

*“I am Yosef
Is my father
still alive?”*

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Vayigash

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

The Importance of Illumination and Abundance

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Commitment, Responsibility, and Trust

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Predestination and Personal Accountability

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The Ultimate Display of Statesmanship

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1. *Binyamin* is accused of stealing the silver goblet of the viceroy.
2. Yehuda's response: Whoever took the goblet shall die. How could he say that?
3. *Lavan* accused *Yaakov* of taking his fetishes, said whoever took the fetishes should die, understanding it was an impossibility.
4. *Yaakov* raised his family with exceptional level of integrity and holiness; that would be impossible.
5. *Rachel* took the fetishes to separate her father from idolatry.
6. *Rachel*, our Matriarch, passed away due to *Yaakov's* statement.
7. Yehuda, and his brothers, being raised by them, knew that this could not be.
8. *Torah*: “*Yaakov* was left all by himself.”
9. *Midrash*: As it says, “G-d is exalted unto Himself,” *Yaakov* is also unto himself.
10. Yehuda to the viceroy: “He (*Binyamin*) is left by himself to his mother.”
11. *Binyamin* was the antagonist of Edom because he was the son of *Rachel*.

Dissipating The Trauma To Perpetuate A People

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1. Yosef revealed himself to his brothers and they were overwhelmed with shame.
2. He consoled them to not be saddened as G-d had sent him as their provider.
3. Yosef as Viceroy provided food for Egypt and all of the surrounding countries.
4. Yosef knew he was sold specifically for this purpose and prepared his family for the Egyptian exile.
5. Yosef names his first-born *Menashe*. G-d caused him to forget his family and strife he experienced.
6. The trauma and suffering his brothers caused was beyond repair and forgiveness.
7. If so emotionally scarred, it would have been impossible for Yosef to be a proper provider.
8. He wouldn't be selflessly dedicated without a trace of negativity towards them.
9. Yosef realized a miraculous transition began to occur: memories of his brothers' abuse faded as if it never happened.
10. To commemorate this miracle, Yosef named his son *Menashe*.
11. This was the basis for Yosef knowing beyond any doubt that he was sent to Egypt for this mission.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Vayigash



G-d Restraining the Attribute of Justice

Torah: Yehudah convinced his father Yaakov to allow him to take his younger brother *Binyamin* down to Egypt. It was a prerequisite for them to return to Egypt and have their brother *Shimon* released from prison and to be allowed to purchase grain. The Viceroy of Egypt had accused them of being spies, and by bringing their youngest brother *Binyamin*, it would vindicate them and establish them as honest people. Yaakov initially refused to allow *Binyamin* to be taken to Egypt because he was concerned that he may die on the way to Egypt.

Rashi citing *Chazal*: “Satan prosecutes at a time of danger.” Since the journey to Egypt would be dangerous, *Binyamin* would need special Divine protection not to die. After Yaakov finally acquiesced to allow *Binyamin* to accompany his brothers to Egypt, he said, “And may Almighty G-d (*Keil Shakai*) grant you mercy before the man that he may release your brother as well as *Binyamin*...” What is the significance

of Yaakov using the appellation of “*Keil Shakai*” when he referred to G-d in his blessing?

Rashi citing *Chazal*: “May He Who said to the world ‘Enough (*Dai*)’ now declare that my troubles are enough. I have had no rest since my youth: I had troubles with *Rachel*, *Dinah*, *Yosef*, *Shimon* and now *Binyamin*.”

Chazal: The appellation of G-d “*Hashem* (YKVK)” connotes the Attribute of Mercy and signifies that G-d is infinite. He was, is, and always will be. The appellation “*Elokim*” connotes the Attribute of Justice. The appellation of “*Shakai*” is conjunction of two words, “*Shekocho Dai* (Whose Power is Enough).” The commentaries explain this to mean that G-d’s abilities and powers are infinite and without limitation.

When the *Torah* states regarding all aspects of creation such as, “And G-d said, ‘Let there be light...’”, the energy that was released at that moment would

have been ongoing and unending without limitation because it emanated from G-d Who is unlimited and infinite. However, because there is the appellation "*Shakai*," G-d restrains and limits His power so that the result should be exactly as He wishes it to be. If G-d would not have restrained His power, creation would have continued and evolved without end. The world, which was intended to be the setting for man would not have come about.

When *Yaakov* referred to G-d with the appellation "*Keil Shakai*," he was praying that the G-d Who had used His power to limit creation, should use that same power to limit *Yaakov's* suffering and bring it to an end. Seemingly, *Yaakov* at this moment is repeating the mistake that he had made earlier which precipitated the Attribute of Justice. Before the strife of *Yosef* and his brothers, which ultimately led him to be sold into slavery and brought about untold suffering for twenty two years, the *Torah* alludes to what precipitated all of these tragic events.

Torah: "*Yaakov* settled (*Vayeishev Yaakov*)...."

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: *Yaakov* wanted to be in a state of tranquility after his previous sojourning and suffering.

Midrash: "G-d says, 'Though the righteous seek tranquility, the Holy One Blessed Be He says, 'Are the righteous not satisfied with what awaits them in the World to Come that they expect to live at ease in this world too?' *Yaakov* should not have requested to be in a state of tranquility. Factually, at this point *Yaakov* was not asking to be in a state of tranquility, but rather he was requesting that the Attribute of Justice that had been in effect until now should cease, and G-d should evoke the Attribute of Mercy upon him. At the beginning of creation, the *Torah* refers to G-d with the appellation "*Elokim*" regarding the process of creation. However, after man was created, the *Torah* refers to G-d with the appellation "*Hashem Elokim*."

Rashi citing *Chazal*: G-d initially wanted to create existence with the Attribute of Justice, which is exacting and precise. However, G-d saw that it would not be possible for the world to continue because man is prone to fail. He thus coalesced His Attribute of Justice with the Attribute of Mercy. The world thus functions within the context of the Attribute of Mercy. Although this may be so most of the time, there are instances when G-d unleashes His Attribute of Justice. After the Attribute of Justice is put into force, what

restrains that Attribute so that all existence should not be destroyed?

Just as G-d, with the appellation of "*Shakai*," demonstrated that He restrains and limits the unlimited for the sake of purpose, identically that same Attribute is able to withhold and intervene regarding the Attribute of Justice in order to establish the Attribute of Mercy. This concept is stated by *Moshe* when he addressed the Jewish people before his passing. He said to them, "Under normal circumstances when an arrow is released by a mortal, it cannot be retrieved, However, regarding G-d's Justice, even after it has been released, G-d's Mercy can intervene and restrain the Attribute of Justice."

This is what *Yaakov* meant when he had said, "*Keil Shakai*." Just as G-d, at the beginning of creation, put a limitation and restraint on His power of creation, so too should G-d restrain His Attribute of Justice and invoke His attribute of Mercy upon him. It is interesting to note that the appellation "*Shakai*" although its effect and implementation was for the sake of bringing about creation in a precise context, simultaneously, it facilitates the existence of man by restraining the Attribute of Justice when it is in force.

Conscience, the Restraint for Man

Torah: When *Yosef* revealed himself to his brothers, they were overwhelmed with shame to the point that they could not respond. The verse states, "And *Yosef* said to his brothers, 'I am *Yosef*, Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him because they were left disconcerted before him."

Midrash: "*Reb Shimon Ben Elazar* says, 'Woe to us from the day of judgment! Woe to us from the day of rebuke! What is this referring to? *Yosef* was from the youngest of the tribes, and when he revealed his identity to his brothers, they could not respond because they were overwhelmed with shame. When G-d will come to each one and inform him of his actions and where he failed, how much more so will one be subsumed with shame!'"

Chazal: *Yosef's* facial features were identical to that of his father *Yaakov*. Despite this, when his brothers came before him in Egypt, they did not recognize him. They did not recognize him as their brother, and they believed that he was a pagan Viceroy of Egypt who was unrelated to them.

Gemara: The reason they did not recognize their brother Yosef was because when they had sold him into slavery he did not have a beard, and now when they had come before him, he did have a beard. The difficulty still remains. If they were so intimately involved with their brother Yosef before they had sold him into slavery, how could they not recognize him even with a beard? In addition, if he looked exactly like their father Yaakov, how could they not acknowledge him as their brother Yosef?

Prior to him being sold into slavery Yosef had Shared his dreams with his brothers. His dreams clearly communicated to them that there would be a day in the future that Yosef would rise to a position of greatness and power, and his brothers would ultimately bow to him. They dismissed his dreams as delusions of grandeur, and they destroyed his life because of the intense hate they had for him.

Yosef's dreams did in fact come to fruition as was proven during the years of famine when his brothers needed to come to Egypt to purchase grain. The reason Yosef's brothers did not recognize him despite all of the indicators which were in place was because they were in such a state of denial due to their original understanding of their brother. In addition, if in fact the Yosef's dreams were not delusions of grandeur, then what they had done to him would be unconscionable. When Yosef's brothers initially were accused of being spies by the Viceroy, they immediately attributed it to G-d's retribution because they did not have mercy on their brother when he pleaded with them not to be sold as a slave.

Sforno: The brothers acknowledged that they had demonstrated a level of cruelty that was unforgivable although they had seen him as "pursuer (*rodeif*)" trying to destroy their lives. When Yosef finally revealed himself to his brothers, they were overwhelmed with shame. The basis for the all-subsuming shame was that at that moment they realized what they had done was unconscionable. Their initial understanding of Yosef as being pompous and self-centered was not correct. His dreams were not delusions of grandeur, but rather they were prophetic.

Midrash: If Yosef's brothers were overwhelmed with shame when their younger brother confronted them with truth, how much more so will we be ashamed when G-d will reveal to us the truth of our behavior.

What is the basis of the shame? Is the overwhelming shame rooted in being confronted with the realization of the truth? Or is the shame a combination of being confronted by the truth in the presence of the one against whom he sinned?

Mishna in Tractate *Berachos*: Being confronted by the truth alone is not sufficient to impede one from doing the wrong thing, but rather, it must be associated with the one whose word is being transgressed. It is clear that the shame is a result of being seen by the individual who perceives the other as flawed and deficient. It is only when one perceives it in this context will one not sin.

Gemara: When Reb Yochanon ben Zakai was on his deathbed, his students gathered around him to receive his blessing. He said to them, "May you fear Heaven (G-d) as you fear man." They were taken aback and said, "Is that all?" He responded, "Hopefully! When one sins in private where no one can see, it is easier for him to sin. However, if one were to consider to sin in public, he would not. We see that one is more concerned with what others think of him than what G-d sees."

The students of Reb Yochanon Ben Zakai were the leading *Torah* sages of the generation. It is certain that they fully understood and internalized what their *rebbe* had said to them. They had a full grasp of truth, especially of G-d's awareness of their actions. Despite this, they were in need of the blessing of their *Rebbe* that their fear of G-d should be no less than their fear of man. Recognition of truth, even at the most advanced level, is not necessarily sufficient to withhold one from sinning.

King David in *Psalms*: "I have placed G-d before me always..." The blessing that Reb Yochanon Ben Zakai gave to his students was that they should have the merit to be cognizant of G-d's presence in their lives to no less of a degree than being cognizant of a human being observing them.

When there is a conflict of interest in which one has a desire, one's level of clarity is impaired and one cannot appreciate the spiritual consequences of his behavior. It is only when that desire is subdued that one regains the subjectivity to appreciate the gravity of his misbehavior. When Yosef confronted his brothers with truth, that his dreams were in fact prophetic and not delusions of grandeur, they realized that their behavior

was unconscionable. It was only because Yosef, the victim of their actions, was the one who confronted them with the truth that they were overwhelmed with shame, although he was of the youngest of the tribes. The shame they experienced was all consuming to the degree that they could not respond. How much more so will one be overwhelmed with shame when confronted by G-d with one's spiritual record.

Yosef, a Beneficiary of a Miracle

Torah: After Yosef had revealed himself to his brothers, they were overwhelmed with shame and were not able to respond.

Midrash: Yosef's brothers were overwhelmed with embarrassment because at that moment they understood that his dreams were in fact prophetic and not delusions of grandeur. Thus, they realized that their victimization of Yosef was at the most extreme level. They had acted in an unusually cruel manner towards him and unjustly brought untold suffering upon him to a degree that they believed that it was unforgivable. After seeing their level of shame, which indicated that they had recognized their extreme failure, Yosef attempted to appease them. He assured them that he had no claim against them because the events that had transpired were clearly part of G-d's plan.

Torah: "He (Yosef) then kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; afterwards his brothers conversed with him." Only after Yosef allayed their fears and alleviated their shame, were his brothers able to speak.

Rashi: "When they saw how Yosef was weeping, they understood that his heart was complete with them (he was fully dedicated to them), and they were able to converse with him."

Torah: After Yaakov passed away, Yosef's brothers came before him and pleaded for their lives. They contrived a story that their father had told them that after his passing they should tell Yosef in their father's name that he should continue to treat them well and attend to all their needs. The reason they were concerned that the relationship had changed was because they noticed that after their father Yaakov passed away, Yosef distanced himself from them.

Before Yaakov had passed away the brothers dined at Yosef's table; however, after Yaakov's passing

the relationship was no longer the same. They no longer sat at his table. They understood that as long as Yaakov was alive, they were treated royally in his honor. Yosef would not cause any displeasure to his father. However, now that Yaakov was no longer alive, the distance between them was an indication that Yosef was harboring ill feelings towards them for what they had done to him. They feared that he would take revenge for the past. Why was it so difficult for Yosef's brothers to accept the fact that he had fully forgiven them and would not bring harm upon them?

Torah: "And to Yosef were born two sons...Yosef called the name of the firstborn *Menashe* for, 'G-d has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's household.'" Yosef was acknowledging the fact that G-d had caused him to forget the hardships and anguish that he endured as a result of his brothers' hate and envy. Yosef understood that it was truly miraculous, that he was able to be relieved of the trauma and suffering that he had experienced at the hands of his brothers.

Acknowledging this miracle, he named his firstborn, who is the most special to a father, "*Menashe*" as a testament to this recognition. Yosef understood, especially when he rose to power and prominence, as the ruler of Egypt and its provider, that he was in a position to address securing the spiritual and material future of the Jewish people in Egypt. He could only succeed in his mission if he were totally dedicated to his brothers and their families. If there would be any trace of hatred towards them for what they had inflicted upon him, he would have failed in his mission. Factually, G-d performed the miracle on his behalf because he was the only one of Yaakov's children who was qualified to be the provider for the Jewish people in exile.

Yosef experienced and understood that he had been endowed with something humanly impossible to achieve due to the profound level of suffering he endured. However, his brothers could not comprehend this fact. The level of hatred and cruelty to which they subjected him would leave an indelible impression on Yosef's psyche and emotion. They therefore had difficulty accepting the fact that Yosef had fully forgiven them.

The brothers believed that Yosef was merely restraining his feelings of revenge towards them out of respect for his father. This is the reason that although Yosef had

wept upon them to indicate that he had no ill feelings towards them, they continued to be concerned that in the future things could change. Therefore when Yaakov passed away and they no longer were invited to Yosef's table, they suspected that he would soon act upon his claim and take revenge.

The Irreparable Loss for the Jewish People

Rabbeinu Bachya: The reason the Ten Martyrs were killed by the Romans in the most cruel manner was to atone for the sin committed by Yosef's ten brothers for selling their brother into slavery. Although Yosef did not have a claim against his brothers nor did he exact revenge on them, he nevertheless did not forgive them. Since Yosef did not release his ten brothers from their debt by forgiving them, the Ten Martyrs were killed to repay the debt.

Torah: Yosef actually underwent a metamorphosis in Egypt, which was crucial to his objective and mission of being the provider for the Jewish people in exile. Although he had suffered untold anguish as a result of his brothers selling him into slavery, all of that pain had miraculously dissipated. Because G-d performed a miracle which allowed Yosef to forget his suffering, he named his firstborn son, "*Menashe*" as the verse states, "...Yosef called the name of the firstborn *Menashe* for, 'G-d has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's household.'" Yosef clearly understood that since he was to be the provider for all the spiritual and material needs for the Jewish people in exile, he could not have any negative feelings for his family, which would interfere with that objective. Since G-d had caused him to forget his suffering, Yosef did not harbor any ill feelings towards his brothers.

The *Torah* attests to this fact when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers. Although Yosef's brothers were overwhelmed by shame when he revealed himself to them, he appeased them by explaining that it was part of G-d's plan that he was sent to Egypt. He was thus communicating to them that he did not have any ill feelings towards them because it was part of his destiny to come to Egypt, rise to power, and become the provider for the Jewish people in exile.

If Yosef had no claim against his brothers and attempted to appease them, why should there remain a debt from his brothers' cruelty that needed to be repaid through the death of the Ten Martyrs? The Ten

Martyrs were the ten most special *Torah* sages who lived in the same generation since the giving of the *Torah* at Sinai.

Torah: *Shimon* and *Levy*, the sons of Yaakov, destroyed the community of *Shechem* to avenge the defilement of their sister *Dinah*. After this incident, Yaakov was disturbed with his sons because of what they had done and said to them, "*Achartem osi* – you have discomposed me (made me murky)..."

Rashi citing *Chazal*: "Yaakov said to his sons, 'Prior to your action against *Shechem*, I had clarity of mind; however, after you created a state of conflict, I no longer have that clarity.'" Yaakov's claim was that they had denied him the opportunity to advance his spiritual state because he no longer had the unique clarity that is necessary for that growth.

Torah: Yosef's brothers sold him into slavery. They took Yosef's tunic and dipped it into goat's blood and brought it to their father Yaakov. Yaakov rent his garments, put on sackcloth, and began to mourn and grieve the death of his son Yosef. Despite all the attempts of his children to console him, Yaakov refused to be comforted and said, "For I will go down to the grave mourning for my son (Yosef)."

Gemara in Tractate *Bava Basra*: The Divine Presence only rests with one who is in a state of joy and not grieving, mourning, or depressed. Yaakov was in a state of mourning for twenty-two years. Because Yaakov believed that Yosef was no longer alive, he was denied infinite levels of spiritual growth because of his state of being. When Yaakov became aware that his son Yosef was in fact alive the *Torah* states, "... the spirit of Yaakov became alive."

Rashi citing *Chazal*: G-d's presence was restored to Yaakov, and thus he began prophecizing again. The liability of the ten brothers of Yosef for denying their father Yaakov the Divine Presence for twenty-two years is unfathomable. It denied the Jewish people a special level of spiritual advancement that cannot be regained until the end of time. The atonement of the killing of the Ten Martyrs was within the context of measure for measure. Just as the ten brothers of Yosef denied their father clarity and spiritual growth, so too the ten most advanced *Torah* sages needed to be taken to deny the Jewish people clarity and a context of spiritual advancement.

The actions of Yosef's brothers brought about a desecration of G-d's name because they caused their father to not be able to function in the capacity that he should have. Measure for measure, the ten most special *Torah* sages needed to be killed at the hands of the Romans, which was also a desecration of G-d's name. Since the Romans were the descendants of *Esav* (Edom) it was a demonstration that the "Hands were the hands of *Esav*" because the "Voice was not the voice of *Yaakov*." This was a desecration of G-d's name at an advanced level.

Yosef's Internalization of His Mission (from Mikeitz)

Torah: Yosef was appointed to be the Viceroy of Egypt, which was a position of great power. The verse states, "Pharaoh said, 'See! I have placed you in charge of all the land of Egypt.'" The only condition placed upon Yosef by Pharaoh was that he should acknowledge him as the king. Other than that, Yosef's decisions regarding every aspect of Egypt was his domain.

Pharaoh then gave Yosef *Asenat* the daughter of *Potiphara* to be his wife. She bore him two sons as the verse states, "And to Yosef were born two sons... Yosef called the name of the firstborn *Menashe* for, 'G-d has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's household.'" Yosef was thanking G-d for causing him to forget the hardships and anguish that he endured through his brothers and all that ensued. Yosef understood that it was truly miraculous that he was able to forget all the trauma and ridicule that he had experienced at the hands of his brothers.

One would think that the pain and emotional scars that Yosef had endured from the time he was thrown into a snake pit and sold into slavery due to his brothers' decision to remove him from their presence would be indelibly emblazoned on his emotion and conscience. Nevertheless, G-d caused him to forget all that had transpired, as if it had never happened. Why was Yosef so thankful to G-d for causing him to forget that he named his firstborn son to acknowledge this fact? Was it merely because he felt relieved that he no longer experienced the trauma and pain of the past?

Yosef's brothers hated and despised him because they believed that all of his tale bearing to their father was to disenfranchise them from being part of the future of Jewish people. It reached a point that they considered

killing him. It was only because there was a caravan of *Ishmaelites* that was passing by that *Yehudah* suggested that they not should not leave Yosef in the pit to die but rather sell him into slavery.

After being sold as a slave, Yosef experienced many levels of suffering. His greatest pain came from being denied his special relationship with his father *Yaakov*. *Yaakov*'s love for Yosef was greater than for all of his other sons because he saw him as the spiritual heir regarding guaranteeing the spirituality of his family and the Jewish people. The teachings and the spiritual mentoring that Yosef was denied was incalculable.

Yosef was mentored by his father to address all of the spiritual issues of the Jewish people in exile. He understood that his mission, as the son of *Yaakov*, was to prepare Egypt for the Jewish exile that was going to take place. He was to create an insular spiritual environment to guarantee the spiritual and material survival of his family in Egypt.

Had it not been for Yosef's selfless dedication and sacrifice for his family, the Jewish people would not have evolved into a people who would stand at Sinai and declare, "*Naaseh v'nishma* (we will do and we will listen)." It was only because of Yosef, who was uniquely qualified and sensitive to contend with all of the issues of exile, were the Jewish people able to maintain themselves as a spiritual family.

This was similar to what *Yaakov* had done for his family in the home of *Lavan*. All of the *Torah* that *Yaakov* had received from *Shem* and *Aiver*, which was the *Torah* specific to the spiritual challenges that existed outside of the Land of Israel, was transmitted to Yosef. Despite the depravity of Egypt and its pagan culture, Yosef remained unaffected as "*Yosef hatzaddik* (Yosef the devoutly righteous)."

In order for Yosef to assume his role as the sustainer and provider for his family, he could not have any sense of negativity towards his brothers. The hardships and suffering that he had endured due to his brothers' initiative would have hindered and interfered with his mission. The degree of dedication that was needed for Yosef to succeed was overwhelming.

Since Yosef's positive mindset was an imperative for the future of the Jewish people, for the specific purpose of existence (meeting its objective that there should

a Jewish people who would accept the *Torah* at Sinai), G-d caused him to forget all that he had suffered at the hands of his brothers as if it never happened. Yosef, recognizing this fact, acknowledged and declared his thankfulness to G-d for bringing about something that under normal circumstances would have not been possible. Forgetting the trauma and pain that his brothers had brought upon him was the equivalent of a miracle. By naming his firstborn *Menashe*, Yosef declared his thankfulness to G-d for allowing him to be the effective agent to bring about a Jewish people.

King *David* in *Psalms*: "Remove yourself from evil and do good..." Before one begins to engage in good deeds, one must first remove himself from evil so that the good will be effective. Regarding the naming of his firstborn son, Yosef chose the name "*Menashe*" because G-d allowed him to forget the hardships that he had experienced. The naming of *Menashe* was a demonstration of "remove oneself from evil" since this name was given because G-d allowed him to forget something negative.

The naming of Yosef's second son, *Ephraim*, was an act of "do good." Yosef chose the name "*Ephraim*" for his second son because "G-d has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." We see that although *Menashe* was the firstborn (*bechor*), Yaakov put his right hand on the head of Ephraim when it came time to bless them, which demonstrates that Ephraim was more special and had a greater spiritual potential than his brother *Menashe*.

We find something similar regarding *Leah*'s naming of her sons. *Leah* named her firstborn son "*Reuvain*" because "G-d discerned my humiliation," which has a negative connotation. Her younger son was given the name "*Yehudah*" because "Let me gratefully praise G-d." The name "*Yehudah*" connotes something positive. Although *Yehudah* was the younger son, he was more special than *Reuvain* the firstborn, and he had a greater spiritual potential as we see *Yehudah* represents kingship.



Yad Avraham Institute