

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES
The Portion of
Vayeitzei

November 15, 2007

Dedicated by David Lobel and Family

In loving memory of his father

Barnett Lobel

Baruch ben Shimon HaLevi

May his neshama have an aliyah

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
<i>1. Yaakov, the Most Special of the Patriarch</i>	2
<i>2. Setting the Destiny of the Jewish People in Motion</i>	3
<i>3. The Awesome Protection of Torah</i>	3
<i>4. Appreciating the Innate Characteristic of Silence</i>	5
<i>5. Coming Upon Clarity</i>	5

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
November 15, 2007

B"H

Vayeitzei

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. Yaakov, the Most Special of the Patriarchs

The Torah states, **“Yaakov departed Beersheva and went toward Charan. 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...”** Rashi cites the Gemara in Tractate Chulin, which explains that the stones that Yaakov had placed under his head began to quarrel amongst themselves- each one saying “allow the tzaddik to place his head upon me.” Because of Yaakov’s unique spiritual dimension, existence, that was created for the sake of G’d’s Glory, wanted to fulfill its purpose by accommodating the “devoutly righteous” who facilitates the purpose of existence. In order to accommodate each stone’s willingness to be associated with the tzaddik, G’d fused them into one stone.

The Midrash (Yalkut) tells us that Yaakov had initially taken twelve stones in order to determine whether he was going to be the Patriarch who would father the twelve tribes of Israel. There was a tradition among the Patriarchs that the one who would be qualified to father the tribes of Israel would have twelve sons. Yaakov understood that if the stones were to be fused together into one stone, it would indicate that he was sufficiently pure to establish the twelve tribes. The symbolism of the twelve being fused into one is to confirm that although each of the twelve tribes had its own unique characteristic, together they comprise the Jewish people.

The Midrash (Tanchuma) cites the opinion of Raish Lakish regarding the incident of the stones, “The Torah states, **‘G’d stood above him (Yaakov)...’** Yaakov had seen a ladder in his prophetic dream that extended up into the heavens. He had seen angels ascending and descending with G’d being above the ladder. When the stones had sensed the Divine Presence at the location where Yaakov was lying, they melted and became one

stone.” Every one of the Patriarch was a prophet who received a communication from G’d based on his own dimension of spirituality. Rambam explains that the communication that is received by the prophet is transmitted to him through an angel. These angels are referred to as *“ishim (men).”* Although they are spiritual beings, because they are the ones who bring the communication to the human being, who is classified as *“ishe (man)”* they are referred to as *“ishim.”* However, because of Yaakov’s unique level of spirituality, he did not receive the communication through an angel, but rather, it was the Divine Presence Itself. When the stones were exposed to the awesome Presence of G’d, they melted into one. This consequence was an indication of Yaakov’s advanced level as a Patriarch. The Presence of G’d upon Yaakov was similar to that of the Divine Presence at Sinai. When Yaakov had seen the stones fused together, it allowed him to understand the value of his own Torah study. The intensity of the experience was similar to that which would take place at Sinai. Thus, it was a confirmation that he will be the father of the tribes of Israel.

The Gemara tells us that the Ark in the Temple was located in the portion of Binyamin. The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that Binyamin merited to be the host of the Divine Presence because it was something that he had desired more than his brothers. However, the Midrash (Yalkut) tells us that it was because when Yaakov was aged, he would lean on the shoulder of Binyamin when he would walk. In the merit of this accommodation to his father, he merited to be the host of the Divine Presence/Holy Ark. Because of Yaakov’s dimension of being, G’d’s Presence was continuously upon him. Consequently, when Binyamin supported his father and attended to his needs, it was the equivalent of accommodating the Divine Presence. Thus, he merited being the host of the Holy Ark.

2. *Setting the Destiny of the Jewish People in Motion*

The Torah tells us that Yaakov went toward Charan he had encountered “the place.” Chazal tell us that this was the location of the Temple Mount/Mount Moriah. There he fell asleep and experienced a prophecy. As the verse states, “**(he) spent the night there because the sun had set...**” The Midrash states, “Our Rabbis of blessed memory tell us that the sun set suddenly because G’d had extinguished it. He caused that the sun should set prematurely so that He could communicate with Yaakov in a concealed/private setting. This is analogous to an intimate friend of the king who comes on occasion to visit him. When the intimate friend arrives at the palace, the king gives an order to extinguish all of the lamps so that he could converse with his special friend in a private and concealed manner. G’d wanted a similar setting when he communicated with Yaakov on the Temple Mount.”

Why did G’d need to cause the sun to set prematurely in order for Yaakov to receive his prophetic communication? A prophet can receive a communication from G’d at any time of the day or night.

The Gemara in Tractate Zevachim tells us that when G’d was giving the Torah at Sinai to the Jewish people, the earth quaked so violently that the nations of the world believed that the world was coming to an end. They came to Bilaam, their prophet, with their concern. They said to him, “The world is coming to an end.” Bilaam responded, “Do you not realize that the world is not being destroyed because after the Great Flood G’d made a covenant with existence that He would not destroy it.” They replied, “G’d only promised not to destroy the world with water. Perhaps it is being destroyed by fire.” Bilaam said to them, “You fools! Do you not realize that G’d is giving His strength/power to the Jewish people (which is the Torah). It is because of this monumental moment that the world is quaking.” To this the nations of the world responded, “G’d should bless His people with Shalom” and returned to their evil ways. We see from this dialogue that when G’d gave the Torah to the Jewish people at Sinai, it was not concealed from the world.

Although G’d had communicated openly with the Jewish people at Sinai, they nevertheless succumbed to the sin of the Golden Calf. The Midrash tells us that the reason the Jewish people were vulnerable to idolatry was from the evil eye that they had received from the nations of the world. If the Torah had been given in a private setting, this would have not come about. Thus, the public

aspect of the Sinai event resulted in tragedy. However, after Sinai, G’d’s intimate relationship with the Jewish people was limited to a concealed setting. As G’d had requested of the Jewish people after the sin of the Golden Calf, “**Make for Me a dwelling place so that I may dwell amongst you...**” The Divine Presence would be present in the Holy of Holies.

The Gemara tells us in Tractate Shabbos that at Sinai, the Jewish people were compelled to accept the Torah. G’d had held the mountain over them, giving them an ultimatum, “either you accept the Torah or you will be buried under the mountain.” The acceptance of Torah at Sinai was not considered of qualitative nature because it came about under duress. It was not until the events of Purim that the Jewish people reaffirmed and accepted upon themselves the Torah out of love. This was considered to be the ultimate level of acceptance. It is interesting to note that the Hand of G’d that brought about the miracle of Purim was cloaked and concealed within nature. It was something that was hidden from the eyes of the world. It was only when the Jewish people realized G’d’s special love for them- causing events to change at the last moment, thus not allowing them to be annihilated, that they accepted and reaffirmed their commitment to G’d and His Torah.

Yaakov, was the most special of the Patriarchs, who embodied and personified the Torah. As the verse refers to him as “**the perfect man who dwelt in the tent (of Torah).**” Chazal tell us that there is a principle – “The actions/experiences of the Patriarchs are a sign for the children.” Meaning, the actions of the Patriarchs set in motion and establish future events that the Jewish people will experience. In order to establish the necessary setting and circumstance that would bring about the affirmation of Torah on the most advanced level had to begin with G’d communicating with Yaakov in a private/concealed setting. This was similar to the Purim event, which was a concealed setting – “the Hand of G’d cloaked in nature.”

3. *The Awesome Protection of Torah*

The Torah tells us that after Yaakov received the blessings from his father Yitzchak, he was advised by his mother Rivka to flee because his brother Esav was plotting to kill him. She had told him to go Lavan her brother for a “short stay” so that the anger of Esav should dissipate. The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that before departing to Charan, the community of Lavan, Yaakov spent fourteen years studying in the Yeshiva of Shem and Aiver. Yaakov is quantified by the Torah as a man who studied

Torah his entire life, as it states in the verse **“the perfect man who dwelt in the tent (of Torah).”** When Yaakov had received the blessings from his father, he was sixty-three years old. If had spent another 14 years studying Torah, it would mean that he was 77 years old when he arrived in Charan, the home of Lavan. If he had dedicated his life to the study of Torah until the age of 63, what was the added value of studying an additional 14 years in the Yeshiva of Shem and Aiver?

Yaakov, as his father Yitzchak before him, had not yet left the boundaries of the Land of Israel. The spiritual environment of the Land is equated by the Midrash to the holiness of the Sanctuary in the Temple. Yitzchak, “the unblemished burnt offering” was not permitted to leave the Land of Israel because it would have been the equivalent of taking a sacrifice outside of the confines of the Holy Sanctuary. Therefore, despite the famine, G'd had told Yitzchak must remain in the Land.

Yaakov had never believed that he would need to leave Canaan. He assumed that all the spiritual encounters that he would need to confront would be based on his surroundings, which was the Land of Canaan. All the trials and tribulations that exist outside of the Land of Canaan, because of the lack of G'd's Presence, are not the same. As the Gemara at the end of Tractate Kesubos states, “One who lives outside of the Land (of Israel) it is as though he has no G'd.” Meaning, G'd's relationship and providence with the Land of Israel is different than any other location in the world. It is more direct and intimate. Therefore, all of the Torah that he had studied until this point was to deal with all the spiritual issues that exist within the Land. However, when he was confronted with the need to flee to Charan, a community that personified evil, Yaakov understood that he would have to study certain other aspects of Torah that would enable him to be resilient to those negative influences. Aiver had been mentored by his father Shem, the son of Noach, who appreciated and understood all levels of evil of existence. Aiver had understood how to contend with the depravities of mankind, allowing him to retain his status as a “tzaddik.” Yaakov understood that he needed that orientation in order to survive the environment of Lavan's household and remain spiritually intact and unscathed.

When Rivka told Yaakov to flee, she had told him to go for a “short stay.” Meaning, that soon after he arrived to Charan, he should return home. However, he violated the wishes of his mother and remained away for 36 years. Chazal tell us that Yosef, the most beloved son of Yaakov, was denied to him for 22 years (he believed that Yosef had died), because he had denied his parents 22

years of honoring them. If Yaakov was meant to return soon after he had arrived in Charan, he should have been punished for the entire period that he denied his parents his presence. Why was he only punished for 22 years – it should have been 36 years?

When Yaakov left his parent's home, his father had entrusted him with great wealth. The wealth was necessary to negotiate with Lavan for the hand of his daughters in marriage. The Midrash tells us that Yaakov was impoverished as a result of a confrontation with Elifaz, the son of Esav. Elifaz had come upon Yaakov to take his life through the instruction of his father, Esav. Yaakov had relinquished all of his wealth to Elifaz so that he should not be killed. Yaakov has said to him, “Based on the principle that you had learned from your grandfather, Yitzchak, ‘one who is impoverished is considered as if he is dead,’ by taking my wealth you would have conformed to your father's wishes.” Consequently, Yaakov's sole possession was the clothing on his back and his walking staff, as it states, **“With this walking staff, I have crossed the Jordan.”** Because of this impoverishment, Yaakov needed be away from his parent's home for 22 years.

The Torah tells us that if one is threatened with his life by an attacker, one is permitted to kill him. Yaakov had every right to kill Elifaz and not forfeit his wealth. Had he done so, he would have been able to negotiate with Lavan for his daughters Rachel and Leah and not need be delayed for 22 years. However, Yaakov chose not to kill Elifaz so that he should not diminish his spiritual standing. He understood that although he was permitted to kill in this circumstance, the consequence of that action would have impacted negatively on the future of the Jewish people. Being chosen to be the Patriarch of the twelve tribes of Israel, he understood that whatever level of diminishment of spirituality that would exist within himself would ultimately express itself as a limitation of spirituality of his children. Therefore, he chose to part with his wealth and not kill Elifaz. It was because of his decision that Yaakov was punished for denying his parents of his presence for 22 years.

Although Yaakov had remained in the Yeshiva of Shem and Aiver for 14 years, he did not need to be atoned for that period of time. Chazal explain that it was in the merit of his Torah study that he was not punished for denying his parents the mitzvah of honoring them. However, the additional 22 years that he was not associated with his parents, although they were integral to the future spiritual development of the Jewish people, he

was punished because those 22 years were unrelated to his Torah study.

4. Appreciating the Innate Characteristic of Silence

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 share the information with his father, yet he remained silent.'...Queen Esther, who descended from Rachel also possessed the characteristic of silence. It was because of her silence that Rachel merited to have a son.."

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 have then entered into a dispute with my father. 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.

One could say that it was simply wise and calculating of Rachel to remain silent, understanding the

possible negative consequence of her claim. Nevertheless, Chazal tell us that it was only because she possessed the quality of silence that she was able to do so. It was not due to a logical calculation of events, but rather it was based on an attribute, which she possessed within her. Anyone else would not have been able to restrain themselves despite the consequence of speaking.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers) states "Who is the wise person? It is the one who sees the consequences of his actions." The Mishna does not state that the wise person is the one who "understands" the consequences of his actions. Rather, it uses the expression "sees." This is because "seeing" is a reality that one experiences, whereas "understanding" is an intellectual appreciation. The wise person sees and feels the consequences of his actions as a concrete reality. However, if one's appreciation of a situation is based on his intellectual understanding alone, then the truth could easily become obscured due to a conflict of interest. However, the wise person, because he "sees," is not subject to a conflict of interest. Thus allowing truth not be distorted.

Rachel could have rationalized, because of her conflict of interest, that it would be wise to share what had happened with Yaakov. However, because her characteristic of silence was the equivalent of "seeing", she was able to rise above any conflict of interest and act accordingly. This was the level of clarity that Rachel possessed.

Binyamin, the son of Rachel, although he knew that his brother Yosef was sold into slavery, he did not share that information with his father Yaakov. If Yaakov had been 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 its pain, Binyamin 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 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.

5. Coming Upon Clarity (from Toldos)

The Torah states that after Yitzchak had been told to leave the community of Gerar by Avimelech the king of

the Philistines, **“Hashem appeared to him that night and said, ‘I am the G’d of your father Avraham: Fear not, for I am with you; I will bless you and increase your offspring because of Avraham, My servant.’”** Yitzchak himself was one of the three Patriarchs of the Jewish people. He was quantified by G’d as an unblemished burnt offering. He was the Patriarch who had fathered Yaakov, who had fathered the Tribes of Israel. One would think that Yitzchak, after all that he had endured and accomplished would have been deserving of G’d’s blessing in his own right. However, it is clearly inferred from G’d’s statement to him that he was only worthy of the blessing in the merit of his father Avraham. Where did Yitzchak fail? What was the basis for his spiritual deficiency that did not make him worthy?

After G’d blessed Yitzchak, the Torah continues, **“He built an altar there, invoked Hashem by Name...”** Soon after espousing G’d’s Name to the world, the Torah tells us that Avimelech, the king of Gerar, who had previously driven Yitzchak out of his community approached him and said, **“We have indeed seen that Hashem has been with you...let us make a covenant with you...Just as we have done only good with you, and sent you away in peace...”** What caused this sudden change regarding their perception of Yitzchak?

Sforno explains, “This is the first time we find that Yitzchak had called in the Name of Hashem. Avraham was always considered the beloved of G’d because he invested his life in loving kindness (chesed). As it is stated, ‘What are the ways of Hashem? Kindness and Truth and to advise sinners to walk the proper path.’ Unlike, Yitzchak who was withdrawn from the world at large, Avraham had gone out and exposed the world to monotheism. As it is stated, **‘...and he called in the Name of Hashem .’**” Yitzchak only understood his spiritual shortcoming when he realized that he was not worthy of G’d’s blessing in his own right. He had understood that the only area of his spirituality that was not addressed was that of not bringing monotheism to all humanity as his father had done. Regardless of his unique and unusual spiritual stature, he was not embraced by the world, but rather, he was rejected as was demonstrated by Avimelech, the king of Gerar. After building the altar and calling in the Name of G’d, addressing his spiritual deficiency, he was seeing in another light. As it states that Avimelech and his general had approached him and stated, **“We see that G’d is with you.”** Another positive consequence that evolved from assuming this new level of responsibility vis-à-vis the world was that when the final well was dug and water was found, Yitzchak’s rights to it were not disputed.

The Torah tells us that Noach fathered three sons at the age of 500. Sforno explains that although during the generations of Noach people began fathering children at an earlier age, he was not able to father children until he was 500 years old. It was only after he began building the Ark which was meant to be the medium for him to engage with the members of his generation to cause them to repent, did he merit having children. Similarly, Yitzchak was only worthy in his own right for the blessing when he began to call out in the Name of G’d.

The verse in Psalms states, *“Olam chesed Yibaneh – The world with Kindness did He Create.”* G’d created existence with the objective for man to perfect himself spiritually as a result of making sufficient correct choices. Thus, causing man to be the beneficiary of the ultimate good, which is having a share in the world to come. If one is responsible for another to appreciate and actualize the purpose of his own existence, it is considered to be rendering the greatest kindness. It is the equivalent of emulating G’d in the context of bringing about the objective of Creation. Regardless of how much Yitzchak perfected himself as an individual he did not affect others to achieve their purpose in existence. He only fully internalized this fact when G’d blessed him in the merit of his father Avraham. Similarly, the value of Noach to father progeny was not only to perpetuate the human race, but rather to fulfill the spiritual objective of existence. Only after Noach began interacting and admonishing the members of his generation to repent, which was addressing the objective of creation, did he merit children to bring about that same purpose.