

# NO ROOM TO RATIONALIZE WHEN THE EVALUATION IS JUSTICE

## YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Vayeitzei

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

**And Yaakov Leaves to Find Woman of Caliber as His Wife**

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**Why a People are Compared to Dust**

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**The Four Exiles - Ascending & Descending the Ladder**

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**Measure for Measure - Respecting One's Parents**

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**A Pledge Never be Abandoned**

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**Vaporizing the Untenable to Assure the Perpetuity of Existence**

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1. Yaakov leaves Beersheva to go to Charan.
2. Chazal: When a devoutly righteous person leaves a location, its splendor & beauty depart with him.
3. This is extrapolated from the words "Yaakov left Beersheva".
4. Although Yitzchok & Rifka remained his absence made its mark.
5. He fathered the twelve tribes; his absence was more greatly felt.
6. Was it that the 12 tribes were only a consequence of Yaakov's dimension?
7. Yaakov: "Man of The Tent (of Torah)"; was a personification of the Torah.
8. Midrash: Avraham was thrown into the fiery kiln: the heavenly angels objected to G-d's saving him.
9. "A man whose descendants are going to be evil how do you save him?"
10. G-d: He will have a grandson Yaakov in whose merit he will be saved.
11. Prophets: The house of Yaakov redeemed Avraham.
12. Gemara: "I've created an evil inclination; I've created Torah as its antidote."
13. Midrash: As long as the voice is the voice of Yaakov, the hands can not be the hands of Esav.
14. The counterbalance to Esav is Yaakov.
15. Yaakov will counter all of Avraham's evil descendants (Yishmael, Edom).
16. His absence was felt there because only he could counter the evil of Esav.



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## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Vayeitzei

**NO ROOM  
TO RATIONALIZE  
WHEN THE  
EVALUATION  
IS JUSTICE**

### Yaakov, Through the Millennia of Exile

*Torah:* When Yaakov our Patriarch saw Rachel, “Then Yaakov...raised his voice and wept.”

*Rashi citing Chazal:* The reason Yaakov wept was because he saw through his Divine Vision that Rachel would not be buried with him (in the Tomb of Machpelah). Another explanation cited by Rashi is that Yaakov wept because he came to Rachel empty-handed (without any gifts).

*Midrash:* “Yaakov had said, ‘Eliezer the servant of my grandfather (Avraham) came with a nose ring, bracelets, and delicacies in his hand as gifts for Rivka and I did not.’ It is because Yaakov was pursued by Elifaz, the son of Esav, who wished to kill him in order to fulfill the dictate of his father. Since Elifaz was raised by his grandfather Yitzchak, he withdrew his hand and did not kill Yaakov. Elifaz said to Yaakov, ‘If I do not fulfill by father’s dictate to kill you, how shall I fulfill my obligation to honor my father?’ Yaakov said to

him, ‘Take all of my possessions. A poor person is the equivalent of one who is dead.’”

Therefore, Yaakov had given all of his wealth to Elifaz in order to be spared. As a result of this encounter, he did not have anything to give to Rachel. Why did Yaakov weep regarding the inability to give gifts to Rachel, our Matriarch? Regarding the nose ring and bracelets that were given by Eliezer to Rivka, our Matriarch, the Torah identifies the weight of each of the pieces of jewelry. The Torah identifies the weight of the nose ring as “Bekka.”

*Rashi citing Chazal:* The weight of the nose ring “Bekka” is an allusion to the half-silver coin (*machtzis haShekel*) which would be given in the future by the Jewish people for the sake of purchasing communal offerings. (The communal offerings atoned for the Jewish people). The two bracelets are identified by the Torah as “two bracelets, their weight ten in gold.” This alludes to the Ten Commandments that were inscribed on Two Tablets that were attached and of



identical dimension. When *Eliezer* had given these gifts to *Rivka*, the future Matriarch of the Jewish people, he established and secured these two spiritual elements on behalf of the Jewish people.

*Yaakov*, our Patriarch, who fathered the twelve tribes understood that he must establish and secure a foundation that would guarantee the greatest potential for the spiritual advancement of the Jewish people. Thus, when he came upon *Rachel*, who was destined to be his primary Matriarch, he understood because of the loss of his wealth that he was not able to establish the necessary elements for the future of the Jewish people. In addition, he could not reinforce what *Eliezer* had set into motion through the gifts of jewelry that were given to *Rivka*, our Matriarch. *Yaakov* wept because he had understood that the spiritual future of the Jewish people was compromised because he was not able to present *Rachel* with these necessary elements.

*Elifaz*, the son of *Esav*, confronted *Yaakov* after he had fled his parents' home. After *Elifaz* had taken the wealth of *Yaakov*, he chose to spend fourteen years in the *Yeshiva* of *Shem v'Aiver*. Only after spending fourteen years studying *Torah* in this *Yeshiva*, did he continue on to the house of *Lavan*.

If *Yaakov* had already spent sixty-three years dedicated and immersed to *Torah* study, why did he need to study an additional fourteen years in the *Yeshiva* of *Shem v'Aiver*? It was because he needed to study the *Torah* that was relevant to confronting all of the issues and influences of exile. Initially, *Yaakov* did not believe that he would need to spend any significant amount of time outside of the Land of Israel. *Yaakov* believed that he would only need to negotiate for the hand of *Rachel* and return home in a short while, as his mother had instructed him.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: When *Eliezer* went to seek out a wife for *Yitzchak*, he merited the miracle of "*kfitzas ha'derech* (shortening of distance). A journey that would have normally taken weeks, *Eliezer* traveled in less than a day.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Chullin* tells us that *Yaakov* in fact merited a similar miracle. Just as *Avraham* understood that the hand of *Rivka* could not be negotiated unless *Yitzchak* possessed an enormous amount of wealth, so too did *Yitzchak* understand that *Yaakov* needed a great amount of wealth in order to negotiate with *Lavan* for the hand of one of his daughters. They understood

with absolute clarity that without this degree of wealth, *Yaakov* would be forced to remain with *Lavan* for an extended period of time. *Yaakov's* spirituality would thus be put into jeopardy. However, because *Yaakov* had forfeited his wealth to *Elifaz*, in order to be spared, he understood that he would be forced to remain for an extended time outside of the confines of the Holy Land. For this reason, *Yaakov* chose to spend fourteen years in the *Yeshiva* of *Shem v'Aiver* in order to fortify his spirituality to be able to contend with exile.

*Yaakov* is depicted as the Patriarch of exile. It is because he needed to be in exile for an extended period of time, he addressed all of the spiritual issues with which he would be confronted. *Yaakov* prepared himself and inculcated within his being all of the elements and safeguards that are necessary to survive exile.

*Chazal*: Exile is compared to the nighttime period. The experience of exile is a distortion of truth. Because of a lack of clarity, one has great difficulty to discern between right and wrong. This is similar to the nighttime period, during which one experiences difficulty in discerning which path to take due to the lack of illumination. Each of the Patriarchs enacted one of the three prayer services.

*Yaakov* had enacted the *Maariv* service, which is a nighttime service. It is only because of what *Yaakov* had developed within himself that the Jewish people are able to maintain their spirituality despite the influences of exile. Had *Elifaz* not taken *Yaakov's* wealth he would not have needed to study the additional fourteen years in the *Yeshiva* of *Shem v'Aiver*. It would not have been necessary to address all the issues of exile because he would have returned immediately to the Holy Land.

Consequently, the Jewish people, who were destined to go into exile, would not have been able to survive. G-d, therefore, orchestrated events so that *Yaakov* should be forced to develop this aspect of his spirituality. It came about through *Yaakov* relinquishing all of his worldly possessions to *Elifaz*, thus causing him to prepare for the inevitable exile that he would be forced to experience.

## **The Unfathomable Potency of Torah**

*Midrash*: *Yaakov* was confronted by *Elifaz*, the son of *Esav*. He was sent by his father to kill *Yaakov*. Rather

than killing *Yaakov*, *Elifaz* was told by him to take all of his wealth. By doing so, he would be considered to be the equivalent of being killed. As it is stated, "A poor person is the equivalent of one who is dead." Thus, *Elifaz* was able to fulfill his father's dictate without actually taking *Yaakov's* life.

Because *Yaakov* had forfeited the wealth that his parents had given him to negotiate for the hand of one of *Lavan's* daughters, he was forced to remain in the house of *Lavan* for many years in order to pay for his wives. Although *Esav* knew that *Yaakov* was alive in the house of *Lavan*, after *Elifaz* had taken his wealth, he did not pursue him to avenge his taking of the blessings. If he had vowed to kill *Yaakov* at the time he had taken the blessing, why did *Esav* not pursue *Yaakov* and kill him in the house of *Lavan*. *Esav* allowed *Yaakov* to remain with *Lavan* his uncle for twenty years.

If *Yaakov* had not given his wealth to *Elifaz* in order to save his life, he could have negotiated with *Lavan* for the hand of his daughter, as *Eliezer* had done for *Rivka*, and return home after a short period of time. However, he had gone to the home of his uncle in a state of destitution, as the verse states, "With my walking stick I crossed the Jordan." *Esav* understood that *Yaakov* would remain for an extended period of time in an environment that was the antithesis of spirituality and be associated with a person who personified evil and depravity. He believed that with time, *Yaakov's* spirituality would be undermined and diminished, thus rendering the blessing of *Yitzchak* to *Yaakov* null and void.

The prerequisite for *Yitzchak's* blessing to be effective was that *Yaakov* needed to maintain his spiritual state at the most advanced level. When *Yaakov* would fail, the blessing would automatically transfer to *Esav*. Therefore, there was no need to pursue *Yaakov* at the house of *Lavan* because it was inevitable that *Esav* would regain the birthright.

*Yaakov*, being depicted by the *Torah* as, "the perfect man who dwelled in the tent (of *Torah*)" is a confirmation by G-d that he personified the *Torah* itself. In order to appreciate the power of *Torah* one must be immersed in its study continuously, as *Yaakov* had been. When *Yaakov* was returning from the house of *Lavan*, he communicated to his brother *Esav* saying, "I have sojourned with *Lavan* (*im Lavan gartie*) and lingered until now."

*Rashi*: The word "*gartie*" 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 for a period of twenty years with *Lavan*, his spirituality had not been diminished. He had remained spiritually unscathed although he was in an environment that was the antithesis of what *Yaakov* represented.

*Yaakov*, because of his dimension of *Torah*, was able to create an insular environment to protect himself and his family from spiritual demise. *Esav*, who had no relevance to spirituality, was not able to fathom the power of *Torah*. He could not appreciate that *Torah* had the ability to dispel and incapacitate any influences that are contrary to the spiritual. Because of this lack of understanding and appreciation of *Torah*, *Esav* did not attempt to kill *Yaakov* while he was with *Lavan* because he believed that he would be spiritually doomed.

*Rambam* in *The Laws of Torah Study*: "Although there is a *mitzvah* to study *Torah* during the daytime and nighttime period, the majority of one's study should be during the nighttime period... Our Rabbis have said, 'The song of *Torah* is only in the night.' As *Jeremiah* the prophet states in *Eicha*, 'Rise up and sing out in the night.'" Thus, the song of the Jewish people is the study of the *Torah*, which should be studied during the nighttime period.

*Chazal*: Exile is compared to the nighttime period. The experience of exile is a distortion of truth. One has great difficulty to discern one's proper direction because of the confusion that engulfs one in exile. Without the study of *Torah*, the pitfalls of life and the machinations of the evil inclination are not obvious. It is only through the study of *Torah*, which illuminates the darkness, can the Jew differentiate between truth and falsehood. *Jeremiah* had witnessed the destruction of the Temple and the Jewish people being taken to the Babylonian exile. He thus instructed them that the only antidote for their predicament is the song of the Jew, which is the *Torah* itself.

## Good and Evil on Equal Footing

*Torah*: *Yaakov* our Patriarch had a prophetic dream when he had slept on the Temple Mount. He had seen angels ascending and descending a ladder that extended into heaven. Each of the angels that ascended and descended the ladder represented the archangels of the various civilization that were going to enslave the Jewish people in the future.

*Midrash: "Rav Shmuel Bar Nachman says, 'These are the angels of the nations of the world. Yaakov was shown the archangel of Babylon. He ascended 70 rungs of the ladder and then he descended. (Indicating that the Babylonian exile was going to be 70 years). Yaakov was then shown the archangel of Persia, which ascended 52 rungs before descending. The archangel of the Greeks ascended 100 rungs and then descended. However, when Yaakov saw the archangel of the Edomites (Esav/Rome) it continued to ascend without any indication of descending.*

*"Yaakov upon seeing this was frightened. He said to G-d, 'Is it possible that this angel will ascend without ever descending? G-d responded, 'My servant Yaakov, do not fear. Even if you will see him (the archangel of Edom) ascending up to the point that is next to Me, from there I will bring him down.' As it is written, If they rise like an eagle and perch among the stars, from there I (G-d) will bring them down.'" The Midrash is saying that the archangel of Edom, which is a personification of evil is able to ascend to a point that he can associate himself with G-d. Why would G-d allow this to take place?*

*Gemara in Tractate Yomah: The inclination of idolatry was such an overwhelming force at one time that it ravaged and destroyed the Jewish people. One of the sins that had caused the destruction of the First Temple, was the sin of idolatry. It was even more overwhelming than the sexual drive. The Men of the High Assembly, fasted for thirty days so that G-d should reveal to them the evil inclination for idolatry so that it could be destroyed.*

*After thirty days they had witnessed a fiery lion exiting from the Holy of Holies. They took this fiery lion that was the representation of the inclination for idolatry and removed it from existence. It is interesting to note that the Holy of Holies, the location of G-d's Presence, should be the location from which the inclination for idolatry should exit. Seemingly, that this intense impure force has relevance to the most holy.*

*In order to maintain the context of choice in the world, G-d needs have good and evil exist in an even plane so that each should be a counterbalance for the other. If the representation of good would be initially established at a level that would be superior and more advanced than evil, humanity would be compelled to do good, thus rendering choice irrelevant. Therefore, in order to maintain the counterbalance, there needs*

*to be a representation of good as well as evil at the same advanced spiritual level. Thus, the fiery lion that represented idolatry emanated from the Holy of Holies. Yaakov, being the representation of good and Esav, of evil, needed to emerge from their mother's womb simultaneously so that good and evil should exist on an equal footing.*

*We recite the verse in our prayers, "The saviors will ascend Mount Zion to judge Esav's mountain, and the kingdom will be Hashem's. The Hashem will be King over all the world, on that day G-d will be One and His Name will be One." Meaning, at the end of time, regardless of the degree of evil that will exist in the world, G-d will vanquish the representation of Esav from existence. This will thus endow mankind with a level of clarity to be able to recognize and fully appreciate G-d in every aspect of creation. However, before that will take place, G-d allows the archangel of Edom to ascend to His level, to be on par with the Jewish people.*

## **One's Failing Due One's Greatness**

*Torah: Yaakov, our Patriarch, experienced a prophetic dream on the Temple Mount. G-d showed him angels ascending and descending a ladder that extended into heaven.*

*Midrash: "G-d showed Yaakov the archangels of Babylon, Persia, the Greeks, and the Edomites ascending and descending. G-d said to Yaakov, 'Why do you not ascend?' Yaakov was frightened and responded, 'I am concerned that just as the archangels of the nations ascended and subsequently descended, if I will ascend I will also have to descend.' G-d said, 'Do not be concerned, if you will ascend you will not descend.' Yaakov did not believe and he did not ascend. Because he did not believe, it was considered a failing. G-d said, 'If you would have believed and ascended, you would have never had a decline from that special level; however since you did not believe, your children will be enslaved and subject to the exile of four kingdoms, which will levy taxes against them and subject them to levels of oppression.'"*

*Midrash: It is interesting to note that Yaakov "was afraid" and "he did not believe," thus, "he did not ascend." Yaakov is identified by Chazal as "the most special of the Patriarchs." How could he not believe?*

Eitz Yosef, a commentator on the *Midrash*: *Yaakov* did not feel confident in himself, regarding his vulnerability to sin. Therefore, he was afraid to ascend because of his fear of sin. If he were to sin it would disqualify him from remaining on that exalted level. He would consequently be forced to ascend. We see from the *Midrash* that *Yaakov* had a basis for concern.

*Midrash*: “*Reb Shimon bar Yochai* says, ‘G-d does not associate His name with the devoutly righteous (*tzaddikim*) during their lifetime. It is only after their passing does He associate His Name with them... It is because G-d does not have faith in them. He is not sure if the evil inclination will mislead them to sin...’” *Yaakov*’s own level of introspection and fear of sin was so great that he was concerned that it would be possible that he would sin. Although it was considered a shortcoming that he did not ascend as G-d told him to do so; nevertheless, it is an indication of the exalted standard that *Yaakov* had achieved within himself.

*Torah*: When G-d told *Avraham* that he would have a son, despite his advanced aged, “He believed” and it was considered a “righteousness.”

*Ramban*: Despite all of *Avraham*’s spiritual accomplishments and dimension of being, he believed that he was not worthy to merit a child. When G-d told that he would have a son, he understood that it was not based on his own worthiness due to his spiritual accomplishment, but rather it emanated purely from G-d’s infinite Kindness.

*Torah*: Despite the fact that G-d promised the Land of *Canaan* to *Avraham* and his offspring, he questioned and asked, “Whereby shall I know that I am to inherit it?” *Avraham* was concerned that perhaps G-d’s promise was contingent on the worthiness of his children. What would happen if his children were to sin? Would they be exiled from the Land? This question was considered a lack of faith because in this instance *Avraham* did not appreciate the extent of G-d’s Kindness.

As a result of *Avraham*’s failing, the Jewish people were destined to be enslaved in Egypt. Had *Avraham* not questioned G-d’s Promise, the Jewish people would have not needed to experience the exile of Egypt. *Avraham*’s question to G-d emanated from his own perception of His Omnipotence, thus causing him to be concerned that his level of service may be deficient.

*Yaakov*, because of his advanced level of reverence for G-d, had difficulty believing that his level of spiritual achievement would be sufficient to remain in a state of ascent. *Yaakov* not ascending was due to his own unfathomable level of spirituality. If he would have been less sensitive to sin, he would have surely ascended.

## **The Pre-Sinai Observance of the Torah** **(from Toldos)**

*Torah*: G-d blessed *Yitzchak*, our Patriarch, in the merit of *Avraham*, his father. As it states, “Because *Avraham* obeyed My voice, and observed My safeguards, My commandments, My decrees, and My *Torahs*.”

*Baal HaTurim*: “In this verse we find ten words. This corresponds to the Ten Commandments (that were given at Sinai). Contained within the Ten Commandments are 172 letters/words. This also corresponds to the ten tests that were presented to *Avraham*. In addition, it corresponds to the Ten Utterances with which G-d Created the world.

“*Gemara*: *Avraham* acknowledged his Maker at the age of three and he lived for 175 years. Thus, he heeded G-d’s Word for 172 years of his life (which corresponds to the number of letters in the Ten Commandments).”

*Gemara*: The Patriarchs observed the *Torah* in its entirety, including the Rabbinic enactments that were to be legislated in the future. They chose to observe the *Torah* although they were not commanded to do so.

*Ramban*: “If the Patriarchs observed the *Torah* in its entirety and it is forbidden for one to marry two sisters, how did *Yaakov*, our Patriarch marry *Rachel* and *Leah* who were sisters? It was because the Patriarchs observed the *Torah* only in the Land of Israel. Since *Yaakov* married *Rachel* and *Leah* outside of the Land, he was permitted to do so.” The observance of the *Torah* until Sinai was considered “non-obligatory (observing without being commanded).” However, after the Sinai event the observance of the *Torah* became “obligatory.”

*Gemara* in Tractate *Kiddushin*: “Greater is the one who performs the *mitzvos* when he is obligated to do so, than the one who performs them when he is not obligated.” One would think that when one observes the *mitzvos* voluntarily and not as an obligation it would be considered a greater accomplishment. This is because



the one who is obligated has no choice but to perform. However, we see that this is not so.

*Tosfos*: When one is not commanded to perform a *mitzvah* one does not have an evil inclination to interfere with the performance of that individual. Therefore, when one fulfills the *Torah* without being obligated to do so, it does not have the same degree of value than when one performs the *mitzvos* because he is obligated. Once one is commanded and is thus obligated to observe a *mitzvah*, the evil inclination immediately attempts to interfere by not allowing the individual to fulfill his obligation.

The one who performs the *mitzvos* that he is obligated to keep, despite his evil inclination, has greater value than the one who performs *mitzvos* due to his own choice. This is based on the principle, “The reward is commensurate with the difficulty in its performance.” The observance of the Patriarchs was considered not obligatory.

*Torah*: At Sinai, when the Jewish people were offered the *Torah* by G-d, their response was the unequivocal declaration of “*Naaseh V'nishma* (We will do and we will listen).” However, we find that after this declaration, G-d held the mountain over their heads with an ultimatum saying, “If you accept the *Torah* it will be good. If not, there you will be buried.”

*Tosfos*: “If they had already accepted the *Torah* with their unequivocal declaration of *Naaseh V'nishma*, why did G-d need to hold the mountain over their heads?” *Tosfos* answers that the fires that they had seen at Sinai were a representation of the fires of *geheimom*. By seeing these fires, they became aware of their level of liability should they deviate from the Word of G-d. They wanted to retract their initial acceptance of the *Torah*, realizing the ramifications of their commitment. G-d, therefore, gave them an ultimatum indicating that they no longer had a choice and they were to be committed to their initial acceptance.

When the Jewish people initially accepted the *Torah* they did so without being commanded to do so by G-d. They voluntarily accepted the *Torah* while all the other nations of the world had rejected it. Thus, when they accepted the *Torah* with “*Naaseh V'nishma*” the quality of that commitment was one that was non-obligatory, thus rendering it deficient. G-d wanted their acceptance of the *Torah* in its entirety to be on the most advanced level of spiritual value. He therefore held the mountain over their heads and commanded them to accept the *Torah* or be buried under the mountain. This changed the quality of their acceptance from non-obligatory to obligatory, which brought about a new level of spiritual value that had not previously existed. This ultimatum, although it the equivalent of coercion, is considered to be the ultimate kindness that G-d did for the Jewish people.



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