

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES
Parshas Vayigash

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Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Parshas Vayigash

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. Yosef's Spiritual Posture as Viceroy of Egypt

After Yosef had ascended to power in Egypt as the Viceroy, why did he not inform his father Yaakov that he was alive? In addition, why did he not initially reveal himself to his brothers when they had come to Egypt to purchase grain? Yosef's dreams were prophetic. Had he revealed his true identity to his brothers the prophecy would not have come to fruition. Therefore in order not to interfere with his prophecy, he attempted to conceal his identity until the point that his father Yaakov would come to Egypt and bow to him. Only because Yosef was in a life-threatening situation when he attempted to retain his brother Binyamin, was he forced to reveal himself to his brothers. Ultimately, at the end of Yaakov's life when he became ill, he bowed to Yosef when he made him swear that he would be buried in the Land of Israel. Thus, the final chapter of Yosef's dream came to fruition. Why did G'd want Yaakov and his children to bow to Yosef as was communicated through the dreams?

The Torah tells us that when Pharaoh had appointed Yosef as Viceroy, he was referred to as "avreich." Rashi cites a number of interpretations based on the Midrash. One explanation of the term "avreich" is that it is a conjunction of two words "av (father) and "reich (young man). Regarding wisdom, Yosef was the equivalent of a Sage (father of wisdom), although regarding his age – he was a young man (reich). Another explanation is that "avreich" is referring to bowing on the knee. Meaning, everyone who would come before Yosef would bow to him. One would think that the reason the Torah is revealing this fact to us is to give us an understanding of the position of Yosef – that he was the equivalent of a king and his status was no less than that of Pharaoh.

Sforno explains the term "avreich"- "Whoever would come before Yosef would need to bow before him on his knees as one would do before a king. As they call out before a king, 'To him every knee bows...'" Pharaoh was a pagan, a sorcerer, and the embodiment of impurity.

Contrastingly, Yosef was the embodiment of holiness who personified spirituality. Yosef was known as a "tzaddik" (righteous). Despite the negative influences of Egypt, he was able to dominate its physicality and spiritualize it. The Midrash tells us that a prerequisite for receiving grain during the years of famine was that one needed to be circumcised. According to Rambam in his work *Guide for the Perplexed*, one of the effects of circumcision is that it curbs the sexual drive. Thus, Yosef impacted upon Egyptian society by elevating them spiritually through circumcision.

The Torah states that when Pharaoh had discovered that Yosef's family had come to Egypt, "**It was pleasing in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants...**" The Midrash tells us that since, in fact Yosef was a slave, Pharaoh was criticized for appointing him as Viceroy. According to Egyptian law, a slave could not assume a position of power. Initially, Pharaoh insisted that Yosef was from a royal family and not a slave. Pharaoh continuously defended his position without any proof. When it became known that Yosef's family came to Egypt it was obvious to all that he was royalty. Thus, any controversy over Pharaoh's appointment of Yosef was eliminated. Therefore it was pleasing to Pharaoh and his servants.

The Midrash tells us that there was never a king whose reign was as long as Yosef. He was the Viceroy of Egypt for 80 years. When he assumed the position of Viceroy he was 30 years old and he passed away at the age of 110. He dominated Egypt (and by extension the world) with a strong hand of spirituality. Not only was the world dominated by Yosef, but also his family was subject to his kingship. It is interesting to note that his reign was 80 years, which is a number that connotes something beyond the natural. This was a confirmation that Yosef's reign was that of a spiritual person who represented G'd. Yosef's kingship represented the ultimate kiddush Hashem (sanctification of G'd's Name). Just as at the end of time, when the world will recognize G'd's unity, they will all bow before Him, so too during the 80-year reign of Yosef, who was G'd's agent, did the world bow before him. Yosef was a symbol of the heavenly kingdom. This is the

reason that it was necessary for his dreams to come to fruition. In addition, this prophecy to Yosef was integral to establish G'd's Presence in the world.

2. *The Convincing Element of the Tears of Yosef*

The Torah tells us that after Yosef had revealed himself to his brothers, they were overwhelmed and were not able to respond. The Midrash explains that the brothers were overwhelmed with embarrassment because at that moment they understood that Yosef's dreams were in fact true. They realized that they had unjustly inflicted untold suffering upon him when they had sold him into slavery. Their level of embarrassment was such that they could not even utter a word in the presence of their brother. The Torah states, **"He (Yosef) then kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; afterwards his brothers conversed with him."**

The Midrash explains, "Yosef kissed each of his brothers and wept upon them. As a result of Yosef's weeping, they were appeased and understood that he had truly forgiven them. Similarly, when G'd will ultimately redeem the Jewish people He will do so through their crying. As it states, 'They will come with tears and with great beseeching I (G'd) will lead them...'" Eitz Yosef (commentator on the Midrash) states, "The Midrash explains that just as Yosef's brothers were redeemed through his weeping so too will the Jewish people be ultimately redeemed by their crying. What is the correlation between Yosef's weeping and the appeasement of his brothers? When Yosef wept upon his brothers it was not due to pain, but rather it was from joy. The Jewish people will cry at the time of their redemption not because of pain but as a result of joy. As it states, 'Those who G'd redeems will return to Zion with song...' Similarly, the tears of Yosef were from joy. When his brothers understood that Yosef's tears were from joy they were appeased..." How do we understand this?

Since the destruction of the Second Temple, the Jewish people have been in a state of exile. The day the Temple was destroyed (Ninth of Av (Tisha b'Av)) is one that is commemorated through fasting and mourning. In fact the level of mourning that one is obliged to observe on Tisha b'Av is even more severe than that of a mourner. For example, on Tisha b'Av one is not even permitted to immerse his finger in cold water (for the sake of pleasure); whereas a mourner is permitted to do so. The grieving that is demonstrated on Ninth of Av is an expression of the pain that the Jewish people are experiencing as a result of no longer having a relationship with the Divine Presence

(destruction of the Temple). When the Jewish people will ultimately be redeemed their level of joy will be so overwhelming that they will weep. In the merit of this joyous weeping they will be redeemed.

If one does not truly experience the pain of not having a Temple and that special relationship with G'd then one will not have the overwhelming feeling of joy at the time of redemption. If one had not felt the void, one will not respond to the reinstatement of G'd's Presence. Unfortunately many people are content, despite the fact that we are in a state of exile. On the Ninth of Av many people only observe the day on a perfunctory level rather than truly grieving for the loss. If so, then how could the redemption be the most joyous moment of their lives?

A Kohen under normal circumstances is not permitted to contaminate himself with the dead. However, in a specific context, he is permitted to contaminate himself when the prohibition is only rabbinic, in order to witness the coronation of a non-Jewish king. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos explains that when one witnesses the glory and majesty of a king being coronated, albeit a non-Jew, one will have a greater appreciation for seeing the glory and majesty of Moshiach. One needs a frame of reference in order to make a comparison so that he may truly appreciate what is at hand. By witnessing the glory, majesty, and pomp at the installation of a non-Jewish king, one will be able to truly appreciate the glory of the coming of Moshiach.

One cries either from pain or as a result of joy. Tears are an indication that the individual is experiencing something that is beyond his capacity to deal with – either it is caused by an overwhelming level of pain or joy. When one is emotionally overwhelmed with joy, one cries. The Gemara in Tractate Sukkah tells us that at the end of time the tzaddikim (righteous) will cry and the reshaim (evil) will cry. At the end of time G'd will destroy the evil inclination. The righteous will cry because at the end of time G'd will show them the enormity of their evil inclination – that it was the equivalent of a large mountain. The righteous will be overwhelmed with tears saying, "How were we able to conquer such a mountain?" (The greater the individual the greater is his evil inclination.) In contrast, the evil people will cry when G'd will show them how minute their evil inclination truly was. They will see that their inclination was no more than a hairbreadth. They will cry saying, "How were we not able to conquer such a measly inclination!" What is the basis for the tears of the tzaddikim? Seemingly one could say that although both the righteous and evil are crying, the tears of the righteous are those of joy and the tears of the evil are ones of pain.

However it seems that the crying of the righteous and evil emanate from the same source – which is pain.

Very often when one succeeds, one attributes his success to his own initiative. The tzaddik understands that the reason he is able to lead a life of spirituality and holiness is because of the way he invests his life – which is in Torah and mitzvos. Therefore he has the ability to control his evil inclination. However at the end of time when G'd will reveal the true nature of his evil inclination, the tzaddikim will realize, seeing its enormity, that it was not possible to dispel it without G'd's Assistance. They will understand that their ability to have succeeded spiritually was not to any degree attributable to their own ability. The tzaddik will cry for having the insolence to even consider for one moment that his control over his inclination was possible without Divine Assistance.

When Yosef had initially revealed himself to his brothers, they were taken aback with embarrassment to the point they could not utter a word. However, after Yosef wept unceasingly upon them, they were appeased. Why did Yosef's tears eliminate the embarrassment of his brothers? If in fact the embarrassment was due to the injustice that they had perpetrated against him, how did Yosef's tears alleviate and reconcile that issue. When they had witnessed Yosef's degree of weeping upon them, they understood and appreciated that he was overwhelmed with joy- being reunited with them. Thus, they felt that he was not focused to any degree upon their past relationship with him. Had he focused upon the past it would have been impossible for him to express such a level of joy.

3. The Hidden Message of the Wagons

The Torah states, **“And they (Yosef's brothers) told him (Yaakov), ‘Yosef is still alive,’ also that he is ruler overall the land of Egypt...when he saw the wagons (agalos) that Yosef had sent to transport him, then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived.”** When Yaakov saw the wagons that were sent by Yosef, his state of prophecy returned. The Gemara states, “The Divine Presence only dwells upon one who is in a state of joy.” Since his sons had shown him the bloodied tunic of Yosef, Yaakov was spiritually disconnected from G'd and could not prophesize because he was in a state of mourning. It was only when Yaakov was informed that Yosef was alive that his prophecy was restored.

Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Yosef, by sending wagons (agalos) to his father, communicated that although they had been separated for many years he had not forgotten the last Torah subject that they had studied

together. This subject was the law of *eglah arufa* (the decapitated calf). The law of *eglah arufa* dictates that if one finds a corpse of a Jew outside of a community and one is not able to locate the murderer, the elders of the community (Sanhedrin) must bring a calf (eigel), break its neck in a certain location (decapitate it), and declare, “We are not in any way culpable for the death of this person...” The *agalos* (wagons) that were sent by Yosef were an allusion to this law which he had studied with his father. Yosef had studied many subjects with his father. In fact, all the Torah that Yaakov had studied in the yeshiva of Shem v'Ever, he had transmitted only to Yosef. Why did Yosef specifically choose to communicate to his father that he had not forgotten the law of *eglah arufa*? Why not any other law?

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains the reason Yosef was subject to suffering at the hands of his brothers and was not protected by a merit. He explains that when Yaakov had initially sent Yosef to Shechem to seek out the welfare of his brothers and the sheep, he was concerned that Yosef would be in danger during his journey. However there is a principle that if one is engaged in a mitzvah he is protected from any harm. Since Yosef was involved of the mitzvah of honoring his father by going to see his brothers (upon Yaakov's request) in Shechem, he was protected from any harm. However, when Yosef arrived in Shechem and did not locate his brothers, he chose to go to another location, Dosan, to seek them out. Once Yosef had left Shechem, he was no longer the agent of his father because he was specifically told to go to Shechem. Thus, he was no longer protected by the merit of the mitzvah.

Yaakov was not aware that Yosef had continued on to Dosan. Therefore, he was under the assumption that his son was protected by the mitzvah. Later when his sons had shown him the blood-soaked tunic, Yaakov became disconcerted because he believed that the failure of the mitzvah to protect his son was an indication of his own shortcoming. In addition, Yaakov had known through tradition that if any of his children were to pass away during his lifetime he would be punished eternally in *gehinom*. He therefore believed that he was responsible for Yosef's death.

Yosef specifically sent the *agalos* (wagons) to his father to indicate to him that everything that had transpired since they were separated was of Divine design. The sequence of events leading to the Egyptian exile and the ultimate redemption were set in motion when Yosef was sold into slavery. All the suffering that came upon Yosef was only part of the Divine plan to prepare him to create

an insular environment for the Jewish people in Egypt. Thus, Yosef wanted his father to understand that he had no culpability in the suffering that he experienced – it was ordained by G'd as part of ensuring the future of the Jewish people. Just as the *eglah arufa* (decapitated calf) was the ritual through which the elders of a community declared that they were not culpable for the death of a Jew found outside of the city, so too were the *agalos* (wagons) an indication to Yaakov that he was not culpable for Yosef's suffering.

4. Yosef's Qualification as the Guarantor for Torah

The Torah tells us that when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, they initially did not believe him. Yosef then said to them, **"Come close to me..."** Rashi cites Chazal who explain this verse to mean that Yosef had spoken to his brothers in a gentle and beseeching manner and he showed them he was circumcised. By making this fact known to them it was a confirmation that it was indeed Yosef.

When the famine began in Egypt, one could only purchase grain through Yosef himself. The Egyptian people complained to Pharaoh that Yosef was being too demanding of them. One would think that the basis for their grievance was that Yosef was overcharging them for the grain. However, Chazal tell us differently.

Pharaoh asked his subjects, "Why is it necessary for you to purchase grain from Yosef if you knew that the years of famine were coming? You should have stored away grain during the years of plenty in preparation for the seven years of famine." To this, the Egyptians responded by saying, "We did store away grain; however Yosef decreed that it should rot." Pharaoh said to his subjects, "Just as Yosef decreed that your grain should rot, he could decree that we should all die! Therefore, it is imperative that you heed the demands of Yosef." Why did Yosef demand that all Egyptians must have themselves circumcised?

The Arizal explains, based on Rambam's work *Guide for the Perplexed (Moreh Nevuchim)* that the value of circumcision is that the removal of the foreskin (orlah) curbs the sexual drive of the male. Yosef understood that the Jewish people would be spending an extended period of time in Egypt, a spiritually depraved society. This would ultimately be detrimental to the spiritual state of the Jewish people. Therefore, Yosef attempted to elevate the Egyptian society to a higher level of spirituality through

circumcision so that the effect of the exile would be less damaging.

If in fact all the Egyptians were circumcised, how did Yosef showing that he was circumcised prove that he was indeed Yosef? The Gemara tells us that before Sinai, the obligation of circumcision regarding the Jewish people was only the cutting of the foreskin (*milah*), without peeling it back (*priah*). The commandment of circumcision that was given to Ishmael, the son of Avraham (even post Sinai), was **only milah**. However, after Sinai, if a Jew had only *milah* without *priah*, he was considered un circumcised. The Patriarchs and their family observed the Torah in its entirety even before it was given at Sinai. Therefore, Yosef's circumcision was not only *milah* (as he was obligated) but also *priah*., which was unlike the Egyptians. Therefore, Yosef's brothers immediately understood that the Viceroy was indeed their brother.

The Shalah HaKadosh writes, "The only reason the Arabs are able to remain in the Land of Israel is that they are circumcised. The Torah tells us that a prerequisite for inhabiting the Land is that one must be circumcised. As one can see, there has never been a people who have occupied the Land for an extended period of time other than the Jews and the Arabs." The Shalah explains that although the Arabs do inhabit the Land, they will ultimately be forced to leave because they are only partially circumcised. However, the Jew who is fully circumcised has a permanent relevance to the Land.

After Yosef had proven to his brothers who he was, he said to them, **"You have seen with your own eyes...Therefore tell my father all my glory in Egypt and all that you saw..."** Rashi explains that what Yosef was saying to his brothers is, "You have seen with your eyes my glory, that I am circumcised as you are, and I speak Hebrew as you do." Since Yosef had already sufficiently proven himself to his brothers through the fact that he was circumcised as they were, then what is he adding by saying, "You have seen with your eyes my glory, that I am circumcised as you are, and I speak Hebrew as you do"?

Yosef was communicating that they must tell their father Yaakov that he was now the Viceroy of Egypt and therefore in a position to properly prepare Egypt for the Jewish exile. This was demonstrated through his glory, which was his circumcision. His ability to speak Hebrew demonstrated that he also had the capacity to create an environment of holiness in Egypt despite the depravity of the society.

Yosef rose to be the position of Viceroy of Egypt. He was the sole provider of sustenance for the entire world. When Yosef said, “you see my glory” he was referring to the power that he possessed as Viceroy in Egypt. When Yosef mentioned that he was circumcised like his brothers (milah with priah), he was indicating that his spirituality was no less than that of his brothers. Although Yosef was in the depraved environment of Egypt for many years without any spiritual support, he was not diminished in any way. In addition, Yosef said that he spoke the Holy Tongue – Hebrew. Since he had all of these qualities, he was qualified to create the insular environment that was necessary for the Jewish people in Egypt. Yosef wished to communicate to his brother his level of appreciation and understanding of spirituality that he possessed, despite his involvement in the material world as Viceroy.

Every aspect of Yosef’s accomplishments was linked to his own spirituality and this is why he succeeded. The Mishnah states, “*Im Ein kemach, Ein Torah* – if there is no flour there is no Torah.” Meaning, if one does not have material, he is not able to attain the spiritual – Torah.

Yaakov, our Patriarch, created a partnership between his two children Yissachar and Zevulun. Yissachar’s role was to be fully immersed in Torah study and Zevulun’s responsibility was to be the seafaring merchant. He spent months traveling to achieve financial success in order to support the spiritual endeavors of Yissachar. The Torah states at the end of the Book of Devarim, “Moshe had blessed the tribe of Zevulun by saying, “Zevulun rejoice in your going out and Yissachar in your tent (of Torah).” What is the basis for Zevulun’s rejoicing? Was he only rejoicing over the potential material success that was at hand? Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Moshe was saying that Zevulun should rejoice in his initiative to achieve financial success because it would support the Torah of Yissachar. His rejoicing was not because of the material success in and of itself. This was only possible because Zevulun had a unique appreciation of Torah. He understood that his responsibility to succeed financially was an imperative because without it Torah could not flourish.

We are able to learn from Yosef and Zevulun that the only way one can assume the role as a provider for Torah, is determined by one’s understanding of the value of the Torah that is being studied. It was only because of Yosef’s own level of spirituality that he was able create an insular society that would guarantee the spiritual survival of the Jewish people.

5. *Egypt- the Provider to the World* (from Mikeitz)

The Torah refers to Yosef as “the provider.” During the years of famine, Yosef as the Viceroy of Egypt was responsible for the distribution/selling of the grain that was stored in Egypt. Because Yosef had foreseen the severity of the upcoming famine, he had stored unlimited amounts of grain during the seven years of plenty in various locations throughout the land. Because of Yosef’s ingenuity, Egypt became the provider of grain to the world.

The Midrash cites a verse in Proverbs which states, “The one who denies grain to the people, the nations will curse him; however, blessing will come upon the head of the provider.” The Midrash explains. “Who is the one who denied the grain and was cursed by the nations? This was Pharaoh. During the years of famine, Pharaoh had hidden the grain in a manner that it could not be found. Who is the provider who is blessed? This was Yosef. He sustained the world during the years of famine as a shepherd provides for the needs of his flock. King David writes in Psalms, ‘The shepherd of Israel listens, He (G’d) leads us as Yosef led his flock...’” Why did Pharaoh hide the grain and refuse to distribute it to the nations of the world when Yosef so generously provided for them? What was the difference between the mindset of Pharaoh and that of Yosef?

Rabbeinu Bachya writes that all the monarchs of Egypt were given the title of “Pharaoh.” Although the name appears to be Egyptian, it has its origin in Hebrew. The Egyptian civilization was founded and rooted in the concept that nothing exists outside of the physical/material realm. This belief is manifested in the title “Pharaoh” because it contains the Hebrew letters “*ein, pei, reish* – which spells *afar (dust)*.” This indicates that everything is earthy and material, which was the basis of the Egyptian civilization.

Maharal of Prague z’tl explains that the number seven connotes the natural order. This is because Creation was a seven-day process. However, the number eight, which is beyond seven, connotes the supernatural. As we find, on Chanukah the one vial of oil for the Menorah lasted for eight days (and not seven) to emphasize that this event had no relevance to the nature. The Torah commands us that the foreskin of a newborn male child must be removed on the eighth day (bris milah - circumcision), demonstrating the spiritual essence of the Jew, which transcends nature. Although a child is naturally born

uncircumcised, the Torah dictates that despite this natural state, the foreskin must be removed.

The Gemara tells us that one of the shortcomings of Yosef that had been highlighted by the wine steward to Pharaoh was that he did not speak Egyptian. However, the night before Yosef was released from prison the archangel Gabriel came to him and taught him 70 languages (one of them being Egyptian). Since Yosef was already fluent in Hebrew, he thus had a proficient in 71 languages. One would think that it would have been sufficient for the archangel to teach Yosef Egyptian. Why did he need to acquire a fluency in 71 languages? The Midrash explains that Pharaoh spoke 70 languages. When he discovered that Yosef was fluent in 71 languages, he made him take an oath that he would never reveal this fact. If this information were to become known, it would result in Pharaoh being toppled from power. Why would Yosef's knowing one more language than Pharaoh cause the Egyptian monarch to be dethroned? The fact that Yosef knew 71 languages, one more than Pharaoh, was an indication that an individual was able to go beyond the natural – which is connoted by the number 70. This reality was a refutation of the basis for Egyptian civilization. Therefore Pharaoh insisted that Yosef take an oath not to reveal this fact.

The reason Pharaoh was reluctant to distribute the grain that had been stored was because he believed that everything that one achieves is due to one's own initiative. Material circumstance was solely based on one's ability to achieve within a natural context/limitation. Understanding that Egypt had a limited supply of grain (despite its abundance), Pharaoh did not want to jeopardize the future of the Egyptian people by selling it to other nations of the world. However, Yosef the spiritual person, knew that everything was determined by G'd. If the world needed to be sustained because of the famine, then the grain must be distributed. The bounty that was provided by G'd would be sufficient to provide for the world and Egypt. Because of Pharaoh's own limitation, the nations of the world cursed him. However, because Yosef understood that G'd's blessing is unlimited, he was not concerned.

It is interesting to note that the Gemara in Tractate Taanis tells us that the reason the Torah reiterates the term referring to the tithe of "maser" is to indicate that when one gives the proper percentage as the tithe (10%) he will become wealthy. He will have more rather than less. Rather than being depleted he becomes a beneficiary of G'd's material blessing. In fact the Gemara in Tractate Kesubos tells us that regarding the obligation of giving charity there was an old dictum in Jerusalem – "The more

you salt the less you have. The less you salt the more you have." This means that the more one retains and is not charitable, his assets will be depleted (he will have less). In contrast, the more one gives, the greater will be his blessing. The reward for one having faith that G'd is the true Provider is material blessing. Similarly, Yosef, who was the spiritual person and understood that everything emanates from G'd, was a beneficiary of the blessing of the nations of the world. Pharaoh, on the other hand, who was the one who believed that everything is determined by one's own accomplishment, was cursed because he was limited by the material.

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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

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11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
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12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Pesachim**
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Between E.51st and E.52st

Tuesday

12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
Location: Yad Avraham

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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