

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Mikeitz

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Vayeishev: Yisroel's Gift to Yosef was More than a Coat

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The Significance of Specifying Goat's Blood

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The Wine Steward's Role

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Why Yosef was Thrown into the Pit

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When Personal Initiative Belies Cosmic Intervention

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1. Yosef was imprisoned by Potiphar for 10 years.
2. In year 10, 2 ministers of the king were also incarcerated.
3. Yosef was appointed to attend to their needs.
4. One was the wine steward, the other, the baker.
5. They both dreamed the same perturbing dream one night. Yosef offered interpretation.
6. The wine steward would be reinstated in three days and the baker would be hanged.
7. Yosef requested the wine steward remember him, mention his innocence, & how he was sold into slavery.
8. Midrash: because of this request, Yosef spent two more years in prison for a lack of faith. Why?
9. When one sees that it is G-d catapulting him to the top, taking initiative is a lack of faith.
10. When Yosef was sold as a slave to Potiphar, his level of success was extraordinary.
11. When incarcerated, he rose to unofficial warden.
12. As it was clear beyond doubt that G-d was directing Yosef's life, his initiative was considered a lack of faith.

Processing Life Through One's Own Prism

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1. Pharaoh dreamt two dreams that were not interpreted to his satisfaction.
2. The wine steward informs Pharaoh there is someone in prison with him who has the ability to interpret dreams.
3. When he describes Yosef to Pharaoh, he depicts him in the most denigrating context to indicate that he has no qualifications other than interpreting dreams.
4. Each depiction was intended to disqualify him from rising to power.
5. Midrash: we are able to draw from the wine steward's depiction that when evil people do a good deed they cannot do it appropriately.
6. Yosef asked the wine steward to mention him to Pharaoh when reinstated hoping to be released.
7. The wine steward failed Yosef thus causing him to remain in prison an additional two years.
8. The wine steward believed if Yosef rose to power, he would put him to death as an act of revenge.
9. He therefore depicted him as an unqualified person not fit for royalty or any position of leadership for self preservation.
10. Yosef, as a Tzadik, understood his extended incarceration was only due to his own failings.
11. A Tzadik doesn't look for scapegoats to blame because of his belief and faith.
12. An evil person who doesn't have belief, attributes everything to cause and effect to oneself & others.
13. The wine steward being evil processed Yosef's predicament within his own purview thus concluding what he would do under the same circumstances.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Mikeitz



Yosef – The Universal Person

Torah: Yosef was imprisoned in Egypt because he was accused of attempting to rape his master's wife. While in prison, he was given the responsibility to attend to the needs of Pharaoh's wine steward and baker. They both had unusual dreams which needed interpretation. Yosef had interpreted the dream of the wine steward that he would be reinstated to his post and the baker would be killed. Yosef had asked the wine steward to "remember me" and "mention me" to Pharaoh because he was kidnapped from the household of his father.

Midrash: Because Yosef had elicited the assistance of a pagan, he was punished because his initiative was considered a lack of faith. As a result of the two words that Yosef had expressed – "remember me" and "mention me", he remained an additional two years in prison.

Torah: "It happened at the end (*mikeitz*) of two years (to the day): Pharaoh was dreaming..." At that time, Pharaoh had an unusual dream that could not be interpreted by any of his sorcerers. Yosef was summoned from prison to interpret his dream.

Midrash: The term "*mikeitz* (the end)" to mean, "Every thing that emanates from the Mouth of G-d is in an exact/limited measure. The sun from the time it rises to the time that it sets has its limit. Heaven has its limit...The earth has its limit...The redemption from Egypt was set for a specific time... Even Yosef's imprisonment has its limit as its states – 'It happened at the end (*mikeitz*) of two years..."

It is interesting to note that the *Midrash*, in explaining the term "*(mi)keitz* – the end" involve aspects of existence on a universal level or the Jewish people as a whole- the exactness of the length of time the sun

shines every day, the limitation of the earth, and the length of the Egyptian exile. However, the context regarding *Yosef's* imprisonment only has relevance to *Yosef* as an individual. Seemingly, *Yosef's* release from prison is the equivalent of an event that impacts on all existence.

After *Yosef* interpreted Pharaoh's dream at the precise moment of his release from prison, he immediately experienced meteoric rise to power to become the Viceroy of Egypt. In that capacity, *Yosef* dictated and determined all financial and economic issues relating to the future of the Egyptian civilization. As the Viceroy, he assumed the role of "provider" for the Jewish people. He secured and established a location in Egypt, removed from the populous, so that the Jewish people could survive the 210-year exile in Egypt. *Yosef* provided all the material that was needed to create a spiritually insulated environment for them in *Goshen*.

Torah: Before *Yaakov* our Patriarch, was to descend to Egypt along with his family, G-d came to him and said, "Do not be fearful about going down to Egypt." G-d had assured him not to be concerned because the setting that *Yosef* had prepared for the Jewish people would allow them to eventually experience redemption from Egypt. The redemption from Egypt needed to come about at a specific and determined time because the Jewish people needed to go to Sinai and receive the *Torah*.

Although they were initially meant to remain in Egypt for 400 years, the redemption came about after 210-year stay. If the Jews would have remained in Egypt beyond the 210 years, they would have been impacted negatively to such a degree that they would not have merited redemption. Thus, they would have been denied them the Sinai experience. The bondage was thus shortened through Pharaoh's embitterment of their lives to such a degree that their 210-year stay was the equivalent of 400 years.

Gemara in Tractate *Avodah Zorah*: The world was not in a secured state until the Jewish people accepted the *Torah*. Had the Sinai event not transpired, the world would have reverted back to a state of preexistence. *Yosef's* release from prison, at that particular moment, was a necessity. He had to assume the position of Viceroy in order to set in motion all the prerequisites that would ultimately

lead to the redemption from Egypt – thus enabling the Jewish people to receive the *Torah* at Sinai. The term "(mi) keitz – the end" within the context of *Yosef's* release is no less universal than the exodus from Egypt. Without the release of *Yosef* from prison at that particular moment, the Jewish people would have not merited redemption – consequently there would not have been a Sinai event.

Who is the True Agent of G-d

Midrash: "Antoninus, the Roman Emperor had come to Caesarea and had sent for Judah the Prince to meet with him. *Reb Shimon*, his son, and *Reb Chiya* accompanied him to meet with the Emperor. On the way, *Reb Shimon* saw a legion of Roman soldiers who stood impressive and polished. He said to *Reb Chiya*, 'See how fattened are the calves of *Esav (Edom)*.' *Reb Chiya* did not reply. When *Reb Chiya* and *Reb Shimon* had come upon a market, *Reb Chiya* pointed to a basket of grapes and figs that were infested with flies. *Reb Chiya* said to *Reb Shimon*, 'You were impressed by the Roman legions. However you should know, that the Roman legions have no greater value than these flies.'

"*Reb Shimon* recounted his conversation with *Reb Chiya* to his father Judah the Prince. Judah the Prince responded to his son, 'You mean to say that *Reb Chiya* equated the value of the Roman legions to the flies? The Romans, in fact have less value than the flies. The flies have a purpose in existence – that they are the agents of G-d. As it states, '...I (G-d) have sent (upon those who need to be punished) the flies.' However the Roman legions are not the agents of G-d."

It is interesting to note that one may think that many tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people throughout history were by the hands of the agents of G-d, although they chose to be evil. For example, the holocaust only could have happened because G-d allowed the Nazis to bring about the atrocities that they had. They were in effect acting as G-d's agent to punish the Jewish people (although only G-d's knows the failing of the Jewish people).

We see from the *Midrash* that this is not the case. Being the true agent of G-d can only exist within a context in which there is no power of choice. The fly carries out the agency of G-d without question because it has no free will to function independent of the Will of G-d.

Regarding all the enemies of the Jews (Babylonians (destroyed first Temple), Romans (destroyed Second Temple), although G-d allowed them to perpetrate their evil, they were not His agents. They had taken their own initiative in persecuting the Jewish people and bringing about *chilul Hashem* (desecration of G-d).

Gemara: There were four rivers that flowed out of the Garden of Eden. Although the Euphrates was not the largest, it is referred to as “the great river – the Euphrates.” The reason for this special quantification is because of its proximity and association to the Land of Israel. Every species gains its importance because of its level of association with G-d. The fly, although it may seem totally insignificant, in its own right, it has greater value than the Roman legions because it act as G-d’s agent.

Torah: Because *Avraham* had questioned G-d after He had promised the Land of *Canaan* to him and his offspring, it was decreed that the Jewish people would be “strangers in a land that is not their own and the nation that will enslave them will be judged...”

Ramban: “If it was decreed by G-d that the Jewish people should experience exile and bondage, then why should Pharaoh and the Egyptian people be held culpable for enslaving them? They were in fact performing a *mitzvah* – fulfilling the decree of G-d.” *Ramban* cites an opinion which states that the decree of enslavement against the Jewish people did not need to come through the hands of the Egyptians. It was their choice. To this *Ramban* replies, “If it was a *mitzvah* to enslave the Jewish people, the Egyptians would be considered fulfilling G-d’s Decree and it would be admirable that they chose to preempt other nations.

Nebuchadnezzar (the Babylonian Emperor) was told by the prophet to go to the Land of Israel, destroy the Temple, and send the Jewish people into exile. If *Nebuchadnezzar* would have acted in order to fulfill the dictate of the prophet, he would not have been held culpable. He would have been considered as carrying G-d’s order. However, when *Nebuchadnezzar* destroyed the Temple and exiled the Jewish people he did so for his own glory, which was unrelated to acting on behalf of G-d. Because he had acted through his own initiative he is held fully culpable for his actions.

Similarly, the Egyptian people did not enslave the Jews to fulfill G-d’s Edict. They did so because of

their insecurity and hatred of the Jewish people. Thus, they were held fully culpable and punished for their actions. Whenever one acts through his own initiative then the action is attributed to the person. However, when one acts solely based on the word of G-d (*mitzvah l’shmah*), he is classified as acting on behalf of G-d.

The True Yield of Yitzchak’s Harvest

Torah: There was a famine in the Land of *Canaan*. “*Yaakov* had perceived that there were provisions (*shever*) in Egypt...”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: “The term *shever* (provisions) can also mean hope. Through a holy vision *Yaakov* had a sense of hope in Egypt. (*Yosef* may still be alive).”

Midrash: “King *David* writes in *Psalms*, ‘Fortunate is the one who has the G-d of *Yaakov* to assist him.’ Why does King *David* only identify G-d as ‘the G-d of *Yaakov*?’ Why not ‘the G-d of *Avraham*’ or ‘the G-d of *Yitzchak*?’ It is because G-d did not associate Himself with any of the Patriarchs as He had done with *Yaakov*. As the verse states regarding *Yaakov*’s dream on Mt. *Moriah*, ‘...G-d (*neetzav alov*) stood upon him (*Yaakov*).’”

Midrash: “*Reb Semon* states, ‘When does a king go out to see his field? It is not when it is being sowed. It is not when it is being cultivated. It is only when all the harvest has been reaped does the king go out into the field. Similarly, *Avraham* was the one who prepared the field for planting. As the verse states, ‘G-d said to *Avraham*, ‘Walk the length and breadth of the Land...’ *Yitzchak* sowed the field. As the verse states, ‘...*Yitzchak* sowed.’ (The *Torah* tells us that there was a famine in the land where *Yitzchak* lived. Despite the famine, *Yitzchak*’s field yielded a crop that was a hundred fold.) The king did not come until *Yaakov* came into existence who was the equivalent of the harvested wheat. As the verse states, ‘Israel (*Yaakov*) is sanctified to G-d – the choicest of His wheat ...’ Thus, the king (G-d) stood upon *Yaakov*.’”

On a simple level, if one were to read the narrative of *Avraham*’s “walking the length and breadth of the land” and *Yitzchak*’s “sowing” the field during the famine, one would understand the significance of their actions purely for material result. *Avraham* walked to demonstrate his dominion over the land. *Yitzchak* planted the field in *Gerar* in order to harvest a crop.

Torah: Despite the famine, the bounty of his planting was a hundred fold yield of a normal year. Seemingly, G-d's blessing was limited to material abundance. However, we see from the *Midrash* that the value and significance of *Avraham's* and *Yitzchak's* investment in the land extends beyond the material.

Chazal: There is a principle – “The actions of the Patriarchs are a sign for the children.” Meaning, the actions of the Patriarchs set in motion the future events that will be experienced by their descendants.

Ramban: The actions of the Patriarchs were only symbolic to guarantee and set in motion future events to transpire. When the Patriarchs performed certain physical actions, they set in motion spiritual resources that would be available to their descendants.

Midrash: Because *Avraham* went down to Egypt, the Jewish people also went to Egypt. Because *Avraham* left Egypt with great wealth, the Jewish people also left Egypt with great wealth. Because *Sorah*, our Matriarch was not defiled by Pharaoh (the Egyptian king), the Jewish women throughout the bondage in Egypt were not defiled by the Egyptians. These examples are within the context of the principle, “The actions of the Patriarchs are a sign for the children.”

Chazal: *Yaakov* was the most special of the Patriarchs. One would think that with a father such as *Yitzchak* and a grandfather like *Avraham*, it is understood that *Yaakov* would be the most special. However, we see from the *Midrash* that it was only because *Avraham* and *Yitzchak* had performed specific physical actions that activated spiritual forces which were made available for *Yaakov* to develop to be the most special Patriarch– the “choicest of His wheat.” When *Avraham* walked the length of the land and *Yitzchak* sowed the field, their intent was to accomplish something beyond a material result.

The ramifications of *Avraham's* walking and *Yitzchak's* sowing activated a spiritual yield that manifested itself in *Yaakov*, our Patriarch. *Yaakov's* potential for development was only as a result of what his antecedents had provided for him to draw upon. With this we can understand why King *David* identifies G-d as “the G-d of *Yaakov*” – it is because *Yaakov* is the spiritual yield of the efforts of *Avraham* and *Yitzchak*. It is true that *Yaakov's* personal spiritual achievement was due to his own initiative/proper choices throughout his life; however, the context

and potential of those choices was due to the efforts of his father and grandfather.

Maintaining One's Focus

Gemara in Tractate *Shabbos*: “What is *Chanukah*?” The *Gemara* cites a *beraisa* which states, “On the 25th day of the month of *Kislev* the days of *Chanukah* begin. There are eight days of *Chanukah*. One is not permitted to deliver a eulogy and one is not permitted to fast. When the Greeks entered into the Sanctuary they contaminated all of the oil. When the *Chashmonaim* gained the upper hand and defeated the Greeks, they searched and only found one vial of pure oil bearing the seal of the High Priest. There was only sufficient oil to burn one day; however, a miracle occurred and they were able to light from it for eight days. The following year, they designated it as a holiday that is celebrated through praise and thanks (to G-d).”

When the *Gemara* answers the question, “what is *Chanukah*”, why does it cite the beginning of the *beraisa* which states the prohibitions regarding eulogies and fasting? Seemingly, this has no relevance to the question. The *Gemara* should have only cited the part of the *beraisa* which tells us the extent of the holiday (eight days) and the historical background which recounts why the holiday was established.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: “What is the basis for reciting a blessing before one partakes of food or drink?” The *Gemara* responds with the concept of *Kal V'Chomer* (logical deduction – which is one of the 13 methodologies which were ordained to *Moshe* at Sinai to interpret the Written Law). Just as the *Torah* obligates one to acknowledge G-d after one is sated after eating (as it states – “You have eaten and have been sated and you shall bless Your G-d”), is it not logical to say that one must acknowledge G-d before one partakes of food when he is in a state of hunger?”

Gemara: “The reason one recites a blessing before partaking of food is based on the principle that one who benefits from this world without a blessing is considered as if he had benefited from something that was consecrated.” When one recites the blessing (acknowledging G-d as the source of the food item), he releases the food from its consecrated status.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk *z'tl*: The blessing that one recites before eating is only of *Rabbinic* nature while the after blessing (*birchas hamazon*) is a *Torah* dictate. If the obligation of reciting a pre-blessing is derived through the principle of *Kal V'Chomer* then the pre-blessing should be classified as a *Torah* obligation and not *Rabbinic*. The *Kal V'Chomer* employed initially to establish the obligation of the pre-blessing has a fallacy in its reasoning. The reason the *Torah* obligates one to recite a blessing after one is sated is because one tends to forget G-d when one becomes complacent and secure.

Verse: "When *Yeshurun* (the Jewish People) become fat (financially secure) they bolt (from G-d)." When one is in a sated state, he must immediately acknowledge the source of that satiation and complacency. Thus, the *Torah* requires one to immediately to recite the after blessing upon being sated. However, when one is in a state of hunger and feels in need, one tends to have greater clarity and recognizes the source of his blessing. He is fully cognizant that he is in need of G-d's kindness. Thus, the *Torah* does not require one to recite the pre-blessing before eating.

In order for one to recognize and be fully appreciative of G-d's Kindness, one needs to be focused. Although fasting and saying eulogies have great value in their own right; however, because they have no relevance to the event of the day/*Chanukah* they are considered a distraction. Thus, before discussing the extent of the *Chanukah* obligation and its historical background, which is the basis to give thanks and praise to G-d, the *Gemara* presents the beginning of the *beraisa* that communicates what one must not do to be distracted.

The *Chofetz Chaim z'tl* would send his students to surrounding villages in the proximity of Radin (his community) every *Shabbos* in order to teach them about Judaism. He instructed them to present and elucidate only one central point per *Shabbos*. Because if one presents multiple points, regardless of the capability of the lecturer to transmit cogent concepts, he would not sufficiently impact upon the listeners. One point will detract from the other. Therefore, the *Gemara* needs to instruct the Jew to be fully focused on the issues of *Chanukah* and not be distracted even for something of great value such as eulogy and fasting.

The Primary Value of a Revealed Miracle

During the holiday of *Chanukah* there is a special insertion (*al hanissim*) in the Amidah (silent prayer) which is recited three times a day. This insertion recounts the miracles pertaining to *Chanukah* that G-d had performed on behalf of the Jewish people. The text of *al hanissim* reads, "...You (G-d) in Your great mercy stood up for them (the Jewish people) in the time of their distress...You judged their judgment... You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak , the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the wanton into the hands of the diligent students of Your *Torah*...."

In recounting the miracle of *Chanukah* it is understandable that the *al hanissim* mentions the "strong into the hands of the weak" and "the many into the hands of the few" because this was the miracle that had transpired. Naturally one's numbers and physical strength determine victory. What relevance does "the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous etc..." have to the miracle of *Chanukah*?

In order to merit G-d's miracle of delivering the "strong into the hands of the weak" and the "many into the hands of the few" the Jewish people needed to have a degree of worthiness. Before stating the miracle, the *al hanissim* relates two aspects of G-d's involvement- firstly, G-d stood up for the Jewish people in the time of their distress and secondly, He judged their judgment.

The first aspect is factually what G-d had done and the second is the basis for His response. Meaning, the reason the Jewish people merited G-d's protection was because of His judgment (of the Greeks). It was because the Greeks were impure, wicked, and wanton that G-d delivered them into the hands of the pure, righteous, and *Torah* scholars. Thus the *al hanissim* not only relates the miracle that transpired on *Chanukah* it also tells us the basis for the miracle.

The *al hanissim* continues: "For Yourself You made a great and holy Name in Your world, and for Your people Israel you worked a great victory..." The primary value of the miraculous victory of *Chanukah* over the Greeks was *kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of G-d's Name). The secondary benefit was the salvation of

the Jewish people. G-d demonstrated to the world that good dominates evil and the pure dominate the impure. Those who adhere to His *Torah* will not fall into the hands of the wanton. This was a *kiddush Hashem*. Had the conflict between the Greeks and the Jews simply been a battle between two peoples who were of similar beliefs, ethics, and values, there would be no *kiddush Hashem* as a result of either party being victorious. However, because the Jewish people were righteous and pure G-d brought about victory in order to establish His Name in the world.



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