

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES

Parshas Vayeitzei

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Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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B"H

Parshas Vayitzei

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

Dean

1. The Blessing Contained within the Curse : "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread..."

The Torah tells us that Yaakov needed to flee from his brother Esav. He was instructed by his parents to go to the home of his uncle Lavan to take a wife. Yaakov understood that the home and community of Lavan would expose him to all levels of evil and depravity. He needed G'd's protection in order to survive that environment. The Midrash states, "Reb Brechya says, 'Everything that Yaakov had supplicated from G'd was granted. Yaakov had asked that G'd be with him. The verse states, 'I (G'd) will accompany you...' Yaakov had asked to be protected. The verse states, 'I shall watch over you wherever you go.' Yaakov asked that he should return to his home in peace. The verse states, 'I will bring you back...' Yaakov had asked G'd to guarantee him bread (a livelihood), G'd did not respond. G'd said, 'If I guarantee Yaakov his bread, he would not have any reason to beseech Me. Therefore I will not guarantee him his bread.' The Rabbis argue with Reb Brechya: G'd in fact did respond to Yaakov-guaranteeing him his sustenance/bread – as it states, 'I will not abandon you...' The expression of abandonment refers to bread. As King David writes, 'I have never seen a devoutly righteous person abandoned by G'd so that his children should seek out bread.'" Meaning G'd does guarantee sustenance to the special tzaddik. Understanding the spiritual dimension of Yaakov, is it even conceivable that if he were guaranteed a livelihood, he would not supplicate G'd? Evidently, Reb Brechya is of the opinion that it is in fact a valid concern. The Rabbis on the other hand disagree.

Initially when G'd created the world, everything was provided to Adam without any need for him to take the initiative. However after Adam had sinned by eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, G'd cursed man "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread..."

From this time onward, man needed to take the initiative to provide for himself. Even the food itself was no longer fully edible without some degree of processing/preparation. Ramchal writes in his work Mesilas Yesharim that although the Gemara tells us that one's yearly allocation for livelihood is determined from Rosh Hashanah to Rosh Hashanah, in order for one to draw upon this allocation, one needs to take the initiative because of the curse "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread..." Why after the sin of Adam was it necessary for man to take the initiative to receive his yearly stipend that was designated for him?

Before Adam had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, he had a nearly absolute level of clarity. As the Midrash states, "He was able to see from one end of the world to the other." This clarity emanated from his own innate purity. However after eating of the Tree of Knowledge, because it represented evil, his clarity was compromised and thus occluded. As a result of his diminishment G'd created another level of circumstances for Adam to encounter. He needed a setting in order to be able to make choices despite the distortions of truth. If he were to succeed and take the proper initiatives that were necessary, he would regain much of the clarity, purity, and spirituality that he had lost. Adam had to be put into a position of need so that he should pray to G'd for His Assistance and to understand that although he may attribute the success of his endeavors to himself, he must realize that in actuality it is G'd. Through this process and conditioning, Adam and mankind would be able to gain a level of appreciation and understanding that all that man has is as a result of G'd's Beneficence and Omnipotence.

Adam's failing not only compromised his own spiritual system, it actually affected that of all mankind. Yaakov, our Patriarch, despite his unique level of spirituality, being a descendant of Adam, also possessed a natural degree of lack of clarity. Thus he was required to be in need in some aspect of his life. If G'd were to

guarantee his sustenance/livelihood, then he would no longer have any reason to beseech Him. Consequently, the mechanism that was set in place to enable man to acquire and regain clarity would be denied to him.

However, the Rabbis argue with Reb Brechya. Although in concept and principle they agree with him, regarding Yaakov our Patriarch, because of his dimension of spirituality and involvement in Torah study- he did not need to be subjected to this circumstance. Therefore Yaakov was also guaranteed a livelihood by G'd. Because Yaakov is quantified by the Torah as, "the complete man who dwelt in the tent (of Torah)" the issue of lack of clarity had no relevance to him. This is based on the principle of "I have created an evil inclination and the Torah as its antidote." Since he had this special level of clarity, Yaakov would continuously recognize and experience G'd's presence.

2. Yaakov, the Father of the Jewish People

The Torah states, **"Yaakov departed Beersheva and went toward Haran. He encountered the place (Mt. Moria) and spent the night there...he took from the stones of the place which he arranged around his head, and lay down in that place... and he dreamt...Yaakov arose early in the morning and took the stone that he had placed around his head..."** The Midrash tells us that Yaakov had arranged twelve stones around his head in order to determine whether he was going to be in fact the Patriarch who would father the tribes of Israel. If the stones were to fuse together into one stone, it would indicate to him that he was sufficiently pure enough to establish the twelve tribes. This is in fact what had happened. Although G'd had told him, **"...the ground upon which you are lying, to you I will give it and to your descendents..."** it was not an indication that he would be the last Patriarch from which the Jewish people would descend.

The Torah tells us that after Yaakov had awoken from his sleep, **"he took the stone that he had placed around his head and set it up as a pillar; and he poured oil on its top. And he named the place Beth-el (the house of G'd)." The one stone that was in essence comprised of twelve was symbolic of the future Jewish people who were meant to serve G'd in that location. As King David refers to the tribes of Israel as "*Shiftei ka* – the tribes of G'd." It is interesting to note that although ultimately the Jewish people would be comprised of thirteen tribes, Yaakov only took twelve stones. This is**

because the tribes of Ephraim and Menasha were in essence the totality of Yosef.

After Yaakov designated the stone as "Beth el" the Torah states, **"Yaakov took a vow saying, 'If G'd will be with me, will guard me on this way that I am going, will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear; and I return in peace to my father's house; and Hashem will be a G'd to me- then this stone which I have set up as a pillar shall become a house of G'd, and whatever You will give me, I shall repeatedly tithe to You.'" What is the significance of Yaakov's vow to tithe from all that G'd gives him?**

The Torah tells us that if one wears a four-cornered garment, one is obligated to put fringes (*tzitzis*) upon its corners. However one is not obligated to wear a four-cornered garment. Ramchal explains that although the majority of one's garments do not necessarily have four corners; nevertheless, G'd commanded the Jew that if he does wear a four-cornered garment it must have *tzitzis*. He explains that the value and effect of this mitzvah is to give one's total attire relevance and connection to something that represents holiness/kiddushah. This is because contained among his garments there is a garment that has relevance to kiddushah, thus his entire wardrobe assumes an elevated level by association. This principle holds true with all other aspects of the life of a Jew. When the Torah touches upon one aspect of a particular area in one's life all that is associated with that aspect will assume a greater level of value and importance. Therefore when one tithes all of his possessions, he is in essence acknowledging that everything that he has amassed is from G'd. By doing so, one brings a level of sanctity to all that he owns.

After it was confirmed to Yaakov, through the fusion of the twelve stones, that he was chosen to be the father of the Jewish people, it was necessary for all that was associated with him (even the mundane) to assume a relevance to kiddushah. The reason he had committed himself to tithing his assets at this moment was because he needed to create an environment of an elevated spiritual status in which the future tribes of Israel will be born and nurtured.

Although one may be a personal beneficiary of his own initiative, if the impetus for that initiative was to participate in a mitzvah, the entire initiative assumes a level of kiddushah.

3. *Silence is Only an Indication of Something Greater*

The Torah tells us that Rachel, the wife of Yaakov, initially was barren. The Torah states, “**G’d remembered Rachel...**” – subsequently she was able to conceive. The Midrash states, “There was no one who was more pleasant and beautiful than Rachel. It was because of this unique pleasantness that Yaakov wanted to marry her. During their seven-year engagement period, Yaakov sent many gifts to Rachel; however, Lavan, her father, gave the gifts to Leah her sister. Rachel remained silent. Reb Shimon Ben Gamliel says, ‘All of my days I have developed in the company of great Torah sages and I have not found a greater quality than silence.’ Rachel took hold of this character trait. Because she had done so, her descendants also assumed this characteristic. She had seen the gifts that were meant for her in the hands of her sister Leah, but she remained silent. The stone in the breastplate of the High Priest that represented the Tribe of Binyamin, the younger son of Rachel, was called ‘*yishpei*.’ What is the meaning of ‘*yishpei*?’ Although Binyamin was aware of the sale of his brother Yosef into slavery, he did not share this with his father Yaakov. ‘*Yishpei*’ is an contraction for ‘*yesh peh*’ which means, ‘he has a mouth.’ Binyamin had the ability to communicate the information to his father, yet he remained silent.’...Queen Esther, who descended from Rachel also possessed the characteristic of remaining silent. It was because of her silence that Rachel merited to have a son.”

The Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashanah tells us that one who is willing to overlook a claim against another, which is justified (*maavir aal midosov*), measure for measure G’d will overlook and not prosecute him even for a defiant act. One may think that G’d’s response to Rachel’s silence was due to it being an expression of her “*maavir aal midoseha*”- suppressing her pain and disappointment and not reacting to the injustice of her father Lavan. However, the Midrash clearly indicates that her meriting the child is unrelated to this principle.

The Midrash continues, “Why did Rachel remain silent? Rachel had thought, ‘If I should inform Yaakov that my father Lavan had given the gifts that were meant for me to my sister Leah, Yaakov would not tolerate this. Yaakov would then enter into a dispute with my father and consequently he would deny me Yaakov as a husband. Although I have a claim, I shall remain silent so that I shall not be distanced from this special tzaddik, Yaakov.’” Rachel, despite the overwhelming pain and anguish that she was experiencing as a result of the gifts that were

denied to her, chose to endure so that she could ultimately be attached to Yaakov the tzaddik. Because of Rachel’s appreciation and understanding of the dimension of Yaakov’s spirituality, even experiencing the greatest hardship was worthwhile in order to become his wife. She thus remained silent.

It is because of this appreciation of Yaakov, which manifested itself in her silence, that she merited to become the primary Matriarch of the Jewish people. In addition, the Midrash tells us that she merited to have an additional two tribes- the sons of Yosef. Yosef, the son of Yaakov was divided into two tribes – Ephraim and Menasha. Leah, her sister did not merit having one of her children dividing into two tribes. Rachel was only able to endure as she had because of her deep appreciation of spirituality. Therefore her descendants were endowed by G’d with the same capacity to appreciate spirituality on a level that would not allow them to speak – thus not jeopardizing that spirituality.

Binyamin, the son of Rachel, although he knew that his brother Yosef was sold into slavery (which caused him untold pain), he did not share that information with his father Yaakov. If Yaakov was told that his sons had sold Yosef into slavery, he would have cursed them. This would have put the future of the Jewish people into jeopardy. Therefore, regardless of how pained Binyamin was, he remained silent.

Esther, was offered half of the kingdom by her husband the Persian Emperor- Achashverosh. He had said to her “If you reveal your lineage and pedigree to me, I will give you up to half of my kingdom.” Despite the fact that his kingdom encompassed the entire world, Esther remained silent. By remaining silent as she was instructed by Mordechai (the leader of the Jewish people), the events of Purim were able to unfold.

4. *Yaakov, the Embodiment of Torah*

The Torah states, “**He (Yaakov) encountered the place...**” Rashi cites Chazal who explain that when Yaakov, our Patriarch, came upon Mt. Moriah he prayed. The Gemara in Tractate Chulin explains that Yaakov had intended to pray at Mt. Moriah (the Temple Mount); however, he had inadvertently passed it on his way to Charan. When he realized that he had passed it, miraculously he was returned to Mt. Moriah. This is the meaning of the term, “**He encountered the place....**” The prayer that Yaakov had established at this location was arvis (evening prayer service).

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that prior to Yaakov's departure from the Land of Canaan, he had spent 14 additional years studying Torah in the Yeshivah of Shem v'Aver. Yaakov had dedicated his entire life to Torah study – as he is quantified by the verse, “The perfect man who sits in the tent (the tent of Torah).” Yaakov at the time of receiving the blessings from his father was 63 years old. What was the value and necessity of the additional 14 years of Torah study that Yaakov had invested before departing Charan?

Yitzchak, who is identified as “the unblemished offering” was not permitted to leave the Land of Canaan to go to Egypt. Chazal tell us that just as an offering is invalidated if it is taken out of the Sanctuary, so too Yitzchak would be diminished if he were to leave the confines of the Land of Canaan. Yaakov, believed, after being mentored in a home which was the equivalent of the Holy of Holies, that he would never leave the Land of Canaan (the Holy Land). Thus, all the Torah that he had studied until the age of 63 was directed to his spiritual development within the confines of the Holy Land. When he needed to flee to Charan, the community of Lavan, he understood that the moral and ethical fabric of that community was the antithesis of what he valued and represented. The fare of the day in Charan was the three cardinal sins (murder, idolatry, and adultery). Yaakov understood that without sufficient preparation before entering into that negative spiritual environment, he would be diminished. He thus had to spend an additional 14 years in the yeshivah of Shem v'Aver to gain the Torah that was necessary for him to confront all of the spiritual challenges that may present themselves in the future.

Yaakov, is the Patriarch who represents *galus* (exile). None of the other Patriarchs suffered or were displaced to the degree of Yaakov. The Gemara tells us in a number of locations that exile is analogous to the nighttime period. During the period of darkness/nighttime one's perception of reality is very often distorted. Because of the lack of illumination one lacks clarity. Thus, the nighttime period is fraught with confusion. Similarly when one is in a state of exile, one is subject to confusion, distraction, and unanswered questions. Therefore Yaakov, the Patriarch of *galus*(exile) is the one to establish arvis, which is the nighttime prayer service.

Yaakov, despite being exposed for many years to the overwhelming negative influences of Charan, he immersed spiritually unscathed. He fathered 12 sons who were worthy to be classified as “the Tribes of G'd.” They were individuals who were spiritually attuned and had a

capacity for unlimited growth. How was Yaakov able to accomplish this impossible feat? It was only because he is the Patriarch who epitomizes and personifies Torah study. It is only through Torah study that one is able to ward-off and dispel all negative influences. Yaakov was able to create an insular environment for his family to develop and blossom as spiritual giants.

The Gemara states in a number of locations, “I (G'd) have created the evil inclination and the Torah is its antidote.” Thus, the only way to achieve clarity, despite one's being engulfed in darkness/confusion, is through the Torah.

Yaakov chose to author the nighttime service (*arvis*) when he came upon Mt. Moriah. Why did Yaakov not establish this prayer service earlier in his life? It is not because he could only enact this service when he assumed the role of “Patriarch” because when he did establish arvis, both of his parents were still alive. Why was it only after investing 14 years at the yeshivah of Shem v'Aver that Yaakov was ready to establish the tefillah (prayer) of arvis?

In order to enact the prayer of the nighttime period, Yaakov needed to appreciate and understand all the issues and nuances that one must face while in exile. Prior to his Torah study in Shem v'Aver, Yaakov had not yet fully understood how to confront the negativity of exile. It was only after 14 years of studying the Torah that was necessary to approach the challenges of exile, did Yaakov come upon Mt. Moriah to establish arvis. The evening service encompasses and addresses all the conceivable issues that the Jewish people will be confronted with throughout their existence in exile.

Rambam writes in *The Laws of Torah Study* that the optimum time for one to study Torah is during the nighttime period. He quotes a verse from Eicha which are the words of Yirmiyahu the Prophet (who had witnessed the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jews to Babylon), “Rise and sing out in the night.” Rambam explains that the word “sing” refers to Torah study because the song of the Jew is the Torah itself. Yirmiyahu the Prophet was saying that after the Jews had experienced destruction and upheaval in their lives, the only way one is able to gain clarity is through the study of Torah. It is fitting that Yaakov is the Patriarch who represents exile, because it was only he (who is the embodiment of Torah) had the ability to navigate through the confusion and darkness of *galus*/exile. King Solomon encapsulates this reality by stating, “The receptacle is the mitzvah, and the Torah is the illuminator.”

5. *The Functionality of the Heart* (from Toldos)

The Torah states, “...**Esav came in from the field, and he was exhausted. Esav said to Yaakov, ‘Pour into me, now, some of that very red stuff for I am exhausted. Yaakov said, ‘Sell, as this day, your birthright to me...’** Thus, Yaakov had purchased the birthright from his brother Esav for the value of a bowl of lentil soup and some bread. After consuming what was given to him by Yaakov, the Torah states, “**Esav got up and left; thus, Esav disgraced the birthright.**” After Esav had satisfied his physical needs, he was not concerned that he had sold his birthright for something of such little value. He had given away something of infinite value for a pittance. Although the commentators explain that the lentil soup was not the full value of what Yaakov had agreed to pay for the birthright (it was only a down payment), nevertheless, Esav’s behavior after consuming the food confirmed without question that he had no sense of value regarding the birthright. Spirituality and G’d had no place in his life.

Baal HaTurim cites a verse from the Megillah of Esther regarding Haman (a descendant of Esav): “He became disgraced in his eyes.” When Haman had seen that Mordechai would not bow to him, he detested the existence of Mordechai. The Midrash states, “Haman was the disgracer who descends from the one who disgraced (Esav).” Although Mordechai was a the leader of the Jewish people –representing the most advanced level of spirituality and purity, Haman had no appreciation for his existence. Identically regarding his forbearer, Esav, who did not have any appreciation or relevance to spirituality (the birthright).

Yitzchak, the Patriarch, in addition to his own personal wealth, was the sole heir of his father Avraham who had great material wealth. The one who possessed the birthright would inherit all of Yitzchak’s fortune. Ramban asks, “Knowing that the birthright was linked to such material wealth, how could have Esav been so limited – not realizing its material value?” Ramban answers, “It was because Esav possessed cruelty/evil in his heart that he was not able to internalize and relate to the true value of the birthright.” This cruelty of heart not only denied him the spiritual, but also caused him to forfeit the material.

The Gemara tells us that Acher the teacher of Rebbe Meir), Elisha Ben Avuya, despite the fact that he was one of the greatest Torah sages of his generation, abandoned the Torah. He had declared (as Esav had done because of an incident that he had witnessed), “There is no

judgment and there is no judge!” He denied G’d and consequently His Torah. How was it possible that one who had invested his life in Torah study at such an advanced level should not be protected from the evil inclination? The Gemara answers, “It was because he had possessed an impurity in his heart.” Despite being the repository of a unique level of Torah, the impurity in his heart had caused a blockage that did not allow him to merit the clarity, which the Torah offers. Therefore what he had witnessed was in a distorted context. Similarly, Esav and Haman, because of the cruelty that existed within their hearts, despite their dimension of genius, were not able to appreciate spirituality for what it truly is. It is the heart that gives one the capacity to evaluate and esteem what is proper.

In contrast, Moshe is quantified by King Solomon in Proverbs as “the one with the wise heart will take mitzvos.” Moshe had sought out the remains of Yosef while the Jewish people were borrowing the wealth of the Egyptians. It was only because Moshe had purity of heart that he was able to appreciate and understand what needed to be done at that moment. Without the remains of Yosef, the Jewish people could not leave Egypt.

We supplicate G’d in the Amidah (silent prayer) on the Shabbos and Yom Tov to, “purify our hearts to serve Him with Truth.” It is not sufficient to have great intellectual capability without the heart having the capacity to appreciate and sense the true value of spirituality. The degree of impurity that exists in one’s heart will determine one’s level of sensitivity or lack of it.