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Vayeshev | Joy — Remedy for Every Ill





# MESILOT Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha of Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l

From the weekly lessons of his son **Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita** 

פרשת וישב | אנגלית

#### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Life–As a Spinning Top	1
Laban and His Misdeeds	4
After Twenty Years of Toil	6
The Anguish of Joseph	9
The Embers Ignite into a Bonfire!	10
"Where Can I Go?"	12
Publicizing the One Who Does a Mitzvah	16
The Importance of Joy in Observing the Commandments!	17
Serving G-d with Joy	18
Summary and Practical Conclusions	25



#### Beit Hamidrash Hameir La'aretz

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Parshat Vayeshev - Life-As a Spinning Top



# Life-As a Spinning Top

In a talk delivered by Rabbi Shalom Meir Wallach Shlita (Ma'ayan HaShavua, Bereishit – p. 530), he said the following:

We live in a dizzying era. Processes occur at such speed that we don't have time to digest one situation before it changes beyond recognition. Economies rebound and collapse, empires shed one form and assume another. In our region, far-reaching changes are taking place – and we don't even know whether it is for the better or for the worse.

The state of the world resembles a dreidel (spinning top). It whirls at great speed, spinning as if gripped by madness. But it has a handle at its top. Someone grasped it and set it spinning. Indeed, that is the case: Someone from on High is driving these processes, Someone in heaven is steering all of them!

We only need to look in our parasha at the story of Joseph's sale. What do we learn from it? "As for you, you intended to harm me, but G-d intended it for good, in order to accomplish, as it is this day, to keep a great nation alive" (Genesis 50:20) - the brothers heard Joseph's dreams and sought to thwart them. But what happened instead? Not only is man incapable of thwarting the counsel of G-d and foiling His plans, but the person who tries to do so will, in the end, discover that he was essentially a "plaything" in the hand of the Creator, and through him, the very plan he sought to destroy was realized and brought to fruition! They sought to push Joseph off the path of his destiny, but G-d said: "We shall see whose word will stand - yours or Mine!"

Parshat Vayeshev - Life-As a Spinning Top

Barely twenty years passed since the sale; the brothers had not yet recovered from the whirlwind it created, and already the brothers found themselves sucked into the Egyptian exile!

If we focus on the final year of the Egyptian exile, we see the same phenomenon:<sup>1</sup>

During all of the years of the Egyptian exile, our ancestors' lives followed a routine track – grueling servitude, along with fish, cucumbers, and melons "for free." A fixed and monotonous pattern of life...

Suddenly, Moses, our teacher, appeared, and it was as if a spirit of frenzy entered their hopeless routine: events chased one another — warnings and ten plagues, Pharaoh's agreement and recalcitrance, hope and despair, anticipation and disappointment. Then came the Korban Pesach and the Exodus, the chase and the splitting of the sea, Rephidim and

Marah, the war with Amalek, and the Giving of the Torah...

Just as it happened at the descent to Egypt and at the redemption from it, so too in our times.

For so many generations, life ran its course routinely – spiritually satisfying, materially oppressive.

Then, all at once, an upheaval, a revolution: exiles were uprooted from their place and came to the Holy Land, the land desired by our forefathers. Over here, events pursue one another; there is no day of routine, of rest, of calm. What is happening here? What is the meaning of it all?

I recalled a story told by an elderly Jew from Russia. In his childhood, his village had just been connected to the electric grid, and there was a movie house there where the projector

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**<sup>1.</sup>** The following excerpt is taken from *Ma'ayan Ha-Mo'ed* (Passover Haggadah –

p. 422) by Rabbi Shalom Meir Wallach, Shlita.

Parshat Vayeshev - Life-As a Spinning Top

was hand-cranked. The operator sat in his booth and turned the handle at a slow, steady pace.

day, the villagers One gathered in the cinema took their seats: the and hall was darkened, and the screening began. Everything went smoothly until suddenly, the picture froze on the screen.

It turned out the operator had fallen asleep...

They waited a minute or two, then they began to protest, to make noise, to shout – it was all in vain. The man was shut in his booth, sleeping soundly. With no other choice, they waited for him to wake up. There was nothing better to do, so they stared at the silent, frozen image staring back at them from the screen...

The film was slated to last two hours. In the first fifteen minutes, they watched a normal screening; for the next hour and a half, they gazed at a frozen image. Then, all at once, the projectionist awoke, horrified, and looked at his watch. Alas! — the film was only at its beginning and had only fifteen minutes left to finish! It didn't occur to him to stay even a minute past the set time, so he began cranking the handle at top speed... Thus, for an hour and a half, they had seen one still image, and then afterward, the frames began to leap frantically, racing crazily, chasing each other in a blur, and the viewers were all left stunned...

escape the Onecannot thought that this is what is happening now. For generations, the picture of our G-dly destiny stood frozen. The world rested on its laurels, and we rested on Then suddenly, ours. Redemption is drawing near, and there is a need to hurry and accelerate processes, to settle all open accounts, to conclude all maneuvers – there is no time, the hour is pressing, Moshiach is restlessly waiting!

And just as in Egypt, the appearance of Moses was sudden, so will it be in this

Parshat Vayeshev - Laban and His Misdeeds

Redemption: "And suddenly the L-rd whom you seek will come to His Temple" (Malachi 3:1).

As noted, we now stand very close to the coming of Moshiach, and everything is running at a dizzying speed. This explains the all-too-common phenomenon of the year passing by so quickly.

A year ago, we read Parashat Vayeshev, where we learned about the strength of Yosef the righteous. We barely managed to absorb the lessons from that talk, and we have already arrived again, an entire year later, at Parashat Vayeshev.

Well then, this year, we will learn an enduring lesson that our Sages derived from the actions of reuben, the son of Jacob...

But first of all, a review of the parasha – and before that, let us refresh our memory...

#### Laban and His Misdeeds

In the year 2185 to Creation, Jacob, our forefather, at age seventy-seven, arrived in the city of Haran. There, he approached Laban's house and asked him: Please give me your daughter Rachel as a wife.

Laban, naturally for the crook that he was, demanded in return 2,555 days of work (seven years)!

The seven years of work ended, and Jacob came to claim his reward. But Laban the deceiver, true to form, tricked him and brought him Leah instead.

Jacob approached Laban and asked him, "Why did you deceive me?"

Laban replied calmly and casually: "No problem! If you want to marry Rachel, work another 2,555 days! And so that you won't feel cheated, I'm willing to give you Rachel now, and then you'll work for her for the following seven years."

A few months passed after the wedding, and on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, Leah bore Jacob, his firstborn son. Jacob turned to

Parshat Vayeshev - Laban and His Misdeeds

Leah and said to her: You choose the name, and Leah chose the name reuben.

The holy Torah reveals to us the reason for her choice: "Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, 'Because the L-rd has seen my affliction, for now my husband will love me'" (Genesis 29:32).

Three and a half years went by, and little Reuben asked his father, Jacob, for permission to go out and wander in the fields. On that walk, he found dudaim (mandrakes). As it says: "And Reuben went during the days of the wheat harvest and found mandrakes in the field" (ibid. 30:14).

Reuben returned home and brought the mandrakes to his mother, Leah. At that time, his aunt Rachel was standing there, and when she saw the mandrakes, she turned to her sister Leah and said: My sister, you know that I have not yet merited to bear children, and mandrakes are a plant that helps with conception. "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes" (ibid.).

So Leah gave her some of the mandrakes, and this benefited them both: Leah merited her fifth son – Issachar, and Rachel merited her firstborn son – Joseph.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, through the mandrakes that Reuben brought, it came about that Joseph was born...

When the additional seven years of work were completed, Jacob said to Laban: Thank G-d, the 14 years of work for your two daughters are finished. Now, I want to return to the Land of Israel.

Laban pleaded with him: Do not leave me; I'm willing to pay you for your work.

So Jacob remained in Haran for another six years (in total, he was in Haran for twenty years).

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Parshat Vayeshev - After Twenty Years of Toil

At age 97, Jacob left Haran and began his journey back to the Land of Israel. On the way, he reached a place called Sukkot and stayed there for 18 months. After that, when he was already 99 years old, he

finally merited to return to the Land of Israel.

He stood in silent and solemn prayer before the Holy One, blessed be He, and asked Him to grant him to finally dwell in tranquility.

## **After Twenty Years of Toil**

Our parasha, Parashat Vayeshev, opens with the verse: "And Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan" (Genesis 37:1).

Rashi writes (ibid., verse 2) as follows:

"'And he dwelt (vaveshev)' -Jacob wished to dwell in tranquility, but instead, anguish of Joseph immediately sprang upon him. The righteous seek to dwell in tranquility; says the Holy One, blessed be He: Is it not enough the righteous what is prepared for them in the World to Come, they also seek to

dwell in tranquility in this world?"

From Rashi's words, we understand that Jacob, our forefather, should not have been asking for peace because such a request is not realistic — it is impossible to have both This World and the World to Come.

When the Lubavitcher Rebbe studied these words of Rashi, he asked two questions:<sup>3</sup>

1. Rashi explains that the word "vayeshev" implies Jacob's request to attain tranquility. If so, we need to understand: why is the parasha's name "Vayeshev" ("He dwelt")? In other words, the name

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of Parashat Vayeshev), by Rabbi Chaim Miller.

**<sup>3.</sup>** The *Five Books of the Torah* with *Torat Menachem* commentary (opening

Parshat Vayeshev - After Twenty Years of Toil

of the parasha does not seem to fit its content: the word vayeshev connotes peace and calm, whereas the parasha deals from beginning to end with hardships and troubles, with death and abductions — matters utterly contrary to the concept of tranquility!

2. From Rashi's words, it sounds as if the righteous never get to sit in peace – hence, "the anguish of Joseph immediately sprang upon him." However, in reality, that's not how things ultimately turned out. Many years later, Jacob went down to Egypt, and there he did merit to dwell in tranquility:

Jacob lived another 17 good and happy years with all his children and grandchildren, and since these were the final years of his life, it surely cast a pleasant light upon all of the difficult years that preceded them.

How does this accord with Rashi's implication that the righteous do not get to sit in tranquility?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explained as follows:

Jacob, our forefather, request to "dwell in tranquility" was a straightforward request — a request that every person makes of G-d: that his dealings with the world be peaceful.

Because in truth, the very act of existing day-to-day in this world – the struggles of earning a livelihood, etc. – demands great effort from a person and sometimes causes heartbreak, as it is said: "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread" (Genesis 3:19). Therefore, every person who goes out into the world and begins to grapple with the difficulties of making a living, etc., asks G-d to "dwell tranquility" – that dealings with the world be smooth and without grief.

Thus, Jacob, our forefather too, when he returned to the land of Canaan – the land of his father's sojourns – prayed to G-d that his engagement with the material world be easy and peaceful.

Parshat Vayeshev - After Twenty Years of Toil

However, the novel element with Jacob, our forefather, was that he only made this request now when he returned to the land of Canaan at age 99. He did not make this request, as most people would, at a much younger age when one first begins dealing with the outside world.

Prior to that, Jacob had no need for such a request. During the first seventy-seven years of his life, he sat immersed in Torah study and took shelter under the wings of the holy Shechinah; he had no need to ask for relief from any worldly troubles.

Even when he later arrived at Laban's house and began his twenty years of labor, he did not ask for peace. After all, he had taken upon himself fourteen years of hard work in Laban's house, and in the six years after that, he worked further to accumulate possessions. Thus, it stands to reason that he was not asking for quiet and peace during that period.

Only when Jacob returned to the land of Canaan and was freed from all the obligations and commitments he had did he ask — for the first time in his life — for a tranquil life, a life without worries or burdens that would disturb him in serving G-d...

G-d indeed granted him his request, but because He granted him this request, "the anguish of Joseph immediately sprang upon him," as we will explain further:

We must recognize that the troubles and hardships that befall a person also contain a glimmer of light: they present a person with a challenge that can lead to spiritual elevation. The trust in and strengthening connection one's with G-d during those times together with the refinement and humility that suffering engenders - make one worthy of even higher spiritual levels.

Sometimes, in order to attain those lofty levels, one must first travel a path of suffering; in that way, one becomes worthy of that elevation and spiritual tranquility. Without the difficulties, one cannot attain that level.

Parshat Vayeshev - The Anguish of Joseph

So it was with Jacob: the trials and hardships he endured elevated him to very high levels of connection with G-d, and only then did he become worthy of the sublime tranquility he yearned for. Indeed, after all the hardship and suffering with Joseph, G-d fulfilled his request to merit tranquility: in the last 17 years of his life in Egypt, he lived a life of peace and serenity.

Thus, we can interpret Rashi's words: "Jacob wished to dwell in tranquility, and therefore the anguish of Joseph sprang upon him." Jacob sought to dwell in peace and — therefore, the anguish of Joseph sprang upon him in order to make him — through suffering — worthy of dwelling in peace.

And this is why our parasha is called "Vayeshev" ("He dwelt"): because in it, we read about the process that ultimately brought Jacob to complete tranquility — the trials and sufferings that paved the road to serenity, both in this world and in the World to Come.

#### The Anguish of Joseph

The Lubavitcher Rebbe continued:

As aforementioned, when Jacob arrived in the land of Canaan, he prayed to dwell in peace. And G-d, who heard his prayers, paved for him the road to forge a true connection and an eternal bond with Him, blessed be He!...

This was the path:

When Jacob settled in the land

of Canaan, Joseph was seven years old. To Jacob's surprise, he noticed that a rivalry had developed among the brothers; the sons of Leah were calling the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah "the sons of the maidservants."

Joseph was appalled by this and tried with all his might to fix the situation, and when he did not succeed — "Joseph brought evil reports about them to their father" (Genesis 37:2).

Parshat Vayeshev - The Embers Ignite into a Bonfire!

Rashi explains that one of the things Joseph tattled about his brothers was that the sons of Leah "demeaned the sons of the handmaids (Bilhah and Zilpah) and called them 'slaves'".

As a result of Joseph's words, flames of jealousy began to burn within the household "the anguish of Joseph." Yet despite everything, they still remained low-burning embers.

Barely a year had passed since Jacob settled in Canaan when, on the journey from Shechem, between the city of Bethel and Ephrath, Rachel was seized by labor pains. Rachel gave birth there to Benjamin, but she died in childbirth. As it is said: "Rachel died and was buried on the road to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem" (ibid. 35:19)...

Jacob, our forefather, who until then had been living in Rachel's tent, moved to reside in Bilhah's tent... and Reuben was hurt – Has Father forgotten my mother, Leah? He went and moved Jacob's belongings from Bilhah's tent to Leah's tent.

This act caused a tremendous defect in the celestial realms, and as a result, the birthright was taken away from Reuben and given to Joseph.

Reuben recognized his sin and understood that he must repent. Among the steps he undertook, he donned a sackcloth on his body and began a very long regimen of fasting and weeping.

The years continued to pass...

## The Embers Ignite into a Bonfire!

Joseph was 17 years old, and G-d – who wished to initiate the Egyptian exile - sent him two dreams that ignited the flame. G-d gave him two dreams that sparked a tremendous fire of jealousy and hatred - "and they hated him" (Genesis 37:4), "and his brothers envied him" (ibid. v.11).

A kind of unspoken ban was imposed upon Joseph – "and they could not speak him to

Parshat Vayeshev - The Embers Ignite into a Bonfire!

peaceably" (ibid. v.4). These dreams caused the underlying conflict to erupt in all its intensity.

Days went by, and the brothers went to pasture their father's flocks in Shechem, and they tarried in returning home.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch writes (Genesis 37:12) that the holy tribes went to Shechem in order to discuss among themselves how they should go about their relationship with Joseph! The reason they went specifically to Shechem was that a wondrous light shone there – the spiritual light of brotherly love!

To elaborate: It was there, in Shechem, that the great feeling of fraternal love of Shimon and Levi was revealed; there still echoed their cry of "Shall he treat our sister like a harlot?!" (ibid. 34:31).

It was there that the light of brotherly love for their family shone forth in the past, and so they went to bask in the glow of that great, awesome, and wondrous residue, hoping to draw strength for the decision that they felt was necessary.

The holy tribes, in the greatness of their spiritual stature and by virtue of their spiritual vision, concluded that Joseph deserved the death penalty!

Meanwhile, Jacob waited for his sons to return, and they did not return. He grew very concerned for them, and therefore, he said to Joseph, "Come, let me send you to them" (ibid. 37:13). Although Joseph knew that his brothers hated him, he desired to fulfill the mitzvah of honoring his father.

Joseph went to look for his brothers but did not find them. "A man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, 'What do you seek?' ... He said, 'I seek my brothers'" (ibid. v.15–16), and the man told him that they had gone on to Dotan. Joseph arrived at the area and saw his brothers from afar.

The brothers saw Joseph approaching – "and they

Parshat Vayeshev - "Where Can I Go?"

conspired against him to kill him" (ibid. v.18). We ruled that Joseph deserves to die; come,

let's kill him! And they began to prepare themselves to carry it out...

#### "Where Can I Go?"

In a talk by Rabbi Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi zt"l, he said as follows (Birkat Mordechai, Bereshit – p. 413):

The tribes of G-d sit in judgment; the great ones of the generation sit in deliberation. The accused is a beloved, cherished brother. The quandary is terrible. Every subjective murmur must be uprooted, every bias peeled away, and the truth laid bare and presented as is.

They elevate themselves to cling to the Holy One, blessed be He, and they include Him in their deliberation (Rashi Genesis 37:33) at the highest level possible.

Everything is taken into account — Joseph, Father (Jacob), the future... The mental strain is crushing, and the responsibility enormous. But the verdict is decisive: Guilty — he must die!

Reuben, too, joins them in judgment. Long ago, his essence was defined by his very name: "Reuben – see what a difference between my son (Reuben) and the son of my father-in-law (Esau)" (Berachot 7b)...

Rashi explains: Esau willingly and knowingly sold his birthright to Jacob, yet afterwards, he complained and accused Jacob, "Why did you steal my birthright?" Whereas Reuben had the birthright taken from him and given to Joseph – and nevertheless, in the end, he was the cause of saving Joseph from being killed.

"Reuben" \_ thus his mother Leah named him, for depicted foresaw and son's character with her divine inspiration: blend а of unreserved esteem his younger brother, devotion to his father the patriarch,

Parshat Vayeshev - "Where Can I Go?"

and inexhaustible reserves of immense inner strength.

There are no words to describe this phenomenon of release and elevation — to subordinate everything to the truth, without grievance, and without pain. On the contrary, with identification and cooperation, to hand the kingship to another king and anoint a different High Priest in his stead.

This giant of a man, Reuben, is also seated on the threshing floor of judgment, judging his brother. The deliberation is concluded; the decision is unanimous.

Reuben speaks up and says: "I beg you, beware of acting rashly!" (Sforno on Genesis 37:21).

Reuben had experienced firsthand the fruits of impulsiveness. All eyes turn to the sackcloth on his body and from there to his tormented face. For years, he had occupied himself with his sack and his fasting, trying with all his might to uproot the remnants of his 'pachaz' – reckless haste...

The Gemara states (Shabbat 55b): "Whoever says Reuben sinned is simply mistaken." His intention was utterly pure – he was defending his mother's honor. Even so, the term 'pachaz' ("wanton haste") still clung to his cloak...

And now, between one fast and the next, in the midst of his teshuvah process, Reuben asks his holy brothers to please understand and realize that there is no substitute for a second thought, no replacement for further deliberation — for one more moment of contemplation — they must not be caught in the snare of 'pachaz' (recklessness)!

His request was granted!

Divine inspiration attests that the power of an extra moment's contemplation that prevents rashness is so great that it can even overcome a decree of Heaven (who was included in their deliberations) and bring Joseph back intact to his father!

Parshat Vayeshev - "Where Can I Go?"

Thev heeded Reuben's words: "Do not shed blood! Cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him" (Genesis 37:22).

They inspected the pit – Reuben himself checked it and the pit was empty, without water. They took Joseph and cast him into the pit, and Reuben hurried off to Father's house to attend to him and serve him, continuing the work of his life – to scrub and cleanse his soul, to launder and purify himself, to keep examining and toiling in the question of "How should one contemplate?"

But there, by the edge of the pit, the unforeseen occurred. Another unfortunate deliberation took place – and that reflection bore fruit! The brothers decided to heed Judah's proposal: "Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let our hand not be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh" (ibid. v.27)...

All this was the result of Reuben's moral counsel. Consider what might have

transpired through a sudden diabolical action and what was averted by his having prevented impulsiveness.

Reuben finished the day's toil – another day in his father's company, another step in the accounting of his soul. "And Reuben returned to the pit" (ibid. v.29). He hadn't lingered with his brothers; he ran back to the pit. Now, he would meet his beloved brother, lift him from the pit, hug him, and carry him on his shoulders back to Father.

Who knows? Perhaps in the meantime, his Father had asked him, "How are your brothers, and how is Joseph?" Reuben, bearing the pain of what was concealed, at least told the truth as he knew it – that all was well. After all, he knew full well that Joseph was alive in the pit, and by preventing rashness, the disaster had been averted.

Reuben bent over the mouth of the pit, reached in his arms, and lowered a rope, calling his brother's name. But the rope slackened, flapping limply. He

Parshat Vayeshev - "Where Can I Go?"

raised his voice: "Joseph! Joseph!" No voice answered. A menacing echo rebounded back, slicing into his gut.

With trembling hands, Reuben tied the rope to a stake in the rock and lowered himself, heart pounding, into the pit. He searched every cranny on the way down into the depths. Panic gripped him; a prayer escaped his lips. His senses were on high alert, eyes straining, ears pricked to catch any sound — hope had not yet vanished.

How *can* it be?! He refused to accept the logical reality. *Where* is *Joseph*?! There – a sound!

Hope surged anew, driving away terrifying visions of a grieving father. He turned toward the sound – and stumbled into spurting streams of venom hissing in the darkness...

All hope was gone; his heart fluttered and was thrown about with the fear of a devoured brother and haunting images of a heartbroken father. With one last ounce of strength, he pulled himself up to the edge of the pit. His being was nullified into the dreadful void; torturous thoughts and a flood of anguished reflections filled every space in his mind where order and calm had previously been. He tore his clothes in grief and mourning — "Behold, Joseph was not in the pit!"

Crushed and broken by suffering, Reuben turned toward his brothers, hounded by a guilt that beat and strangled him: Why wasn't the pit checked? Why did no one consider the possibility of snakes and scorpions? It seems the contemplation was not fully implemented. The rashness had not been uprooted; the impetuosity not laundered clean.

For years upon years, Reuben wandered in sackcloth, afflicting his soul with fasting, scrubbing away that *pachaz*. Just a few hours earlier, his efforts had borne fruit — the wisdom of an extra reflection. But now his world collapsed. It became clear that the root of *pachaz* had not been eradicated;

Parshat Vayeshev - Publicizing the One Who Does a Mitzvah

the "sudden deed" he had been working to eradicate had not been averted - "The boy is gone, and I – where can I go?" (ibid. v.30).

I thought to myself that my repentance was complete, the breach had been sealed, and no rashness would ever overcome me again – the episode of Bilhah had been erased from the record.

But the boy is gone. From afar, the faint hissing of snakes can be heard – "and where shall I go regarding rectification of the matter of Rilhah"

## Publicizing the One Who Does a Mitzvah

Despite Reuben's immense anguish, the Torah praises him for his deed. It says: "And Reuben said to them, 'Shed no blood! Cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him' - in order to rescue him from their hand to return him to his father" (Genesis 37:22).

From here, the Rashba learns (Responsa of Rashba, Part I, §581) that we publicize the one who performs a mitzvah. He writes:

"It is the way of the Torah to record and publicize one who does a mitzvah. And since the Torah did so, we must follow the ways of the Torah, for its ways are ways of pleasantness. Behold – regarding the saving of Joseph, where Reuben saved him from his brothers, the Torah wrote about him: 'And Reuben heard, and he saved him from their hand' (ibid. v.21). Similarly, regarding Boaz when he offered [Ruth] bread and vinegar - The prophet recorded it (Ruth 2:14)...

The Rashba continues, bringing the words of the Midrash:

'Rabbi Yitzchak bar Marion said: The verse comes to teach you that if a person is going to perform a mitzvah, he should do it with a full heart. For had Reuben known that the Holy

rarshat Vayeshev - The Importance of Joy in Observing the Commandments!

One, blessed be He, would record in the Torah about him, "And Reuben heard and saved him from their hand," he would have carried Joseph on his shoulder to bring him to his father.

And likewise, had Aaron known that G-d would write about him, "Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will

rejoice in his heart" (Exodus 4:14), he would have gone out to meet Moses with tambourines and dancing.

Similarly, had Boaz known that G-d would write about him, "And he handed her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left over" (Ruth 2:14), he would have fed her fattened calves!"

# The Importance of Joy in Observing the Commandments!

To quote Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum zt"l (Teshua Gedolah – p. 29):

"From the story of Reuben the Midrash taught that if a person performs a mitzvah, he should do it with a full heart — for had Reuben known that G-d would write 'And Reuben heard and saved him from their hand,' he would have carried him on his shoulder to bring him to his father.

In actuality, it was impossible for Reuben to *actually* return Joseph to his

father – for it was the will of the Creator that Joseph goes down to Egypt. However, Reuben did know this since G-d not concealed the ultimate purpose from him, and everything happened through various natural causes. Yet. since Reuben's desire was to do this – to return Joseph to his father the rule is: 'If a person intended to do a mitzvah but was prevented and did not do it, the Torah credits him as if he had done it' (Kiddushin 40a). And since, according to Reuben's understanding, he would have

Parshat Vayeshev - Serving G-d with Joy

done the deed with a true and wholehearted intent – for he did not know that carrying it out was impossible – therefore G-d considered it as if he had indeed returned Joseph to his father!

From this, we see how far the power of a sincere heart extends: even though Reuben wanted to do something that was not in line with what had been planned before G-d, nonetheless, since his will was truly for the sake of Heaven, the Torah credits him as if he had done it in practice.

This crystallizes the Midrash's lesson: The Torah teaches us the proper way – that when a person does a mitzvah, he should do it with a joyful heart and a full heart.

Had Reuben known that the Torah would write about him,

"And Reuben heard and saved him from their hand" (Genesis 37:21), he would not have believed that his *thought* alone could count so much as to be considered an *action*.

If he had known that the verse writes "to return him to his father" (ibid. v.22), Reuben would have hoisted Joseph on his shoulder and carried him to his father – he wouldn't have relied on his thoughts alone. But in truth, he didn't need to perform the deed physically since that was not the will of the Creator. It was written in the Torah only to show how far the power of a joyful heart and full heart in a mitzvah reaches – G-d considers it as if Reuben had brought Joseph back in actuality!"

Let us expand further on this matter.

# Serving G-d with Joy

We must internalize that the feeling of joy is a divine light revealed within the heart, and from there, it spreads to all the limbs and sinews — joy is a complete state of being!

Thus, the virtue of joy is very great. It brings a person to ruach

Parshat Vayeshev - Serving G-d with Joy

hakodesh (the Holy Spirit) and prophecy. It is the foundation for the Divine Presence resting upon a person, for when this divine light is revealed in a person, it opens for him all of the gates of heaven!

Behold, the primary feeling of joy is revealed in a person at the time of learning Torah and performing mitzvot, as the Gemara says (Pesachim 117a): The Shechinah does not rest [on a person] in the midst of sadness, nor in the midst of laziness, etc., but only in the midst of the joy of a mitzvah.

Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel zt"l once explained as follows (Imrei Noam, Parashat Ki Tavo – Ma'amar 4):

In Parashat Ki Tavo, the Torah details wondrous blessings that each and every one of us can merit if "you will surely listen to the voice of G-d your G-d, to observe to do all His commandments" (Deuteronomy 28:1).

Afterward, the Torah enumerates ninety-eight harsh

and bitter curses and says that all these curses will come "because you did not serve G-d your G-d with joyfulness and gladness of heart, when you had an abundance of everything" (ibid. v.47).

On the simple level, the intent of the Torah here is that the curses will, G-d forbid, befall a person for not serving G-d at a time when he was joyful and content from the abundance of good that G-d had bestowed upon him — when he lacked nothing (this is indeed how Rashi explains the verse.)

However, Rabbeinu HaAri z"l (Sha'ar HaMitzvot – Introduction) interprets that the meaning of the verse is that the curses are not because a person didn't serve the Creator at all, but rather because he did not serve Him and fulfill His commandments with great joy and gladness of heart, as he would have rejoiced if he had received thousands upon thousands of gold coins and an abundance of wealth.

Similarly, Rabbeinu Bachya explains (on Deuteronomy 28:47):

Parshat Vayeshev - Serving G-d with Joy

"Because you did not serve G-d your G-d with joy" – the Torah charges the person for serving the Blessed G-d without the service being with joy because a person is obligated to feel joy when engaged in mitzvot. And the joy in doing the mitzvah is itself a mitzvah. Aside from the reward one earns for the mitzvah, one earns reward for the joy. Therefore, verse here punishes someone who performs the service of a mitzvah without having done it with joy. Accordingly, a person must perform the commandments with joy and complete sincerity.

Thus, we find that joy in serving G-d and fulfilling His commandments is а most fundamental important and matter – so much so that for refraining from it, such grievous curses are, heaven forbid, liable to come upon a person. In the words of the Rambam (Hilchot Lulav 8:15): "The joy that a person experiences in performing a mitzvah and in the love of G-d who commanded them — is a great service; and anyone who holds himself back from this joy is worthy of retribution."

When a person performs any mitzvah, one of the clearest signs that he did it wholeheartedly is if he did it with great joy. As the holy Rabbi Nachman of Breslov zt"l writes in Sefer HaMiddot (entry "Simchah," §1): When a person does a mitzvah with joy, it is a sign that his heart is complete with his G-d.

And likewise, regarding the service of prayer: A Jew needs to come to prayer with truly joyful enthusiasm, as it is said: "Serve G-d with joy, come before Him with gladness" (Psalms 100:2). Thus, the Rambam writes (Hilchot Tefillah 4:15): "If someone finds his thoughts confused and his heart troubled, he is forbidden to pray until his mind is composed" – because in a state of unsettled, anxious mind, he cannot pray with joy.

If someone wants to know whether his prayer was accepted before G-d or not, let

Parshat Vayeshev - Serving G-d with Joy

him examine *how* he prayed. If he prayed with joy, he could be confident that G-d accepted his prayer – and not only that but that G-d takes his prayer and places it as a crown upon His head. There is nothing in the world that can draw a person closer to G-d as much as prayer offered with joy and love.

Likewise, regarding Torah study, learning Torah must be done with great and profound joy. The verse states: "Their idols are silver and gold" (Psalms 115:4) — the word for "their idols" (atzabeihem) is related to atzvut, sadness. A person who studies Torah in sadness creates impure spiritual "husks" and gives power to the Sitra Achra (the "Other Side," forces of impurity) through his learning.

Therefore, it is brought in halacha (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah, §384:1) that a mourner — heaven forbid — is forbidden to study Torah throughout the seven days of mourning. Aside from the straightforward reason (because "the precepts of G-d (i.e.

words of Torah) are upright, gladdening the heart" (Psalms and a 19:9). mourner forbidden to experience joy see Moed Katan 21a and Rashi there), the inner reason is that since the mourner is steeped in terrible sadness, if he studies in such a state he will only blemish the sanctity of the Torah and all of his learning will be given over to the forces of impurity. Therefore, refraining learning is better than learning in that state, and thus, it is forbidden for him to learn.

It is said that the Baal HaTanya would sometimes pause in the middle of learning with his students and ask them to sing some joyous melodies for a few minutes. He had noticed that a few students sitting in the class were feeling despondent and sad, and he instructed them to sing a few joyful tunes to bring joy into their hearts.

When I see a young kollel scholar come to learn in a downcast mood, I call him over and ask: "Are you feeling well?

Parshat Vayeshev - Serving G-d with Joy

Is everything alright? Maybe go rest a bit first?" The reason I do this is because I know that if he doesn't have joy in his learning, he won't be able to gain anything from it.

A Jew who comes to study the Torah, Mishnah, Gemara, Halacha, Chassidut, etc., and wants to remember what he learns – the advice is that he should learn with joy because joy brings a great deal of memory. Conversely, if one studies without joy, G-d will shut the gates of Torah wisdom and will not help him grasp what he is learning.

If a person wants the halacha to be absorbed properly within him, he must be happy while he learns – because when one learns with joy, he receives special Heavenly assistance to intuit the true meaning of the halacha.

This is why in all disputes between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel, the halacha always follows Beit Hillel – because Hillel the Elder's approach was that of the students of Aaron the

Kohen, "loving peace and pursuing peace" (Avot 1:12). He was always in great joy and greeted every person warmly. Therefore, he merited special divine assistance to arrive at the truth of the halacha.

Likewise, King David merited that the halacha is in accordance with him (wherever there was doubt), as it is said of him: "And G-d was with him" (I Samuel 16:18). Our Sages explained (Sanhedrin 93b) that this meant the halacha agreed with him in every instance. The reason for this, says the Ramchal (Tikunim Chadashim -Intro.), is that the Shechinah was always with him – and that was because he never allowed himself to fall into sadness.

King David was entirely filled with joy in serving G-d. As he said: "I will sing to G-d as long as I live; I will sing praise to my G-d while I exist" (Psalms 104:33). And lest you say that he was always happy because his life was smooth and blissful — in fact, from the day King David was born until the

Parshat Vayeshev - Serving G-d with Joy

day he died, he did not have a single truly "happy" day. It is written in the Gemara (Berachot 7b) that he never even had a good dream, much less a good reality while awake. Rather, King David's joy sprang from his service of G-d. All that he went through in this world did not interest him at all, nor did it dampen his joy in the slightest.

The holy Or HaChaim wrote (on Deuteronomy 26:11) that if people could feel the sweetness and pleasantness of the goodness of Torah, they would go absolutely wild and fervently pursue it — and a world full of silver and gold would be nothing in their eyes.

If a person truly understood the immense value of the holy Torah, he would act like an utter madman, running after it in the streets. We should, every single day, be paying the Creator all of the money we have in our bank accounts and in our houses, in our safes and hiding places, for having given us permission to learn His holy Torah. Not only do we not pay Him for this – we even receive reward from Him for it.

Is it a small thing in your eyes to open a Gemara and delve into the words of the Tannaim and holy, pure Amoraim, who lived almost thousand years ago?! two When you pause for a moment the disparity consider between you and them, you will surely feel what an immense privilege has fallen into your lot - to study their holy words. Consequently, you will do so with indescribably great joy.

The same is true regarding teshuvah (repentance): true teshuvah must specifically be done with tremendous joy. The sign that a ba'al teshuvah (penitent) has found favor in G-d's eyes and that his repentance has been accepted in Heaven is when joy begins to enter his heart.

If G-d forbid one's teshuvah is accompanied by sadness, it is not accepted in Heaven – akin to the rule that "none may enter the King's gate wearing sackcloth"

Parshat Vayeshev - Serving G-d with Joy

(Esther 4:2). Repentance done in sadness does not ascend to the side of holiness, but rather to the opposite side, which is characterized by "sorrow and sighing."

We must stay far away from those crooked paths and return in repentance to G-d with joy. In the verse: "In Your Name, they rejoice all day" (Psalms 89:17) the initial letters spell "weeping" (BeChiYa) (Likutei Moharan I, Torah 175) – to teach us that the main value of crying of repentance is when it wells up from the heart out of an inner joy. For there is such a thing as tears of joy; joy over the fact that G-d is calling us to return in teshuvah, for "Your right hand is extended to receive the repentant."

When a person feels immense joy in prayer, in learning, etc., or he hears a Torah lesson, and his heart rejoices — that joy has the power to rectify hundreds of details that he may have omitted or forgotten. The moment a

person serves G-d with joy, the joy erases all of the undesirable past that he had. As it is said: "For with joy you shall go out" (Isaiah 55:12) — meaning that through the attribute of joy in serving G-d, one merits to go out and leave behind all of their negative past.

This is also hinted at with the word besimcha ("with joy"), which is an acronym for "erase, in Your great mercy, our promissory notes (of debt)" (מחוק ברחמיך הרבים שטרי חובותינו).

A person who is always joyful - his sin will not be remembered against him in Heaven. Because with G-d. there is a rule: He does not judge unfavorably joyous people. Whoever fulfills in himself the verse, "I will rejoice in G-d," will have fulfilled in him the verse that immediately follows: "Sins cease will from the earth" (Psalms 104:34-35) - and all his transgressions will fade away on their own...

Parshat Vayeshev - Summary and Practical Conclusions

#### **Summary and Practical Conclusions**

1. The feeling of joy is a divine light revealed within the heart and spreads from there to all the limbs and sinews - for joy is a complete state of being!

The virtue of joy is exceedingly great. It brings a person to Ruach ha-kodesh and prophecy; it is the basis for the Shechinah resting upon a person. When this divine light is revealed in a person, all of the gates of Heaven open for him!

The primary feeling of joy is revealed in a person at the time of Torah learning and mitzvah performance; as our Sages have said, the Shechinah rests on a person not amid sadness, nor amid laziness, etc., but only amidst the joy of a mitzvah.

2. The Rambam rules: "The joy that a person feels in performing a mitzvah and in the love of G-d who commanded them, is a great service, and anyone who holds himself back from this joy is worthy of punishment."

When a person performs any mitzvah, a clear sign that he has done it wholeheartedly is that he did it with great joy, for "when a person does a mitzvah with joy, it is a sign that his heart is complete

with his G-d."

3. The same applies to prayer: a Jew must approach prayer with joy and true gladness. He should feel happiness and delight that he has merited permission to approach G-d and ask Him for all of his desires.

This joy itself will bring him closer than anything to G-d, for nothing in this world can draw a person closer to G-d as much as prayer offered with joy and love.

- 4. The same applies to Torah study: one must study the Torah with very great and abundant joy. This joy will open his mind and understanding, and he will remember everything he learns. In addition. G-d will assist him in arriving at the truth, and the halacha will follow his view in all cases.
- 5. If a person truly understood the immense worth of the holy Torah, he would run after it through the streets as a fool. We ought, every single day, to pay the Creator of the world all the money we have in our banks and in our homes, in our hiding places and secret stashes, for granting us permission to learn His holy Torah. And not only do we not pay Him for this -

#### Parshat Vayeshev - Summary and Practical Conclusions

but we even receive reward from Him for doing so! Therefore, we must learn the holy Torah with immeasurably great joy.

6. The same applies to the service of teshuvah: true repentance must be done out of tremendous joy. The sign that a penitent has found favor in G-d's eyes and that his teshuvah was accepted on High is when joy begins to enter his heart.

If G-d forbid one's repentance is accompanied by sadness, it is not accepted in Heaven - as it is said: "for none may enter the King's gate clothed in sackcloth." Repentance done in sadness does not ascend to the side of holiness but to the opposite side,

which is characterized by "sorrow and sighing."

7. A person who feels tremendous joy in prayer, in learning, etc., or who hears a Torah class and his heart rejoices - such joy has the power to rectify hundreds of details of Torah laws that he had forgotten. For when a person serves G-d with joy, the joy erases all the undesirable past he had, as it is said: "For with joy you shall go out" - i.e., through the attribute of joy in serving G-d, one merits to leave behind all the negative past. This is hinted at in the word besimcha ("with joy"), which is an acronym for "erase, in Your great mercy, our promissory notes (of debt)."

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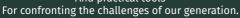


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# **Shabbat Times** Vayeshev

23rd of Kisley ,5786

	Candle	Shabbat	Rabbeinu
City	Lighting	Ends	Tam
New York	4:11 pm	5:14 pm	5:41 pm
Miami	5:13 pm	6:09 pm	6:44 pm
Los Angeles	4:27 pm	5:26 pm	5:57 pm
Montreal	3:53 pm	5:01 pm	5:23 pm
Toronto	4:23 pm	5:29 pm	5:53 pm
London	3:33 pm	4:50 pm	5:03 pm
Jerusalem	4:21 pm	5:12 pm	5:43 pm
Tel Aviv	4:17 pm	5:08 pm	5:38 pm
Haifa	4:14 pm	5:09 pm	5:38 pm
Be'er Sheva	4:19 pm	5:13 pm	5:43pm

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From the Words of

HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l

There is no Iew in the world who has no share in the Torah. As we say in the prayer, "Grant us our share in Your Torah"—each person asks to receive his particular portion.

Even if a person in this world slips a bit, it's only temporary and only for the moment, for after every descent there comes a great ascent.

But a Jew is ultimately brought back in complete teshuvah (repentance), and that day is the finest day before the Holy One, blessed be He; it brings Him the greatest joy!



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