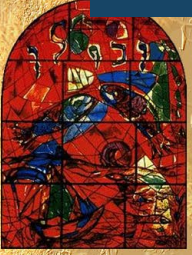


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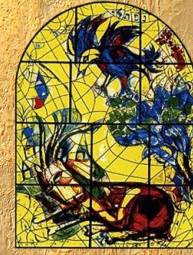
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THE CHAGALL WINDOWS, HADASSAH MEDICAL CENTER

YadAvNow.com Weekly Audio Series: Vayechi

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

One Life Empowered to Insulate All from Exile

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Bound Or Released By An Oath?

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The Multileveled Blessing of Yaakov to His Grandchildren

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1. Yaakov blesses Yosef's sons Ephraim and Menashe.
2. His blessing concludes: "And you should increase in number like fish," etc.
3. Midrash: Fish proliferate In unlimited numbers.
4. Midrash: Fish are covered by water and subject to the human eye.
5. During the Great Flood all terrestrial species were destroyed; fish were spared.
6. The terrestrial, after the Great Flood, was the equivalent of a new creation.
7. The fish who were not destroyed were part of the original existence.
8. Yaakov's blessing: As fish aren't subject to the human eye you shouldn't be subject to evil eye.
9. As fish proliferate In unlimited numbers, so too should you.
10. Yaakov gave Yosef's children the most advanced blessing; they should be like the species of the original creation.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Vayechi



Yaakov, the Eyes of the Jewish People

Rashi citing Chazal: The paragraph structure of the Portion of *Vayechi* is such that it is considered a “sealed” portion.

Midrash: “The reason the Portion of *Vayechi* is written in such a manner is to allude to the fact that when *Yaakov* passed away the eyes and the hearts of the Jewish people became sealed as a result of the bondage.”

Chazal: Eyes are the “brokers” of the heart. Meaning, the heart lusts and the eyes seek out to satisfy the desire that originated in the heart. If this is so, one would think that the order stated in the *Midrash* should have been inverted. The *Midrash* should have stated, “the hearts and the eyes of the Jewish people

became sealed.” Why does the *Midrash* first mention the eyes and then the heart?

As long as *Yaakov* was alive the Jewish people were not affected to any degree by the debase and depraved environment of Egypt. They were not affected spiritually because of *Yaakov*’s dimension of person and were not physically subject to bondage because they were the family of the Viceroy, *Yosef*. Prior to descending to Egypt, *Yaakov* had fathered and raised eleven of his sons in the community of his uncle *Lavan*, which was devoid of holiness and was debase. It was the antithesis of spirituality. *Yaakov*’s spiritual dimension created an insular environment for his family to address their spiritual function regardless

of the location in which they were. He was able to do this because *Yaakov* was as the *Torah* quantifies him, “The perfect man who dwelt in the tent (of *Torah*).” He was the personification of *Torah*.

Gemara in Tractate *Sukkah*: “G-d created the evil inclination and the *Torah* as its antidote.” One is drawn to sin because the evil inclination obscures and impairs one’s clarity. When one does not sense something to be tainted with sin or something that is truly evil, he is vulnerable and subject to transgression. The study of *Torah* provides a level of clarity that assists the person to see and appreciate the machinations of the evil inclination.

Since *Yaakov* was the Patriarch who personified *Torah*, he had the greatest degree of clarity. He could not be deceived because of his attachment to the ultimate truth of *Torah*. *Yaakov* was the Patriarch that represents exile, since he had spent a significant part of his life outside of Canaan; nevertheless, the negativity and the distortion of truth due to exile had no relevance to *Yaakov* himself because of his degree of clarity.

Chazal: The physical world is compared to the nighttime period.

Ramchal in *The Path of the Just*: Just as one sees things in a distorted context during the nighttime period, so too one’s grasp of truth clarity is distorted due to the physicality world. In the physical world (and even more so when one is in exile), falsehood presents itself as truth. One cannot discern between good and evil without the assistance of *Torah*.

It is only through *Torah* study that one can become spiritualized to be able to transcend the physical world and grasp truth. *Yaakov*, being the embodiment of *Torah*, was able to detect even the slightest influence that could spiritually compromise himself or his family. His dimension of clarity allowed him to create a spiritually insular environment despite the depravity and impurity of Egypt.

When *Yaakov* passed away, that acute level of clarity no longer existed. Thus, the family of *Yaakov*, although their hearts desired spirituality, were no longer sensitive to the subliminal spiritual pitfalls around them because their eyes became impaired. They functioned in a diminished capacity until their hearts also became affected due to their choices.

This is the meaning of the words of *Chazal* that tell us that their eyes first became sealed and subsequently their hearts were negatively affected.

What is the Significance of *Yaakov*’s Bowing at the Head of the Bed?

Torah: “The time approached for Israel to die, so he called for his son *Yosef*, and he said to him, ‘...Please do not bury me in Egypt...swear to me...’ and he (*Yosef*) swore to him; then Israel prostrated himself towards the head of the bed.”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: Although *Yosef* was *Yaakov*’s son, *Yaakov* bowed down to *Yosef* because he was the Viceroy. As *Chazal* state, “When the fox is at his time of greatness bow down to him.”

Sforno: The prostration of *Yaakov* was, ‘To express his thanks to his Maker. Through G-d’s graciousness, *Yaakov*’s request was fulfilled through his son (that he would not be buried in Egypt).’ Where do we find something similar? After *Eliezer*, the servant of *Avraham*, had successfully negotiated for the hand of *Rivka* to be the wife of his master’s son *Yitzchak*, he gave thanks to G-d.

Torah: ‘And it was, when *Avraham*’s servant heard their words, he prostrated himself to the ground unto G-d.’

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: “From here we learn that one must give thanks for good tidings.” The words of the *Midrash* are seemingly difficult to understand. Is it not obvious that when one receives good tidings or receives something of great value, that one gives thanks? The *Torah* does not communicate something that is obvious. What is the significance of prostration when one offers thanks?

Prostration is an act of negation of self. By extending one’s body on the ground one is in essence stating that his value is no greater than the dust on the ground. The posture of prostration is an expression of humility. The only way one is able to appreciate and internalize the good that he had received is to negate himself to feel that he is truly unworthy. If one has any sense of entitlement, he will not fully appreciate what he has received.

Since *Eliezer* understood that his success regarding finding a wife for his master’s son was fully due to

G-d's beneficence, which was unrelated to his own capability and status, he needed to internalize what he had understood. This internalization could only be experienced through self-negation, which was accomplished by prostrating himself before G-d. Similarly, *Yaakov* wanted to fully appreciate that *Yosef's* agreeing to fulfill his request was not due to *Yaakov's* position as his father, but rather it was only due to G-d's Graciousness. He thus prostrated himself in order to achieve this.

Torah: When one brings the newly ripened produce (*bikurim*) to the Temple mount one must make a declaration of appreciation, as described in the *Torah*. After the declaration is made, the individual prostrates himself before G-d. The *Torah* then states, "You shall be glad with all the goodness that Hashem, your G-d, has given you and your household..." The *Torah* is telling us that the joy and recognition of all the good that G-d had bestowed upon the individual is only realized after the individual negates himself through prostration before G-d. It is only then that he can truly rejoice in the good that He has given him.

The Positive Side of Spiritual Void

Torah: Before *Yaakov* passed away he made a special request of his son *Yosef*, the Viceroy of Egypt. "The time approached for Israel to die, so he called for his son, for *Yosef*, and said to him – Please – if I have found favor in your eyes, please place your hand under my thigh... please do not bury me in Egypt." Why did *Yaakov* not want to be buried in Egypt?

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: There are three reasons *Yaakov* not want to be buried in Egypt. The first reason is that *Yaakov* foresaw the plague of lice that would come upon Egypt. He did not want the lice to crawl under his body, which would be considered a negative experience for him. The second reason is that at the time of resurrection, all the remains of people that are buried outside of the Land of Israel will roll through underground caverns in order to be resurrected in the Land. *Yaakov* did not want to be subjected to this painful process.

The third reason given by the *Midrash* is that *Yaakov* did not want to be deified. *Yaakov* was renowned in Egypt as a spiritual individual. The famine had ceased when he came to Egypt as a result of his blessing to Pharaoh that caused the Nile to rise and irrigate the land.

Chazal: When Divine Retribution will come upon the idolaters, G-d will also bring judgment upon the deities that had been worshiped. If *Yaakov* would be deified by the Egyptians he be held culpable.

Midrash: Here is another reason *Yaakov* did not want to be buried in Egypt, not cited by *Rashi*. "*Yaakov* said, 'I do not want the Egyptians to be redeemed through me.' The prophet *Yechezkel* identifies the Egyptians as donkeys (*chamorim*), 'Their flesh is the flesh of donkeys (*chamorim*).' *Yaakov* had said, 'I am compared to the sheep. As it states, 'Israel is the sheep...' And I do not wish to be the sheep that redeems the donkey.' As it states in the verse, 'the donkey shall be redeemed by the sheep.' Therefore, please do not bury me in Egypt." (The *Halachah* states that one is forbidden to benefit from a first-born male donkey until it is redeemed with a sheep that is given to the *Kohen*.)

Maharal of Prague: The word "*chamor* (donkey)" in the verse in *Yechezkel*, which refers to the Egyptian people, is derived from the word "*chomer*," which means physical/material. Meaning, of the seventy root nations of the world, the Egyptian people were the most devoid of spirituality. They are therefore referred to as *chamorim*, to indicate that their essence was totally physical. Because of this spiritual void, the Egyptian people had sunk to the lowest depths of depravity such as incest, adultery, witchcraft, and idol worship.

Psalms: "When Israel went out of Egypt, *Yaakov's* household from an alien people (*Betzeis yisrael Mi'Mitzrayim bais Yaakov me-am loez*)."

Maharal of Prague in *Gevuras Hashem*: The verse means that in order for the Jewish people to develop as the nation of G-d, their bondage needed to be in Egypt (and not any other location) because in order to bring about the greatest level of spiritual advancement, it must be in a setting of the most extreme level of spiritual void. Thus, in order for the Jewish people to develop to their fullest spiritual potential, they had to be in Egypt. *Maharal* cites many sources to support this principle, that wherever there is the greatest absence of holiness it is in that location where the most advanced level of spirituality would emerge. There are a number of verses that support this principle such as G-d extracts light from darkness and purity from impurity.

Midrash: “Where do we see that G-d extracts light from darkness? *Avraham* from *Terach*.” Although *Terach*, the father of *Avraham*, was a pagan, *Avraham* his son was the one to introduce monotheism to the world. *Avraham*’s essence and spiritual make up had no relevance to *Terach*, as light has no relevance to darkness. Another example cited by the *Midrash* of light being extracted from darkness, is the Jewish people (being set apart) from the nations of the world. Thus, in order for the Jewish people to develop to their fullest spiritual potential, they had to be in Egypt.

Yaakov understood that the Jewish people needed to remain in Egypt, which was the most appropriate location for their spiritual development to be worthy to stand at Sinai to receive the *Torah*. If the Egyptian people were to rise above their physicality and become spiritualized to a greater degree, it would seriously curtail the spiritual development of the Jewish people.

When one serves a deity, one does so by doing the will of the deity that is being worshiped. If *Yaakov* were to be deified and worshiped, as a spiritual being, the Egyptian people would need to serve him by emulating his unique spiritual posture as a person who was divorced from physicality. Consequently, the Egyptians would be weaned and extricated to some degree from being totally physical beings to become more spiritual. If this were to occur, then the spiritual development of the Jewish people, would not come about. Therefore, *Yaakov* said to *Yosef*, “Since I am compared to the sheep who has the innate ability to redeem the donkey, I would be the one to cause a transformation of the Egyptian people from being completely material to having relevance to the spiritual.” *Yaakov* did not want to be buried in Egypt so as not to impede the development of G-d’s people.

The Jewish People, G’d’s Representation in Existence

Torah: “And it came to pass after these things that someone said to *Yosef*, ‘Behold! –your father is ill.’ So he took his two sons...” When *Yosef* was informed that his father was ill, he immediately took his children to *Yaakov* to receive his blessing.

Midrash citing *Psalms*: “Those who bless Him shall inherit the earth, while those who curse Him shall be

cut off.’ Reb Meir says, ‘One who blesses the Jewish people it is as if he blessed the Divine Presence’...” How is this to be understood?

Maharal of Prague *z”l*: The number four represents something that has no substance because each of the four entities are unrelated to one another. Thus, there is no unity among them. However, if there is a fifth entity that is placed in the center, it will unify all the four in the corners by bringing them together. The number five is thus a unifying factor.

Rashi throughout the *Talmud*: The ultimate unpronounceable Name of G-d, which is the four-letter Name “YKVK (*Hashem*)” is the “*shem Ha’Mefurash*.” It represents G-d as the Infinite Being that has no beginning and no end. If this is so, how could this Name of G-d be comprised of four letters, if the number four connotes a lack of substance?

Chazal interpreting “*Bereishis bara Elokeem...* In the beginning G-d created...”: For the sake of the *Torah* which is referred to as “*reishis* (choicest)” it was created and for the sake of the Jewish people who are also referred to as “*reishis* (choicest)” it was created. The Jewish people are the only nation who have any relevance to the *Torah* and G-d himself. As *Chazal* explain, before *Avraham* began to espouse monotheism, G-d was only known as “G-d of heaven.” However, after *Avraham* had espoused monotheism and introduced Him to the world, G-d was not only the “G-d of heaven” but also “the G-d of the earth.”

It was through the initiative of *Avraham*, our Patriarch, the founding father of the Jewish people that G-d had relevance to mankind. In essence, *Avraham* was the fifth component that gave meaning and purpose to the four, which is G-d Himself, in existence. Similarly, the Jewish people, together with the *Torah*, give existence purpose and are crucial to be G-d’s representation on earth. It is only through the Jewish people that mankind has a grasp or an inkling of the value of G-d. They are the equivalent of the fifth unifying the four.

Gemara in Tractate *Pesachim*: “Just as I have received reward for my elucidation of the *Torah* I will receive reward for its retraction.”

Mishna: *Shimon Ha’Amsuni*, a colleague of *Rebbe Akiva*, had dedicated his life to elucidating the meaning of every mention of the word “es” in the *Torah*. The word

“es” in itself has no translation other than being an adjunct to what it predicates. When he came upon the verse, “*Es Hashem Elokecha tira* – You shall fear Hashem your G-d” he chose to retract his understanding of the word “es.”

Based on *Shimon Ha'Amsuni's* understanding, the *Torah* was saying that one should fear and revere someone no less than one fears G-d Himself. This seemed to be a sacrilegious concept to *Shimon Ha'Amsuni*. He thus without hesitation, retracted his entire life's work of interpretation. *Rebbe Akiva* told him that he did not need to retract because the “es” in the verse (*Es Hashem Elokecha tira*) is referring to the *Torah Sage*. The *Torah* is stating, just as one must revere G-d, one must identically have the same degree of reverence for the *Torah sage*. Why does G-d want one to revere the *Torah sage* as much as Himself?

Maharal: The *Torah sage* is responsible for the dissemination of His Word, the *Torah*. By revering the *Torah sage* to no less a degree than G-d, the *Torah* that is being taught by him will be valued and esteemed as something of the greatest importance. In addition, the *Torah Sage's* beliefs and values will be emulated by his students.

Psalms: “Those who bless Him shall inherit the earth, while those who curse Him shall be cut off.” When one blesses the Jewish people, it is as if one is blessing the Divine Presence because it is due to the existence of the Jewish people, who adhere to the Will of G-d through studying His *Torah* and performing His mitzvos, that G-d has a representation in the world. By blessing His representation, one is blessing Him. If the Jewish people succeed to a greater degree due to one's blessing, then he truly blessed the Divine Presence.

Midrash: “*Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* says, ‘One who assists the Jewish people it is as if he assists the Divine Presence.’” This can be understood in the same vein.

Yaakov's All Encompassing Influence (from *Vayigash*)

Torah: When Yaakov descended to Egypt from Canaan, “They took their livestock and their wealth which they had amassed in the land of Canaan and they came to Egypt – Yaakov and his offspring with him. His sons and grandsons with him, his daughters and

granddaughters and all his offspring he brought with him...” The *Torah* could have stated that Yaakov had taken all his offspring with him to Egypt. However, the verse chooses to delineate each segment of Yaakov's progeny that went to Egypt and reiterates with each segment of his family the words “with him (eeto).” Why does the *Torah* need to reiterate this point?

We find that when the *Torah* wants to say “with him” it expresses itself in one of two ways, “eemo” or “eeto”. For example, when the family of *Noach* accompanied him into the Ark, the *Torah* states, “*Noach*, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives with him (eeto), went into the Ark...” The *Torah* uses the term “eeto – with him” to indicate that those who accompanied *Noach* were secondary to him, because the word “es” is only an adjunct to the subject. The only reason *Noach's* family was permitted to enter the Ark was because of the were not worthy in their own right.

In contrast, the *Torah* uses the word “with him- eemo” (which means of equivalent status) regarding *Ephraim* and *Manasseh* to indicate that although they were going to receive a blessing from Yaakov as the sons of *Yosef*, they were deserving of Yaakov's blessing in their own right as individual tribes. As it states, “So he took with him (eemo) his two sons, *Manasseh* and *Ephraim*.” Thus, Yaakov's descent to Egypt with all of his offspring was within a context that they were all secondary to him.

Torah: “G-d said (to Yaakov)...have no fear of descending to Egypt...” If Yaakov was not afraid to confront and wrestle an angel (archangel of *Esav*) why was he afraid to descend to Egypt? He was not concerned about his physical welfare, but rather he was concerned about the impurity of Egypt that would erode the spirituality of his family. He understood that Egypt was the most spiritually devoid location on earth, there was a concern that the Jewish people would be spiritually compromised and become unworthy to receive the *Torah* at Sinai.

The *Torah* gives us an understanding to what degree Yaakov had taken precautions regarding his family before descending to Egypt. The *Torah* reiterates the word “with him (eeto)” to indicate that each segment of his family, regardless of gender or generation, were the equivalent of an adjunct to him regarding his involvement in their lives. The verse states, “All the

people of Yaakov's household who came to Egypt was seventy." All seventy members of his family, which was the core from which the Jewish people descend as a nation, were subsumed by Yaakov's spiritual presence. In order to survive this exile, they needed to be firmly rooted in their spirituality and protected from any external influences.

Chazal: The reason the Jewish people needed to be exiled for 210 years in Egypt was because of Avraham's sin. The *Torah* tells us that children are not culpable for the failings of their parents. If so, why were the Jewish people punished with exile for Avraham's sin. The reason the child is not held culpable for the failing of the father is that the child has no relevance to the father's power of choice.

In contrast, the Jewish people are a holy nation only because of the spiritual inheritance that they received from the holy Patriarchs – Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Since the Patriarchs are the foundation and basis for the spirituality of the Jewish people, if there

were to be a deficiency in the foundation it would negatively impact upon their descendants. When there is a deficiency in the root, it will manifest in the tree and its fruits. In order to build a secure and eternal structure, there cannot be any deficiency in the foundation.

Although the failing of Avraham, was his own, the Jewish people needed to purge that impurity from their spiritual make up in order to become G-d's people. Egypt was the location for that purging process. The Egyptian exile is referred to by the *Torah* as "the iron smelter" for the Jewish people, in which all of their impurities were removed.

In order for the purging process to occur as it should, the seventy root souls of the Jewish people needed to descend to Egypt. These souls needed to be firmly rooted in spirituality so as not to become acculturated and subsumed Egypt. If Yaakov's family were not subsumed by his presence and influence, they would not have been able to survive the exile in Egypt.



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