing to their father was to ultimately destroy them. The Torah states, "**They took him and cast him into the pit; the pit was empty, no water was in it.**" The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos asks, "If the Torah tells us that the pit was empty, is it not obvious that it did not contain water?" The Gemara answers, "By stating that the pit was empty and no water was in it, something else was contained within it - snakes and scorpions."

Based on the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos, it seems that Yosef's brothers' understanding of him was not correct. If in fact he was cast into a pit filled with snakes and scorpions and did not die, it would have been a confirmation that he was a tzaddik. He could have only merited a miracle if he was deserving. If this is so, this should have immediately given credence to Yosef's dreams - that they were in fact prophetic and not delusions of grandeur. Nevertheless, the brothers seemingly were not impressed with this and therefore when the opportunity presented itself to sell Yosef into slavery - they did so.

The Midrash tells us that when Yosef's brothers cast him into the pit, they did not see the snakes and scorpions because they were hidden in the walls of the pit. Thus, they were unaware of the miracle that had transpired. However, according to the Midrash it seems to be difficult. If Yosef's brothers were not aware of the snakes and scorpions, why did G'd want Yosef to be cast into a pit that contained snakes and scorpions? The value of being put into a snake-pit and experiencing a miracle was for Yosef himself. G'd wanted to communicate to Yosef that although his predicament seemed bleak and hopeless, he should not despair - G'd was with him. Initially Yosef believed that his dreams were prophetic visions which he needed to share with his brothers. However, when he was cast into the pit to die, he began to question the efficacy of his visions. Perhaps he was mistaken - maybe they were in fact delusions of grandeur. G'd wanted to dispel this consideration from his mind and to communicate to him that he was not mistaken. His dreams would come to fruition. Consequently, Yosef did not despair because he understood that G'd was with him.

After Yosef was taken out of the pit, he was sold into slavery. The Torah describes the merchandise and wares that was being transported by the merchants who had bought Yosef as a slave-"**A caravan of Ishmaelites from Gilead, and their camels were bearing spices, and balsam, and birthwort...**" Rashi in his commentary cites the Midrash which asks, "Why did the Torah make known the nature of the merchandise that was being transported - To make known the reward of the righteous." For it is not the way of Arabs to carry anything but naphtha and foul smelling resins. But because Yosef was a tzaddik, the cargo that was being transported was spices which emitted a (pleasant) fragrance- so that he should not be harmed by the foul odor." Chazal use the expression "to reward the tzaddik" as the reason for Yosef being exposed to the pleasant fragrances rather than foul smelling materials. Do pleasant-smelling spices constitute a reward?

When Yosef was taken out of the pit by the Arab merchants and put onto the caravan, he immediately noticed that there were no foul smelling fuels, which would have been expected. Rather, there were pleasant smelling spices. Yosef again understood that this was another communication from G'd that He was with him. The "reward of the righteous" that is mentioned by Chazal is not the pleasure of smelling something that is sweet; but rather, informing the tzaddik that he should not despair. Thus, despite the bleakness of the moment and with no understanding of the direction in which he was going, Yosef believed that ultimately this would lead to something positive.

At every opportunity G'd wanted to communicate to Yosef that he should not despair because He did not want Yosef to believe, even for a moment, that he had been abandoned and that his visions were misunderstood. Because of all of these assurances, Yosef's initiative that he took while imprisoned in Egypt was considered a lack of faith.

After Yosef had interpreted the dreams of the steward that he would be reinstated to his original position, he had asked him to "remember" him and "mention" him to Pharaoh. Because of this initiative, Yosef spent an additional two years in prison. Although there is a principle that one must not rely on miracles but rather take the initiative, this was considered a failing. It was only because G'd had clearly communicated to Yosef that He was with Him that Yosef's initiatives were not necessary.

G'd continuously communicates to us through our experiences in life. We must be cognizant and sensitive to them. If one has a discerning eye, one is able to see that although his predicament - for good or bad- may be similar to others, it is in fact unique to himself. If one chooses to ignore or gloss over information which indicate that he should have acted differently, then he would be seen by G'd as an individual who is acting irresponsibly.

## 5. *The Ultimate Loss*

The Torah tells us that Yosef's brothers sold him into slavery. They had taken Yosef's tunic and dipped it into goat's blood. They brought the blood-soaked tunic to their father Yaakov and said, "**We found this; identify (it), if you please: Is it your son's tunic or not?**" Yaakov recognized it and said, "**My son's tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Yosef has surely been torn to bits!**" Yaakov rent his garments, put on sackcloth and began to mourn and grieve the death of his son Yosef. Despite all

the attempts of his children to console him, Yaakov refused to be comforted and said, "**For I will go down to the grave mourning for my son.**" Juxtaposed to this portion, the Torah states, "**It was at that time that Yehudah went down from his brothers and turned away towards an Adullamite man whose name was Chirah...**"

Rashi cites Chazal who ask, "Why is the portion concerning the separation of Yehudah from his brothers juxtaposed to the portion concerning the sale of Yosef and the subsequent grieving of Yaakov? To teach us that Yehudah was no longer esteemed by his brothers and thus caused him to assume a secondary status. He was no longer recognized as their leader. They believed that Yehudah was the cause of their father's distress and grief. They had said to Yehudah, 'You told us that we should sell him (into slavery). Had you told us to return him to our father Yaakov, we would have listened to you.' Consequently, Yehudah went away from his brothers.

Sforno tells us that after Yehudah went away, he married and had three sons; however two of them died at a young age. This was a punishment to Yehudah measure for measure for what he had done to his father. Since he caused his father to grieve over a lost child, Yehudah had to experience a similar level of grief- measure for measure. What was the real claim against Yehudah?

The Torah states, "**Yaakov had said, 'For I (Yaakov) will go down to the grave mourning for my son (Yosef).' And his father bewailed him...**" Rashi explains that "**And his father bewailed him**" is referring to Yitzchak, our Patriarch- the father of Yaakov. Yitzchak cried on behalf of his son because he saw Yaakov in such distress and grief. However, Yitzchak did not mourn for Yosef himself because he was aware that he was alive. Sforno explains that the reason Yitzchak cried for his son was because Yaakov was denied a relationship with the Shechina (Divine Presence)/prophecy because he was in a state of mourning. The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra tells us that the Divine Presence only rests with one who is in a state of joy and not grieving, mourning, or depressed. Yitzchak was pained not because Yaakov was suffering and anguished over the death of his son Yosef, but rather because Yaakov was denied the infinite value of having that special connection with G'd. In fact, this disconnection with the Shechina continued for a period of 22 years. When I Yaakov became aware that his son Yosef was in fact alive the Torah states, "**... the spirit of Yaakov became alive.**" Meaning, at that moment, because he was extricated from his state of depressed to a state of ecstasy- thus allowing him to prophesize.

Yehudah's brothers rejected him because he was the cause of their father's state of being removed from the Divine Presence. The consequence of this caused untold and unlimited spiritual loss to themselves and to the Jewish people until the end of time.

The Torah tells us that Shimon and Levy, the sons of Yaakov destroyed the community of Shechem to avenge the rape of their sister Dinah. After this incident, Yaakov was angry with his sons and said to them, "**Achartem osi - you have discomposed me (made me murky)...**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "Yaakov had said to his sons, 'Prior to your destruction of Shechem, my mind was clear; however, after you have brought us into conflict with the nations that surround us my clarity has been diminished. I have become distracted.'" The Torah tells us that Yaakov "cursed their wrath." Yaakov did not curse the wrath of Shimon and Levy because they had placed the Jewish people in physical jeopardy, but rather, it was because of the distraction and lack of clarity that they had caused. The result of Yaakov being distracted by Shimon and Levy's irresponsible behavior was similar to the grief that Yehudah had brought upon his father. As a result of his diminished clarity, Yaakov could not access the same level of Divine Assistance that he could have done had he not been distracted. Therefore the entire Jewish people suffered an incalculable degree of loss as a result of Shimon and Levy's actions.