

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES
Parshas Vayeishev

December 3, 2004

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
1. Admission is Rooted in Truth	2
2. The Exceptional Dimension of a Mitzvah	3
3. The Far Reaching Ramifications of Love	3
4. Reading Life's Events	4
5. Avraham's Role in the Development of the Jewish People	6

Last Week's Edition:

The Balance Between Good and Evil
The Ramifications of Missed Opportunities
Yaakov's Initial Feelings Towards Leah
Yosef the Son of Rachel
Truth Defined by the Torah
The Subliminal Forces of Good and Evil

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

www.yadavraham.org

Yad Avraham Institute
New York
December 3, 2004

B"H

Parshas Vayeishev

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*
Dean

1. Admission is Rooted in Truth

The Torah states, “**Now Yisroel loved Yosef more than all his sons...His brothers saw that it was he whom their father loved more than all of his brothers so they hated him; and they could not speak to him peaceably.**” Why is it important for the Torah to share with us the unfriendly interaction between Yosef and his brothers? Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “Through their shortcomings we see their (the brothers) praiseworthiness. They were not speaking one way and in their hearts feeling otherwise (hatred).” The praiseworthiness of Yosef’s brothers was that they openly showed their true feelings towards him.

Yaakov, our Patriarch, was the embodiment of truth. He is the Patriarch that is identified by the Torah as “the man who dwells in the tent,” – meaning he personified every aspect of Torah, which is synonymous with truth. Thus, his children were inculcated with the understanding and appreciation not to deviate from truth at any cost. When Yaakov learned that one of his family members was accused of having stolen Lavan’s personal idol, he responded strongly. He had said that whoever had stolen the idol shall die. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Yaakov was unaware that his wife Rachel (the daughter of Lavan) was the one who had taken the idol. As a result of Yaakov’s curse, Rachel passed away. Why did Yaakov react so strongly? Yaakov, who embodied truth, could not under any circumstance justify stealing because of its innate wrongness (except in life-threatening situations). Anything less than unadulterated truth was not acceptable to Yaakov. He could not consider that a member of his family would steal, thus compromising truth.

If Yosef’s brothers were to outwardly relate to him in a cordial/peaceful manner and at the same time harbor hate in their hearts for him, it would be a breach of truth. Thus acting in an unfriendly manner was considered praiseworthy.

It is interesting to note that when Leah gave birth to her fourth child, she named him Yehudah (which is derived from the word *hodaah* (to thank). She had said “**This time let me gratefully praise Hashem.**” With the birth of her fourth son, Yehudah, Leah understood that she received more than her share of sons because each of Yaakov’s four wives was to bear three sons. Thus, when she had an additional son, she expressed her thanks to G’d by calling him “Yehudah.”

Chazal tell us that when Tamar was taken to be burnt at the stake because she was suspected of having an illicit affair, Yehudah openly admitted that he fathered the children that were being carried by Tamar (his daughter-in-law). Regardless of the public disgrace, because of his commitment to not compromise truth, Yehudah did not withhold the information that exonerated Tamar. However, Chazal seem to explain it differently. Yehudah’s admission is unrelated to his standard of truth, but rather, his admission was rooted in a characteristic that he had inherited from his mother. Just as Leah had given thanks to G’d after she gave birth to her fourth son, so too, Yehudah admitted his involvement with Tamar. What relevance does Leah thanking G’d for the additional son have with Yehudah admitting to fathering Tamar’s children?

When one gives thanks to G’d, it is an admission and acknowledgement that he is a beneficiary of G’d’s Kindness. His good fortune was something that did not come about randomly or as a result of his own accomplishment. Giving thanks is an admission that it was only because of G’d’s good Grace that he is a beneficiary of good fortune. A consequence of acknowledging G’d’s Graciousness causes one to be beholden to G’d. Being able to recognize and acknowledge truth, despite its cost factor, is an indication of one’s commitment to truth. Thus, Leah’s expression of thanks to G’d was an indication of her dedication to not compromising truth. Therefore Yehudah, her son, displayed that same characteristic by admitting and acknowledging the fact that he fathered the

children – regardless of the cost factor (which was disgrace).

The only way one can have a relationship with G'd, whose signet is truth, is through the Torah itself, which is quantified by King Solomon in Proverbs as “absolute truth” – “Truth you shall acquire, and do not sell it.” Thus, in order for a Jew to come upon the truth of Torah he must continuously evaluate himself to determine that his standard of truth is not being compromised.

2. *The Exceptional Dimension of a Mitzvah*

The Torah states that Yosef's brothers were about to kill him when Reuvain interceded by saying, “**Shed no blood! Throw him into this pit in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him!**” – **intending to rescue him from their hand, to return him to his father.** The Torah reveals that Reuvain's true intent when he suggested to put Yosef into the pit was in fact to rescue him.

The Midrash states, “When one performs a mitzvah he should do so with a joyous heart (*leiv samayach*).” When one truly appreciates and understands the innate value of his actions it will bring a greater level of joy to his heart. If one would only understand the infinite value of performing a mitzvah/good deed one would experience tremendous joy. The Midrash continues, “If Reuvain had been aware that his true intent to rescue his brother Yosef was going to be written into the Torah, he would have taken Yosef on his shoulders and brought him back to his father. Had Aaron known that his greeting of Moshe in the desert would have been recorded in the Torah, he would have approached Moshe with drums and other musical instruments. If Boaz had known that his gift of food to Ruth, the Moabite, would have been recorded in the verse he would have given her fattened calves. In the past, when one would perform a mitzvah, it was inscribed into the Torah by the Prophets. However, today that there are no longer prophets, who would be the one to inscribe them? Eliyahu and Moshiach will inscribe them and G'd Himself will sign His Name as testimony.”

The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin tells us that if one would understand the profound consequences of his good deeds and his spiritual failings/transgressions, he would act differently. One must understand that everything that one does for good or for bad impacts on all existence. Each person must see himself as if the world is in the balance (50% positive and 50% negative). If one should sin, it would tip the balance to the negative and thus bring about destruction to himself and the world. However if one would perform one good deed he would sway the

balance to the positive and bring about salvation to himself and the world.

If one would only understand the far-reaching value of even responding to a blessing with “Amen” he would definitely not pass on the opportunity to do so. Similarly if one understood the gravity and ramifications of one's sin, one would avoid failure at all cost.

The Midrash is teaching us that if one understood that his mitzvah had such great value that it deserves to be recorded for posterity by G'd, he would perform the mitzvah with greater joy so the mitzvah should be recorded at a more advanced level.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that there are two classifications of people who perform mitzvos. There are the “*maimenim (right handed)*” (*l'shma*) who are those who perform mitzvos for their own sake/for the sake of G'd. There are also “*masmeelim (left handed)*” (*shelo l'shma*) who perform the mitzvah with an ulterior motive. Why is the one who performs a mitzvah not for its own sake considered a “*maasmeel (left handed)*”? The Commentators explain that when one performs an action with his right hand, it is done with agility and precision. However, when one does that same act with his left hand it is done in an awkward manner – and thus it is lacking in perfection. If one would truly understand and realize the value of being the “chosen people” (by G'd Himself) – and being given His Torah – he would definitely perform the mitzvos in a more perfect manner/with a joyous heart.

3. *The Far Reaching Ramifications of Love*

The Torah tells us that when Leah gave birth to her first born, she named him Reuvain because “**Hashem has seen my plight for I am disliked (by Yaakov), for now my husband will love me.**” The Gemara in Tractate Berachos explains that when Leah named her first-born son Reuvain, there is a hidden meaning/intent contained within the name “Reuvain.” She had actually meant to say–“*Reu ma bein binee l'ben chami* – look at the difference between my son (Reuvain) and the son of my father-in-law (Esav).” Yaakov had legally purchased the birthright from Esav. However, despite this fact Esav vowed to kill Yaakov for taking the blessings. Reuvain, the natural *bachor* (firstborn) of his father Yaakov, who was deserving of the birthright, rescued Yosef from his brothers – despite the fact that Yosef had received the double portion that was rightfully Reuvain's. The Torah tells us that Reuvain suggested to his brothers to put Yosef in a pit in the desert rather than shed his blood because ultimately he intended to return and retrieve him. The

Gemara concludes, “From Reuvain’s behavior we see that he did not hate Yosef as his brothers did.” Where does the Gemara see that the basis for Reuvain’s suggestion was rooted in his love for Yosef? Perhaps it was because if anything were to happen to Yosef, he would be held responsible by his father because he was the eldest.

The Torah tells us that Reuvain returned to the pit intending to rescue Yosef, but he was no longer there. His brothers explained to Reuvain that they had sold him. Reuvain said to them, “**The boy is gone! And I – where can I go?**” Rashi explains the meaning of “where can I go?” based on the Midrash. The Midrash explains Reuvain was saying, “I must flee because I cannot tolerate to see the pain of my father (Yaakov).” Reuvain was the only son of Yaakov who internalized his father’s pain to the point of not wanting to see Yaakov in that state. Therefore he needed to flee. Reuvain experienced his father’s pain differently than his brothers.

The Torah states, “**Yaakov loved Yosef more than all of his children (combined).**” Yosef meant everything to his father. If one truly loves his father, then it follows that if the father has a special love for one of his sons, that he will have love for that brother. Reuvain’s love for Yosef was rooted in his love for his father Yaakov. It was not that Reuvain had special feelings for Yosef because he was his brother, but rather it emanated from his love for his father. Thus, Chazal understood that the reason Reuvain saved Yosef was not because he was concerned that he would be held accountable, but rather, because of his love for Yosef.

G’d refers to the Jewish people as His “firstborn.” We cannot even comprehend or relate to the level of love that G’d has for each individual Jew. Thus, He is pained by the failing of every Jew. There is a positive commandment that one must love his fellow Jew as himself. Based on our explanation of Reuvain’s love for Yosef we are able to have another understanding of this commandment.

If one truly loves G’d, who loves every Jew, then it follows that one would love his fellow Jew (who is loved by G’d) – as Reuvain loved Yosef because of his love for Yaakov. If one does not love his fellow, then it is only a reflection and indication that his love for G’d is deficient. Chofetz Chaim z’tl writes in his work *Chofetz Chaim* that if one communicates negative information about another Jew, when it has no constructive value, it angers G’d. It is similar to one speaking negatively about one’s child to another, when that information has no value other than placing that child in a negative light – which causes the father to be pained and angered. So too the Jewish people

who are the children of G’d – when one speaks lashon hara (negative speech) about them it evokes the Midas HaDin (Attribute of Justice) because it is a direct affront to G’d.

4. *Reading Life’s Events*

The Torah tells us that Yosef had interpreted correctly the dreams of the wine steward and the baker who were in prison with him in Egypt. The interpretation of the wine steward was that he would be released from prison and reinstated by Pharaoh to his original status, while the Baker would be hanged. When the wine steward was being released from prison, Yosef had made a request of him, “**If only you would remember me with yourself when he (Pharaoh) benefits you, and you will do me a kindness, if you please, and mention me to Pharaoh, then you would get me out of this building...**” Rashi cites Chazal who explain that because Yosef had made two requests of the wine steward; “remember me” and “mention me,” Yosef spent an additional two years in prison (for these two words). It was considered a lack of faith to put his trust in a heathen. As it is stated in Psalms, “Fortunate is the man who puts his faith in G’d and did not turn to the heathens...”

Rabbeinu Bachya explains, “Although there is a principle known as *hishtadlus*- that one must take the initiative before G’d lends His Assistance. Yosef’s request of the wine steward was considered a breach of faith because of Yosef’s outstanding level of spirituality and relationship with G’d. Taking any initiative on his own was considered inappropriate.” If one has a special relationship with his own father and his father is able to respond and assist him in any area of his life without difficulty, then if the son should ask assistance from anyone else, it would be considered an affront to his father. Since the father has great love for his son and wants him to benefit from his kindness, why should the son seek assistance from a stranger? This was the exact situation with Yosef. However, one can approach this question differently,

Initially, before Yosef was sold into slavery by his brothers, the Torah tells us that his brothers had cast him into a pit because they had believed that the purpose of his tale bearing to their father was to 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, “By stating that the pit was empty and no water was in it, infers that although it did not

contain water – it contained something else - snakes and scorpions.”

Based on the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos, it seems that Yosef's brothers' evaluation is not to be understood. If in fact he was cast into a pit filled with snakes and scorpions, how could he have survived? It is evident that he merited a miracle because he was a tzaddik. If this is so, this should have immediately given credence to Yosef's dreams – that they were prophetic and not delusions of grandeur. Nevertheless when the opportunity presented itself to remove Yosef from the pit to be sold into slavery, Yosef's brothers did so.

The Midrash tells us that when Yosef's brothers cast him into the pit, they did not see the snakes and scorpions because they were hidden in the walls of the pit. Thus, they were unaware that a miracle had transpired that allowed Yosef to survive. However, according to the Midrash it seems to be difficult. If Yosef's brothers were unaware of the snakes and scorpions, why did G'd want Yosef to be cast into a pit that contained snakes and scorpions? The value of being put into a snake-pit and experiencing a miracle was for Yosef himself. G'd wanted to communicate to Yosef that he should not despair – G'd was with him. Initially Yosef believed that his dreams were prophetic visions which he needed to share with his brothers. However, when he was cast into the pit to die, he began to question the efficacy of his visions. Perhaps he was mistaken – maybe they were 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, Yosef did not despair because he understood that G'd was with him.

After Yosef was taken out of the pit, he was sold into slavery. The Torah describes the merchandise which was being transported by the merchants who purchased Yosef - **“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 foul odor.” Chazal use the expression “to reward the tzaddik” as the reason for Yosef being exposed to the pleasant fragrances rather than foul

smelling materials. Do pleasant-smelling spices constitute a reward?

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 understood that this was another communication from Hashem that He is 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 path that he was taking, Yosef believed that ultimately this would lead to a position of power.

In Egypt, Yosef continuously advanced himself from one success to another. Initially he was sold as a slave to Potiphar. He eventually rose to a level of control of administering the entire household of his master. When he was accused of attempting to defile the wife of his master, Potiphar, he was imprisoned. There he quickly rose again to become the unofficial warden. After he was released from prison he immediately became the Viceroy of Egypt. Eventually his prophetic dreams were realized. In every one of these successes, from the time he was thrown into the pit until he ultimately held the most prestigious and powerful position in the world, Yosef never needed to take the initiative. He was always the person for whom G'd performed miracles. Hashem continuously communicated to him through his various experiences so that it was not necessary to take any initiative; but rather, things would evolve as G'd wished.

With this we can understand the gravity of Yosef's failure when he uttered the two words to the wine steward: “remember me” and “mention me.” Despite G'd's assurances, Yosef sought out the assistance of a pagan and a heathen. It was not necessary to take any initiative - especially with a pagan such as the wine steward. Yosef's initiative was a lack of faith. Consequently, he remained another two years in prison.

G'd continuously sends us messages. We must be cognizant and sensitive to our experiences and interpret them in order to understand what we should do. If G'd sends one difficulties, he must understand that there is a message that is being communicated. If one chooses to ignore these communications and continuously behaves without any change in his life, he is acting foolishly.

5. Avraham's Role in the Development of the Jewish People (from Vayishlach)

The Torah tells us that after Dinah was raped by Shechem, his father Chamor approached Yaakov to negotiate the hand of Dinah on behalf of his son. The Torah states, **“Shechem, my son, longs deeply for your daughter—please give her to him as a wife. And intermarry with us, give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves...Whatever you tell me to give (as a dowry) – I will give. Inflate exceedingly upon me the marriage settlement and gifts and I will give whatever you tell me...”**

The Midrash states, “Chamor came to Yaakov to negotiate for the hand of Dinah saying, ‘I know that her grandfather Avraham was a prince. I too am a prince of the land.’ Yaakov replied, ‘Avraham was not a prince, but rather he was the equivalent of an ox.’ As it states (when Avraham hosted the angels, ‘...He ran towards the cattle.’ You on the other hand are a Chamor (which means donkey in Hebrew) and it states in the Torah that one is not permitted to plow with an ox and a donkey joined together.’...” Initially, Chamor wanted to establish that there was a commonality between him and Yaakov in that he was a prince just as Avraham was a prince. Thus, he was in a position to be able to negotiate for the hand of Dinah being of a similar pedigree. However, Yaakov responded to him that his evaluation of Avraham was incorrect. He was not a prince but rather “an ox.” How do we understand this?

The Torah tells us that in order to even consider giving Dinah to Shechem, all the males in that community were required to be circumcised. On the third day after their circumcision (which is the most difficult day of recovery), Shimon and Levy (the brothers of Dinah) killed all the males of the entire community.

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin zt'l explains that the Jewish people and the individual are comprised of the same three elements: Nefesh – the life source, Ruach – spirit, and Nishama – soul. All physical movement emanates from the *Nefesh* that is contained within the living being (similar to the animal who possesses a nefesh). The *Ruach* (*spirit - which means wind*) is what gives man the power of speech (ability of expression). The *Nishama* is the spiritual essence that man possesses which is the basis for him to be classified as an intellectual being with all of its ramifications.

Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, the founding Patriarchs of the Jewish people, respectively represent

each one of these components. Avraham, our Patriarch corresponds to the *Nefesh* (*life source*) of the Jewish people. He perfected the *Nefesh* through his most prominent characteristic of *chesed* (*kindness*). *Chesed* is expressed through physical involvement and movement.

When Adam ate of the Tree of Knowledge, he impaired and contaminated the *Nefesh* of man. The *Ruach* and *Neshama* remained intact and unaffected. As a result of Adam's sin, a foreskin developed which covered his male organ. Just as his clarity became obscured by his sin, so too his organ became obscured by the foreskin. The foreskin of the male is an impediment to his spirituality. By G'd giving the Jewish people the mitzvah of circumcision He enabled them to remove the spiritual impediment/obstruction. Thus, the Jew is able to perfect his *Nefesh* that was impaired.

Yechezkel the Prophet refers to the Egyptian people as “Donkeys/Chamorim.” As he states “The flesh of donkeys is their (the Egyptian) flesh. Maharal of Prague z'tl explains that the word “chamor (donkey)” is derived from the word “chomer (material).” Meaning that of all the nations of the world, the Egyptian people have the least relevance to spirituality.

When Yaakov had explained to Chamor that he was “chamor” and Avraham was an “ox” he was pointing out that his essence was purely physical. However, Avraham who corresponds to the *Nefesh* (life source) of the Jewish people perfected his life source through his acts of *chesed* – thus affecting his essence, which was spiritual. Thus, Chamor, as a person, had no relevance to Avraham. Avraham's essence was spiritual and thus circumcision had value in removing the obstruction to his spirituality. However, in regard to Chamor, whose essence was physical/material, circumcision was irrelevant.

The Mishna in Tractate Nidarim tells us that if one makes a vow that an uncircumcised person is not permitted to benefit from him, a circumcised gentile is restricted by this vow. As the verse states, the nations of the world are referred to as “*arlei leiv* – covered hearts.” Their classification is “uncircumcised,” regardless of the external physical act. Their essence is “sealed” because they are physical. On the other hand, the Jew is a spiritual being whose *Nefesh* is impaired by the foreskin. Thus, removing the foreskin of the Jew perfects the *Nefesh* sufficiently to allow for the person to make choices that will affect his *Ruach* and *Neshama*. Thus the “chamor/donkey” and the “shor/ox” cannot be joined because each of them is a different realm of existence. This is what Yaakov was communicating to Shechem.

YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE

***Energize your day...
... with a solid morning of Torah study***

Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Mishna
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

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

- 11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street
- 12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Avodah Zorah**
Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue
Between E.51st and E.52st

Tuesday

- 12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
Location: Yad Avraham
- 1:30 – 2:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street

Wednesday

- 11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street
- 1:00—2:00 pm **Derech Hashem**
Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

- 10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**
Location: Yad Avraham
- 12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street

**TUNE IN ON THE INTERNET
FOR LIVE VIDEO BROADCAST OF SELECTED
CLASSES
WWW.YADAVRAHAM.ORG**