

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	KETUVIM
Vayishev	1 Dec 2018	23 Kislev 5779	Gen. 37:1-40:23	Amos 2:6-3:8	Matt. 1:18-25

We read this week's Vayishev in which Ya'akov "dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan." The Torah already explained in previous chapters that Ya'akov returned to his father in Canaan and Esau removed his family to relocate in Mount Seir. The Midrash asks, "Why the repetition?" And it answers by stating Isaiah 57:13, "In your crying out, your gatherings will rescue you." Meaning, Ya'akov and his sons in prayer saved him (Ya'akov) from Esau's hand. "But the wind carry them all away; nothingness will take them" – this refers to Esau and his sons. "But the one who trusts in Me will inherit the land" refers to Ya'akov as the Torah says, "Ya'akov dwelt in the land."

"Ya'akov dwelt in the land" means his intention was to stay in one location permanently, whereas Yitzchak "sojourned" (Gen. 35:27) – meaning he moved from places to places. Ya'akov wished that he would finally settle down in tranquility. Thus, Hashem said, "Are the righteous not satisfied with what awaits them in the World to Come that they expect to live in at ease in This World too?" (Rashi) Yet, Ya'akov did live in tranquility for 17 years before his death. The Midrash explains that Ya'akov's mission was not yet complete.

Let us review Ya'akov's life briefly. He left home in a hurry to avoid being killed by Esau. He was cheated constantly for 20 years by Lavan. He returned to face Esau again and survived. He had to run again from Shechem. He had 12 sons that were bound to become a nation as prophesied. If this wasn't enough, Yosef was killed by a wild animal. Why all these travails?

The tradition says that in Yyov (Job) 3:26 says, "I was not secure, I was not quiet, I was not at rest, and torment has come." According to the tradition, this verse was said by Ya'akov: 'I was not secure' – because of the trouble with Esau; 'I was not quiet' – because of the trouble with Lavan; 'I was not at rest' – because of the trouble with Dinah; 'and torment has come now' – now because Yosef is upon me.

The idea of "And Ya'akov wanting to dwell in peace", after everything that he had been through, he wanted to bring the Divine Presence into this world as all the *tzadikim* (righteous) desires. This was Ya'akov's life work and that is all he ever wanted. He wanted the world to be at peace with Hashem's Presence.

R' Chiya explains in the Zohar<sup>1</sup> by citing Psalms 34:19, "Many are the evils of the righteous, But YHWH delivers him out of them all." Meaning, there are many enemies a man must face from the day that he was born. As soon as he is born, the Evil Inclination enters his body as said in Genesis 4:7, "sin couches at the door." The animals flee away from danger to protect itself from the birth. However, because the Evil Inclination dwells in the man, he runs toward it.

There are two chambers in the heaven (shamayim), the Chamber of Purity and the Chamber of Impurity. The Chamber of Impurity tells you to lie, steal, cheat, etc. But the Chamber of Purity says not to steal, cheat, lie, nor lashon hara (evil tongue), etc. So, when you hear and bends your ear toward the voice, you are going to do as the Inclination dictates, that is who you become.

In Ecclesiastes 4:13 says, "Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king who knows not how to take care of himself." "Better is a child" because he represents Good Inclination as it has been with a child for a short period of time. We see such examples when Yeshua said in Mark 10:14, "Let the little

<sup>1</sup> Zohar, 179a

children come to Me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the reign of Elohim.”<sup>2</sup> We have learned that the Good Inclination enters the child when he is 13 years old. The king refers to the Evil Inclination as it is called a ‘king’ and ‘ruler of people in the world’. It is “old” and “foolish” as it refers to the Evil Inclination because as soon as a child is born, it lives with him. Thus, it is an “old and foolish king.” “Who knows not how to care of himself” – meaning, he needs to “take care of himself” first, that is spiritually, to help others.

Ya’akov wanted to be the bridge that connects between heaven and earth, the ladder that he himself saw in his dream (Gen. Ch. 28). And in order for this goal to be accomplished, the goal of bringing the light of holiness into this world, he knew it would be Yosef. Of all his children, he knew that Yosef was best equipped to be firmly part of the physical world yet strong enough to not allow it to conquer him... as evidenced by Yosef’s victory over himself later in this *parasha*, passing the test of the temptation of his master’s wife.

Ya’akov knew that Yosef could be the conduit of this Divine blessing and that he [Yosef] alone could channel it to the rest of the tribes of Yisrael. Therefore, the key to understanding this *parasha* is found in verse 2 and their relationship. In English, in order for it to make sense, we need to punctuate it with a colon and read: “These are the generations of Ya’akov: Yosef, at age seventeen, was a shepherd with his brothers...etc.” But in Hebrew it reads, “*eleh toldot Ya’akov Yosef...*” Which is more correctly rendered, ‘these are the generations of Yaakov: Yosef.’ Meaning, Ya’akov saw Yosef as the continuation of the legacy of the forefathers, itself the legacy of Adam. That is to bring the knowledge of Hashem into this world and ultimately the Redemption.

The Zohar supports this idea: “These are the generation of Ya’akov, Yosef being seventeen years old.” The Sages ask why the Torah does not say, “These are the generation of Ya’akov, Reuven being the firstborn.” They answer that the Torah was saying Yosef had the highest spiritual level amongst his brothers. Therefore, he was considered as the firstborn.

In verse 3, we read, “Now Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his sons since he was a child of his old age, and he made him a fine woolen tunic.” It is true, Yosef was a son born of old age and very special to his father. It is also true, Yosef was the son of his most beloved Rachel. On the surface, it appears as if Ya’akov was guilty of simple favoritism. According to the tradition, the coat that Ya’akov ‘made’ was none other than the garment of Adam made by Hashem that had been passed down through the generations which Ya’akov passed over to Yosef along with the responsibility of continuing the *tikkun* of Adam Harishon, the first man.

The Torah provides a hint by using the name ‘Yisrael’ in that verse: “Now Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his children...and he made him a coat of many colors.” The sages teach that the word ‘Yisrael’ over use of the word ‘Ya’akov’ in the Torah always refers to a higher level of prophetic consciousness, and to the collective of Yisrael.

Now, let us turn to chapter 38 of Genesis and discuss the events of Yahudah and Tamar. Here is a brief synopsis: Yahudah’s eldest son Er was married to Tamar but as the verse states “he was evil in the eyes of Hashem and Hashem cause him to die.” According to the sages, Er did not want Tamar to become pregnant so as not to mar her beauty and thus he wasted his seed.

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<sup>2</sup> Similar verses in Matt. 19:13-14, 18:2-5, 18:10, 18:14; Luke 18:10, 18:15-17; Mark 9:36-37

Yahudah's second son Onan, marries Tamar but he too, wastes his seed rather than fulfill the commandment known as *yibum* (Levirate marriage), a mitzvah based on Deuteronomy 25:5-6 requiring the brother of a man who dies without leaving his children, to marry his brother's widow so that his brother's line will continue. Hashem kills Onan as punishment for this.

After the death of two of his sons, Yahudah is hesitant to allow his last son, Shelah marry Tamar. He thought that everyone who marries this woman seems to die, so he makes an excuse to refuse the marriage between Tamar and Shela by using the boy's young age. Tamar was forced to return to her father's house and remain unmarried, to wait until Shelah becomes of age and marries her.

Tamar knew Yahudah was wrong. Thus, when she finds out that Yahudah is in Timnah she disguises herself and waits for him on the main road. Not recognizing her, Yahudah lies with her – and leaves her his personal effects as a deposit...his seal, his cord and his staff. Afterwards he seeks to pay the woman and she is nowhere to be found. After three months passed, Yahudah is informed that his daughter in law is pregnant and, presiding over a court of law, he pronounces a verdict over her to be put to death.

As Rashi points out she is the daughter of Shem and considered a *kohen* (priest), and as the daughter of a priest such behavior is unacceptable. As she was taken out for the sentence to be carried out, she sends word to him privately, so as not to embarrass him and asked if he recognizes them. The Midrash relates to this chapter, "what goes around comes around. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to Yahudah, as it were 'You fooled your father with a goat, now Tamar will fool you with a goat; you said to your father 'do you recognize this,' (Gen. 37:32, referring to the use of Yosef's coat), so Tamar will say to you, 'do you recognize this...' and she will mean, 'please recognize Hashem in all of this.' Yahudah admits that she is right, and he cancels the death sentence. The Midrash explains that the two messianic forces are the main them in this chapter as the Messiah will come from the line of King David, and Peretz is the ancestor of King David. And Yosef to prepare for the ultimate redemption.

Meanwhile back in Egypt, Yosef was sold to a prominent servant of the Pharaoh, Potiphar. Because everything about Yosef reflects Godliness, Yosef finds favor in his master's eyes and is put in charge of the entire household. Hashem blesses the house on account of Yosef's presence. There's only one problem. Potiphar's wife is a sexual predator, obsessed with Yosef and tries relentlessly, every day, to seduce him and convince him to lie with her. He adamantly refuses, time after time.

One day, when they were alone her advances toward Yosef became very aggressive and she took hold of his garment. Yosef escaped, having no choice but to flee, leaving the garment behind in her hands. She framed him by claiming he tried to rape her. Yosef was thrown in the dungeon. But there too, Yosef continues to radiate blessing and he finds favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

While in jail, Yosef meets two of Pharaoh's servants, the Chief Cupbearer and the Chief Baker. One day he sees they are disturbed and they relate to him that they both dreamed a dream and they don't know what it means. They tell Yosef their dreams and he offers an interpretation. Yosef implores the Chief Cupbearer to remember him to Pharaoh when he is free. The two interpretations come true but the Chief Cupbearer doesn't remember Yosef, he forgets all about him.

All of this, everything that we are learning about in this week's portion, is the background that comprises the circumstances leading up to what became Yisrael's exile in the land of Mitzrayim. For reasons that were determined by Hashem's wisdom alone, the nation of Yisrael's exile in Mitzrayim had been decreed yet at the covenant between the portions, when it foretold to Avraham (Gen. Ch. 15) "Know of a certainty that

your offspring shall be strangers in a land not their own and they will serve them, and they will oppress them, four hundred years." That had to happen no matter what, because it was Hashem's decree. Why? The sages teach that the exile was not as a punishment, but as a preparation for the giving of the Torah. It prepared the hearts of the Children of Yisrael for accepting the Torah, for the responsibilities of nationhood, and for their duties in this world. The events of our Torah portion, Vayishev begins the actualization of this decree and it informs us of the events that would lead to the nation's descent into Mitzrayim.

Everyone involved in this story is playing a role arranged by Divine providence as Yosef will eventually tell his brothers, when he is reunited with them in parashat Vayigash; that it was all part of Hashem's plan, and all for the good. The hatred of Yosef's brothers was not the primary reason for the exile as Hashem already decreed, but it was the vehicle through which the exile became about.

Thus, the sages teach in tractate Shabbat, "Said R. Chama bar Giora in the name of Rav, a person should never show any favoritism between his children, for on account of a garment that weighted two selaim, which Ya'akov gave to Yosef, his brothers were jealous, and events transpired which caused our forefathers to descend to Mitzrayim." The sages were well aware that the exile had been foretold to Avraham; they are not saying that the enmity caused it, but that it facilitated it. Thus, a Torah lesson we can learn from this week's parasha is that we are to be careful in our relationships.

One of Ya'akov's characteristics is that he wants to fix the world. He is an activist, an initiator. When Ya'akov arrived in Charan (Parashat Vayeitzei), he sees the shepherds gathering early, in the middle of the day, on work time, and he gets involved: "It is still early in the day, not time to gather the flocks, go herd them" Why is he getting involved? It seems like a simple story as we can easily defer that he was chasing away his competitors for Rachel. Was that the reason the Torah telling us? No. It teaches us that Ya'akov cannot remain passive or silent when he is confronted with a situation he feels that is not right. He is motivated to try and fix. Ya'akov's son Yosef follows in his father's footsteps.

The Righteous Yosef, when he sees that Leah's children are not behaving properly towards the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, as they ostracized the handmaiden's children and call them 'slaves', Yosef does not hesitate to take action. He associates with them himself and trying to lift up their spirits, and also by bringing the matter of their [Leah's sons] negative speech to Ya'akov's attention.

Yosef was not arrogant or boast about himself. Rather, he knew himself and his mind. He thinks it is important for his brothers to know his dreams because they have merit, and so he tells them. Yosef knows very well that this might lead to envy and hatred, just as Ya'akov knew back in Charan that the shepherds might not take kindly to his unsolicited advice. But they both follow a path of truth without fear or hesitation.

Yosef demonstrates this quality of steadfastness consistently. He goes at his father's bidding to inquire of his brothers and the flock's welfare even though he realizes the danger, and in his dealings in both the house of Potiphar and in prison, he works to improve and fix the respective situations as best he can.

**Amos 2:6-3:8**

Amos opens with a rebuke to Israel. Hashem had been patient with them notwithstanding their transgression of the three cardinal sins – sexual impropriety, idolatry, and murder. Their fourth sin, however, crossed the line – the mistreatment of the innocent, widows, orphans and the poor.

Hashem reminds the Israelite how He took them out of Egypt and led them through the desert for forty years and settled them in the Holy Land with love. Despite they were given prophecy, the people did not respond in kind by giving wine to the Nazirites and instructing the prophets not to prophesy. Amos then describes Hashem's punishment for their behavior: "And the stout-hearted among the mighty shall flee naked on that day, says the Elohim."

**Matthew 1:18-25**

In verse 18, it says "Holy Spirit" or "Holy Ghost." The word "holy" derives from "*heile*" referring to the warmth of the sun. And "ghost" is a Saxon (Germanic tribe) term that refers to the spirit of the dead. Thus, the words are inconsistent with being Set Apart for the Kingdom of Elohim.

Just as Hashem led Yosef (Gen. 37-40) into Egypt, He guides Yosef (Matthew 1) not to divorce Miriam for her pregnancy to fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14. Just as He was actively involved in moving in their lives, so is He today.

Yosef overcame his *yetzer hara* by remembering the teachings of his father, Ya'akov. He overcame his *yetzer hara* by obeying the words of Hashem in Matthew 1:24. So, that we all can serve YHWH with higher purpose. Amen.