

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
The Portion of
Vayishlach

December 10, 2008

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
New York
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B"H

Vayishlach

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita
Dean

1. The Superiority of Yaakov Over Esav

The Torah tells us that after Yaakov had not seen his brother Esav for nearly 36 years, he communicated to him through angels (agents), **“I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now. I have acquired oxen and donkeys, flocks, servants, and maidservants...”** Yaakov had delineated to Esav his possessions that he had amassed while being with Lavan. Why would Yaakov share this information with his brother Esav, who had despised him?

The Midrash explains that when Yaakov communicated this information, he was in essence telling him that he had nothing to fear, because of his own personal spiritual value. The Midrash states, “Yaakov said, **‘I have no reason to fear you (Esav) because I have acquired oxen...’** The ‘ox’ refers to Yaakov’s son Yosef. As it states, **‘A sovereignty is his ox-like one-majesty is his.’** Another reason Yaakov had no reason to fear Esav was because he had **‘donkeys.’** This is an allusion to Moshiach, the son of (King) David, who will redeem the Jewish people and bring existence to its spiritual perfection. As it is stated, **‘Moshiach will come like a poor man riding on a donkey... The ‘sheep (flock)’** mentioned by Yaakov refers to the merits of the sons of the Tribes – who are referred to as flocks. Additionally, Yehudah is the antagonist of Esav. As the verse states, **‘The lion like the cattle will eat the straw...’** The ‘lion’ refers to Yehudah and the ‘straw’ refers to Esav.” Therefore, because of all of these reasons, Yaakov had no reason to fear Esav.

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra states, “The progeny of Esav can only fall through the hands of the progeny of Rachel.” The Gemara continues to explain that the Jewish people were never victorious in a battle against Amalek (descendants of Esav) unless the progeny of Rachel were involved. For example, the first encounter with Amalek, who attacked the Jewish people in the desert (after leaving Egypt) was led by Yehoshua bin Nun, who was from the Tribe of Ephraim (which is Yosef). King

Shaul, who was from the Tribe of Binyamin, fought the second battle against Amalek, which took place in the Land of Israel. Mordechai and Esther, who brought about the destruction of Amalek in their time were from the tribe of Binyamin. Why are the progeny of Rachel uniquely qualified to defeat the progeny of Esav?

Rachel, our Matriarch although she was uniquely beautiful, as the Gemara tells us that she was one of the most beautiful women to ever live, was fully dedicated to the service of G’d. She was the primary wife of Yaakov the most special of the Patriarchs. She subordinated and dominated her physicality for the sake of spirituality. Her physical existence was only a means to an end. Yosef, her son, also possessed exceptionally beauty. His intellect transcended the human capacity and he had ascended to become the Viceroy of Egypt. Despite his beauty and power he is identified as **“Yosef ha’tzaddik (Yosef the righteous).”** His physical essence was only a means to a spiritual end. He prepared the location for the Jewish people for their extended exile in Egypt. Yosef is quantified by the Torah as “the ruler (shalit).” He dominated the most advanced civilization in existence.

Esav, in contrast, personified physicality on the most exaggerated level. The Torah refers to him as, **“the man of the field.”** He was the consummate hedonist who had no relevance to spirituality whatsoever. Thus, his involvement in the material was an end unto itself. Because Yosef, the son of Rachel possessed the characteristic of his mother, the ability to dominate the physical for the sake of the spiritual, Yaakov was no longer fearful of Esav’s presence. This was communicated to Esav when Yaakov had said that he possessed “oxen” which alludes to his son Yosef.

The final conflict that will bring about the ultimate redemption will come through Moshiach the son of Yosef. This battle will prepare the way for the coming of Moshiach the son of David, who then will dispel all falsehood from existence, which is disseminated by Esav.

Ultimately, Mt. Seir, which is the location of Esav and the Edomites, will be judged – concluding with G'd's dominion over all existence.

Every Jew has the capacity to infuse the physical with the spiritual – thus spiritualizing existence. By doing so, the Jewish people will hasten the coming of Moshiach and the ultimate redemption.

2. *Perceiving True Value*

The Torah tells us that Yaakov had sent angels to share with his brother Esav his degree of financial accomplishment and that he is seeking to find favor in his eyes. He had said, **“I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now. I have acquired an ox and a donkey, a flock, a (male) servant, and a maidservant...”** The Midrash asks, “Did Yaakov only have one ox and one donkey? Surely not, he had many herds, flocks, and servants. This is evident from the gift that he had sent to his brother Esav. If so, why did Yaakov express himself in the singular when describing his holdings to Esav?” Rashi explains that when one expresses himself in the singular, it is only referring to the species rather than the number. Meaning, “ox” connotes “many oxen” and “flock” connotes many flocks. The Midrash explains this differently, “When a *tzaddik* (righteous individual) speaks about his own accomplishments, he does so in a manner that minimizes himself. In contrast, when a *rasha* (evil person) person speaks about himself he does so in a way that magnifies and elevates himself. As it states after Esav had received the gift that Yaakov had sent, **‘Esav said, ‘I have plenty. My brother, let what you have remain yours.’** As it states in Proverbs, ‘There is one who makes himself wealthy, yet he has nothing. There is one who makes himself impoverished, yet he has great wealth.’” This is the contrast between Yaakov and Esav. Why does the *tzaddik* minimize himself, despite his great level of wealth?

The Torah tells us that when the Divine Presence had descended upon Mt. Sinai, no one was permitted to approach the mountain because it was holy. However, after it ascended, one was permitted to approach it because it had returned to its original ordinary status. The Gemara states, “From this we learn that it is not the location that glorifies the individual but rather, it is the individual who brings glory to the location.” It was only because G'd associated Himself with the mountain that it became holy. However, when His Presence departed, it reverted back to its ordinary status. Regardless of one's material wealth, if

one's essence is truly spiritual, he will bring value to all that is associated with him. However, if one only possesses the material and his essence is devoid of spirituality, his wealth has no special value.

The *tzaddik* understands and appreciates that his only true worth is his relationship with G'd. Whatever material that he may possess is only an endowment from Him. As the Gemara in Tractate Berachos states, “Everything is predestined, except for the fear of heaven.” It is only because of the *tzaddik's* choice to adhere to the Word of G'd that he is classified as “righteous.” The *tzaddik's* true accomplishments only relate to his own degree of spirituality. Thus, when Yaakov expressed his degree of material success he did so in a manner that reflected his understanding of the material. His assets, although they were of great material value, they were of minimal importance to Yaakov because all that mattered was his spiritual success. Esav, in contrast believed that he had “plenty” because his only level of accomplishment was in the material realm. This is what he truly valued. This is the reason that Esav had expressed himself as he had. If he had any understanding or appreciation for spirituality he would have realized that he truly had nothing. As it states in Proverbs, “There is one who makes himself wealthy, yet he has nothing (Esav). There is one who makes himself impoverished, yet he has great wealth (Yaakov).”

3. *The Rise and Fall of Man*

The Midrash states, “A matronly woman asked Reb Yosi ben Chalaftha, ‘How long did it take for G'd to create the world?’ He responded, ‘It took Him six days.’ As it states, **‘For in six days Hashem created the heavens and the earth...’** She asked, ‘Since the time of Creation, how does He occupy His time?’ He answered, ‘He makes ladders.’ He causes people to ascend and descend the ladders. If one succeeds, he ascends but if he were to fail he will descend.’ Where do we see this? When Yaakov fled to go to Lavan he crossed the Jordan with only a walking staff. On Mt. Moriah he had gathered stones upon which to rest his head. If he were wealthy, he would have lied on a pillow or bedding and not upon stones. Evidently, he was destitute at that time. It was only after he worked for Lavan that he became wealthy. As it states, **‘The man (Yaakov) became exceedingly prosperous...’** What was the source of Yaakov's wealth? His wealth emanated from the blessing that he received from his father Yitzchak before he had left. As it states, **‘Yitzchak said, May G'd give to you the blessing of**

Avraham. What is the blessing of Avraham? The Torah states, **'G'd blessed Avraham with everything.'**"

Avraham was blessed with everything that he needed in order to fulfill his objective in existence, which was the espousal of monotheism. Although Avraham had amassed great material wealth, it was only for the purpose of facilitating his spiritual objective. Chazal interpret the verse, **"G'd blessed Avraham with everything (*bakol*)"** to mean that he was blessed with a son. The numerical equivalent (*gematria*) of the word "*(bakol)* everything" is "*(ben)* son." Yitzchak, the son of Avraham, who was destined to be the future Patriarch of the Jewish people was the equivalent of everything. Avraham had succeeded in creating and establishing the dynamic that would bring existence to its level of perfection. The innate value of the wealth that Avraham possessed was only relevant to Yitzchak becoming his successor/spiritual heir.

When Yaakov began to work for Lavan he was in an impoverished state. At that time, he was not yet ready to assume the position of Patriarch. It was only after he had eleven of the twelve future tribes of Israel that he began to become exceedingly wealthy. As it states after the Yosef was born, **"...when will I do something for my own household?"** It was only because Yaakov needed this degree of wealth to secure the future of his family that G'd provided it for him. Just as Avraham was blessed with all the material that was necessary to address his objective, so too was Yaakov blessed.

The Midrash tells us that G'd continuously judges the world as to who is worthy to ascend the ladder and become wealthy or descend and become impoverished. He created existence with the sole purpose of being the setting in which the Jewish people would fulfill their role as the chosen people through the observance of the Torah. All creation was brought into being only to accommodate this objective. Thus, if one needs wealth or utilizes his wealth to facilitate and accomplish his spiritual potential, then G'd will provide him with that. However, if one misappropriates his blessing and utilizes it inappropriately, then he may be judged to descend the ladder and no longer have the blessing.

G'd provides every Jew with what is needed for him to achieve his spiritual objective. The Gemara tells us that every day a Heavenly Voice emanates from Sinai and declares, "The entire world is sustained in the merit of My son Chanina (Reb Chanina Ben Dosa). It is sufficient for him to subsist on a small measure of carob from one eve of Shabbos to the next." Despite his impoverished state, Reb Chanina Ben Dosa was able to create sufficient merit so

that the world should be sustained on his merit. It is was because he was satisfied with his meager portion, although it was the minimum. It was in fact because of his state of impoverishment to succeed in his purpose.

4. Yosef's Dimension of Being

When Esav met Yaakov, after not seeing him for many years, he noticed the camps of Yaakov and asked, **"Who are these (people) to you?"** Yaakov responded, **"The Children who G'd has graciously given to your servant."** Each of Yaakov's wives, followed by their children, came forth to acknowledge Esav's presence. When Rachel had approached with Yosef, her son, Yosef preceded her before Esav. Rashi cites Chazal who ask, "Why regarding the other wives of Yaakov, the mothers had preceded their children, but when Rachel had passed before Esav, her son Yosef preceded her?" Chazal answer, "Yosef had said, 'My mother is an exceptionally beautiful woman, and perhaps the eye of that evil man will gaze upon the beauty of my mother. Therefore I will block his view so that he will not be able to gaze upon her.'" Chazal tell us that because Yosef had not allowed the eye of Esav to come upon his mother, he merited to receive from his father Yaakov the special blessing of "*Alei aayin* - You are above the eye." Meaning, Yosef was not susceptible to the evil eye, measure for measure.

Why did Yosef not want Esav to gaze upon the beauty of his mother Rachel? The Gemara tells us that Rachel was one of the most beautiful women who ever lived. However, rather than succumbing to vanity as a result of her exceptional beauty, she consecrated that beauty/ her physicality to the service of G'd. Thus, Rachel's physicality was not representative of what it appeared to be. Esav, being the epitome of physicality and hedonism, did not have the capacity to appreciate the spiritual. The Torah quantifies him as **"the man of the field."** Yosef understood that if he were to gaze upon his mother, he would see this holy person purely within the physical context as a sexual object. Rachel, the primary Matriarch of the Jewish people, the wife of Yaakov, would be limited in his eyes to a physical object of desire. Perceiving something of such spiritual dimension in a physical context would be a chillul Hashem (desecration of G'd's Name). Therefore, Yosef shielded Rachel from the gaze of Esav. Because he prevented this chilul Hashem he merited the blessing of "*Alei aayin*" - to be protected from the evil eye.

The Torah tells us that Moshe did not age physically. As the verse states at the time of his passing,

"Moshe was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eye was not dimmed, and his vigor had not diminished." Why does the Torah describe Moshe's physical condition, that even at the age of 120 he had the vibrancy of a young man? Maharal of Prague explains that physical entities are subject and susceptible to being affected, thus causing their deterioration and decomposition. Spiritual entities, in contrast, are not subject to being affected because they are not within the context of cause and effect. Since physicality is synonymous with being influenced and affected by one's material environment, when one does not allow himself to be influenced by that environment, he is assuming a spiritual posture.

Moshe, was a person who affected others and the world at large. He was not affected as much as an iota by the physicality of existence. As a confirmation of this fact, the Torah describes Moshe's physical condition to indicate that he was a person who was unaffected and therefore he did not age. Maharal explains that the vast majority of the world is of pagan belief whereas the Jewish people, who are an insignificant minority, believe in the Omnipotent G'd. Although they should be overwhelmed by the pagan beliefs of the world and become spiritually eroded, they are nevertheless steadfast in their belief. This also is a confirmation that the Jewish people, in their essence, are spiritual. Thus, despite all of the holocausts, pogroms, upheavals and displacements throughout history, the Jewish people have survived because their essence is spiritual, thus giving them relevance to eternity.

Although Esav was overwhelmingly intimidating, Yosef did not hesitate to intercede and not allow him to gaze upon the beauty of his mother. Yosef was not concerned that Esav would sense his intent and thus provoke his anger. By doing so, Yosef assumed a spiritual posture of one who affects and is not affected, thus making him not susceptible to the evil eye.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that there was a time when there was a severe drought. After instituting all of the measures of fasting and supplicating G'd, the rain did not come. The Gemara asks why in the time of Reb Yehudah, although people were not proficient in all six sections of the Talmud, when he would remove his shoe in preparation for prayer, it was a sufficient initiative to cause it to rain? However, in our time, when we are proficient in all six sections of the Talmud, with all of our initiatives it does not rain. What was so special about Reb Yehudah? The Gemara explains that it was because "he was willing to give his life for the sanctification of G'd's Name." The incident through which

Reb Yehudah demonstrated his self-sacrifice to sanctify G'd's Name was: a woman, who was believed to be Jewish maiden wore an immodest head covering. When Reb Yehudah had noticed her, he had removed it from her head. He had considered it to be an inappropriate attire for a Jewish woman. His reaction to this act of immodesty did not take into account the dire consequences of his action, which could have come upon him. Either his behavior would be seen as irrational, causing him shame and embarrassment or there would be a monetary claim for bringing a hardship upon the woman. He was willing to make the sacrifice for the sake of G'd. Therefore he was sufficiently worthy to evoke G'd's Mercy with a minimal initiative.

The Gemara is communicating to us that if a Jew is willing to go against his natural instinct, which is to protect his persona in other people's eyes, he is assuming a spiritual profile. Therefore, he is able to bring about a positive consequence, although it may be out of the realm of the natural order.

5. *Yaakov's Confirmation As the Master Patriarch* (from *Vayeitzi*)

When Yaakov, our Patriarch was about to leave the Land of Israel as he fled from his brother Esav, the Torah states, **"He (Yaakov) encountered (*vayifgah*) the place..."** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the word "*vayifgah* (encountered)" alludes to prayer. When Yaakov, our Patriarch, came upon Mt. Moriah, which was the future location of the Temple, he prayed. The prayer that Yaakov had established at this location was arvis (the evening prayer service). Although Yaakov at this moment was seventy-seven years old, he did not establish the evening prayer service until this moment, when he was about to flee from the Land. Why was this so?

The nighttime period is a time when one does not recognize and see things for what they are because of the absence of light. Ramchal in his work, Path of the Just, explains that during the nighttime we perceive something to be one thing, although it is something else. Chazal explain that exile, is comparable to the nighttime period. It is a time of great confusion and unanswered questions. There is a lack of clarity. Yaakov, our Patriarch, who was an embodiment of Torah understood that in order to withstand and overcome the trials and tribulations of exile, one needed to strengthen his understanding of G'd's Ways through Torah and prayer. One is only able to dispel the darkness of exile with the study of Torah and prayer. Since Yaakov was now assuming the role of the Patriarch

of exile, he needed to establish the prayer service of the nighttime period in order to be able to confront all the issues of exile. A significant portion of Yaakov's life was spent outside of the Land of Israel. He is therefore characterized as the Patriarch of exile. It is because of what he had inculcated within his own spirituality that the Jewish people are able to survive the difficulties of exile.

It is interesting to note that the Torah repeats the word **"the place (ha'makom)"** three times in the same verse. Baal Haturim explains, "Each mention of the term 'the place' alludes to one of the three festivals that the Jewish people will observe in the future. They will ascend to the Temple Mount three times a year in observance of these festivals (Pesach, Shavuos, Succos)." This was alluded to Yaakov at the time he had **"encountered the location."**

The Torah states when Yaakov arrived in Charan, **"...And Behold! Three flocks of sheep lay there beside it (the wellspring)."** Why is it necessary for the Torah to inform us how many flocks of sheep were waiting to receive water? The Midrash tells us that the three flocks of sheep allude to the three festivals during which the descendants of Yaakov will ascend to Jerusalem. The Gemara in Tractate Taanis tells us that one of the liquids to which the Torah is compared is water. This is because the Torah sustains the spiritual viability of the Jewish people. Thus, the mention of the three flocks of sheep waiting to be watered symbolize the three festivals during which the Jewish people will ascend to the Temple and secure their connection to G'd and His Torah.

The Torah tells us that when Yaakov slept upon the location of the Temple, G'd came to him and said, **"Your offspring shall be as the dust of the earth..."** What is the significance of comparing the Jewish people to "dust?" Regarding Avraham and Yitzchak, the Torah states that they were told that their children will be as numerous as the "stars in the heaven" and the "sand on the seashore." There was no mention to them about the "dust of the earth." Seemingly, this characterization of the Jewish people is particular to Yaakov. Yaakov is quantified by the Torah as, **"The man who dwelt in the tent (of Torah)."** G'd was telling Yaakov that just as dust when it is not intermingled with water has no significance or permanence, as it is easily scattered, so too the Jewish people without Torah being infused into their lives will have no value or permanence.

The Torah tells us that after Yaakov had awoken he was confident and had a sense of security because G'd had promised to protect him and bless his progeny. He

immediately pledged himself to G'd saying, **"...whatever You will give me, I shall repeatedly tithes to You (a tenth)."** Why does Yaakov mention the giving of tithes at this moment? What relevance does it have to the promise of being protected and meriting a special family? When Yaakov awoke he understood that he was destined to be the one to father of the twelve tribes of Israel. Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the number "ten," which manifests itself in many areas of the Torah is a reflection of the Ten Utterances of G'd that brought existence into being. We find that Avraham was presented with ten tests by G'd in order for him to spiritually develop and be worthy of being the founding Patriarch of the Jewish people. The Jewish people witnessed the Ten Plagues in Egypt that were revealed miracles in order to be extricated from the pagan influences. This caused them to be qualified to receive the Ten Commandments at Sinai. Thus, the number "ten" reflects the innate intent of creation.

The Torah begins, **"Bereishis bara Elokim- In the beginning G'd created ..."** Chazal explain that the opening words of the Torah allude to the fact that existence came into being for the sake of Torah, which is *"reishis (first/choicest)."* Existence came about only for the specific purpose of the fulfillment of Torah. Another interpretation of the word "Bereishis" is that the world was created for the sake of the Jewish people who are referred to as *"reishis (chosen)."* When it became clear to Yaakov that he would father the Jewish people who would be the ones to bring existence to its level of perfection, (which came about through the Ten Utterances), he pledged to give a tenth of his wealth, acknowledging his role regarding the spiritual development of existence to bring it to its level of perfection.