



YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Vayeishev

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

An Embodiment Of Clarity To Dispel Distortion

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1. Yosef the son of Rachel is the most beloved child of Yaakov because he is his Ben Zekunim.
2. Ben Zekunim has 3 interpretations.
3. A. born to him in his old age B. wisest son C. his facial features were identical to his father.
4. One would think he was most beloved because he was the eldest son of Rachel.
5. Gemara: The progeny of Esav will only fall into the hands of Rachel.
6. Yosef was the flame that reaches out to consume the house of Esav.
7. Yosef, the wisest of his sons, was taught all the Torah that Yaakov had learned in Yeshiva Shem V'Eiver.
8. Yaakov enacted Arvis, the evening service.
9. Evening is a representation of exile; ominous and lacking in clarity.
10. Yaakov is the Patriarch who represents exile.
11. Despite the overwhelming challenges of exile Yaakov is able to retain his spiritual persona to its fullest.
12. Yosef was endowed with the capacity of his father to contend with all the negative issues of Egypt as Yosef Hatzadik.
13. Yosef as Viceroy of Egypt was therefore able to create a setting for his family to survive the Egyptian exile.

The Exactness Of Justice Nullifies Mercy

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1. Yosef was sold as a slave to Potiphar, a Minister in the court of Pharaoh.
2. Because of his unusual ability, he rose to oversee all the financial affairs of his master.
3. After being acknowledged for his success he focused on being physically attractive.
4. Rashi: G-d said, "Yaakov your father is grieving over your loss and you're coiffing your hair; I will set the bear upon you."
5. Potiphar's wife took notice of him and attempted to seduce him.
6. If not for Yosef's insensitivity to his father he would not have been subject to this challenge.
7. It was necessary for him, as the son of Rachel, to subordinate his physicality for the sake of G-d.
8. Yosef tale-bared against his brothers.
9. One of the things he said was that they had illicit relations with women.
10. G-d said: "Because you slandered your brothers your master's wife will attempt to seduce you."
11. Yosef definitely repented for his slander after being sold into slavery.
12. Based on the Attribute of Mercy, Repentance is sufficient to absolve one of sin.
13. However, if the Attribute of Justice should be activated, there is still a level of liability.
14. Not being sensitive to his father's mourning, activated the Attribute of Justice.



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A Calculation Indicative of Rational Thinking

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1. Yosef was the most beloved son of Yaakov because he was most similar to him.
2. He was acknowledged by his father to be most special by giving him a special tunic.
3. Yosef, due to his immaturity, shared with his father what he believed to be negative about his brothers.
4. This caused great strife and animosity between Yosef and his brothers.
5. Yosef dreamt 2 dreams he believed to be prophetic and therefore shared them with his brothers.
6. This only intensified the hate and strained the relationship to a greater degree.
7. In the second dream he dreamt the sun, moon and 11 stars bowed to him.
8. The sun being his father, the moon his mother, and the 11 stars his brothers.
9. Yaakov scolded Yosef for sharing this with his brothers because it was obviously nonsense since his mother had passed away.
10. Midrash: The moon was Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, who raised him as a mother.
11. When Rachel passed away, Yaakov put his bed in the tent of Bilhah, rather than the tent of Leah, who was a Matriarch.
12. Yaakov loved Yosef more than all his sons – he saw Yosef as his equivalent with similar abilities.
13. Bilhah, as Rachel's maidservant, was mentored by Rachel, understanding how to raise Yosef.

Assuming A Quasi Matriarchal Stance

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Weekly Video: An Irrevocable Loss Births A People

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Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Vayeishev

Launching The Destiny Of The Jewish People



Confirming Yosef as his Father's Successor

The *Torah* tells us that *Yaakov* our Patriarch had a special love for his son *Yosef*. The verse states, "Now Israel loved *Yosef* more than all of his sons..." It is interesting to note that when the *Torah* tells us about the special love that *Yaakov* had for *Yosef*, it refers to him with the appellation of "Israel" and not "*Yaakov*." The appellation "Israel" was given to *Yaakov* by the archangel of *Esav*, after he had defeated him in battle. The name was later confirmed by G-d. The name "Israel" connotes that *Yaakov* was able to lord over G-d (angel) and man (*Esav* and *Lavan*).

When *Yaakov* was quantified as "Israel," he was established as the ultimate spiritual person in existence, who had the capability to address every aspect of the spiritual advancement of existence. Although *Yaakov* had already fathered the eleven of the twelve tribes (*shiftei Ka*, the Tribes of G-d), he still needed to confront

the archangel of *Esav* in order to fully dominate the material realm for the sake of spiritualization. Why did Israel love *Yosef* more than all of his children?

The verse continues, "....since he was a child of his old age (*ben zikunim*)..." *Rashi* cites three interpretations of the words "*ben zikunim*." The literal translation of the words mean that *Yosef* was born to *Yaakov* in his old age. *Targum Unkolos* interprets these words to mean, that *Yosef* was the wisest of all of *Yaakov*'s children. All the *Torah* of *Shem* and *Aiver* that *Yaakov* had studied, was transmitted to *Yosef*. Another interpretation of "*ben zikunim*," is that *Yosef*'s facial features were identical to those of his father *Yaakov*. *Rashi* cites *Chazal*, "The radiance of his face (*Yosef*) was similar to his (*Yaakov*)." It is because of these reasons, that *Yaakov* loved *Yosef* more than any of his other children.

Chazal tell us that when *Yosef* was in *Egypt*, he did not succumb to the seduction of the wife of his master *Potiphar* to commit adultery, because he had seen

“the form of his father’s face (*demus yukno shel aviv*).” As a result of seeing his father’s image, Yosef was able to suppress his desires and not sin with his mistress. *Chazal* do not mention in this context that Yosef had seen the “radiance of his father’s face” but rather only “the form of his father’s face.”

The *Torah* states, “And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham - Avraham fathered Yitzchak....” If the *Torah* identifies Yitzchak as the son of Avraham, then it is obvious that Avraham is the father of Yitzchak. Why then is it necessary for the *Torah* to state the obvious? *Rashi* cites *Chazal* who tell us that after Yitzhak was born to Avraham, the scoffers of the generation had said, that the conception of Yitzchak is attributed to Avimelech and not Avraham. Thus, Avimelech is the father of Yitzchak and not Avraham. G-d therefore performed a miracle and caused Yitzchak to have the identical facial features as his father Avraham so that there should not be a question regarding his pedigree.

In this context of identifying Yitzchak as the son of Avraham, *Chazal* do not mention the “radiance” of the face of Yitzchak, but rather, the formation of the facial features themselves were identical to those of Avraham. However, regarding Yosef’s facial features, *Chazal* address the “radiance” of the facial features of Yosef was similar to that of his father Yaakov. What is the significance of “radiance”?

Radiance is something that goes beyond the physical. It is an expression of one’s inner spiritual dimension. One’s radiance connotes the overwhelming spiritual essence of that individual. As we see, the *Torah* tells us that Moshe had an overwhelming radiance of holiness. The *Gemara* in *Tractate Bava Metzia* states, “The beauty (radiance) of Yaakov was a semblance of the beauty (radiance) of Adam.” Adam radiated holiness, because he was the handiwork of G-d. He was initially created in a state of total spiritual purity. *Chazal* tell us that initially his radiance was so overwhelming that the angels of heaven had mistaken his radiance for the radiance of G-d and they thus began to sing songs of praise to him.

Based on this understanding, we are able to appreciate Yaakov’s dimension of holiness because it was semblance of Adam, although Adam was the handiwork of G-d. In contrast, the radiance of Yaakov came about through his own initiative and was not endowed to him as was with Adam. He actualized

his potential to ascend to a level of spirituality to be qualified to address all the spiritual needs of existence that were initially meant for Adam to perfect. However, since Adam had failed due to eating from the Tree of Knowledge, he was no longer qualified and Yaakov assumed the status and role of Adam. He thus fathered the Jewish people, the Tribes of G-d, to address and maintain the spiritual needs of existence.

When Yaakov saw that the radiance of the features of his son Yosef had a semblance of his own, he understood that Yosef’s spiritual capacity was similar to his own. Yosef was thus greater than all of the other children. Understanding Yosef’s spiritual dimension of being, Yaakov understood that Yosef was meant to be his successor to carry on the spiritual mission to facilitate the advancement of the Jewish people so that they could actualize their potential in addressing the objective of creation.

Yaakov therefore loved Yosef not because he had similar facial features, but rather because he had the same spiritual potential and capability to lead the Jewish people. This is the reason the *Torah*, within this context, uses the appellation “Israel” rather than “Yaakov” regarding his special love for Yosef. It is because this appellation alludes to the fact that Yaakov lords over all existence for the sake of the spiritual. Recognizing this characteristic within his son Yosef, was the cause of his special love for Yosef more than all his other children.

Rachel, the Primary Matriarch of the Jewish People

The *Torah* states, “Yaakov departed Beersheva and went toward Charan. He encountered the place (Temple Mount/Mt. Moria) and spent the night there... he took from the stones of the place which he arranged around his head...” The *Midrash (Yalkut)* tells us that Yaakov had initially taken twelve stones in order to determine whether he was going to be the Patriarch who would father the twelve tribes of Israel. There was a tradition among the Patriarchs, that the one who would be qualified to father the tribes of Israel would have twelve sons.

Yaakov understood that if the stones were to be fused together into one stone, it would be a confirmation that he was sufficiently pure to establish the twelve tribes of Israel. When Yaakov awoke, he noticed that

the twelve stones had become one. G-d then took that stone and embedded it into the center of the earth. This stone had thus become “the foundation stone (even *haPina*)” of existence. That stone represents the twelve tribes of Israel upon whose merit the world continues to exist.

The *Midrash* continues to explain, that the reason there are twelve months in the year, twelve signs of the Zodiac, and twelve hours of day and night is because the Jewish people are comprised of twelve tribes. Their imprint and profile is evident in all aspects of existence. It is because *Chazal* tell us that G-d brought about existence to accommodate the Jewish people in their fulfillment of the *Torah*. Thus, all existence is contingent upon the existence of the Jewish people.

The *Torah* tells us that there was strife between Yosef and his brothers, because he talebeared to his father regarding their behavior. They believed that Yosef's intent was to undermine their relationship with Yaakov their father, so that he could assume the role of his father's successor. They believed that ultimately by discrediting them, Yaakov would curse them and the Jewish people would emanate from Yosef. Yaakov dismissed Yosef's tale bearing as immaturity. He did not consider it as something worth addressing. Why did Yosef's behavior cause his brothers to become concerned regarding his tale bearing, if in fact their father dismissed it? If the tribes of Israel were meant to be twelve in number and Yosef was only one person, how could Yosef's plans come to fruition?

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Sotah* tells us that although Yosef was the son of Yaakov, he was qualified to father and addition twelve tribes who would be considered to be the equivalent of the twelve tribes of Israel. This is evident as the *Torah* attests regarding Yosef's sons *Ephraim* and *Menasheh*. Yaakov had said to Yosef, “*Ephraim* and *Menasheh* shall be mine like *Reuvain* and *Shimon*.” Meaning, that although *Ephraim* and *Menasheh* were only his grandchildren, Yaakov classified them to be the equivalent of his own sons *Reuvain* and *Shimon*. Thus, they were recognized as the tribes of Israel.

If Yosef was qualified to father twelve tribes, why did he only father two? The *Gemara* explains that when Yosef nearly succumbed to the seduction of his mistress in Egypt (the wife of *Potiphar*) he had lost ten droplets of semen, although he did not succumb to her advances.

For each droplet of semen that was lost, Yosef lost a tribe. Therefore, Yosef only fathered two tribes.

Yosef's brothers, sensing his innate essence, that he was the equivalent of twelve tribes were concerned that the objective of his tale bearing was to destroy them and establish a Jewish people. He would thus be the equivalent of the Jewish people to father twelve sons/tribes. Regardless of their concern, Yosef's tale bearing was in fact a product of his immaturity and not to bring harm upon his brothers.

Chazal tell us that the reason Yaakov loved Yosef more than all of his other children was because he was “*ben zikunim*.” The word “*zikunim*” is an acronym for “*ziv ikunim* (radiance of facial features).” Meaning, Yaakov had a special love for Yosef not only because his facial features were identical to his own, but also because he had a semblance of the radiance of his father. The unique and special radiance of the facial features of Yosef was an indication of his unique spiritual dimension. Yosef's spiritual capacity and essence was thus similar to Yaakov, his father. He was an extension of his father.

In actuality, there are thirteen tribes of Israel. There are twelve tribes who received a share in the Land, and the tribe of *Levy* who was chosen to be the officiant of G-d and thus did not receive a share. The *Torah* states, “G-d will be their portion.” *Chazal* tell us that Rachel was the primary Matriarch of the Jewish people, despite the fact that she had only mothered two children for Yaakov – Yosef and *Binyamin*.

Based on our understanding of Yosef's spiritual dimension, it can be said that Rachel in essence mothered thirteen tribes – Yosef was the equivalent of twelve and *Binyamin*, is the thirteenth. She thus was the equivalent of *Leah* and more so. We see clearly that *Binyamin* was the equivalent of *Levy* (the thirteenth tribe) because the portion in which the Holy Ark was located was in his portion. In the words of *Chazal*, he is referred to as “the host of the Divine Presence.”

With this we can understand what Rachel had said when Yosef was born. The verse states, “G-d has gathered in my disgrace....” *Rashi* cites *Chazal* who explain that initially it was said that the older daughter of *Lavan*, *Leah* was meant for *Esav* and the younger daughter Rachel was meant for Yaakov. When it was indicated that it was not meant for Rachel to have a

child people began to say that she was meant to fall into the lot of *Esav*. However, now that she had given birth to *Yosef*, G-d had removed her disgrace.

Seemingly, *Rachel* being the primary Matriarch and *Leah* giving birth to the majority of the tribes, it was still a disgrace to *Rachel* since she had only born two children to *Yaakov*. However, because *Yosef's* innate standing was the equivalent of twelve tribes, her disgrace was thus removed. When *Rachel* had said, "Let G-d give me another child...." She called that child "*Yosef* (add another)" because she wanted G-d to give her an additional child who would be the equivalent of *Levy*, who had an intimate relationship with the Divine Presence. This was fulfilled with the birth of *Binyamin*, who merited the ultimate location to be the host of the Divine Presence.

Yitzchak, Our Patriarch Bemoaning His Son's Tragic State

The *Torah* tells us that after *Yosef's* brothers sold him into slavery, they returned to their father *Yaakov* with *Yosef's* tunic covered with blood. When *Yaakov* saw *Yosef's* garment in its bloody state he said, "A wild beast has devoured him!" Realizing that his son was no longer alive, *Yaakov* rent his garments and grieved over the loss of his most special son. He was not agreeable to be consoled by his family over his loss and thus grieved for *Yosef* for twenty-two years.

The verse states, "*Yaakov* had said, 'For I will go down to the grave mourning for my son.' And his father bewailed him..." *Rashi* cites *Chazal* who explain, " 'And his father bewailed him...' is referring to *Yitzchak*, our Patriarch (the father of *Yaakov*). *Yitzchak* cried because he saw his son *Yaakov* in pain and distress. However, *Yitzchak* did not grieve and mourn for *Yosef*, because he was aware that he was alive." One may say that it was natural for *Yitzchak* to cry because he was the father of *Yaakov*. It was painful for him to see the pain his son was experiencing. Despite the fact that the *Gemara* tells us that suffering cleanses one from sin, *Yitzchak*, nevertheless cried for the pain of his son, despite the spiritual value of his suffering.

Sforno explains that the reason *Yitzchak* cried for his son, was because since *Yaakov* was not willing to be consoled and entered into a continuous state of grieving, he was denied the Divine Presence. As 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 one who is in a state of melancholy. *Yitzchak* was not pained because he had witnessed his son's anguish over the death of *Yosef*, but rather because *Yaakov* was denied a special relationship with G-d for twenty-two years. As the *Torah* states after *Yaakov* was informed that *Yosef* was still alive, "... the spirit of *Yaakov* became alive." *Rashi* explains that since he was extricated from a state of depression to a state of joy, his ability to prophesize was reinstated.

The *Midrash* tells us regarding the Patriarchs, "*Hein, Hein HaMerkava* – they are the Chariot (for the Divine Presence)." Meaning, the Patriarchs were the location for the Divine Presence in this world. The existence of the Patriarchs was the equivalent of the Divine Presence in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. *Chazal* tell us that *Yaakov* was the most special of the Patriarchs. If he were denied a communication with G-d, due to his grieving, *Yaakov's* spiritual advancement would be impeded and thus it would cause unfathomable loss to the Jewish people and all of existence. If *Yaakov* would have been able to prophesize for those twenty-two years, he would have been able to spiritually elevate his family, the tribes of G-d. He would have impacted upon the spirituality of the Jewish people until the end of time.

The loss that was brought due to *Yehudah* and his brothers regarding the sale of *Yosef*, was unfathomable. It is due to this spiritual devastation that *Yitzchak* cried. What level of culpability do the ten brothers of *Yosef* have because of the devastation that they brought about?

Chazal tell us that the Ten Martyrs who were the ten greatest *Torah* sages (who had lived in the same generation since the giving of the *Torah* at Sinai), were killed by the Romans in the most cruel manner to atone for the sin of the selling *Yosef* into slavery. The simple understanding as the narrative reads, that since the *Torah* prescribes the death penalty for selling a Jew into slavery, each of the ten martyrs needed to atone for each one of the brothers who had participated in the sale of *Yosef* into slavery.

However, according to our understanding of the spiritual loss that they had brought about upon the Jewish people, there needed to be an atonement for the spiritual devastation that resulted from *Yaakov* not prophesizing for twenty-two years. Within a certain

context, the punishment was measure for measure. Just as the ten brothers of Yosef denied their father unlimited spiritual growth, thus bringing about a lack of clarity, so too the ten martyrs being taken from the world, caused the Jewish people to have an extreme lack of clarity within the context of *Torah*.

The *Torah* tells us that *Shimon* and *Levy* the sons of *Yaakov*, destroyed the community of *Shechem* to avenge the defilement of their sister *Dinah*. After this incident, *Yaakov* was disturbed with his sons because of what they had done. He said to them, “*Achartem osi* – you have discomposed me (made me murky)...” *Rashi* cites *Chazal* who explain, “*Yaakov* said to his sons, ‘Prior to your action, I had clarity of mind; however, as a result of your behavior, I no longer have that clarity.’” As a result of the lack of clarity *Yaakov* was denied spiritual growth and advancement due to the actions of *Shimon* and *Levy*. Thus, the spiritual cost factor of their actions to the Jewish people is eternal. It is because of this level of

irresponsibility on the part of *Shimon* and *Levy* that *Yaakov* before his passing, cursed their wrath. It was not solely because they had destroyed the community of *Shechem*, but rather because of the greater loss of spirituality that they had caused. It is interesting to note that the few instances that *Moshe* had forgotten a law that was taught to him by G-d, it was due to being in a state of anger. The anger of *Shimon* and *Levy* which caused the destruction of the community of *Shechem* caused *Yaakov*’s lack of clarity. This is the reason *Yaakov* cursed their wrath.

When one enters into a state of anger, he loses clarity and thus processes things irrationally. Thus, when *Moshe* became angry, even what was taught to him by G-d was forgotten. Similarly, to a greater extent, the wrath of *Shimon* and *Levy*, which was entering into a state of irrationality caused *Yaakov* to lose his clarity although he himself was not in a state of anger.

The Undercurrent of One’s Inner Feelings

The *Torah* tells us that after Yosef had shared his dreams with his brothers it caused their hatred of him to become intensified and increased the schism between them. They understood that it would be best to distance themselves from him. They thus had taken their flocks to graze in another community. *Yaakov*

asked Yosef, his son to visit his brothers and see how they and their flocks were faring. When his brothers saw him, believing that he was coming to find fault in them and discredit them, they attacked 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.’”

Rashi cites *Chazal* who explain, “The *Torah* is communicating through Divine Vision, that when *Reuvain* told his brothers to throw Yosef into the pit, rather than killing him, his intent was not that he should die there, but rather so that *Reuvain* could go back and rescue him from the pit. *Reuvain* said (to himself), ‘I am the first born and eldest of all of my brothers. If Yosef were to die, I will be held culpable and responsible for this tragedy.’” Seemingly, the impetus for *Reuvain*’s saving Yosef was not for altruistic reason but rather for his own self interest. He did not want to be held personally responsible for the death of his brother.

The *Torah* tells us that when *Leah* gave birth to her first born, she named him *Reuvain*. She had said, “*Hashem* has seen my plight for I am disliked (by *Yaakov*), for now my husband will love me.” The *Gemara* in Tractate *Berachos* explains that when *Leah* named her first-born son *Reuvain*, there was a hidden meaning contained within the name “*Reuvain*.” She had also meant to say–“*R’euh ma bein binee l’ben chami* – look at the difference between my son (*Reuvain*) and the son of my father-in-law (*Esav*).”

Although *Yaakov* had legally purchased the birthright from *Esav*, he vowed to kill *Yaakov* for taking his blessings. However, *Reuvain*, the firstborn (bechor) of his father *Yaakov*, who was naturally deserving of the birthright, rescued Yosef from his brothers, so that he should not be killed, despite the fact that Yosef had received the double portion that was rightfully *Reuvain*’s.

Based on the *Midrash* cited by *Rashi*, the motivation for *Reuvain*’s rescue of his brother Yosef was because of self-interest. It was purely for the sake of not being held accountable to his father for not being sufficiently responsible. If so, there is nothing admirable about *Reuvain*’s intervention to prevent Yosef from being killed. It was purely for self-interest. If this is so, why did

Leah pride herself regarding the behavior of *Reuvain* as it compared with *Esav*, the son of her father-in-law?

The *Torah* states when *Bilaam* went to curse the Jewish people, “*Bilaam* arose in the morning and saddled his donkey...” *Rashi* cites *Chazal* who state, “From here we see the principle of ‘*ha’sinah mekalkeles es hashura* – hate disrupts protocol.” Although *Bilaam* was a self-centered and egotistical person with an insatiable desire for honor and wealth, he nevertheless hitched his own donkey.

One would think that a person of *Bilaam*’s level of need to be honored and revered, he would have had a servant prepare his donkey for riding. However, because of his all-consuming hatred for the Jewish people, with the intent cursing and destroying them, his perspective at that moment was only the objective of his mission. At that moment, *Bilaam* was completely negated to his objective. His sense of self did not exist.

Yosef’s brothers wanted to kill him because of their intense hatred for him. *Reuvain*, on the other hand, chose to save him. The basis for *Reuvain*’s initiative, was that he would be held accountable to his father for *Yosef*’s death. *Reuvain*, being able to make this calculation and assessment regarding the consequences of *Yosef*’s death at that moment, was an indication that he did not share their position of hatred towards *Yosef*. If he had had the same level of hate as his brothers, his rational approach could not have been considered, based on the principle of “hate disrupts protocol.” It would have been impossible for *Reuvain* to make any calculations or assessments.

If *Reuvain* would have truly hated *Yosef* because he had forfeited his birthright to him, all that would have mattered to him would have been *Yosef*’s death and not the consequences to his father, *Yaakov*. However, because he did take this into consideration, it was an indication and confirmation that he did not hate *Yosef* for what he had received. Thus, *Leah* prided in her son that he was different that the son of her father-in-law.

G-d Does Not Abandon the Tzaddik

The *Torah* tells us that before *Yosef* was sold into slavery by his brothers they had cast him into a pit to die. They had believed that the objective of his tale bearing to their father was to discredit them in his eyes and 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 that *Yosef* was indeed devoutly righteous. His dreams were truly prophetic and not delusions of grandeur. However, *Yosef*’s brothers seemed not to have been impressed by his survival. They therefore sold him into slavery the moment the opportunity presented itself. Why did they not recognize that *Yosef* was indeed a *tzaddik* who had merited to be saved by G-d?

The *Midrash* explains that *Yosef*’s brothers were unaware that the pit in which they had placed 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 had seen the snakes and scorpions he was traumatized to such a degree he became as white as a corpse. Thus, 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.

After *Yosef* was taken out of the pit, he was sold into slavery. The *Torah* describes the unusual merchandise and wares that were being transported by the merchants who had 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 at that moment 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*, but rather it was 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 sold to the Arab merchants who had put him on to 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, again G-d reiterated the communication 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.



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