

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES
Parshas Vayechi

January 12, 2006

**In honor of Howard and Sorah Birnbaum
For Their Invaluable
Efforts in Disseminating Torah**

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
<i>1. The Source of Yaakov's Blessing</i>	2
<i>2. The Unlimited Value of Learning from One's Mistake</i>	3
<i>3. The Special Linkage Between Every Jew and the Patriarchs</i>	3
<i>4. The Ripple Effect of a Mitzvah</i>	4
<i>5. The Qualification that is necessary for Kingship</i>	5

Last Week's Edition:

Yosef's Spiritual Posture as Viceroy of Egypt
The Convincing Element of the Tears of Yosef
The Hidden Message of the Wagons
Yosef's Qualification as the Guarantor for Torah
Egypt- the Provider to the World

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.

If you would like to receive this Weekly Torah Commentary Series by email

Please call 212-371-9555 or email:

info@yadavraham.org

TUNE IN TO OUR LIVE VIDEO BROADCAST OF CLASSES

And over

11,000 online classes 24 hours a day

www.yadavraham.org

Parshas Shemos

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. Establishing The Full Spectrum of Torah

The Torah tells us that before Yaakov passed away he blessed his children, in a manner that secured the potential of each tribe. Regarding Yissachar, Yaakov blessed him saying, **“Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey; who rests between the boundaries.”** Meaning, he is the one who bears the heavy burden, the yoke of Torah. Yissachar was fully dedicated to Torah study and possessed a unique level of clarity.

The Gemara in Tractate Eruvin tells us that when G'd told Moshe to seek out judges with specific qualifications, the one qualification that he did not find were those individuals who possessed *“binah- having a special depth of perception.”* The tribe of Yissachar is quantified by the verse in Chronicles (Divrei HaYamim) as those who possess binah - *“yodei binah”* because they were able to perceive things with exceptional clarity.

Yaakov had established a partnership between his two children Yissachar and Zevulon, in which Zevulon would provide for all the material needs of Yissachar who was totally dedicated to Torah study. Because of Zevulon's support, Yissachar was able to engage in Torah study without any degree of distraction. Thus, they were able to achieve a unique level of clarity to be classified as *“yodei binah....”*

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh, based on the Gemara in Tractate Nedarim, explains the verse **“Yissachar is a chamor gorem (strong boned donkey)...”** He writes, *“Yissachar was indirectly caused as a result of the (braying of the) donkey...”* The Torah tells us that Reuvin, the son of Leah went out into the field at the time of the harvest season and brought dudaim (mandrakes) for his mother. Rachel said to Leah, **“Please give me some of your son's dudaim.”** Leah responded, **“was your taking my husband insignificant – And now to take even my son's dudaim!”** Rachel said to Leah, **“Therefore, he (Yaakov) shall lie with you tonight in return for your son's dudaim.”** Thus, Rachel gave Leah her night of cohabitation with Yaakov in exchange for the mandrakes. When Leah heard the braying of the donkey, that night,

she knew that Yaakov had returned from the field. She went out to inform that she was to cohabit with him that night. Consequently, she conceived Yissachar. Thus, the donkey indirectly brought about the conception of Yissachar.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues, *“Yissachar's connection to the donkey goes beyond this indirect relationship regarding his conception. The tribe of Yissachar wandered from location to location for the sake of the study of Torah. Thus, Torah scholars who are an outgrowth of Yissachar also need to wander from city to city in the pursuit of Torah study. Since there was a degree of inappropriateness and lack of modesty in Leah's behavior when she went out to inform Yaakov that it was her night to cohabit with him, what emanated from that initiative was deficient. This deficiency manifested itself in the tribe of Yissachar in that they must go out from location to location for the sake of Torah study. Consequently, other Torah scholars, who are considered an extension of Yissachar must share a similar fate.”*

Although the tribe of Yissachar is classified as *“yodei binah,”* (regarding their clarity in Torah), the fact is that there are other tribes who possess unique share in Torah – such as the tribe of Yehudah and Levy. The Gemara tells us that Kohanim only officiated two weeks out of the year (in addition to the festivals). During the remainder of their time, they were fully occupied in Torah study. Levy was continuously engaged in Torah study, yet Yissachar is the only tribe who has that special classification of *“yodei binah.”* Why is this so? In addition, why should the tribe of Yehudah and Levy be considered an outgrowth of the tribe of Yissachar regarding Torah study (needing to wander from city to city) when each of them were considered independent of one another?

The concept of the partnership between Yissachar and Zevulon actually preceded Yaakov. Sforno explains that the reason Yitzchak wanted to give the blessing to Esav, although it was obvious that he did not possess the spirituality of Yaakov, was so that Esav should be fully responsible for the material support of Yaakov. He knew

that Esav was “the man of the field (material person)” and Yaakov was “the perfect man who sat in the tent (of Torah – spiritual person).” Yitzchak had mistakenly believed that Esav valued spirituality and thus would be dedicated to the support of Yaakov and his Torah study. Yitzchak wanted to establish a partnership between Yaakov and Esav so that Yaakov should not be preoccupied with his material needs – thus allowing him to have full clarity in Torah. Yitzchak understood that in order to establish Torah at its most advanced level it needed to be without any degree of distraction. This concept of partnership was ultimately established by Yaakov through his blessing to Yissachar and Zevulun.

The text of the fourth blessing of the Amidah (silent prayer) is, “You graciously endow man (adam) with wisdom (daas) and teach insight (binah) to a frail mortal (enosh)...” What is the difference between the categorization of “man (adam)” and “frail mortal (enosh)?” The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that when G’d wanted to give His Torah to Moshe, the angels came with a claim, “*Ma enosh keisizkarenu?* What is man that he is not even worth mentioning?” They could not understand why G’d would give His most precious commodity, His Torah, to the *enosh*. Maharsha z”l explains that the term “*enosh*” identifies man in his deficient state. Man/enosh evolves and advances to become the “adam” is through binah. As the Amidah states, “and (G’d) teaches insight (binah) to the enosh.”

The tribe of Yissachar possesses the quality of “binah – acute perception/depth of understanding.” This is only because they are continuously engaged in Torah study without any material responsibility. They thus possess the most unique level of clarity regarding Torah – which transforms the enosh/man into the adam. Although Yehudah and Levy possess Torah at a special level, they are not quantified as “*yodei binah*.” In order to achieve a full grasp of Torah, with its clarity, they needed to engage with the tribe of Yissachar. Consequently, they are outgrowth/extension of Yissachar. Therefore just as there is a deficiency which lies within the tribe of Yissachar as a result of Leah’s “going out,” so too does it manifest itself in other Torah scholars – since they are an extension of Yissachar.

2. The Cessation of G’d’s Relationship with the Jewish People

The Midrash tells us that the reason the Jewish people merited to be redeemed from Egypt, despite the fact that they were idol worshippers, was because they did not change their language (they spoke Hebrew), they retained

their Jewish names, and they dressed as Jews. Because they retained their identity as Jews G’d ultimately gave them the opportunity to merit redemption from Egypt through the mitzvah of circumcision and the korban Pesach (Pascal lamb). Had they not had a sense of their own Jewishness G’d would have not offered them these opportunities because they would have been irrelevant to them.

Chazal tell us that after Yosef’s generation passed away, the Jewish people in Egypt ceased to circumcise themselves because they wanted to become part of Egyptian society. The cessation of circumcision was not due to an Egyptian edict, but rather it was the decision of the Jewish people. The Torah refers to circumcision as “*os bris kodesh*- the sign of the holy covenant.” Circumcision is the sign that is engraved upon the flesh of the Jew to identify with G’d. As a result of the cessation of circumcision, the social status of the Jewish people became precarious and subsequently they entered into a state of bondage. This was a result of no longer wanting to identify with G’d. If the Jewish people in Egypt did not change their language, names, and garb in order to identify as Jews, then why did they stop circumcising themselves? If their Jewish identity was so important to them, despite being idolaters, then why did they not continue to circumcise themselves, which the practice of a Jew?

There is a fundamental difference between identifying as a Jew through language, name, and attire and through circumcision. One is a personal choice of identification while the other is an identification with G’d through Divine Dictate. The concept of subjugating oneself to G’d through circumcision, which appears to be an act of self-mutilation, is vastly different than choosing to speak and dress a certain way. The Jewish people wanted to establish their own independent identity in Egypt. Although they retained certain external aspect of their Jewish roots, they did not want to acknowledge or subjugate themselves to G’d. Since they did not want to subordinate themselves to G’d, consequently they were subjugated to the intense bondage of Egypt.

Sforno explains since the Jewish people in Egypt sinned and continued to intensify their level of sin, the direness of their situation continued to intensify. As the verse states, “**They (the Egyptians) embittered their lives (the Jewish people)....**” The Prophet Yechezkel tells us that when the Jewish people attached themselves to idolatry, the wrath of G’d came upon them. Since the Jew demonstrated a lack of interest in G’d, He responded in kind and allowed them to be enslaved by the Egyptians.

The tendency of man is to want to be free and independent- to do as he chooses. Man has an innate difficulty in subordinating himself to something outside of himself. Adam was given only one Commandment – not to eat from the Tree. He chose not to abide by G'd's Commandment and ate of its fruit. Adam rationalized his action as being proper, because he was convinced that by eating from the Tree of Knowledge he would introduce into himself an evil inclination that would make his context of choice more difficult. He reasoned/rationalized that by succeeding, despite the difficulty of choice, his merit would be even greater. By eating from the Tree he would be a more dedicated servant of G'd. Prior to eating from the Tree Adam was inclined to doing the Will of G'd without any internal struggle.

The Jewish people survived and thrived in Egypt, despite the fact that they were not Egyptian subjects, under the direction of Yaakov and Yosef. There was no need for them to change their ways after the generation of Yosef had passed away. It was only their desire to assert and establish themselves as individuals that motivated them to put an end to circumcision. Whenever man has attempted to become “free”/independent through exercising his own will there have been tragic consequences.

Regarding the Ten Commandments that Moshe had received at Sinai, the Torah uses the term “*charus*-engraved.” The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) states that the word (without vowels) “charus” should be read as “*cheirus* – freedom.” Meaning, the only truly “free” person is the one who is engaged in Torah study. The only way one can act within a context choice is by having sufficient clarity to understand both sides of an issue- thus being able to make the proper choice. If however one does not engage in Torah study, then he does not have the sense and the clarity to assess the proper path. This individual only acts upon his physical impulses/desires/drives and conflicts of interest. Spirituality is viewed as an infringement on his ability to satisfy the physical. Thus, spirituality is no longer even considered an alternative. It is only through Torah study that one can truly be free because it is the Torah that gives one proper perspective to be able to choose.

3. Truth- An Outgrowth of the Fear of G'd

The Torah states, “**The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives (Yocheved and Miriam)...’When you deliver the Hebrew women, and you see them on the birthstool; if it is a son, you are to kill him and if it is a daughter, she shall live.’ But the midwives feared G'd and they did not do as the king of Egypt spoke to**

them, and they caused the boys to live.” The mother and sister of Moshe, Yocheved and Miriam, did not obey the orders of the king of Egypt and succumb to his pressure to kill the Jewish males. Had it not been for their sacrifice there would be no Jewish people. G'd had ensured the survival of the Jewish people by placing Yocheved and Miriam in the position as midwives. The Torah tells us that they disobeyed the king of Egypt because they “feared G'd.” Someone of lesser belief would not have been able to defy Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.

It is interesting to note that the Torah identifies Pharaoh as the “king of Egypt” in the initial interchange between himself and the midwives – and again when they defied his order. However, when he ultimately confronted them saying, “**Why have you done this thing, that you caused the boys to live?**” The Torah states, “**The midwives said to Pharaoh, ‘Because the Hebrew women are unlike Egyptian women...’**” When the Torah refers to Pharaoh as “the king of Egypt” it is emphasizing the fact that he was the most powerful monarch of the world. When “the king of Egypt” instructed the midwives to kill the Jewish males, he did so in his capacity as monarch. However, they were not intimidated by his office. The Torah qualifies this by telling us that the Jewish midwives “feared G'd.” Thus, when they responded to him, they related to him as “Pharaoh” and not “the king of Egypt” – reflecting that they only saw him as a mere mortal. Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the title “Pharaoh” which was given to all the Egyptian monarchs contains the Hebrew letters “*aleph pey raish – afar – earth/dust*” – indicating that “Pharaoh” represented the earthy/material/mortal person. Therefore when the midwives replied to “Pharaoh” they were in essence stating that they were only subservient to the Omnipotent Being.

One compromises truth, values, and ethics only because one believes that the result of his actions is determined through his own initiative. If one truly believed that G'd determines the outcome in every situation (as a reality and not merely conceptually) then one would not consider doing the wrong thing. When one truly fears G'd and internalizes Him, one is not concerned about the consequences of doing what is right in the face of adversity. The G'd-fearing person is not concerned with the consequences imposed upon him by mortal man. A direct outgrowth of fearing G'd is establishing the *midas ha'emes* (the attribute of truth). Because of Yocheved's fear of G'd she was a person who did not compromise. Consequently she merited having Moshe who possessed the attribute of Truth on the most absolute level (*emes*). Because Moshe was a man of truth he merited to receive

the ultimate truth, the Torah at Sinai. The Gemara in Tractate tells us that Korach and his community continuously declare, “Moshe is true and his Torah is true.”

The Torah tells us that when Moshe had left the palace to see how his brethren (the Jewish people) were faring, he witnessed an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Jew. Without considering the grave consequences and repercussions of his actions, Moshe killed the Egyptian. He then needed to flee for his life from Egypt. Although Moshe was considered the adopted grandson of Pharaoh and was treated as royalty, he nevertheless forfeited all of this to halt the victimization of a Jew. Moshe could have restrained himself from killing the Egyptian knowing that he would have been more effective in his position as royalty to assist the Jewish people. However he did not. Moshe because he was an embodiment of Truth, it was demanded of him to correct the wrong that had been perpetrated – regardless of the consequences. Moshe merited this characteristic and quality because of his mother’s exceptional level of fear of G’d that established an uncompromised standard of Truth.

4. The Secret to Merit Greatness

The Torah states regarding Moshe, “**Moshe was a shepherd...**” The Midrash states, “G’d does not elevate one to greatness/leadership until he is tested in an area that is inconsequential. If he succeeds in this area then he is elevated (by G’d) to be a leader. Two of the greatest people of all time were tested and were found to be faithful/worthy and G’d elevated them to greatness. G’d tested (King) David through sheep. In order to distance himself from stealing, he took his flocks out into the desert so that they should not graze upon the fields that did not belong to him...G’d said, ‘Because you were faithful to your sheep (flocks), I will give you My sheep (flock) (the Jewish people) to shepherd.’ ... Moshe shepherded the flocks of Yisro. The Torah tells us that he took the flocks into the desert to graze so that he would distance himself from stealing. G’d said to him, “Because you were faithful to the sheep, I will give you My sheep to lead....”

When Chazal tell us that the determining factor to be elevated to leadership involves acting a certain way in an area that the failing is perceived as inconsequential, such as allowing one’s flock to graze in another’s field, they are specifically referring to stealing something that is of negligible value. This was demonstrated through Moshe and King David. The Midrash tells us that each of them were regarded to be “neeman (men of integrity)” because they did not allow their sheep to graze upon

another’s field. Why is this characteristic unique to leadership?

The Midrash in the Portion of Pikudei cites a verse from Proverbs, “A man of integrity (ish emunos) emanates unlimited blessing (rav Berachos).’ Who is considered a man of integrity (ish emuos)? This was Moshe Rabbeinu. Whatever he oversaw was blessed. Where do we see the effect of Moshe’s blessing? – the Mishkan (Tabernacle) The Torah tells us that Moshe gave a detailed accounting of all the gold and silver that was used in the building of the Mishkan. Since even the smallest amount of material was accounted for, Moshe had proven himself to be a man of exception integrity. Therefore Moshe’s involvement in the Mishkan generated unlimited blessing.”

The most qualified leader is the one who brings blessing to his people. He will only be able to bring blessing if he is considered an “ish neeman” (man of integrity). G’d only elevates individuals to greatness who have proven themselves by refraining from stealing that which others regard as insignificant. It is only this level of integrity that qualifies one to be a true leader who can bring unlimited blessing to his people.

The Gemara tells us that a laborer is not permitted to acknowledge another individual (even through a greeting) while he is working for his employer. Although he is only taking a few moments of his employer’s time, it is considered stealing. We see from this the standard of integrity that is demanded even from the simple laborer. The one who has an exceptional level of integrity because he is meticulous in areas that are glossed-over by most possesses a quality which makes him worthy to become a leader who does bring blessing to his people.

If one wants to have true blessing in his life, one must distance himself from transgression regardless of how minor it may seem. Chofetz Chaim in his work Ahavas Chesed writes that if a person profits from a dishonest act, although the profit may be negligible, it will ultimately impact negatively upon all that he possesses. It is similar to having a small hole in one’s pocket that causes one to lose his wealth one coin at a time. One must have a continuous cognizance to maintain the highest level of integrity. The he will surely merit unlimited blessing.

5. The Profoundness of One Mitzvah Generating Another

The Torah tells us that the daughters of Yisro when they were shepherding the flocks of their father were

attacked by other shepherds who wanted to violate them. Moshe, who had fled from Egypt to Midian, had witnessed the attack and intervened without any hesitation to ward off the attackers. Thus, rescuing the daughters of Yisro. When they returned home to their father, they recounted to him what had occurred. The Torah states, **“(The daughters of Yisro had said to him)...an Egyptian man came to our aid and rescued us....”**

The Midrash states, “The daughters of Yisro had told him that an ‘Egyptian’ had rescued them. Did Moshe have the appearance/likeness of an Egyptian? (The Egyptians were dark skinned and Moshe was not) Rather, the verse is telling us that had it not been for the Egyptian that Moshe had killed in Egypt (that caused him to flee), he would not have been in Midian to witness the event that had occurred – subsequently being able to save the daughters of Yisro. This is analogous to a man who was bitten by a poisonous lizard and needs to run to the river to cleanse his wound. Upon arriving at the river he sees a child drowning, who he promptly removes from the water (rescues). The child thanks the man for saving him from certain death. The man replies to him, ‘I am not the one who saved you. You should thank the poisonous lizard. Had it not been for his bite, I would not have come to the river.’ Similarly, the daughters of Yisro had thanked Moshe for rescuing them from the shepherds. He replied to them, ‘It is the Egyptian that I killed in Egypt that you should thank. Had it not been for him, I would not have come to Midian.’ Thus, the daughters of Yisro told their father, **“an Egyptian came to our aid and rescued us...”**”

There is a principle stated in the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers), *“mitzvah goreres mitzvah* – the performance of one mitzvah brings about another mitzvah.” Reb Chaim of Volozhin z’tl explains that when one performs a mitzvah it generates a positive spiritual energy that compels the person to do another mitzvah. This principle applies to Moshe’s rescuing the daughters of Yisro.

Moshe was valued and treated as the grandson of the monarch of Egypt, the most powerful individual in the world. Chazal tell us that Pharaoh had exceptional love for Moshe. When he came out of the palace to see how his brethren were faring, he saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Jew. Moshe killed him without hesitation because it was the right thing to do. He did not consider for a moment that his actions would jeopardize his prominent and powerful position in Egypt. He did not take into consideration the value it would have been to the Jewish people if he were able to remain in the palace of Pharaoh. Moshe’s single focus was only upon correcting

the evil that was being perpetrated before his eyes because his essence was Truth. Truth does not tolerate inequity and victimization of an innocent party – regardless of the consequences. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that it is a mitzvah for a judge when he adjudicates a dispute between two parties to encourage them to accept a compromise. This was the path of Aaron the Kohan, the brother of Moshe. However, Moshe’s position was never to encourage compromise, but rather, “The law pierces the mountain.” Meaning, truth does not tolerate anything that is not correct. Mediation is not absolute truth. This compelled Moshe to kill the Egyptian, despite the fact that he would become a fugitive.

Upon arriving in Midian, rather than remaining inconspicuous as a fugitive fleeing for his life, Moshe when witnessing injustice, he again responds. He could not tolerate witnessing the victimization of Yisro’s daughters although their predicament was unrelated to him. Once again, Moshe demonstrated his driving/primary characteristic of Truth. G’d brought before him a similar situation to that of killing the Egyptian based on the principle of *“mitzvah goreres mitzvah.”* Initially Moshe needed to flee Egypt because of an action that emanated from his characteristic of Truth. In Midian, he was placed again a similar context to express that same characteristic. Therefore what had actually saved the daughters of Yisro was the original mitzvah that was performed in Egypt when Moshe killed the Egyptian. That mitzvah generated the spiritual energy that placed Moshe in the context to be able to rescue the daughters of Yisro. This is what Moshe had meant when he had said, “Do not thank me for saving you, but rather, it was the Egyptian that saved you.”

The Gemara states, “Whatever the Merciful One (G’d), it is for Good.” When the man was bitten by the poisonous lizard, one would think that it was a terrible tragedy. But in essence, it was because of that bite that he went to the river and was able to save the drowning child. It was a kindness of G’d that he was bitten and subsequently placed in a setting to be able to rescue the child.

The Torah tells us that when the daughters of Yisro returned home and told their father what had transpired, he asked them, **“Where is he (the one who had saved you)? Why did you leave the man?”** Maharal of Prague explains that Yisro immediately recognized the uniqueness and quality of person who had saved his daughters. For someone to risk his life to rescue strangers and not seek any form of acknowledgement or remuneration was truly special. This insight of Yisro is a confirmation that Moshe’s action emanated from his of

Truth and no other reason. Moshe's behavior was not the reaction of a zealot, but rather it was a reflection of his essence.