

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES
The Portion of
Vayigash

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Refuah Shleimah to Shmuel Ben Bluma

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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Yad Avraham Institute
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B"H

Vayigash

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. Yosef's Tears of Joy

The Torah tells us that after Yosef had revealed himself to his brothers, they were overwhelmed and were not able to respond. Rashi cites the Midrash that explains, the brothers were overwhelmed with embarrassment. When the brothers had realized that the Viceroy was in fact their brother Yosef, they understood that what they had initially attempted to reject and destroy was rooted in their own arrogance. They felt that they were culpable for all the suffering that they had caused their brother. The embarrassment was at a level that caused them to be dumbfounded.

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 Tanchuma) writes, “The Midrash explains that just as Yosef’s brothers were appeased 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. Similarly, the Jewish people at the end of time 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...’” The tears of Yosef were from joy that his brothers had realized and appreciated the wrong that they had done. He understood that their embarrassment and weeping was as a result of appreciating their failing. Yosef thus rejoiced. When his brothers

understood that Yosef’s tears were from joy, that he was truly happy for them, they were appeased. Similarly, at the end of time, when G’d will bring about the ultimate redemption the Jewish people will cry from joy because they will understand and appreciate what is the ultimate objective of creation. Because the Jewish people will cry, from joy, it will be a confirmation of their priority and perspective.

In our prayers on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we say that the various classifications of righteous people will rejoice after G’d will instill fear in all of mankind. We then say, that G’d will vanquish evil from existence. Seemingly, one would think that the joy of the righteous is from witnessing the destruction of evil. However, the order of events is that we first mention; the righteous will rejoice when mankind will recognize G’d and then G’d will vanquish evil. It is only after each classification of righteous individuals rejoices, outby declaring their essence, will G’d bring evil to an end. The rejoicing is a confirmation of their worthiness, which will bring about the ultimate redemption and the end of evil.

Every day we recite in the “Modim – prayer of thanks in the Amidah (Silent Prayer),” – “We gratefully thank You for it is You Who are Hashem, our G’d and the G’d of our forefathers for all eternity...” We are not initially thanking G’d for what He continuously provides for us, as stated in the Modim, but rather we are acknowledging the privilege of having an exclusive relationship with G’d the Omnipotent One. A Jew needs to feel grateful and fortunate for this alone. When the Jewish people will internalize the reality of their privileged status, they will weep from joy. This is what is meant to take place at the time of Redemption.

2. Yosef's Failing

The Midrash tells us that Yosef was initially meant to live 120 years. However, his life was shortened by ten years and he passed away at the age of 110. When

Yehudah initially had argued his case before the Viceroy of Egypt, not realizing that it was his brother Yosef, Yehudah had referred to his father as, **“my father, your servant”**. This was repeated ten times. The Midrash tells us that because Yosef had remained silent when he had heard his father being referred to as **“your servant”**, he had lost ten years of his life because his silence was considered a disrespect. Seemingly, the disrespect was that Yosef's father was being referred to as “his servant.” However, from the words of the Midrash we are able to understand it in a way that gives Yosef greater culpability. The Midrash states, “Yosef's silence was *‘shteeka k'hodaah*, which means that his silence was the equivalent of an admission. When Yosef heard his father being referred to as “his servant” there was an element of agreement and embracing of this identification of Yaakov.

Although there is no question that Yosef had an appreciation and understanding of his father, which surpassed his brothers; nevertheless, he had a prophetic dream in which his father was meant to bow before him. Yosef's dreams actually came to fruition. Consequently, when Yosef had heard his father being referred to as “his servant” he felt that in a limited context his father had relevance to that quantification. Chazal tell us that Yosef's silence was considered a disrespect because believing to any degree that his father was meant to demonstrate subservience to him was the ultimate disrespect.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh at the beginning of the Portion of Shemos explains that the bondage of the Jewish people in Egypt came upon them in stages. As long as Yaakov, our Patriarch was still alive they were insulated and unaffected by the spiritual impurity of Egypt. His presence created an insular environment that could not be penetrated. When Yaakov passed away, although the spiritual erosion had begun, they were nevertheless revered by the Egyptians because they were considered to be the family of Yosef, the Viceroy. Thus, the status of the Jew was royalty.

When Yosef passed away, the royal status of his family was lost. Although at that time the physical bondage had not begun, they were no longer seen noach as special by the Egyptian people. Had Yosef lived an additional ten years, the Jewish people would have retained their status as royalty during those years. Thus, postponing the spiritual deterioration of the Jewish people.

The Torah states, **“Rachel saw that she had not borne children to Yaakov... so she said to him ‘Give me children – otherwise I am dead.’ Yaakov's anger flared up at Rachel., and he said, ‘Am I instead of**

G'd....?’” Chazal explain that because Yaakov had reacted to Rachel's comment in an insensitive manner, not relating to her pain, G'd said to Yaakov, “Is this the manner in which you speak to one who is in such pain? Because you replied to Rachel in this way, I swear that your children will bow to her son.” It was because Yaakov had responded to Rachel in a harsh manner, that Yosef had dreamt that his father and brothers were destined to bow before him. Yaakov was the cause for all the events that presented themselves. Ultimately, this led to a moment of choice: will Yosef remain silent when hearing his father being referred to as “his servant, or not? Yosef failed – thus shortening his life by ten years.

3. The Sanctification Process Pertaining to the Jew

The performance of a mitzvah is predicated on the recitation of a blessing. The text of the blessing that is recited before performing a mitzvah is, “...Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us...” One concludes the blessing by specifying the particular mitzvah that is to be performed. The mention of the sanctification of the Jew is only found within the context of this type of blessing. Meaning, it is only through the performance of a mitzvah that a Jew is sanctified. What is the process of this sanctification?

The Torah tells us that at the time of the receiving of the Torah at Sinai, the Mountain assumed a sanctified/consecrated status when the Divine Presence descended upon it. No one was permitted to approach the Mountain as long as the Divine Presence was associated with it. After the Divine Presence ascended from the Mountain, the Jewish people were permitted to approach it because it had reverted back to its ordinary status. We see clearly from this example, that the basis for sanctification/consecration is G'd's association with something. For example, the day of Shabbos is considered holy because G'd's Presence entered and continuously enters into existence on that day. The Divine Presence ascends and departs at the end of the seventh day.

Through the performance of mitzvos, one is sanctified. Does the sanctification come about as a result of doing the Will of G'd? When one does His Will G'd will have a relationship with him – thus causing sanctification similar to what had taken place at Sinai. The Torah tells us that at Sinai, when the Jewish people accepted upon themselves G'd's Torah and its obligations, G'd referred to the Jewish people as **“...holy nation.”**

When G'd chose the Jewish people as His nation, the consequence was holiness/sanctification.

The Midrash states, "Reb Shimon Bar Yochai had said, G'd said to the Jewish people 'You should honor the mitzvos. Because the mitzvah is the equivalent of My Agent.' (There is a principle in Jewish law that states that an agent is the equivalent of the one who established his agency). 'When you honor the mitzvos it is the equivalent of honoring Me. However, if you disgrace them, it is the equivalent of disgracing Me.' There was no one who honored and revered the mitzvos more than Yaakov, our Patriarch. As the Torah states, **'He is the perfect man who sits in the tent (the tent of Torah).'**" We see that when one engages in a mitzvah it is the equivalent of engaging with G'd Himself, because He establishes the mitzvos as "His Agents." Thus, one becomes sanctified through the performance of mitzvos because of his direct association with G'd/mitzvah. An agent is appointed to be the equivalent of the one who appointed him. How is the mitzvah the equivalent of G'd?

King David writes in Psalms, "The prerequisite/beginning to wisdom is the fear of G'd." In order for one to perceive and comprehend the Torah in its proper context, one must first revere G'd Rabbeinu Yonah in his commentary on Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers) and Shaarei Teshuvah (The Gates of Repentance) writes, "All mitzvos of the Torah are the equivalent of 'parparaos-appetizers' to the essence which is the fear of G'd." He explains that whenever one performs a mitzvah, regardless of whatever it may be, it is an expression of his fear of G'd. He is only performing the mitzvah because G'd had commanded him to do so. The mitzvah itself is the facilitator for one to fear/revere G'd, which causes one to cleave to Him. Consequently, the mitzvah itself in its essence creates the attachment to G'd, which is the equivalent of the agent.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos differentiates between prayer (tefillah) and the recitation of the Shema. The Shema is a declaration of one's belief in G'd. Entering into prayer is the equivalent of having an audience with G'd Himself. Because of this difference, the Gemara explains that one's attire during the Amidah (silent prayer) must demonstrate proper respect. However, during the Shema it is not a prerequisite. Based on the Midrash that tells us that when one performs a mitzvah it is the equivalent of engaging with G'd's agent, the moment one begins to perform the mitzvah it is (halachically) the equivalent of engaging with G'd Himself. However, one does not need to exhibit the same degree of reverence

which one would if he were actually standing before the King (e.g. in prayer) because there is a degree of distance.

4. *The Subtleties That Make The Differences*

The Torah states after Yosef had revealed himself to his brothers, **"Yosef said, 'G'd has sent me ahead of you to insure your survival in the land...Hurry- go up to my father and say to him...G'd has made me master of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not delay. You will reside in the land of Goshen...'"** Yosef told his brothers that it was important for them to communicate to their father Yaakov, that he had ascended to the position of Viceroy and that he held supreme power over Egypt. By informing Yaakov of this fact, he would understand that his son Yosef was qualified to provide his family with all their needs.

After appeasing his brothers and making them feel welcome, Yosef 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 was, "You have seen with your eyes my glory, that I am circumcised as you are, and I speak the holy tongue (Hebrew)." Although Yosef had decreed that all of the Egyptians must be circumcised, his circumcision was different from theirs. The circumcision of the Jew has two elements – *milah* (cutting of the foreskin) and *priyah* (pulling it back). The circumcision that he had decreed for the Egyptians was similar to that of the Arabs, which was the cutting of the foreskin without pulling it back. Although the obligation of circumcision for the Jew pre-Sinai was only the cutting of the foreskin (*milah*), the Patriarchs and their families observed the Torah in its entirety as it was meant to be post-Sinai, when the obligation of the Jew, regarding circumcision, entails both *milah* and *priyah*.

By revealing his circumcision, which was unique to the family of the Patriarchs, and by speaking in the Hebrew language Yosef was communicating to his brothers that he was spiritually untainted, despite the impurity of Egypt. Although he had been in Egypt for many years and had risen to great power, he had maintained his spirituality meticulously as the special son of Yaakov, our Patriarch. Just as Yaakov had conveyed to his brother Esav, *"...im Lavan gartie"*, to indicate that although he had been exposed for a period of twenty years to the evils of Lavan and his community, he remained spiritually unscathed. He was not diminished as much as an iota. So too had Yosef had shared this fact with his

brothers that he was no less of a tzaddik as he had been in his father's house.

Yosef then said to his brothers that they must communicate this fact to their father Yaakov. He said to them, **“Take for yourselves from the land of Egypt wagons (agalos)...”** Yosef wanted his brothers to return to their father with wagons (agalos). Rashi cites the Midrash which explains that Yosef, by sending wagons (agalos) to his father, he was alluding to him that although they had been separated for twenty-two 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 agalos (wagons) that were sent by Yosef were an allusion to this law. The Torah states, **“...When they related to him all the words that Yosef had spoken to them, and he saw the wagons...the spirit of their father was revived.”** At that moment, Yaakov's spirit had come alive and he regained his prophetic level. Why did Yaakov need wagons to convince him that this was truly Yosef? Why was the information that the brothers had communicated to him not sufficient?

Yosef's brothers told their father, that as Viceroy of Egypt, Yosef was in a position to insure that the Jewish people would be provided for in a way that they would be kept separate from the Egyptian people – thus not being exposed to their impurity. In addition, Yosef had showed his brothers that he was circumcised as they were and spoke Hebrew. The value of this information was to indicate that he was spiritually sound. One would think that this would be enough to give Yaakov the confidence to relocate to Egypt. However, it was not sufficient. He needed to see the wagons, that alluded to the *eglah arufah* in order to be convinced that Yosef was not diminished.

Yaakov was able to insulate and safeguard himself and his family from the negative influences of Lavan's community only because he was continuously engaged in Torah study. Prior to entering Lavan's community, Yaakov's life had been fully invested in Torah study. Thus, giving him the ability to create an environment for his family that they should develop to be the foundation of the Jewish people. Yaakov understood that Yosef had possessed his ability to create an identical environment to preserve the Jewish people in Egypt. However, Yaakov's concern was, Yosef, being all alone for a period of twenty-two years, may have been slightly affected by the impurity of Egypt. Therefore, being circumcised and speaking Hebrew was not a sufficient reassurance that his family would be protected. He needed to know that Yosef had the spiritual sensitivity to provide the necessary insular environment for the Jewish people. This was only possible

if Yosef had continued on the path of his father. Yosef's intent when he sent the wagons to his father was to convey to him that he had not deviated as much as an iota from when he had last seen him. The Midrash tells us that the wagons, was a confirmation that Yosef was continuously engaged in Torah study while in Egypt.

The Gemara tells us that Rebbe Akiva had 24,000 students who were the leading Torah sages of that generation. During a period of thirty-three days between Pesach and Shavuos, all 24,000 of them passed away. The Gemara explains that the reason they passed away despite their greatness in Torah was “They did not conduct themselves with proper respect towards one another.” The students of Rebbe Akiva were most certainly respectful to one another. However, there is a subtle aspect to which they were not sensitive. Each of the students had a unique dimension of Torah scholarship, which had to be acknowledged and respected. When one accords respect to a Torah sage it must be appropriate to that individual's level of Torah. Rebbe Akiva's students did not discern the subtle differences of greatness between them. They treated one another with the same level of respect, which was not sufficient.

Reb Aaron Kotler z'tl explains that the students of Rebbe Akiva were the sages who were responsible for the transmission of the Torah and its traditions to the future generations. Their obligation was to communicate the tradition accurately, as it was transmitted at Sinai, without even the slightest difference. Because they did not have the sensitivity to value the nuances of differences between one another, they were not qualified for this awesome task. Had they not passed away, the Torah that they would have transmitted would have been deficient. Identically, Yaakov understood that if Yosef was spiritually diminished, even to a small degree, it would put the future of the Jewish people in jeopardy. Therefore, he was not convinced that Yosef was not spiritually affected in Egypt until he saw the wagons that indicated that he had maintained his level of righteousness.

5. Prayer – When it is an Affront to G'd (From Mikeitz)

The Midrash states, “Antoninus the Roman Emperor had asked Judah the Prince (Rebbe), ‘Is one permitted to pray at any time that he wishes?’ Rebbe responded, ‘It is not permitted. One is permitted to pray only three times a day.’ Antoninus asked, ‘Why?’ Rebbe replied, ‘Because praying multiple times will cause one to act with levity.’ Antoninus disagreed with Rebbe. In order

for Antoninus to appreciate Rebbe's position, he rose early in the morning to call upon the Emperor. He acknowledged him with an honorable appellation. After a short time, Rebbe again called upon the Emperor and referred to him with another honorable and appropriate title. Soon after that visit, Rebbe, again returned to the Emperor, and said, 'Greetings to the King.' Antoninus said to him, 'Do you realize that by approaching me so many times on the same day that it is a disrespect. One only approaches the Emperor when there is an important matter that needs my attention.' Rebbe responded, 'You must listen to what you are saying, you who are a mere mortal, feel that it is disrespectful for me to approach you as many times as I have – regardless of our special relationship, how much more disrespectful is it to approach G'd, the King of Kings, the Omnipotent One!'"

The Midrash continues, "Reb Yosi Ben Chalafta says, 'There is a special time when one should pray. It is during the time of special appeasement (of G'd) – *eis ratzon*' When is it the time of special appeasement? It is when the quorum (*tzibor*)/community prays. This is the reason one should rise early in the morning in order to pray at the time of the *tzibor*. There is nothing greater/more effective than prayer. Where do we find this? G'd had decreed that Moshe should not be allowed to enter into the Land and not even to see it. However because he supplicated G'd in abundance, G'd showed him the Land. Moshe was able to partially alter the decree through his supplications. When Yaakov had sent his sons to Egypt, they were in a state of danger. He thus prayed on their behalf..."

Moshe prayed to G'd for two things: firstly to enter into the Land and secondly, even if he should not enter, he should merit to see it. What was the value of Moshe "seeing" the Land? Chazal tell us that for Moshe to see the Land, G'd performed a miracle that enabled him to see every aspect of the Land of Israel, which is humanly not possible within the context of limitation. Sforno explains that since Moshe possessed the ultimate "*ayin tovah* – good eye" he wanted to see every aspect of the Land so that the Jewish people should succeed in it with blessing and good fortune. Even Moshe entering into the Land was not for his own sake, but rather, for the good of the Jewish people- to ensure their spiritual success in the Land. Moshe's only interest, through his prayers were only, to facilitate the glorification of G'd. It was unrelated to his self gain. G'd, therefore, altered the decree and allowed Moshe to gaze upon the Land.

If one approaches G'd for his own needs more than three times a day, it is understandable that it is excessive. It is an indication that one does not revere G'd

sufficiently. Just as one will not approach a mortal king for his mundane needs, unless it was of the utmost importance, identically one does not approach G'd. However, if one's emphasis of prayer is only to alleviate and dispel the desecration of G'd's Name in the world and to make His Presence known to all mankind, it would be permitted even if one were to pray numerous times.

The Torah tells us that Avraham, our Patriarch, was engaged in a communication with G'd when three wayfarers came upon him. The Torah states, "**Avraham lifted his eyes and saw: Behold! Three men... and he said (to G'd), 'My Lord, if I find favor in Your eyes, please pass not away from Your servant.'**" Avraham interrupted his communication with G'd to offer hospitality to the three wayfarers. The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us, "It is from here that we learn that providing hospitality has even greater value than receiving the Divine Presence." Avraham's objective in life was to establish G'd's dominion in existence and to dispel paganism from the world. His hospitality was only a means to enter into a convincing dialogue with the members of his generation that all is Willed by Him. Therefore, Avraham's interrupting his communication with G'd for the sake of hospitality was not an affront to G'd, but rather, carrying out His Dictate. Every aspect of Avraham's life was selflessly focused on doing the Will of G'd, therefore his every interaction with the Omnipotent One was never considered a lack of reverence.

When Yaakov prayed for the safety of his sons when they were sent to Egypt, it was not as a parent demonstrating concern for his loved ones, but rather it was so that they should accomplish his objective. By being protected and succeeding in their mission, it would establish the future of the Jewish people. Yaakov's prayers were only for G'd's Glory and not for his own.

The discussion between Rebbe and Antoninus is limited to the context of individuals who pray for their own needs. If one were to come before the King too often to beseech him for his personal needs it would be considered a disrespect and lack of reverence. However, regarding the prayers of tzaddikim (devoutly righteous), this is not the case. As the Midrash tells us, the reason the Patriarchs and Matriarchs were initially barren was because, "G'd desires the prayers of tzaddikim." The prayers of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov did not emanate from their own desire to have children, but rather to establish the Jewish people who would bring about G'd's Glory.