

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES
Parshas Shemos
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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 Shemos

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. The Objective of the Egyptian Exile

The Torah states, “*V'eileh shemos...And these are the names of the Children of Israel who were coming to Egypt...*” The verse begins with the letter “vav” which means “and.” This indicates that there is a connection and continuum between the book of Shemos and the Book of Bereishis. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains, “Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov understood that the Egyptian exile was needed to purge the Jewish people from the sin of Avraham our Patriarch. He had posed an inappropriate question to G'd and thus the Jewish people were decreed to be exiled to Egypt. The state of exile began with the birth of Yitzchak and it culminated after being in Egypt for 210 years. The Patriarchs understood that the necessity for the purging process brought about by the Egyptian bondage was for the ultimate objective of being qualified to receive the Torah at Sinai/to become the chosen people. So too, the 70 individuals who came to Egypt with Yaakov understood the importance of coming there. This is the significance of the letter “vav” (and). Thus, the Torah is telling us that the descent to Egypt was with the same level of intent and willingness to bring about a more spiritual people as the Patriarchs had intended.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues, “Although the individuals who came to Egypt were identified earlier in the Portion of Vayigash, the Torah reiterates their names to discern between them and Esav. The Midrash tells us that when Esav was given a choice to receive the Land of Canaan he was made to understand that this could only come about if the “debt” of exile was paid (going to Egypt). He chose to pass on this opportunity in favor of going to Mt. Seir. Yaakov and his family chose to go to Egypt because they understood the value of receiving the gift of the Land of Canaan.”

There is a question among the earlier commentators regarding the identification of the Five Books of the Torah. Ramban identifies the first book as *Bereishis* (Genesis), the second book as *Sefer Ha'Geula* (Book of Redemption), the third as *Torahs Kohanim* (Laws

of the Kohanim), the fourth books as *Sefer Ha'Pikudim* (Numbers), and the fifth book as *Mishna Torah* (Review of Torah). Each book is identified by its content. However, Baal Halachos Gedolos (BHAG) identifies the first book as *Sefer Bereishis*, the second book as *Sefer Sheini* (second Book), and the remaining three books are identified by content. Nitziv z'tl in his introduction to Haamik Davar (Commentary on Torah) asks, “If the basis for the identification for each of the Books of the Torah is based on content then why does BHAG identify the Second Book by number?” Nitziv answers, “BHAG identifies the Second Book by number to indicate that in fact it is the second chapter, which is the closing chapter of the First Book – Bereishis (Genesis). The First Book discusses the creation of existence and the evolvement of the precursor of the Jewish people, while the Second Book is the culmination of that evolvement, which concludes with the Sinai experience/the Torah being given to the Jewish people.”

The Torah begins, “*Bereishis bara Elokeem – In the beginning G'd created...*” The Midrash explains that the word “Bereishis” is alluding to the fact that, “*B'shvil Reishis bara Elokeem... – for the sake of ‘the choicest’ (which is Torah) G'd created Heaven and Earth...*” The term “Bereishis” also alludes to the Jewish people who are the chosen people/choicest and who will receive the Torah at Sinai. G'd created existence for the sake of the Torah and the Jewish people. In order for them to be worthy and qualified to receive the Torah, they needed to experience the purging process of the Egyptian exile. Thus, the Second Book is a continuation and culmination of the First.

It is interesting to note that four fifths of the Jewish people perished during the days of darkness, which befell Egypt during the plagues. Why did they not merit redemption? The objective of the redemption from Egypt was so that the Jewish people should receive the Torah at Sinai. Thus, becoming G'd's chosen people. It was not to remove the shackles of bondage and be free of oppression.

Since these individuals had no interest in leaving Egypt, they perished during the plague of darkness.

2. *The Egyptian Bondage, An Outgrowth of Avraham's Question*

The Gemara in Tractate Nidarim tells us that one of the reasons the Jewish people experienced the exile in Egypt was because Avraham had posed a question to G'd that was considered inappropriate. The Torah tells us that G'd had promised Avraham that he and his offspring would inherit the land of Canaan. The Torah states, **“Avraham said, ‘My Lord, Hashem/Elokim: Whereby shall I know that I am (my offspring) to inherit it...And He (G'd) said to Avraham, ‘Know with certainty that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not their own – and they will serve them and they will oppress them...’”** Avraham was concerned that if his offspring were to sin in the future, they would not be worthy to inherit the Land. However, G'd's promise to Avraham was that his progeny would inherit the Land unconditionally. Thus, Avraham's question/concern was unfounded. This was considered a breach of faith and required that the Jewish people should experience exile in Egypt. How did G'd's response to Avraham, address his failing?

After remaining in Egypt for 210 years, the Jewish people had deteriorated spiritually to a point that they had become idolaters. At the time of the splitting of the Sea, G'd had decreed that the Jewish people should safely pass between the walls of water, while the Egyptian army was being destroyed. The angels questioned G'd, “Why are You destroying the Egyptians and not the Jewish people? These (Egyptians) are idolaters and these (the Jewish people) are idolaters.” Meaning, the Jewish people were as much deserving of destruction as the Egyptians for their idolatrous behavior.

The Torah states, **“A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef.”** Rashi explains that the king of Egypt did not know Yosef because he was in fact a new king (different person) or the king of Egypt was actually the Pharaoh who did know Yosef; however, he acted as if he did not know him. Kli Yakar explains this verse differently, “The king of Egypt did not ‘know Yosef’ because he was unaware of what had transpired between Yosef and his brothers. Yosef's brothers attempted to destroy him, nullify his dreams, and not allow them to come to fruition (that they would bow to him one day). However, despite all of their efforts Yosef's dreams came true. It was the Will of G'd to advance Yosef and bring

him to an exalted position and nothing could interfere with the Will of G'd. Similarly, G'd had said that the Jewish people would increase in number and ultimately be redeemed from Egypt; however, Pharaoh attempted to stifle their growth and keep them in bondage. Despite all of his efforts, he was unable to interfere with their destiny. Just as nothing could interfere with Yosef's destiny, so too nothing could interfere with the destiny of the Jewish people.”

Yosef was the model/profile of the Jewish people. He, like his father Yaakov, was the prototype of the Jew in exile. Despite the fact that the Jew is in exile and subject to many obstacles, hardships, and casualties (in the physical and spiritual sense), he nevertheless ultimately survives and flourishes. Pharaoh did not know/appreciate that this was the essence of Yosef nor did he know it was the essence of the Jewish people.

Avraham was concerned that if the Jewish people would sin, they would no longer be worthy to inherit the Land. In response to this, G'd exiled the Jewish people to Egypt where they were subject to bondage and oppression. They became idolaters and as the verse in Yechezkel states, “They were stripped naked (devoid of any mitzvos).” The Jewish people seemingly had no worthiness to be redeemed from Egypt. Despite this, G'd gave them the mitzvah of “*dam Pesach*- the blood of the Pascal Lamb” and “*dam milah* – blood of circumcision” and thus had merit to be redeemed from Egypt. Fifty days after the exodus, the Jewish people stood at Sinai and declared, “*Naaseh V'Nishmah* – we will do and we will listen” to receive the Torah, G'd's most precious commodity. This demonstrated that despite the fact that the Jewish people had fallen to the depths of spiritual debasement through being acculturated in Egypt, their essence remained intact and unaffected. Thus, they were able to ascend and be worthy of becoming G'd's people.

G'd's response demonstrated that Avraham's understanding of the Jewish people was inaccurate. Through the Egyptian bondage, it was indicated that although the Jewish people had fallen to the depths of spirituality, their recovery and rehabilitation was (relatively speaking) immediate. Thus, even if the Jewish people should sin and fail, they still have relevance to the Land of Canaan, which will be ultimately the Land of Israel – Eretz Ha'Kiddoshah (the Holy Land).

3. The Innate Negative Characteristic of Man

The Torah states, **“A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef.”** Rashi cites two opinions regarding this verse. One interpretation is that truly a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef. The other interpretation is that it was the same king, however with a new mandate. The meaning of “who did know Yosef” is that the king acted as if he did not know Yosef.

Daas Zikainim Baali Tosafos cite a Midrash which states, “Reb Yehudah Ben Levy gives us an understanding of the words “who did not know Yosef” with an allegory. A person had stoned the image of the king and was not punished for his behavior. The following day the same individual stoned the king himself. Initially Pharaoh did know Yosef, then ultimately he said, “I do not know G’d.” How does the Midrash equate the allegory of the individual who stoned the image of the king with Pharaoh not knowing Yosef and ultimately denying G’d’s existence? When the individual stoned the image of the king, it a clear indication that he had no regard for the king himself. Since he was not restrained after disgracing the honor of the king, he chose to go to the next level and disgrace the king himself. However, regarding not recognizing Yosef, seemingly this has no relevance to not recognizing G’d.

It is interesting to note that one does not immediately deny G’d’s existence. It evolves through a gradual conditioning process which one undergoes that begins with denying that he is a beneficiary of the good that was done on his behalf by others. The same individual, because he is not willing to recognize that he should be beholden to others, will ultimately deny that he is a beneficiary of G’d’s Goodness. Pharaoh should have been beholden to Yosef. His level of indebtedness to him and his family should have been unwavering and permanent. Had it not been for Yosef, Egypt would have perished with the famine. It was only because of Yosef’s genius and astuteness did Egypt become the provider for the entire world. Egypt, through the sale of the grain, amassed the wealth of the world. Rather than being beholden to Yosef, Pharaoh subjugated his family to bondage.

A person, although he may be the beneficiary of the goodness of others, is able to enter into a state of denial, which allows him to evade that reality in order to accommodate his own agenda. Despite the fact that it was

undeniably clear that Yosef had benefited Egypt more than any other individual, Pharaoh chose to ignore this because of his own insecurities.

G’d provides man with his total existence. It is undeniable that all existence emanates from Him and is sustained by His Goodness. Yet it is possible for one to ignore this fact because of one’s own conflicts of interest- whatever they may be. This conditioning process, which brings the individual to a level to even deny G’d, begins with one’s evading the fact that he is a beneficiary of the kindness of others. This is the analogy stated by Reb Yehudah Ben Levy, who explained that it begins with the stoning of the image of the king and concludes with the stoning of the king himself. Identically the denial of G’d begins with one not feeling beholden to others and ultimately concludes with not having any sense of being beholden to G’d. Thus, Pharaoh was the ultimate ingrate.

It is within the natural makeup of man to have the ability to acknowledge and recognize G’d through the reality of existence or despite that to reject Him. The Torah tells us that after Adam had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, G’d had asked him, “Why did you eat of the fruit of the Tree?” He replied, “It is the woman that You gave me...” – implying that it was only because G’d had provided that woman that Adam sinned. In essence, Adam transferred blamed to G’d for his own sin. When G’d had created Chava, He had done so only because it was necessary for Adam to have a counterpart and helpmate. After Adam’s response to G’d, He said to Adam, “You are an ingrate.” After G’d had provided Adam with all of his needs and accommodated him with a wife (who is a necessity in his life to succeed), he did not acknowledge the Good and furthermore, he blamed G’d for his failing. It is in the fabric of mankind, because of their conflicts of interest, to resist seeing reality for what it is in order to accommodate their own agenda. Thus, man is by nature an individual driven by self-interest, causing him to be an ingrate.

The Torah tells us that G’d had provided the Jewish people with the Manna in the desert, which was a spiritual food that accommodated their every nutritional need. Because of the Manna, the Jewish people were fully sated and protected against any type of disease or illness. It was absorbed into their organs so that they did not need to do any bodily functions. However rather than expressing their gratitude to G’d for what He had provided, they complained vociferously, “What is this light food that You have given us? Perhaps we may ultimately die from it!”

The Gemara in Tractate Avoda Zorah tells us that G'd responded, "You are ingrates the children of an ingrate."

G'd was enraged by their behavior because this negative characteristic of being an ingrate/denying that one is the beneficiary of the good, will ultimately lead them to deny the existence of G'd. Pharaoh, because he was unwilling to acknowledge the goodness of Yosef, ultimately denied the existence of G'd.

4. *The Intensification of the Bondage*

The Torah states, "**Yosef died, and all his brothers and that entire generation. The Children of Israel were fruitful, teemed (*va'yishretzu*), increased, and became strong – very, very much so...**" The Torah continues, "**A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef.**" Sforno explains "*va'yishretzu*" to mean that after the generation of Yosef had passed away, the Jewish people began to behave inappropriately – similar to rodents "*sheratzim*" (pejorative term for improper behavior). Sforno states, "Although Yosef's contribution to the survival of Egypt was part of their history, after his death, Pharaoh did not acknowledge Yosef's contribution and enslaved his people. After the passing of Yosef and his brothers, the generation that followed had no semblance to that which preceded it. The Jewish people had left the path of spirituality to pursue the material. They had given up their spiritual posture. Thus, Pharaoh had no conscience when he chose to enslave Yosef's descendents." Yosef and his brothers lived on a spiritual plane, which clearly quantified them as G'd's people. However, the generation that followed them is compared to the rodent – completely devoid of spiritual perspective.

The Torah states, "**...They (the Egyptians) embittered their (the Jewish people) lives.**" Sforno explains, "When the Jewish people further deteriorated spiritually, the Egyptians increased their level of bondage. The Prophet tells us that the Jewish people did not cast away idolatry... Therefore the wrath of G'd was unleashed upon them."

It is interesting to note that typically when one experiences difficulties in his life, rather than introspecting to understand the cause of the problem, he points outwardly to assign blame. The individual wants to deny that he is in fact the cause of his own situation.

Chazal tell us that Avraham was initially destined to live 180 years; however, G'd deducted five years of his

life because He promised Avraham that he would pass away in a "**good old age**". If Avraham were to have lived to 180, he would have witnessed the day that Esav committed five cardinal sins. It would have been in contradiction to G'd's promise of passing away in a "good old age." Avraham would have been anguished to know that his grandson is in fact evil.

The Torah tells that when Esav had returned weary and exhausted from the field, he came upon Yaakov cooking a pot of lentils. The Midrash tells us that when he entered into his home he noticed that Yaakov's face was soiled with soot as he was preparing the lentils. Esav asked him, "What has happened?" Yaakov answered, "Our grandfather has passed away." Esav's reaction was, "There is no justice and there is no Judge!" Thus, he denied G'd's relevance to existence.

Esav understood that Avraham, his grandfather, was meant to live 180 years. When Avraham passed away at the age of 175, Esav questioned G'd's Justice. The irony is that the answer to Esav's question is found within himself.

Esav chose to be a *rasha* (an evil person). In essence, he was the cause of his grandfather's demise. When he chose to commit five cardinal sins on the day of Avraham's passing, G'd was forced to cause Avraham to die before his time. Esav became a heretic and denounced G'd because he believed his grandfather died prematurely when in fact he was the cause of Avraham losing five years of his life. Esav essentially brought about his own spiritual demise and turned G'd into the culprit.

Most people do not understand and appreciate why difficulties and complications come upon them. They believe that their suffering and setbacks are undeserved. When a person does not accurately evaluate himself and believes that he is undeserving of punishment he will feel that G'd is being unfair. Ironically, the basis for his disillusionment with G'd is only a consequence of his own unwillingness/denial to recognize who he really is. One is most often the cause of his own negative predicament. This is what actually happened to the Jewish people when their lives were "embittered."

5. *The Prerequisite to Establishing Ephraim and Manasheh as Tribes*

The Torah tells us that when Yosef had realized that his father was ill, he brought his two sons Ephraim

and Manasheh to receive a blessing. The Torah states, **“Yosef took the two of them... He blessed Yosef and he said, ‘O G’d before Whom my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak walked...May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads, and may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak, and may they proliferate abundantly like fish within the land...”**

The Torah tells us that Yaakov had given them an additional blessing by saying, **‘By you shall Yisrael bless saying, ‘May G’d make you like Ephraim and like Manasheh’”- and he put Ephraim before Manasheh.’**

It is interesting to note that the Torah states regarding the first blessing given by Yaakov, **“he blessed Yosef.”** Regarding the second blessing the Torah states **“he blessed them (Ephraim and Manasheh).”** Why is the first blessing identified as a blessing to Yosef when in fact Yaakov blessed Ephraim and Manasheh?

The Torah tells us that although Ephraim and Manasheh were the grandchildren of Yaakov and not his children, he gave them the same status as is sons – which were tribes of Israel. The reason they merited the equivalent status of Yaakov’s sons was because of Yosef’s unique spiritual dimension. However, regardless of their dimension of spirituality, Ephraim and Manasheh were not the sons of Yaakov. They were one more generation removed from each of the Patriarchs (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov). If this is so, how did Yaakov elevate their status to be the equivalent of his sons?

Yaakov’s blessing to Yosef was that his children should assume the status of Tribes. However, they could not assume that status unless there is a direct linkage between Yaakov and Ephraim and Manasheh. Thus, the blessing that he gave Yosef was, **“...may my name be declared upon them (Ephraim and Manasheh), and the names of my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak...”** Thus, by associating his name with Ephraim and Manasheh, Yaakov elevated them to the status of Tribes.

The second blessing which Yaakov had given to Ephraim and Manasheh was directed to them – **“...he blessed them...”** This blessing was that they should be the conduit of blessing for the Jewish people.

Before Yosef had revealed himself to his brothers under the guise of Viceroy, he had positioned them around his table and had Binyamin sit next to him. He had said to

Binyamin, **“May G’d be gracious (*chain*) with you...”** Why did Yosef give him such a blessing?

The Torah tells us that when Yaakov was confronted by brother Esav, Esav had asked, **“Who are these children?”** Yaakov responded, **“These are the children with which G’d was gracious (*chananie*) to me.”** Regarding his children, Yaakov used the expression **“chanina (graciousness).”** However, since Binyamin had not yet been born at that moment, Yaakov’s expression of **“chanina”** was not associated with him. Thus, when Yosef blessed Binyamin he used the expression of **“chanina”** because it was not initially applied to him. What is the value of Yosef’s blessing of **“chanina”** to Binyamin if in fact Yosef was not his father Yaakov?

Yosef, in terms of his dimension of spirituality, had a semblance of his father Yaakov. The Torah tells us that he had similar characteristics and abilities as his father. However, regardless of Yosef’s spiritual greatness, he was not in reality his father Yaakov. He is not considered one of the Patriarchs. Therefore, in order to establish Ephraim and Manasheh as Tribes, they had to be linked to Yaakov, the Patriarch. Thus, he blessed them by saying, **“may my name be declared upon them...”**

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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 Shabbos
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi
2:00 pm	Mincha

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- 11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
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Tuesday

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

Thursday

- 10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**
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