



THE CHAGALL WINDOWS, HADASSAH MEDICAL CENTER

# YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Vayechi

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

**Weekly Video:** A Guarantee For The Destiny Of The Jewish People

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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 Bitter and Sweet that was Contained in Their Weeping

*Torah:* After Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, “Then he fell upon his brother *Binyamin*’s neck and wept; and *Binyamin* wept upon his neck.”

*Rashi* citing the *Midrash*: When Yosef fell upon the neck of *Binyamin* he was crying over the destruction of the two Temples that were to be situated in the portion of *Binyamin*. When *Binyamin* cried upon the neck of Yosef he was crying over the destruction of the *Mishkan Shilo*, which in the portion of Yosef. Yosef and *Binyamin* were the only children of *Rachel*. They were extremely close with one another because they shared the same mother. Although they had been separated from one another for twenty-two years, they only wept for the destruction of the two Temples and *Mishkan Shilo* when they were reunited. Why did they weep about these issues at this particular moment?

*Torah:* Yosef was the Viceroy of Egypt and was the provider of all sustenance to the world. Being in this position of power, he would create an insular spiritual environment for the Jewish people in Egypt. He was responsible to provide all the material that was needed to facilitate their spirituality to ensure their survival during the 210 years of exile in Egypt.

After Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, Yaakov descended to Egypt with seventy members of his family who would evolve into becoming the Jewish people. Yosef’s revelation of himself to his brothers precipitated Yaakov descending to Egypt, which was the beginning of the exile. The value of the Egyptian exile was so that Jewish people should be redeemed from Egypt to become qualified to receive the *Torah* at *Sinai* as the nation of G-d. The Egyptian exile was a prerequisite for the Jewish people to become the chosen people of G-d.

The objective of the *Mishkan* and the Temple was to be the medium for G-d to dwell in the midst of the Jewish people. If the Jewish people would not evolve to become G-d's chosen, there would be no context for G-d to dwell in this existence. G-d's Presence in physical existence was contingent on the existence of a Jewish people.

When *Yosef* revealed himself to his brothers, it was an indication that the dynamic for the Jewish people to evolve had begun, to ultimately stand at *Sinai* and provide the location for the Divine Presence. The hosts of these locations were *Yosef* and *Binyamin*. *Mishkan Shilo* was in the portion of *Yosef* and the location of the Holy Ark in both Temples was the portion of *Binyamin*. At the moment of *Yosef's* revelation to his brothers, the dynamic of nationhood was put into motion, making it possible for a location of the Divine Presence. Simultaneously *Yosef* and *Binyamin* had seen the conclusion of those periods with the destruction of *Mishkan Shilo* and the first and second Temple. This is why they cried on each other's necks.

## The Profundity of Yaakov's Blessing to his Grandchildren

*Torah*: When *Yosef* took his sons *Ephraim* and *Manasheh* to be blessed by his father *Yaakov*, the *Torah* states, "And Israel said to *Ephraim* and *Manasheh*, 'May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads... may they reproduce (*vayidgu*) abundantly within the land.'" When *Yaakov* blessed his grandsons he chose the word "*vayidgu*" to imply proliferation, rather than the word "*vayirbu*" which means "to multiply/increase." It is evident that the word "*vayidgu*", which connotes the proliferation of fish, conveys another level of blessing.

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: The significance of the word "*vayidgu*" to be, "*Ephraim* and *Manasheh* should be as prolific as fish, which procreate in an unlimited number. Secondly, they should not be susceptible to the evil eye (*ayin ha'rah*) as fish that are concealed from the human eye as a result of their being covered by the water."

*Torah*: All life that existed at the time of the Great Flood came to an end. *Chazal* tell us that the *Torah* is specific in its description of the destruction of existence, to indicate that it was only the terrestrial species that perished. However, the fish in the sea were spared.

There is an argument in the *Gemara* in Tractate *Zevachim* regarding the survival of the fish during the Great Flood.

One opinion is that they swam to the depths of the sea where they were protected from the heat of the sulfuric waters of the Flood. Another opinion is that the fish swam to the Land of Israel, which was not inundated by the waters of the Great Flood.

After the Great Flood, G-d again blessed man and all existence as He had at the time of Creation. If in fact existence after the Flood was a continuation of the original Creation, why was it necessary for G-d to repeat the blessings of Creation? Since G-d once again did repeat the blessings that He originally bestowed upon Creation, it is an indication that after the Flood it was a new existence. However, the new existence no longer had the dimension of value of the original existence. We see that after the Flood the lifespan of man was greatly reduced. However, the fish in the sea who did not perish in the Flood were the continuation of the original Creation. Their essence and dimension of value had not been diminished. They thus continued proliferate in an unlimited manner.

*Gemara*: King David was one of the three most humble people who ever lived. He authored Psalms and was the most special king that the Jewish people had. The *Midrash* tells us that G-d had shown *Adam* all the wise men and leaders of all the generations until the end of time. *Adam* had noticed a special soul that was among the generations and asked G-d to identify it. G-d said that the soul was only meant to live a few hours.

*Adam* initially was destined to live 1,000 years. Upon hearing what G-d had said about the special soul, *Adam* said to G-d that he would give seventy years of his life so that the special soul could live. Thus, the seventy years of King David's life were the years of *Adam*, who was the handiwork of G-d. The years that *Adam* possessed had unlimited capacity because he was the handiwork of G-d.

*Adam* initially had a level of holiness his radiance was confused by the angels with the radiance of G-d. Since King David was endowed with the special years of *Adam*, he too had a relative unlimited capacity and was thus able to achieve a unique dimension of spiritual accomplishment.

The blessing, which *Yaakov* gave his grandchildren, equating them to fish regarding their proliferation, was intended to bless them with the potential of the original Creation that no longer existed. Thus, by choosing the word "*vayidgu*" rather than "*vayirbu*", *Yaakov*



was communicating a blessing to his grandchildren that they should be the beneficiaries of G-d's original blessing to Creation which was more special.

## **Yaakov's Opposition to be Buried in Egypt**

*Torah:* Before *Yaakov* passed away he made a special request of his son *Yosef*, the Viceroy of Egypt. The *Torah* states, "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* cites three reasons from the *Midrash* why *Yaakov* did not want to be buried in Egypt. However, the *Midrash* offers another reason that is not cited by *Rashi*. "The prophet *Yechezkel* identifies the Egyptian people as donkeys (*chamorim*), 'Their flesh is the flesh of donkeys (*chamorim*):' *Yaakov* said, 'I am compared to the sheep. As it states, 'Israel is the sheep...' Therefore, I do not want to be the sheep that redeems the donkey.' As it states in the *Torah*, 'the donkey shall be redeemed by the sheep.' Therefore, please do not bury me in Egypt."

*Rabbeinu Taam* explaining the *Midrash*: *Yaakov* did not want to be buried in Egypt because it would save the Egyptians from the Ten Plagues. If *Yaakov* were to be buried in Egypt, his merit would prevent the ten plagues from coming upon Egypt in the future. Why was *Yaakov* concerned whether the ten plagues would come upon Egypt or not?

*Torah* at the beginning of *Beshalach*: "And it was when Pharaoh sent out the people (after the ten plagues)..."

*Midrash*: "G-d said, 'Woe that he (Pharaoh) sent the Jewish people out of Egypt only after ten plagues. Had they remained there longer, I would have brought more plagues upon Egypt.'" G-d is bemoaning the fact that He could no longer bring more plagues upon Egypt.

*Bais HaLevy*: "If G-d's Mercy is upon all of His creations, why would He want the Egyptians to suffer to a greater degree with more plagues?" He explains, that the Jewish people, as a result of the bondage in Egypt became pagans. However, when they had witnessed the Hand of G-d through the plagues, which were revealed miracles, they were gradually purged from their pagan beliefs. Each plague that they had witnessed brought about another level of clarity and purging. However,

since it was essential and critical that they leave Egypt at the moment that they had, there remained a trace of idolatry within them. It was due to the urgency of their departure that they were not fully purged.

*Bais HaLevy*: The vulnerability to the sin of the Golden Calf was due to this trace of idolatry. Had the Jewish people been able to remain in Egypt slightly longer and be exposed to additional plagues, they would have been fully purged of the impurity of paganism.

*Yaakov* understood that if the ten plagues would not come upon Egypt because of being buried there, the Jewish people would not have the opportunity to extricate themselves from their idolatrous state, thus retaining the false beliefs of paganism and impurity of Egypt. They would thus not be qualified to stand at Sinai to receive the *Torah*. If this were to happen, the objective of Creation, which is the receiving and fulfillment of the *Torah*, would not occur. It was thus an imperative for him not to be buried in Egypt under any circumstance so that the Jewish people would be qualified to become G-d's Chosen.

*Yaakov* lived his entire life for the sake of fathering a family that would be the foundation of the Jewish people with a capacity to be taken as G-d's people.

*Rav Aaron Kotler z'tl*: The reason *Yaakov* did not start a family until he was eighty-four years old, was because he understood that he was not yet qualified to father the tribes until he fully purged himself from all impurity and deficiency. *Yaakov* underwent many levels of purging through *Torah* study and the difficult challenges that were presented to him. Succeeding in his qualification as the Patriarch, he chose to begin to have a family. Since this was his perspective of life and existence, he would not allow himself under any circumstance to be buried in Egypt, because it would impede and undermine the objective of existence.

## **One's Relevance to Eternity**

*Torah*: Before *Yaakov* passed away he blessed his children, in a manner that secured the potential of each of the tribes. Regarding the blessing *Yaakov* had given his children: "*Zevulon* shall settle by seashores. He shall be at the ship's harbor...*Yissachar* is a strong-boned donkey..."

*Zevulon* was meant to be the sea merchant who would travel and conduct trade, while *Yissachar* was meant to be totally dedicated to the study of *Torah*. It was through

this blessing that *Yaakov*, our Patriarch, established a partnership between his sons *Yissachar* and *Zevulon*, in which *Zevulon* would assume all financial and material responsibility for the support of *Yissachar* who would be fully dedicated to the study of *Torah*.

*Midrash*: The level of commitment that *Zevulon* had to *Yissachar* was to the degree that they “placed the food in the mouth of *Yissachar*.” Meaning, *Zevulon* provided in a manner that *Yissachar* was not distracted for even an instant to be concerned for his own material needs. Because of his degree of immersion in *Torah* study, which was without any distraction, *Yissachar* possessed a unique level of clarity and *Torah* knowledge.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Yomah*: If one sees one who is proficient in *Torah* to the degree that he is a decisor of Jewish Law, he is from the tribe of *Levy* or *Yissachar*. “If so, one could also be from the Tribe of *Yehudah* because he was a legislator of the law?”

*Gemara*: Although *Yehudah* was a legislator, he did not possess the unique ability to determine the absolutely definitive *Torah* law. This ability was unique to *Levy* and *Yissachar*. Why was this so? It is because these two tribes were not involved in the material. *Levy* had no share in the Land because G-d was their portion and they were His officiants. *Yissachar*’s material needs were fully provided by *Zevulon* and thus was able to be continuously immersed in *Torah*.

*Sforno*: “If *Yissachar* was continuously immersed in *Torah* and achieved a unique dimension of *Torah*, why is *Yaakov*’s blessing to *Zevulon* mentioned before the blessing that was given to *Yissachar*? (One would think that since the study of *Torah* is the ultimate pursuit that the blessing to *Yissachar* should have been mentioned first.) It is because one cannot be immersed in *Torah* study unless his material needs are addressed. As it states in the *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 for *Yissachar*, then the merit of that *Torah* study will accrue to both of them. Meaning, the one who had studied the *Torah* and the one who had enabled him to do so through his financial support, will both be fully accredited for the *Torah* that had been studied. This is the intent of the *Torah* establishing the obligation of tithing one’s produce to the *Kohen* (Priests) and the *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.

Similarly 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. As it states in the *Mishna* in Tractate *Sanhedrin*, ‘Every Jew has a share in the world to come.’”

*Gemara* at the end of Tractate *Kesubos*: If one does not engage in *Torah* study, he will not be resurrected at the end of time. This is because the *Torah* is the “dew of life (*tal chaim*).”

*Gemara*: “If so then simple unlearned Jew (*aam haaretz*) will not merit a share in the world to come (to be resurrected).” The *Gemara* states that even the unlearned Jew who is not engaged in *Torah*, if he supports the study of *Torah*, he too will merit resurrection (share in the world to come).

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: 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* because they were not willing to part with a significant percentage of their produce. Since this tithe had not particular level of sanctity they justified withholding it.

They however realized that the tithe of the *Kohen* could not be withheld because of its level of sanctity and liability if they should eat it. Thus, even the *aamei haaretz* had a share in the study of *Torah*. However, after the destruction of the Holy Temple there no longer is a context in which one has the opportunity to give tithes. (It is only the produce that is grown in the Land of Israel that must be tithed). How then is the unlearned Jew able to merit a share in the world to come if the mechanism of tithes is no longer in place? It is only if one supports the study of *Torah* of others will the unlearned Jew merit a share in the world to come.

*Chofetz Chaim*: Just as one needs to eat every day in order to sustain himself, identically one must sustain his spirituality. Regardless if one had eaten sufficiently on one day, he must eat again another day in order to continue to survive. The body needs continuous

sustenance to continue; however, the need to sustain the physical is only as long as the person is alive and therefore it is sufficient to have sustenance that has limitation. However in order for one's soul to come to the world to come, which is eternal, it must be given eternal sustenance. The spirituality that lies within *Torah* gives the Jew the ability to have relevance to eternity.

## **The Assurances that Were Needed by Yaakov (from Vayigash)**

*Torah:* After Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, he saw that they were distraught. He appeased them by explaining to them, that they should not be concerned about what they had done to him, because everything that had transpired was according to G-d's plan. Yosef said, "...Do not be distressed, nor reproach yourselves... G-d sent me ahead of you (to be the provider)...Hurry- go to my father and say to him, 'So said your son Yosef, 'G-d has made me master of all Egypt....And I will provide for you there..." In addition to appeasing his brothers, Yosef asked them to communicate to their father Yaakov his glory and success in Egypt. Why was it important for Yaakov to know Yosef's prominence and power in Egypt?

*Torah:* "And they (Yosef's brothers) told him (Yaakov), 'Yosef is still alive,' also that he is ruler over all the land of Egypt...when he saw the wagons (*agalos*) that Yosef had sent to transport him, then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived."

*Rashi* citing *Chazal:* By sending wagons (*agalos*), Yosef communicated to his father Yaakov that although they had been separated for twenty-two years he had not forgotten the last *Torah* subject that they had studied together. This subject was the law of *eglah arufa* (the decapitated calf). When Yaakov saw the wagons that were sent by Yosef, his state of prophecy returned.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Bava Basra:* "The Divine Presence only dwells upon one who is in a state of joy."

From the time that his sons had shown him the bloodied tunic of Yosef, Yaakov believed that his son had been

killed and was in a state of melancholy and thus was not able prophesize. It was only after Yaakov had seen the wagons that were sent by Yosef, that his prophecy was restored. It was an indication that his beloved son Yosef was not only physically alive but also was spiritually intact and vibrant, despite the exposure to the impurities of Egypt. Yosef had remained, "Yosef *HaTzadik* (Yosef the devoutly righteous)."

Yaakov as the Patriarch of exile, understood the spiritual pitfalls and dangers of being in exile. Yaakov loved Yosef more than all of his children because he understood that Yosef would be his spiritual heir, thus guaranteeing the survival of the Jewish people in Egypt. If Yaakov would have only been informed that Yosef was still alive, it would not have been sufficient for Yaakov to rejoice. He needed to be assured that Yosef was not spiritually diminished. By seeing the wagons, Yaakov was reassured that Yosef had not been affected by the Egyptian environment. It was therefore only after Yaakov saw the wagons did he rejoice.

It was important for Yosef to communicate to his father that he was the master over all Egypt and no one could interfere with his dictate. If Yosef was not the ruler of Egypt to provide for Yaakov and his family all that was necessary, there would be a possibility that Yaakov and his family's spirituality would be compromised to maintain themselves in Egypt. If Yaakov was not convinced of this, he would not rely on Pharaoh's promises to allow himself to descend to Egypt.

Yaakov needed to be fully independent in Egypt to maintain his spirituality. Thus, his children needed to convince him that Yosef was truly in control. This was not sufficient however for Yaakov to descend to Egypt. He needed to be convinced that Yosef was sufficiently spiritualized in order to be able to appreciate Yaakov and his family's spiritual needs. When Yaakov saw the wagons, he understood that Yosef had the spiritual sensitivity to appreciate how one is to provide for the Jewish people in Egypt and create for them an insular environment.



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