

*Yad Avraham Institute*  
**Weekly Torah Commentaries Series**  
*The Portion of*  
**Vayeishev**

**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

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**About the Yad Avraham Institut**

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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# Vayeishev

*Presented by*

**Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**  
**Dean**

## **1. Yaakov's Error, Setting Future Events into Motion**

The Torah states, “**Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.**” Rashi cites Chazal who explain this verse to mean that Yaakov wanted dwell in a state of tranquility. Until this point, Yaakov endured many challenges and tragedies. He fled his father's home because his brother Esav wished to kill him. Yaakov spent twenty years in the home of his father-in-law Lavan and exposed to an environment that threatened his physicality and spirituality. Before meeting his brother Esav, he encountered Esav's archangel who attempted to kill him. Subsequently, he met Esav and miraculously escaped unscathed. Yaakov's most beloved wife Rachel passed away in childbirth. His daughter Dinah was raped by a heathen. Shimon and Levi, Yaakov's sons, destroyed the community of Shechem for not prosecuting their prince for committing this tragedy. As a result of Shimon and Levi's action, Yaakov's family was in a state of danger from being destroyed by the surrounding nations. After experiencing all of these hardships, Chazal tell us that Yaakov wanted to have a respite from suffering and live a life of tranquility.

Rashi cites Chazal that tell us that because Yaakov desired tranquility, G'd caused that there should be strife between Yosef and his brothers. Their hatred for him was as a result of the dreams that Yosef shared with them. Yosef had dreamt that his brothers and father bowed down to him in subservience. He would be their benefactor to provide them with sustenance in order to maintain their existence. As a result of these provocations, Yosef's brothers sold him into slavery. They had told their father that he had been mauled to death by a beast. Consequently, Yaakov was denied his beloved son Yosef's presence for twenty-two years. As a result, Yaakov went into a state of grieving because his beloved son Yosef had died. These tragic events were a direct consequence of Yaakov's wanting to dwell in tranquility.

In the Portion of Veyeitzei, the Torah tells us that Rachel, who was barren at the time, approached Yaakov and said to him, “**Give me children - otherwise I am dead.**” Yaakov became angry and responded strongly to her, “**Am I instead of G'd who has withheld from you fruit of the womb?**” At this point Leah had already given birth to six sons. The Midrash tells us that Yaakov's response to Rachel's request was inappropriate and would thus have severe consequences. The Midrash states, “Is this the way one speaks to an afflicted woman? I (G'd) swear on your life that your children will bow down to her (Rachel's) son.” Thus, Yaakov was responsible for the prophetic dreams that Yosef had dreamt. In addition, had Yaakov been sensitive to Rachel's pain, it would not have led to the strife and ultimate hatred between Yosef and his brothers.

The Torah states, “**Yisroel (Yaakov) loved Yosef more than all of his sons since he was a child of his old age (ben zikunim), and he made him a fine woolen tunic.**” Rashi explains the words “**ben zikunim**” to mean that Yosef was born at a time of Yaakov's old age. Targum Onkelos explains “**ben zikunim**” to mean that Yosef was the wisest of all of Yaakov's children therefore all that Yaakov had learned from Shem and Aver he gave over to him. Alternatively, Yosef is quantified as “**ben zikunim**” because his facial features were identical to those of his father. If Yosef was the most gifted of all of Yaakov's children, why would he have not been naturally chosen to be the leader over his brother? Why was their bowing before him as Viceroy of Egypt considered to be a punishment for Yaakov's insensitivity to Rachel?

When one receives the blessing of G'd through an intermediary, one cannot be fully appreciative of G'd's beneficence because there is a degree of being beholden to the human benefactor. Because of Yaakov's insensitivity to Rachel's pain, his sons were destined to receive the blessing of G'd through Yosef. Thus, they would not have a sense of indebtedness to G'd as they would have had if

the blessing had come directly from Him. Yaakov's punishment was measure for measure. Just as his behavior was a result of not sensing Rachel's pain, although he should have, his sons would be denied the clarity that their blessing was from G'd and not from Yosef, their benefactor.

## 2. *Perceiving Life Through a Discerning Eye*

The Torah tells us that before Yosef was sold into slavery by his brothers they cast him into a pit to die. They had believed that the purpose of his tale bearing to their father was to discredit them in his eyes and ultimately destroy them. The Torah states, "**They took him and cast him into the pit; the pit was empty, no water was in it.**" The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos asks, "If the Torah tells us that the pit was empty, is it not obvious that it did not contain water?" The Gemara answers, "Although the pit had no water, it did contain snakes and scorpions." Despite the snakes and scorpions in the pit, Yosef emerged unharmed because G'd had performed a miracle on his behalf. One would think that after witnessing their brother immerge intact from a snake pit, it should have been a confirmation that Yosef was indeed righteous. His dreams were in fact prophetic and not delusions of grandeur. However, Yosef's brothers seemed not to have been impacted by his survival. They thus sold him into slavery the moment the opportunity presented itself. Why did they not recognize that Yosef was indeed a tzaddik who had merited to be saved by G'd?

The Midrash explains that Yosef's brothers were unaware that the pit in which they had placed him contained snakes and scorpions because they were hidden in the walls of the pit. Only Yosef himself was able to see them. They were therefore unaware of the miracle that had transpired on Yosef's behalf.

After Yosef was taken out of the pit, he was sold into slavery. The Torah describes the unusual merchandise and wares that were being transported by the merchants who had bought Yosef as a slave. The verse states, "**A caravan of Ishmaelites from Gilead, and their camels were bearing spices, and balsam, and birthwort...**" Rashi in his commentary cites the Midrash which asks, "Why did the Torah make known the nature of the merchandise that was being transported - To make known the reward of the righteous. For it is not the way of Arabs to carry anything but naphtha and foul smelling resins. But because Yosef was a tzaddik, the cargo that was being transported was spices which emitted a (pleasant)

fragrance, so that he should not be harmed by the noxious odor." Yosef was being transported at that moment to live his life as a slave in a foreign land. How is experiencing pleasant aromas at this bleak moment considered to be a "reward" for him?

Initially Yosef believed that his dreams were prophetic visions which he needed to share with his brothers. He believed that ultimately he would be the provider for his family and they would bow down to him because he would assume the role of benefactor. However, when Yosef was cast into the pit to die, he began to question the efficacy of his visions. Perhaps he was mistaken – maybe they were in fact delusions of grandeur. G'd wanted to dispel this consideration from his mind and to communicate to him that he was not mistaken. His dreams would come to fruition. Consequently, G'd brought about a miracle for Yosef to understand that he should not despair. The miracle was not for his brothers to appreciate the fact that he was a tzaddik, but rather it was to confirm to Yosef that his dreams were not delusions of grandeur and G'd was with him

When Yosef was taken out of the pit by the Arab merchants and put onto the caravan, he immediately noticed that there were no foul smelling fuels, which would have been expected. Rather, there were pleasant smelling spices. Yosef again understood that this was another communication from G'd that He was with him. The "reward of the righteous" that is mentioned by Chazal is not the pleasure of smelling something that is sweet; but rather, informing the tzaddik that he should not despair. Thus, despite the bleakness of the moment and with no understanding of the direction in which he was going, Yosef believed that ultimately this would lead to a positive outcome.

Ramchal writes in his work, The Way of G'd, that a Jew must "believe and know that G'd exists." It is not sufficient to believe in an abstract sense that the Omnipotent Being Wills existence at every moment, but rather, one must know it as a fact. If the Jew internalizes this truth, he will not despair because he will realize that G'd is with him. Yosef had been raised by his father Yaakov, our Patriarch, who instilled in him a deep understanding of G'd's Presence. When Yosef experienced the incident of the pit, he did not gloss over its details, and thus saw it in a special light. Rather than seeing the situation to be hopeless, he had perceived what was not obvious to others, that despite being exposed to the danger of snakes and scorpions, G'd was with him. When he was taken out of the pit and placed upon the caravan to be sold into slavery, he experienced a pleasant fragrance of

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perfumes, rather than a foul odor. This a confirmation to him that G'd was with him and that he should not despair. Yosef knew that nothing in life is coincidental or arbitrary.

Yosef maintained his belief in G'd throughout his imprisonment in Egypt. He was thus able to survive those painful years and rise to become the Viceroy of the most advanced civilization in the world. Had he not internalized the fact that G'd was with him and that his dreams were destined to be fulfilled, he would not have been able to survive the hardships.

G'd continuously communicates to us through our daily experiences in life. We must be cognizant and sensitive to them. As the Gemara in Tractate Chullin states, "One does not stub his finger below (in this world) unless it has been pronounced from above." If one has a discerning eye, one is able to see, that everything that comes upon him is G'd's Will. By understanding that the events of one's life are not happenstance but rather predicaments that are caused by G'd, then one will be able to utilize them in a manner to advance himself spiritually and continually come upon new horizons of growth. Ultimately, he will be able to meet his own potential and purpose in life.

### ***3. G'd Orchestrating the Events of History***

The Midrash cites the verse from Psalms, " 'Hashem; exceedingly profound are Your thoughts...' Reb Yochanon says, 'The profound thought (of G'd) was initiated and set in motion at the time of the Covenant Between the Parts with Avraham. G'd had given the decree, **'You shall know that your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not their own. There, they will be enslaved and afflicted for 400 years.'** Reb Yehudah bar Shalom says, 'In truth, Yaakov and the Jewish people, should have descended to Egypt in shackles, but this did not occur. G'd wanted them to go to Egypt with a sense of dignity and honor. In order to accomplish this, G'd devised a strategy to cause this to come about. He caused Yaakov to display his affection towards his beloved son Yosef in the presence of his other children. This display of love created a jealousy between Yosef and his brothers and caused them to hate him. Ultimately, this caused them to sell Yosef into slavery at the hands of the Ishmaelites. He was then taken to Egypt. Yaakov had not seen his beloved son for twenty-two years. When he became aware that Yosef was alive and had ascended to the position of Viceroy, he chose to take his family to Egypt to be with his beloved son. Thus, Yaakov did not go to Egypt in shackles, but rather he did so with

honor.' G'd had set in motion a plan at the time of the Covenant Between the Parts so that Yaakov should not be taken to Egypt in a disgraceful state. In order to facilitate G'd's plan, Yosef's brothers sold him into slavery.

Chazal tell us that the Ten Martyrs, who were the ten most special Torah sages who had lived in the same generation, were murdered in the most cruel manner by the Romans to atone for the sin of the selling of Yosef into slavery. The death of the Ten Martyrs was an atonement for each of the ten sons of Yaakov who participated in the sale of Yosef. The sale of Yosef caused the Jewish people to be denied untold levels of spirituality. Because Yaakov was in a state of grieving for twenty-two years, he was denied prophecy. As a result of this, the Jewish people were also denied the benefit of his special influence for twenty-two years. All this came about because G'd did not want Yaakov to descend to Egypt in shackles.

It is inferred from the text that had Moshe spoken to the rock in order for it to bring forth its water rather than striking it, he would have been allowed to enter into the Land of Israel. The Gemara tells us that anything in which Moshe was directly involved assumed an eternal status. As we see regarding the Mishkan that Moshe had built. It was hidden away forever rather than falling into the hands of the enemy. Had he entered into the Land and built the Temple, it would not have ever been destroyed. However, because Moshe struck the rock, the Temple that was ultimately built in Jerusalem was subject to destruction if the Jewish people would fail.

The Gemara tells us that after the Jewish people had brought the Wrath of G'd upon them, the temple was destroyed. As it states, "He expended His Wrath upon the stone and wood...." Rather than destroying the Jewish people, G'd punished them through the destruction of the Temple. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that if Moshe had entered into the Land and built the Temple, it would have assumed an eternal status. G'd would not have been able to destroy, thus causing His Wrath to be expended upon the Jewish People. Consequently, they would have been annihilated. Therefore, G'd created a setting in which Moshe would chose to strike the rock, thus denying him entry in to the Land. By bringing this about, G'd allowed the Jewish people to be spared in the future. It is not that G'd removes the power of choice from any individual, but rather, He in His Infinite Wisdom sets events in motion based on knowing what man will choose at that particular moment.

G'd presents man with tests that he can either choose to pass or fail, based on the principle of free

choice. However, G'd presents the individual with a particular predicament in order to bring about His desired result. This is not contrary to the principle of free choice. Despite the fact that the cruel and tragic death of the Ten Martyrs was one of the most bleak moments in Jewish history, which was caused by the failing of Yaakov's children, it was nevertheless necessary to come about because in order to bring Yaakov Egypt with honor rather than in disgrace. Based on G'd's Divine Wisdom Yaakov's honor had greater value than the lives of the ten most advanced Torah sages of the generation. This was because Yaakov was the most special Patriarch. He was the one who fathered the twelve tribes of Israel. Because of his dimension of being, Yaakov's honor could not be compromised as much as an iota.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that the ultimate Redemption will occur whether the Jewish people are worthy/meritorious (self-motivated to repent), or unworthy (have no interest in repenting). The Gemara states, "If the Jewish people are unworthy, G'd will install a king over them whose decrees will be more severe than those of Haman, the evil one (so that they should repent)." Ultimately G'd wants the Jewish people to be restored and reinstated to be His spiritual people who will bring about His Glory. In order to accomplish this, based on the choice of the Jewish people, He will create a setting that will compel the Jew to repent, thus allowing redemption to come about.

#### **4. Forgetting, A Blessing**

The Torah tells us that Yosef was sold into slavery by his brothers. Yosef became the slave of Potifar who was one of Pharaoh's ministers. Yosef, by gaining the trust of Potifar, was appointed to manage his master's entire household. Potifar recognized that all of the blessing that had come upon him was due to Yosef's unique dimension of spirituality. Although Potifar was a pagan, he had said about Yosef, "**G'd is with him.**"

The Midrash states, "When Yosef had assumed this position he began to eat and drink He groomed his hair and said, 'Blessed is G'd that I have forgotten my father's household.' G'd said to him, 'Your father is covered in ash and dressed in sackcloth and is grieving for his son, and you eat, drink and groom yourself?...'" Why was Yosef thankful that G'd had caused him to forget his father's household?

The Torah states in the Portion of Mikeitz, regarding the birth of Yosef's son Menasha, "**Yosef called**

**the name of the firstborn Menasha for 'G'd has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's household.'**" Yosef was the most beloved son of Yaakov, who was the most special of the Patriarchs. He had taught him all the Torah that he had learned in Shem and Aver. Yosef was nevertheless thankful that he had forgotten his father's household. Why was this so?

Yosef understood that his objective in life was to prepare Egypt for the Jewish people to be able to withstand their long exile and ultimately be worthy of receiving the Torah at Sinai. The Torah tells us that after Yosef revealed himself to his brothers he had said to them, "**Tell my father, 'G'd has made me master of all Egypt. Come down to me...'**" Yosef wanted to communicate to his father Yaakov, that he had the ability to create an insular environment in which he and the Jewish people could be able to maintain their spiritual standard in Egypt. He had successfully prepared a location for them in the material and spiritual sense. If Yosef would not have been able to provide a proper setting for his father Yaakov and his brothers, Yaakov would have not come to Egypt and put his family in jeopardy. The entire future of the Jewish people was dependant on Yosef's ability and interest to succeed in preparing Egypt for their long exile.

Yosef's brothers had thrown him into a pit to die. When he was removed from the pit, he was sold into slavery despite his pleading with them not to be sold. When they had gone down to Egypt and were accused of being spies and were in a difficult predicament, they had said, "**Indeed we are guilty concerning our brother inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us and we paid no heed; that is why this anguish has come upon us.**" After being treated in such a cruel manner by his brothers, how could Yosef have the interest or the will to sacrifice and provide for them selflessly when they would eventually come to Egypt? How could he forget or ignore the unusual level of pain that they had inflicted upon him and become their proper benefactor?

When Yosef rose to a position of power, he noticed that his involvement caused him to start forgetting the past (what his family had done to him). He was thankful to G'd when he realized that all the strife and unpleasantness began to fade because he would now be qualified to be the one to prepare for the coming exile of his family. Now he would be able to secure the material and spiritual future of the Jewish people. Although it was true that he could not be the proper provider for his family had he not forgotten his past, G'd was displeased that Yosef had focused on his own physicality while his father

was immersed in grief. If in fact he had sensed his father's pain, this would have been impossible. The Midrash states, "G'd said to Yosef, Because you were insensitive to your father's pain, I will set your master's wife upon you." It was because of Yosef's unacceptable behavior that he was toppled from his position of power and sent to the dungeon.

## 5. G'd's Protection Over His Children

The Torah relates to us the tragic incident of the defilement of Dinah, the daughter of Yaakov, by Shechem (Prince of Canaan). The Torah states, "**Shechem, son of Chamor...saw her (Dinah); he took her, lay with her, and violated her. He became deeply attached to Dinah, (bas Yaakov) the daughter of Yaakov...**" The Torah could have simply referred to Dinah as "Dinah." Why does it identify her in this context as "the daughter of Yaakov?" The Torah continues to say, "**Now Yaakov heard that he (Shechem) had defiled his daughter Dinah...**" The Torah could have stated that Yaakov heard that Shechem had defiled "**Dinah.**" Why does it refer to her as "his daughter, Dinah?" After Yaakov's sons returned from the field, they had heard that their sister had been defiled, the Torah states, "**...the men were distressed, and were fired deeply with indignation, for he had committed an outrage/disgrace in Israel by lying with the daughter of Yaakov...**" Once again the Torah identifies Dinah as "the daughter of Yaakov." It does not identify her as "Dinah" but only as "the daughter of Yaakov." What is the Torah communicating to us by continuously reiterating this fact – that Dinah was "*bas Yaakov*– the daughter of Yaakov?"

Dinah, the daughter of Yaakov, is a representation of holiness because she was his daughter. As "*bas Yaakov*" she possessed a semblance of the sanctity and holiness of her father Yaakov, our Patriarch. It is precisely for this reason that Shechem, who was a Canaanite, was drawn to her. Shechem was attracted to Dinah, the daughter of Yaakov not because of her exceptional beauty (the Torah does not identify her in this context) but rather because of her innate holiness. Because his essence was cursed, as a Canaanite, he was attracted to her essence that was blessed – to attach itself to it and subsume it. As Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains, every living entity draws its life force from holiness. Even the nether forces which are evil and contaminate seek to attach themselves to something holy in order to be nourished and sustained.

The Midrash teaches us the principle of, "*Maasei avos simon l'bonim* – the actions/experiences of the forefathers is a sign/indicator for their children." The events experienced by the Patriarchs forecast what would

be experienced by the Jewish people in the future. It continues, "Because Avraham went to Egypt, Yaakov and his family (seventy individuals) would later go to Egypt. Because Avraham left Egypt with great wealth; the Jewish people left Egypt with great wealth. Because Sarah, our Matriarch was not defiled by Pharaoh the Egyptian king, no Jewish woman during 210-year period of bondage (with the exception of one) was defiled." Although Sarah, our Matriarch, had been taken by the leader of the most advanced and powerful civilization of the world, she did not succumb to becoming his wife. It is in this merit that the Jewish women were protected from being defile by their masters during their long bondage in Egypt.

In the Portion of Pinchas, the Torah enumerates the names of the tribes as part of a new census that was taken after the plague that followed the incident of Baal Peor. The Torah states, "**The sons of Reuvain: of Chanoch, the Chanochite family, of Pallu, the Palluite family...**" When the verse lists the families of the tribes, the Torah adds the Hebrew letters "hey" and "yud" to their names. Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "The nations of the world were questioning the pedigree of the Jewish people. They had said, 'Why are they presenting their pedigree when it is obviously false. Do you think for one moment that their mothers were not defiled by the Egyptians? If the Egyptians controlled, persecuted and dominated the bodies of the Jewish males in bondage, is it not logical to say that they defiled their women? Therefore G'd associated His Name "Yud and Hey" with the tribes to indicate that He personally attests that the Jewish people are in fact legitimate and their pedigree is truly pure."

Despite all of the merits of Sarah, our Matriarch, Dinah, the daughter of the most special of the Patriarchs was defiled by Shechem. Why was this so? Chazal tell us that it was because she had made a grave mistake by going out alone among the people. In addition, her defilement was a punishment for Yaakov not allowing her to marry his brother Esav. If she were allowed to marry him, she could have influenced him to become righteous. However, because Yaakov truly hated his brother who was evil, he would not allow this to come to be.

We see that the non-Jew is naturally attracted to the Jew. It is because everything in existence needs to be nurtured by a source of holiness. The non-Jew senses that there is something different and unique that is possessed by the Jew. Chazal tell us that the soul of the Jew possesses a dimension of holiness that even the greatest angel cannot fathom. The only reason the Jewish people have not been subsumed by the nations of the world is because they have G'd's Protection. However, if one does

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not merit Divine Protection, he will become assimilated. Shechem was attracted to Dinah because she was the daughter of Yaakov, who was especially holy and the most special of the Patriarchs.