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YadAvNow.com Weekly Audio Series: Vayechi

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Yosef Understood the Ramifications of His Reveal

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The Sealed Portion

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The Brothers Were Overwhelmed

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The Length of the Life of Yaakov

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Yosef's Children had the Status of Tribes

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The Multileveled Blessing of Yaakov to His Grandchildren

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

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Vayechi



The Elucidating Cry

Torah regarding Yosef being reunited with his family: “The news was heard in Pharaoh’s palace saying, ‘Yosef’s brothers have come!’ And it was pleasing in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants....” Why was Yosef being reunited with his brothers considered to be special to Pharaoh?

Ramban: Yosef had been a slave to Potiphar and had been imprisoned prior to Pharaoh appointing him to be Viceroy. The fact that Yosef was a slave was a point of contention between Pharaoh and his ministers. It was considered to be a disgrace to Egypt to have such an individual in a position of power. Pharaoh had continuously insisted that Yosef had come from a royal pedigree and therefore it was an appropriate appointment. Since Pharaoh could not prove this fact, it was a continuous point of contention with his ministers. However, now that it became known that Yosef’s family,

who possessed a royal demeanor and a presence of nobility, had come to Egypt, Pharaoh was pleased to finally prove that Yosef did in fact descend from royalty.

Sforno: Pharaoh was pleased that Yosef was being reunited with his family because he would be dedicated to a greater degree to Egypt because he had a vested interest, which was his family. Despite the fact that Yosef’s plan and efforts regarding the sale of grain and its distribution had made Egypt the wealthiest nation in the world, Pharaoh had believed that since Yosef was not together with his family, he was not able to be fully dedicated in his role as viceroy.

Torah: When Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, “He (Yosef) cried in a loud voice. Egypt heard, and Pharaoh’s household heard.” Why was it necessary for the *Torah* reveal that Egypt and the household of Pharaoh heard Yosef’s crying? If Yosef had in fact had family in the Land

of *Canaan*, why did he make no effort to contact them during the years that he was Viceroy?

Pharaoh had believed that it was because *Yosef* had no relationship with his family. Thus, Pharaoh understood that *Yosef's* role as Viceroy would be implemented without any distraction. However, after Pharaoh had heard *Yosef* crying it became obvious to him that he was in fact intimately close with his family. This gave Pharaoh reason to be concerned that although *Yosef* had dedicated himself as Viceroy and sustainer of Egypt, he could have been dedicated to an even greater degree if he would not have been distracted by his detachment from his family.

In order to facilitate the setting for *Yosef* to be fully focused and dedicated, Pharaoh was willing to put forth a plan that would satisfy *Yosef* beyond his own expectation. Pharaoh would settle *Yosef's* family in a location that was considered the best of Egypt and provide for them as if they were part of the royal family of Egypt.

Pharaoh's selfless dedication to *Yosef* and his family had no relevance to his appreciation of *Yosef's* service and contribution to the Egyptian people. It was unrelated to Pharaoh's kindness and generosity, but rather it was selfishly motivated to maximize upon *Yosef's* service as viceroy to the Egyptian people. Regardless of Pharaoh's self-interest, the outgrowth of his decision to host *Yosef's* family in a special manner ensured that *Yaakov* and his family would be insulated from the impurity of Egypt. They were to be treated as true royalty.

Zevulon's Unique Appreciation for Torah

Torah: Before *Yaakov* passed away he blessed his children, in a manner that secured the potential of each of the tribes. His blessing was based upon his understanding of the spiritual make up and essence of each of his children. *Yaakov* had established a partnership between his sons *Yissachar* and *Zevulon*, in which *Zevulon* would assume all financial and material responsibility of the support of *Yissachar* who would be fully dedicated to the study of *Torah*.

Torah regarding *Yaakov's* blessing to *Yissachar*: "*Yissachar* is a strong-boned donkey; who rests between the boundaries." Meaning, *Yissachar* had the ability to bear the heavy burden of *Torah*. Because of his degree of immersion in *Torah* study, which was without any distraction, *Yissachar* possessed a unique

level of clarity. This was only possible due to the support of *Zevulon*.

Midrash: The level of commitment that *Zevulon* had to *Yissachar* was to the point that, "they placed the food in the mouth of *Yissachar*." Meaning, *Yissachar* was not distracted for even an instant for the sake of his own material needs because of *Zevulon's* responsibility to him. One is only able to support *Torah* and sacrifice for it selflessly when one reveres and esteems its value. *Yaakov*, when he had blessed his son *Zevulon* to assume this responsibility to *Yissachar*, understood *Zevulon's* grasp and understanding of the necessity for uninterrupted *Torah* study. Due to *Yaakov's* evaluation of *Zevulon* and *Yissachar*, *Zevulon* understood that his brother's capacity for *Torah* was greater than his own.

Sforno: "*Zevulon* will dwell on the seashore. His portion in the Land of Israel will be upon the sea. The blessing that *Yaakov* had given *Zevulon* had preceded the blessing that he had given to *Yissachar*. Why is this so? It is because one cannot be immersed in *Torah* study unless one addresses his own basic material needs.

"*Mishna* in *Ethics of our Fathers*: 'im ein kemach, ein *Torah* – if there is no flour there is no *Torah*.' If one provides for his fellow's material needs so that he should be able to engage in *Torah* study, as *Zevulon* had done with *Yissachar*, then the merit for that *Torah* study will accrue to both of them. Meaning, the one who had studied the *Torah* and the one who enabled him to do so through his financial support, will be accredited for the *Torah* that had been studied.

"This is the intent of the *Torah* for establishing the obligation of tithing one's produce for the *Kohen* (Priests) and *Levy*. Since the Priests and Levites were the ones who were fully dedicated to the study of *Torah*, by providing them with their respective tithes, each Jew will have a share in the *Torah* that is studied by them. As we find regarding the blessing that was given by *Moshe* to the Tribe of *Levy*, 'Who are the ones who will teach and give direction to *Yaakov*? It is the Tribe of *Levy*.' By establishing such a partnership between every Jew and the tribe that consists of *Kohen* and *Levy*, the *Torah* is providing each Jew with an opportunity to have a share in the world to come.

"*Mishna* in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: 'Every Jew has a share in the world to come.'"

Gemara in Tractate *Shabbos*: Although there was a significant minority of “*aamei haaretz* – a sect of Jews who were not meticulous and sensitive to many areas of Jewish Law” who did not give the tithe to the *Levy*, they did in fact give the proper tithes to the *Kohen*. Thus, this enabled them to have a share in *Torah*. Every Jew who engages in the support of *Torah* study, the *Torah* that is studied will be accredited to the one who supports it, regardless of the benefactor’s intent.

An example of this is the tithes that were given by the Jewish people to the *Kohen* and *Levy* due to their obligation. They gave tithes not because of their deep appreciation of the *Torah* that was to be studied but rather only to fulfill their obligation to distribute tithes to their proper parties.

This is similar to the *Sifra* cited by *Rashi* in *Devorim* regarding one who loses a coin that is found by a needy person. The one who had lost the coin, although he is unaware that there is a poor person that will benefit from his loss, there is a reward that accrues to the benefactor, regardless of his unawareness of the benefit. If one, however, supports *Torah* because of his recognition of its infinite worth, the value of that support supersedes the value of all other *mitzvos*.

Chazal: The study of *Torah* is the equivalent of all the *mitzvos* combined. Consequently, the one who supports *Torah* in order to facilitate its study is considered an equal partner with the one who studies it.

Torah: When *Moshe* blessed *Zevulon* before he passed away he said, “Rejoice, *Zevulon*, in your excursions, and *Yissachar* in your tents.” It is only possible to give such a blessing to the one who internalizes the fact that there is nothing more valuable and precious than the study of *Torah*. *Zevulon* needed to go to the high seas and risk his life in order to support *Yissachar*. However, he rejoiced because he understood the infinite value of *Yissachar*’s *Torah* study.

Egypt, the Location of Gestation of the Jewish People

Torah: Before *Yaakov* passed away he had made a special request of his son *Yosef*, the Viceroy of Egypt. “The time approached for Israel to die, so he called for his son, for *Yosef*, and said to him – Please – if I have found favor in your eyes, please place your hand

under my thigh... please do not bury me in Egypt.” Why did *Yaakov* not want to be buried in Egypt?

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: There are three reasons *Yaakov* did not want to be buried in Egypt. One of the reasons given is that *Yaakov* did not want to be deified. *Yaakov* was renowned in Egypt as a spiritual individual. The famine had ceased when he came to Egypt as a result of his blessing to Pharaoh that caused the Nile to rise and irrigate the land.

Chazal: When Divine Retribution will come upon the idolaters, G-d will not only punish the idolaters, He will also destroy the deities that they had worshiped. If *Yaakov* would be deified by the Egyptians he would assume culpability.

Midrash: Another reason *Yaakov* did not want to be buried in Egypt, not cited by *Rashi* is, “*Yaakov* said, ‘I do not want the Egyptians to be redeemed through me.’ The prophet *Yechezkel* identifies the Egyptians as donkeys (*chamorim*), ‘Their flesh is the flesh of donkeys (*chamorim*).’ *Yaakov* had said, ‘I am compared to the sheep. As it states, ‘Israel is the sheep...’ And I do not wish to be the sheep that redeems the donkey.’ As it states in the verse, ‘the donkey shall be redeemed by the sheep.’ Therefore, please do not bury me in Egypt.”

The Halacha states that one is forbidden to benefit from a first-born male donkey until it is redeemed with a sheep that is given to the Priest.

Maharal of Prague: The word “*chamor* (donkey) ” in the verse in *Yechezkel*, which refers to the Egyptian people, is derived from the word “*chomer*,” which means physical/material. Of the seventy root nations of the world, the Egyptian people were the least spiritual. They are thus referred to as *chamorim*, to indicate that their essence was material/physical. Because of this spiritual void, the Egyptian people had sunk to the lowest depths of depravity such as incest, adultery, witchcraft, and idol worship. Egypt was a location that was a spiritual vacuum.

Maharal of Prague, in *Gevuras Hashem*: The reason the bondage of the Jewish people had taken place in Egypt and not any other location was because in order to bring about the greatest level of spiritual development and advancement, it must be in a setting of the most extreme level spiritual void. Thus, in order for the Jewish people to develop to their fullest spiritual potential, they had to be in Egypt.

Maharal: There are many sources to support this principle, that wherever there is the greatest absence of holiness it is in that location where the most advanced level of spirituality would emanate. *Yaakov* understood that the Jewish people needed to remain in Egypt, which was the most appropriate location for their spiritual development to be worthy to be taken as G-d's people. If the Egyptian people would be affected in a positive manner that would cause them to advance in their own spirituality, it would seriously impair and curtail the spiritual development of the Jewish people. When one serves a deity, one does so by doing the will of the deity.

If *Yaakov* were to be deified and worshiped, as a spiritual power, the Egyptian people would need to serve him by emulating his unique spiritual posture as a person who is divorced from physicality. Consequently, the Egyptians would wean and extricate themselves from the material and become more spiritual. If this were to occur, then the spiritual development of the Jewish people, as planned by G-d, would not transpire.

Therefore, *Yaakov* said to *Yosef*, "Since I am compared to the sheep who has the innate ability to redeem the donkey, I would be the one to cause a transformation of the Egyptian people from being completely material to having relevance to the spiritual." *Yaakov* did not want to be buried in Egypt so as not to interfere with the development of G-d's people.

It is interesting to note that when *Yaakov* blessed *Yissachar*, who is the one dedicated and immersed in uninterrupted *Torah* study, he referred to him as, "Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey..." If the classification of "donkey (chamor)" is an indication of a lack of spirituality as explained regarding the Egyptian people, then why did *Yaakov* choose to identify *Yissachar*, who is the embodiment of *Torah* as a "donkey?"

Reb Chaim of Volozhin in *Nefesh Ha'Chaim*, citing the *Zohar*: The reason *Yaakov* identifies *Yissachar* as the "donkey" is to indicate that although the human being, in his essence, is comprised of the material (*chomer*) and possesses multiple inclinations towards the material, one is able to transform it into something spiritual through the *Torah*. Since *Yissachar* was the tribe that was fully immersed in *Torah*, he was likened to the "donkey" in order to communicate that despite the fact that a person is a physical being, one is able to transform one's physicality to the most advanced level of spirituality through the study of *Torah*.

It is interesting to note that the donkey is the only non-Kosher species whose first-born male has sanctity upon it as a result of its birth. It thus needs to be redeemed before one can benefit from it as prescribed by the *Torah*. What is unique about the donkey?

Chazal: The donkey, although it is a non-Kosher species, has a special distinction regarding sanctity because when the Jewish people left Egypt, the donkey was used as the beast of burden to transport all the wealth that they had borrowed from the Egyptian people. G-d had promised *Avraham* our Patriarch, at the time of the Covenant Between the Parts, that when the Jewish people would complete their exile they would leave with great wealth.

Had it not been for the donkey, the Jewish people would not have been able to transport the wealth that had been promised to them. Thus, the donkey was integral to the fulfillment of G-d's Promise. Therefore, although the donkey is a non-kosher species, its first-born assumes a status of sanctity upon its birth. Based on the explanation of the *Maharal*, it was only because the Egyptian people are compared to "donkeys" were the Jewish people able to ascend to their pinnacle of spirituality. Since the donkey played an integral role in the development of the sanctity of the Jewish people, it has relevance to sanctity and consecration.

One's Responsibility to His Heritage

Chazal: The paragraph structure of *Vayigash* as it appears in a *Torah* scroll is identified as a 'sealed Portion'. Why is the Portion of *Vayechi* a 'closed Portion (*Parsha stumah*)? One explanation offered is, "Because *Yaakov* wanted to reveal the end of time (*ha'keitz*) to his sons; however, G-d concealed this information from him before he could do so." What is the value of knowing the end of time when *Moshiach* will come? Had *Yaakov* been able to share this information with his children, what would have they done with it?

Rabbeinu Bachya citing a *Midrash*: Initially *Yaakov* was about to reveal the end of time to his sons but he hesitated to do so because he thought that they may not be sufficiently worthy to be privy to this information. Perhaps they were tainted by sin. However after he reflected upon this, he concluded that this was not a basis for concern because the Hebrew letters "Ches" and "Tes" which spell the word "Chet" (sin) did not

appear in the letters of the names of his sons. This was a confirmation that they were pure enough to be informed about the end of time.

However, when *Yaakov* was about to reveal the end of time to his sons, he gain hesitated and reconsidered because he realized that the letters “*kuf*” and “*tzadi*” which spell the word “*keitz* (the end) did not appear in the names of his sons. This indicated to *Yaakov* that regardless of their purity or spiritual standing the end of time must remain concealed.

Torah in Vezos Haberachah: “Torah tzivah lanu Moshe morashah kehilas Yaakov (The Torah was commanded to us by Moshe which is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov).”

Rabbeinu Bachya: The *Torah* is considered a “heritage (*morashah*)” and not an “inheritance (*yerushah*)” which is transmitted from generation to generation. An inheritance “*yerushah*” is something that one receives and may do with it as he wishes. If one chooses to pass it on to his offspring, it is his prerogative to do so or not. However, a heritage “*morashah*” is passed on to someone with the intent that it should be transmitted from generation to generation in an untainted manner.

Each Jew must assume the responsibility that the purity and cogency of the *Torah* should be eternally preserved. One must study and observe the *Torah* as well as impressing it upon one’s family to assume that same level of responsibility. If *Yaakov*’s children were made aware of the end of time, they would have been able to affect and determine the destiny of all future generations. Through their own understanding and ingenuity, they would have been able to create strategies and concepts that would affect the spirituality of the Jewish people until the end of time.

If *Yaakov*’s children had been tainted by sin, then the evolution of *Torah* would have been corrupted and distorted by their spiritual defects and shortcomings. The Jewish people would not have been able to ascend to a level of spiritual perfection if *Yaakov* would have informed his sons about the end of time had they been tainted by sin. However, since *Yaakov* determined that their spirituality was pristine and pure, he thought that perhaps he should communicate this information to them. Despite their spiritual standing, he understood from the fact that since the word “*keitz*” does not appear in their names that G-d wanted the end of time to remain concealed, regardless of their qualification.

Gemara in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: If a judge renders a corrupt ruling he deserves to have his life taken. The *Gemara* then states that if this is so, then qualified judges would be afraid to render judgments. The *Gemara* concludes that if the integrity of the judge had not been compromised, although he had rendered an incorrect ruling, he bears no liability. A judge can only render a decision based on what he sees and understands. Identically, since the letters that spell “*keitz*” do not appear in the names of *Yaakov*’s children, G-d wants the righteous to be able to affect the generations solely based on their own capabilities and understanding gained through their study of *Torah*, without knowing the end of time.

Seeing Pharaoh in his True Light (From Vayigash)

Torah: Regarding *Yosef* being reunited with his family, “The news was heard in Pharaoh’s palace saying, ‘*Yosef*’s brothers have come!’ And it was pleasing in the eyes of Pharaoh....” As a result of *Yosef*’s astuteness to supervise and oversee the sale of grain to the world during the years of famine, all the silver and gold of Egypt and the neighboring countries had been amassed and transferred into the coffers of Pharaoh. One would think that after *Yosef* had made Egypt the wealthiest monarchy in the world, Pharaoh would have believed that *Yosef* was doing his utmost as Viceroy.

Sforno: The verse, “And it was pleasing in the eyes of Pharaoh,” to mean that Pharaoh was extremely pleased to see *Yosef* reunited with his family because now he would oversee the land as one who truly has a personal interest in Egypt. He believed that although *Yosef* had been uniquely dedicated and effective in his position as Viceroy, that he was not fully committed by to his duties because of his separation from his family.

Now that *Yosef* would be reunited with his loved ones, he would surely dedicate himself to an even greater degree in his capacity as Viceroy. This perspective of *Yosef* is a testament to Pharaoh’s self-centered greed. Regardless of the degree of *Yosef*’s success, Pharaoh continued to believe that this was not *Yosef*’s best. Pharaoh believed that he could benefit to an even greater degree from *Yosef* if he were sufficiently dedicated.

Midrash: When *Yosef*’s ten brothers initially entered Egypt to purchase grain during the famine, they did so

through ten gates because had they all entered together through one gate, they would have been noticed due to their exceptional appearance and stature. When they were together, they had the aura of nobility and royalty.

When Pharaoh became aware that Yosef's brothers had come to Egypt, he was pleased. This pleased Pharaoh because initially Yosef had been the slave of *Potiphar* and had been taken from the dungeon by Pharaoh to ultimately ascend to the role of Viceroy. It was written in the protocols of Egypt that a slave could not rule and may not wear regal garments. Many had expressed their displeasure to Pharaoh. They had said that, a person such as Yosef being appointed as the Viceroy was a disgrace to Egypt. Pharaoh responded by explaining that Yosef was in fact from a royal household in *Canaan*, but was kidnapped and sold into slavery. However, the detractors continued to contest the appointment of Yosef. Pharaoh could not confirm his position until Yosef's family came to Egypt.

Ramban: Pharaoh and his servants were elated when they became aware that Yosef's brothers had come to Egypt because they projected a persona of royalty. This is the meaning of the verse, "And it was pleasing in the eyes of Pharaoh..."

Torah: After Yosef was reunited with his brothers, he asked them to send for his father to come to Egypt with his entire family. Pharaoh had told Yosef to communicate to his father *Yaakov*, "...And let your eyes not take pity on your belongings, for the best of all the land of Egypt- it is yours." Pharaoh had seemingly demonstrated a unique level of generosity towards Yosef's family by suggesting that *Yaakov* should not consider inconveniencing himself by bringing his personal belongings to Egypt because all would be provided for him. It appears that Pharaoh's sense of appreciation to Yosef was extraordinary. However, we find Pharaoh's behavior in the future to be contradictory on the most extreme level, when he chose to enslave the Jewish people. How do we reconcile these two modes of behavior within the same individual?

Torah: After *Yaakov* had transported his family and all of his belongings across the *Yabok* river, he had returned alone to retrieve small earthenware vessels that he had left behind. This was the time that *Yaakov* was attacked by the archangel of *Esav*. Why would *Yaakov*, who had been exceptionally wealthy, consider returning for objects of such inconsequential value?

Gemara in Tractate *Chulin*: "A *tzaddik* values his material possessions more than his life." A *tzaddik*, because he cannot not justify stealing even under the most dire circumstance, safeguards and values all that was endowed to him by G-d. Since everything that the *tzaddik* possesses has relevance to his existence, he therefore does not minimize the significance of any of his material endowment.

Based on this perspective, when *Yaakov* was going to come to Egypt, he would not leave any of his possessions in *Canaan*, despite the fact that he was guaranteed by Pharaoh that all his needs would be addressed and accommodated. The perspective that even what is inconsequential has infinite value, is regarded by the gentile world as a sign of lowliness and neediness. One who descends from royalty is magnanimous and pompous because of his status. In fact, a wealthy gentile will demonstrate his great financial stature by squandering his wealth in the presence of others to appear that he has unending resources.

Pharaoh, understanding the perspective of Yosef, who acted meticulously to the point of being responsible for every grain of wheat that was sold in Egypt, was due to the mentoring of his father. Thus, Yosef's father when he would come to Egypt together with his family, would want to transfer all of his material possessions from *Canaan*. This would not bode well for Pharaoh because it would refute all of his efforts to establish and confirm that Yosef was truly royalty. It would demonstrate that Yosef's family was lowly and needy. Pharaoh's generous gesture to Yosef's family is unrelated to his goodness; but rather, it was selfish and self-serving. Pharaoh was a monarch who did not possess the capacity to be appreciative and thus giving.



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