

# Launching The Destiny Of The Jewish People

## Weekly Torah Video & Audio Series: Parshas Vayeishev

### Torah Bullets™: The Worthiness of Achieving Clarity

1. Midrash: Because Yaakov wanted to be in a state of tranquility the strife of Yosef was ignited.
2. Why the claim against Yaakov for wanting a respite from his sufferings and have a tranquil moment?
3. Rashi: It is not enough what the righteous have awaiting them for them in the world to come they also want tranquility in this world.
4. Although one's contribution to a mitzvah is only initiative despite this one receives full credit for the mitzvah.
5. Mishnah: One's reward is determined by one's pain and degree of effort.
6. If not for the struggle aspect of a mitzvah the mitzvah is not commensurate with the reward: the return is endlessly greater than the effort.
7. Since it appears that reward for a mitzvah is basically a gift, G-d creates a context of difficulty.
8. Yaakov's merit did not protect his children from struggles among themselves.
9. Yosef: The most beautiful person to ever subjugate the physical to the spiritual.
10. Yosef functioned as a spiritual being regardless of the setting & dictates of the material.

### Audio Series

#### Impulsivity Nearly Upends Destiny

The patriarchs are the Location of the Divine Presence.

#### A Painful Lesson Well Learned

Reuvein agonized for the rest of his life his impulsivity. He learned his lesson well and did not allow Yosef to be killed.

#### Maintaining Objectivity When The Going Gets Tough

Intense hate disrupts rational thinking.

## Weekly Torah Commentaries Series: Parshas Vayeishev

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#### Minimizing the Desecration of G-d's Name

The Midrash cites a verse, 'How great are Your accomplishments, G-d. Your thoughts are profound.' What is the meaning of 'Your thoughts are profound?' Reb Yochanon says, 'There is a profound thought that was brought about as a result of the Covenant Between the Parts. G-d had said to Avraham, **'You shall know that your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not their own. There they will be enslaved and afflicted for 400 years.'**

If the offspring of Avraham were destined to be strangers and slaves in a land that was not their own, then they would have needed to be brought to that location bound in shackles. G-d wanted Yaakov and his family to go to Egypt in an honorable manner. Therefore, He devised a plan and caused Yaakov to have an intense love for his son Yosef. As a result of this love, Yosef's brothers hated him and sold him as a slave to the Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt. Ultimately, Yaakov and his children went down to Egypt because of Yosef as it states, **'Yosef was taken down to Egypt.'**

Yaakov and his family were in Canaan. If the story would have not unfolded as it did, they would have been forced to go to Egypt bound in shackles because they would have not gone of their own volition. G-d therefore devised a plan so that their descent to Egypt should be within a glorious context to be reunited with Yosef who had become the Viceroy of Egypt.

#### Why was it of the utmost necessity to descend to Egypt in an honorable state?

Yaakov our Patriarch was the personification of Torah. The Torah tells us that after transporting his family across the river, Yaakov returned to retrieve his small earthenware vessels. The Torah states, **"Yaakov was left alone (levado) and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn."** Chazal explain that just as G-d Himself is referred to as **"levado - alone/unique,"** as the verse states, **"G-d is exalted (levado) - at a level unto Himself,"** so too is Yaakov referred to as **"levado."** Yaakov is G-d's representation in existence. He is at a level of spirituality unto himself. Had Yaakov been brought to Egypt bound in shackles together with his family, the Tribes of G-d (Shivtei Ka), it would have been a disgrace and a desecration of G-d's name. Therefore, G-d orchestrated a plan that brought Yaakov to Egypt with honor and glory. While in Egypt he and his family were esteemed and treated by Pharaoh as royalty. Before Yaakov passed away, he adjured Yosef to not bury him in Egypt because he was concerned that the Egyptian people would deify him. From this we are able to understand to what degree Yaakov was revered and esteemed. Yaakov was perceived by the Egyptian people as a person of special spiritual distinction. This perception of Yaakov was a sanctification of G-d's name.

Although the Jewish people were ultimately enslaved in Egypt, the bondage did not commence until after Yosef and the entire generation that had gone down to Egypt had passed away. The subsequent generations had no semblance of their forbearers since they did not follow the way of G-d. They in fact ceased to circumcise themselves so

that they would be valued by Egyptian society. G-d's holiness and its representation through Yaakov's family were thus denigrated in Egypt.

Although Yaakov and his family coming to Egypt in a state of glory and prominence was a positive result of Yosef's brothers selling him to slavery, nevertheless, it ultimately resulted in something extremely negative.

Chazal tell us that the Ten Martyrs, who were the ten most special Torah sages (who had lived in the same generation since the giving of Torah at Sinai), were murdered by the Romans in the cruelest manner to atone for the sin of Yosef's ten brothers selling him into slavery. These Torah sages were spiritual giants and the leaders of the Jewish people. The ten martyrs went to their death and gave their lives to sanctify G-d's name. However, the Romans who were the descendants of Esav demonstrated to the world that "the hands are the hands of Esav." The Edomites demonstrated their upper hand over the children of Yaakov, which resulted in a desecration of His name.

Despite the end result, Yaakov and his family could not be brought to Egypt bound in shackles because that would have not allowed the prominence of Torah to be established, which Yaakov represented.

### The Value of Appreciating One's Failing

The Torah tells us that after Yosef had shared his (prophetic) dreams with his brothers, they wrongly suspected that his intent was to undermine their relationship with Yaakov. They despised him to the point that they chose to remove themselves from his presence. When Yosef was sent by his father to see how they were faring, his brothers attacked and wanted to kill him. The Torah states, "**Reuvain heard (what his brothers were planning), and he rescued him (Yosef) from their hand; he said, 'We will not strike him mortally!...Shed no blood! Throw him into this pit in the desert...intending to rescue him from their hand, to return him to his father.'**" The Torah attests to the fact that Reuvain's intent was not to leave Yosef to die in the pit, but rather to return at a later time and rescue him.

Sforno explains the verse "**...and he rescued him from their hand.**" Acting upon a sudden impulse can bring about a wrong (tragedy) that can never be corrected such as the incident of Reuvain and Bilhah, as it states in the verse when Yaakov had quantified Reuvain at the time of the blessings, "**(he) was impulsive as water.**" Reuvain understood that his brothers were acting impulsively by planning to kill Yosef. It was a decision that was made without any consideration for the future ramifications. Had this tragedy occurred, it would have never been able to be corrected. Reuvain understood the necessity to intercede immediately on Yosef's behalf to prevent his brothers from acting impulsively. Reuvain had done so because he himself was victimized through his own personal impulsive behavior.

After Rachel, the primary Matriarch, passed away, Yaakov had taken his bed from the tent of Rachel and placed it into the tent of Bilhah, the maidservant of Rachel. Reuvain, feeling slighted, chose to take his father's bed and place it in the tent of Leah without consulting with his father Yaakov. The act of moving Yaakov's bed from the location that he had chosen it to be without his permission is considered to be such a grave sin that the Torah equates it to Reuvain cohabiting with his father's concubine. When Yaakov blessed his children before his death, he said to Reuvain, "**...impulsive as water you cannot be foremost, because you mounted your father's bed...**" Consequently, because

of the negative characteristic that he possessed, Reuvain forfeited his birthright, the priesthood, and his leadership position as king.

Although Reuvain had forfeited his inalienable rights as the first born because of his impulsivity, he learned a valuable lesson from his loss. He understood the ramifications and consequences of impulsive behavior. Had Reuvain not interceded to prevent his brothers' decision to kill Yosef, there would not have been a Jewish people. The value of Reuvain's irretrievable loss brought about the ultimate result and accomplishment. There is a Jewish people, which is comprised of twelve tribes because Reuvain had internalized with absolute clarity the consequence of his brothers' behavior. Thus, the Jewish people exist as G-d's nation because of Reuvain's initial failing.

### G-d Does Not Abandon the Tzaddik

The Torah tells us that before Yosef was sold into slavery by his brothers, they cast him into a pit to die. They believed that the objective of his tale bearing to their father was to discredit them in his eyes and to ultimately bring about their destruction.

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, "It is to infer that although the pit had no water, it did contain snakes and scorpions." Despite the fact that he was thrown into a snake pit, Yosef emerged unharmed because G-d had performed a miracle on his behalf.

One would think that after witnessing their brother's miraculous emergence from the snake pit, it should have been a confirmation to them that Yosef was indeed devoutly righteous. His dreams were truly prophetic and not delusions of grandeur. However, Yosef's brothers did not seem to be impressed by his survival. They sold him into slavery the moment the opportunity presented itself. Why didn't they recognize that Yosef was indeed a tzaddik who merited to be saved by G-d?

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

After Yosef was taken out of the pit, his brothers sold him into slavery for twenty silver coins. The Torah attests to the fact that Yosef possessed exceptional beauty, intelligence, and capability. If Yosef was so unique in all of his qualities, why was such a gifted person sold for only twenty silver coins? The Midrash tells us that when Yosef was put into the pit and he saw the snakes and scorpions, he was traumatized to such a degree that he became as white as a corpse. Therefore, when he was removed from the pit, he did not have any semblance of anything of value. Therefore, he was sold for only a pittance.

The Torah describes the unusual merchandise and wares that were being transported by the merchants who bought him as a slave. The verse states, "**A caravan of Ishmaelites from Gilead, and their camels were bearing spices, and balsam, and birthwort.**" Rashi, in his commentary, cites the Midrash which asks, "Why did the Torah reveal the nature of the merchandise that was being transported? To make known the reward of the righteous for it is not common for Arabs to

transport anything but naphtha and foul smelling resins, but because Yosef was a tzaddik, G-d caused that the cargo being transported was spices that emitted a (pleasant) fragrance so that he should not be harmed by the noxious odor.”

Yosef was being transported to live his life as a slave in a foreign location. How is experiencing pleasant aromas at this bleak moment considered to be a “reward” for him?

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

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

The blessing of the righteous in the Amidah (Silent Prayer) states, “On the righteous, on the devout...Blessed are You Hashem, Mainstay and Assurance of the righteous.” Vilna Gaon explains that G-d allows the tzaddik to have faith despite the trials and tribulations that he may face in his lifetime. Although the tzaddik is tested by G-d to a greater degree than anyone else, G-d Himself allows the tzaddik to see glimpses of the true reality of Divine Providence. Yosef had been greatly frightened by his experience in the snake pit; however, by allowing him to survive, He communicated to him that all would be good. After being removed from the pit, G-d reiterated this message again by exposing him to the fragrant spices when he was sold to the Arabs rather than exposing him to foul smelling odors. Yosef understood that although the present is uncertain, the future will reveal G-d’s plan for him.

## Yaakov’s Refusal to Be Consoled

The Torah tells us that after Yosef’s brothers sold him into slavery, they took his tunic and dipped it into goat’s blood. They brought it to their father Yaakov and said, **“We found this; identify (it), if you please: Is it your son’s tunic or not?”** Yaakov recognized it and said, **“My son’s tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Yosef has surely been torn to bits!”** Yaakov rent his garments, put on sackcloth, and began to mourn and grieve for his son Yosef. Despite all the attempts of his children to console him, the Torah states, **“He refused to be consoled.”**

Rashi cites Chazal who explain that since Yosef was in fact still alive, Yaakov could not be consoled because “one who is alive is not forgotten

by the heart.” The Gemara in Tractate Pesachim tells us that one of the gifts that G-d givesto humanity is the ability to forget one’s beloved after he passes away. If one would not be able to forget the pain of losing a loved one, it would be virtually impossible to survive. However, since Yosef was still alive (although it was unknown to Yaakov), Yaakov could not naturally forget him.

However, it seems from the words of the text that Yaakov consciously **“refused to be consoled.”** His lack of ability to be consoled was a deliberate rejection of those who attempted to comfort him.

Sforno explains, “Yaakov did not want to hear words of consolation so as not to remove the feeling of worry in his heart.” What was the worry in his heart that he refused to forget?

Chazal tell us that Yaakov knew from G-d that if any of his children should die during his lifetime, he would be destined for eternal punishment in gehenom. If Yosef had been killed, it was an indication to Yaakov that he had failed in his spiritual objective and responsibility. He was supposed to be the Patriarch to father the twelve tribes of G-d. Without Yosef, there would be no Jewish people and consequently, no future for existence.

Yaakov refused to forget or to be comforted because he internalized the tragic ramifications of Yosef’s death. He believed that since he had failed in his responsibility as Patriarch he must repent and atone for his irreparable failing. The only way that Yaakov could consider the need to do proper repentance was to maintain the tragic loss of Yosef in his state of consciousness.

King David writes in Psalms regarding his own personal sin, “My sin is continuously before me.” King David never lost focus of his spiritual failing and therefore maintained an ongoing cognizance of the need to repent.

The Torah states, **“Yaakov had said, ‘For I (Yaakov) will go down to the grave mourning for my son (Yosef).’ And his father bewailed him...”** Rashi explains that **“And his father bewailed him”** is referring to Yitzchak our Patriarch, the father of Yaakov. Yitzchak cried on behalf of his son because he saw Yaakov in such distress and grief. However, Yitzchak did not mourn for Yosef himself because he was aware that he was actually alive. Sforno explains that Yitzchak cried for his son because Yaakov was denied the ability to prophesize due to his state of grief and mourning.

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra tells us that the Divine Presence only rests upon one who is in a state of joy and not in a state of melancholy. Yitzchak was pained not because Yaakov was suffering, but rather because Yaakov was denied the infinite value of G-d communicating to him during this period of time.

Rashi cites Chazal who ask, “Why is the portion concerning the separation of Yehudah from his brothers juxtaposed to the portion concerning the sale of Yosef and the subsequent grieving of Yaakov for his son? To teach us that Yehudah was no longer valued by his brothers thus causing him to be ineffective.” Yehudah was no longer seen as a leader among his brothers since he was rejected by them because they believed that Yehudah was the cause of their father’s distress and grief. They said to Yehudah, ‘You told us that we should sell him (into

slavery). Had you told us to return him to our father Yaakov, we would have listened to you.” This rejection forced Yehudah to go away from his brothers.

The brothers of Yosef never imagined that this loss would have caused Yaakov to enter into an inconsolable state. They believed that after time and proper consolation, his grief would pass. They did not understand that Yaakov would reject any degree of consolation, thus not allowing him to dismiss the worry in his heart. Only Yaakov could truly understand what it meant to fail in establishing the eternal people, the tribes of G-d.

### **Yaakov’s Level of Accomplishment** (from *Vayishlach*)

When Yaakov was returning from the home of Lavan, he sent agents to Esav his brother with a communication stating, **“I have sojourned with Lavan (im Lavan garti) and lingered until now. I have acquired oxen and donkeys, sheep, servants, and maidservants.”**

Rashi explains that the word **“garti”** is numerically the equivalent of **“taryag,”** which corresponds to the 613 mitzvos of the Torah. Yaakov was communicating to Esav that although he had been associated with Lavan for a period of twenty years, his spirituality had not been diminished. He had remained spiritually unscathed despite the fact that the community of Padan-Aram was the antithesis of holiness.

Reb Meir Simcha asks, “If in fact Yaakov did possess camels as part of his wealth, as we see from the gift that he had sent to Esav, why does the Torah not delineate among his wealth the camels? Why are only the oxen and donkeys mentioned?”

The Torah tells us in the portion of Shemini that in order for an animal to be classified as “kosher” it must have two signs. Kosher species of animal have split hooves and chew their cud. The Torah concludes, **“In order to differentiate between what is impure and pure.”** Based on the two identifying signs that are stated by the Torah it is obvious and clear which species are kosher and which are not. If so, then why does the Torah use the expression **“to differentiate”** between what is impure and pure? Seemingly, the term “discern” should be used regarding a context that is not so obvious and clear.

Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the Torah is addressing the difference between what is considered properly ritual slaughter and what is not. If a kosher species is slaughtered 50%, it is considered to be a “carcass” and it is impure. If it is slaughtered even slightly more than 50%, it is considered to be a valid slaughter and it is pure. It is in this area that one needs to “discern.” It is not regarding the difference between the ox and the donkey where the difference is obvious what is kosher and what is not.

Reb Meir Simcha explains that Yaakov specifically delineated the “ox and donkey” and not the camel because the camel possess one of the signs of being a kosher species (chews its cud). He communicated to Esav that just as the ox is distinctively pure because it possesses two signs and the donkey is without question not kosher because it possesses none of the signs, so too is his pristine spiritual condition clear and distinct. Yaakov’s spirituality had not been tainted to any degree.

Although Yaakov had communicated to Esav that he observed all of the mitzvos in the house of Lavan despite the evil influences, he wanted Esav to understand and appreciate that his reverence of G-d was not diminished to any degree. He was as removed from impurity as the status of the status of the ox has no relevance to the status of the donkey. By informing Esav of his untainted spiritual state, Yaakov was telling him that their father’s blessing was still intact and thus effective. He was therefore not vulnerable to Esav.

When the agents that Yaakov had sent returned to him, they said, **“We met with your brother, Esav.”** Although outwardly he presented himself as Yaakov’s brother, it was important to understand and realize that he was still “Esav” who opposes Yaakov’s existence.

The Gemara in Tractate Nidah tells us that when the fetus is in the womb, an angel teaches the child the Torah in its entirety. Before birth, the child is in a spiritual environment that is the equivalent of the world to come. Despite this fact, Chazal tell us that when Yaakov was in the womb of his mother Rivka our Matriarch, when she would pass before the study hall of Shem and Aiver, he would bolt to try to escape.

If the womb is the equivalent of the Holy of Holies and his teacher was an angel, why would Yaakov want to leave it? It is because he shared the womb with his brother Esav. He needed to flee even from the Holy of Holies so that he should not be exposed to any level of impurity.

