

***Yad Avraham Institute***  
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**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita***

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Yad Avraham Institute  
New York  
February 20, 2014

B"H

## Vayakhel

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

### 1. Silence can be Deadly

The Torah tells us that at the time the Golden Calf was being worshipped, Moshe was in heaven receiving the Torah. G'd said to him, **"You must go down because your people who you have taken out from Egypt have become corrupt."** The Midrash tells us that when G'd said to Moshe to go down because "your people have become corrupt" He was referring to the rabble that Moshe had taken out of Egypt without consulting with G'd. The Midrash states regarding the rabble, "They became corrupt and they corrupted others (the Jewish people)." Meaning, it was the rabble and not the Jewish people who instigated the Golden Calf. To indicate this, the verse states after the Golden Calf was cast, **"They said, 'This is your god, O Israel, which brought your out of Egypt.'"** Chazal explain that if it were the Jewish people themselves who wanted to worship the Golden Calf, the verse would have stated, "This is our god...." The fact that it states, "This is your god..." indicates that it was the rabble who were the ones who instigated the idolatry and not the Jewish people.

As a result of the sin of the Golden Calf, G'd wanted to destroy the Jewish people. However, because Moshe supplicated G'd on their behalf, the decree was annulled. When Moshe descended the mountain, he smashed the first set of Tablets. He said, **"Whoever is for Hashem, join me!"** The entire tribe of Levy, although they were the smallest tribe in number, they joined Moshe to purge the Jewish people from those who worshiped the Golden Calf. There were those who were killed by the sword, while others died as a result of drinking the pulverized gold of the Golden Calf mixed with water, similar to the ritual of the suspected adulteress. If the suspected adulteress was in fact guilty, she would die as a result of drinking the water administered by the Kohen. So too those who drank from the water with the pulverized gold of the Calf, died if they had been involved in idolatry. There were others who died from plague. It is interesting to note that relatively few Jews were actually involved in the worship of the Golden Calf. If such a small segment of the Jewish people engaged in the Golden Calf, why should

the entire people be held culpable to the point that G'd wanted to destroy them?

Sforno explains that although very few of the Jewish people were actually involved in idolatry, the basis for their culpability was that they remained silent and allowed the sin of the Golden Calf to take place in their midst. Witnessing the desecration of G'd's Name in this most extreme manner and not intervening to prevent it from taking place, it was the basis for their liability. They thus deserved to be destroyed. If they internalized and appreciated G'd's Being and that He had performed revealed miracles on their behalf, and had taken them out of Egypt, and revealed Himself at Sinai, it is unconscionable that they remained silent. The Gemara tells us that Chur, the son of Miriam, one of the leaders of the Jewish people, attempted to prevent them from doing idolatry and was killed. After witnessing the death of Chur at the hands of the rabble, how could the Jewish people remain silent? Thus, the Attribute of Justice was evoked against the Jewish people due to their passivity and inaction.

The correction of the failure of the Jewish people, regarding their silence during the worship of the Golden Calf, was that they remained passive and silent when the Levites killed those who were involved with idolatry. The Jewish people stood back and allowed their midst to be purged without interfering. If in fact they condoned what had taken place, why did they not interfere with the Levites? It is a confirmation of their remorse through their silence. It was thus considered a correction. This silence in conjunction with Moshe's supplication allowed them to be worthy of G'd's Attribute of Mercy.

The Torah tells us that Zimri, the prince of the tribe of Shimon committed a public desecration of G'd's Name when he cohabited with the Midianite princess Cosbi. Pinchas in an act of zealotry killed Zimri together with Cosbi, thus bringing about a public sanctification of G'd's Name. Had it not been for Pinchas's act of zealotry, G'd would have destroyed the entire Jewish people. Why

should Zimri's misbehavior evoke the Attribute of Justice against the entire Jewish people? Sforno explains that because they remained silent and did not take action to prevent this desecration, they were culpable. Witnessing this level of desecration of G'd's Name was considered an unconscionable level of disgrace to G'd. If they were pained by the event, how could have they remained silent? The correction for their failure of silence was that they did not react to Pinchas's act of zealotry after killing Zimri. Their inaction and passivity after the sanctification of G'd's Name was an indication that they approved of what Pinchas had done. They thus corrected their initial silence. This is similar to the incident of the Golden Calf.

The Torah tells us that although the Manna was not meant to be found on Shabbos, Dasan and Aviram went out into the field and planted Manna, so that they could gather it on Shabbos, thus refuting Moshe's claim that there would be no Manna on the Shabbos. As a result of their behavior, the Jewish people were held culpable. As the Torah states, **"G'd said to Moshe, 'How long will the people sin against Me?'"** Why are the Jewish people held culpable for the behavior of these two evil individuals? Had the Jewish people established a spiritual standard that must be maintained at all cost, without tolerating any degree of breach, Dasan and Aviram would not have considered behaving as they had done. They would have understood the immediate consequence of their behavior from the Jewish people. There were several instances in which Dasan and Aviram should have been reprimanded and punished but they were not. Their transgression with the manna was a direct result of the ongoing passivity of the Jewish people. There nonintervention when people transgressed, created an atmosphere of tolerance, thus allowing Dasan and Aviram to usurp Moshe's authority. Therefore, the Jewish people were held culpable.

The Gemara in Tractate Shvuos tells us that there is a principle, "If one has the ability to prevent his fellow from sinning, but chooses to remain passive, he is held culpable for the sin that was transgressed." To intercede to prevent one from sinning, one does not need to be a zealot. One needs to only appreciate the gravity of the wrong that is being perpetrated. It is something that is a detriment to the transgressor and the Jewish people as a whole. Just as one has an obligation to rescue his fellow when he is drowning, so too does one have the obligation to try to dissuade him from leaving the proper path.

## ***2. Seeing G'd Through His Own Lens***

The Torah states, **"Moshe assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them, 'These are the things that Hashem commanded to do.'"** The Midrash states, "G'd said to Moshe, 'Gather large assemblies of Jews and lecture before them in a public setting the laws of Shabbos, so that future generations may learn from you to gather large assemblies of Jews each Shabbos in the study halls to learn what is 'forbidden' and what is 'permitted'. You shall do this so that My Great Name shall be extolled among My children.'" The purpose of assembling and lecturing to large assemblies of Jews is not merely for the sake of the study of Torah, but rather to ultimately bring glory to G'd's Name through His children's praises. One would think that gathering large assemblies of people in the synagogue to pray and sing His praises would be considered extolling His Name. As Ramban explains in his commentary in the Portion of Bo, that a synagogue is a location of assembly in which the Jewish people gather to acknowledge G'd and sing His praises. However, the Midrash is teaching us that the true praise of G'd can only come about through the study of His laws, understanding what is "forbidden" and what is "permitted." Why is this so?

The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states, *"Ein am haaretz chasid – An unlearned person cannot be scrupulously pious."* Rabbeinu Yonah explains in his commentary, "It is inferred from what is stated in the Mishna that although one can only become a "chasid" if he is learned; however, one can become devoutly righteous (tzaddik) even if he is unlearned. One can only be a tzaddik if he does everything correctly, in conformance with what the Torah prescribes. If so, how can the person who is ignorant of Torah, be a tzaddik when he is not aware of what the Torah dictates? One can be a tzaddik regardless of his lack of Torah knowledge if he is instructed by another how to conduct his life as a proper Jew in every situation. However, in order for one to become a chasid (scrupulously pious), which is one who goes beyond his base obligation, he must internalize the value of the service of G'd, which can only come about through the study of Torah. To go beyond one's obligation one must be inspired and motivated. Thus, the unlearned person, who does not have the Torah to inspire, motivate, and achieve a higher level, cannot be a chasid."

Chazal tell us that a chasid is "one who does kindness with his Maker (he brings pleasure to G'd)." Due to one's inspiration one continuously comes upon new

horizons of understanding regarding the service of G'd because of his grasp of Torah. Thus, in order for the Jewish people to be able to extol G'd, they must be gathered together to be taught the Torah of what is forbidden and what is permitted. The degree to which one will extol G'd is based on one's Torah knowledge.

The Gemara in Tractate Taanis tells us that if one sees an astute young Torah sage in a state of anger due to witnessing a transgression of Torah law, one should see him in a positive light. His anger stems from the Torah that burns within him as it states in the verse "The words of Torah are like fire." Rashi explains that intense Torah study gives one a broadness of heart. The Torah sage perceives the benefit of doing a mitzvah and the detriment that comes about when one transgresses. It is not limited to knowing what is right or the wrong, but rather appreciating the ramifications and consequences of what is right and wrong. It is only through Torah study that one can sense and appreciate one's own spiritual failings. G'd therefore instructed Moshe to gather large assemblies of the Jewish people to teach them the laws of the Torah because it is only through the study of Torah that one can internalize G'd and thus extol His Name.

### 3. Acts vs. Essence

The Torah refers to those who participated in the building of the Mishkan with three classifications: "*nidiv leiv* (generous heart)," "*yidvenu leibo* (one who gave due to the generosity of heart)," and "*nisaoh leibo* (one who is inspired by his heart)." Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that there is a difference between "*nidiv leiv*- generous heart" which is a noun and "*asher yidvenu leibo*- to give due to the generosity of his heart," which is a verb. "*Nidiv leiv*" describes the essence of the person. One who is classified as "*nidiv leiv*" is innately one with a generous heart, consequently he acts generously. On the other hand, the one who is classified as "*yidvenu leibo*" is the one who does acts of generosity because he chooses to do so only when the opportunity presents itself. This is not the essence of the person.

Chofetz Chaim explains that there is a difference between one who does acts of kindness (*chesed*) and one who is truly kind (*baal chesed*). The one who does acts of kindness will only do so when the occasion presents itself. However the one who is a *baal chesed* will actively pursue opportunities to express his kindness. It is thus a reflection of his essence and being.

There is also a difference between one who studies Torah and one who is a "*ben Torah*." The one who studies Torah is one who chooses to invest his time in the study of Torah when his interest motivates him to do so. In contrast, the "*ben Torah*" is one whose essence is Torah and thus his primary existence revolves around the Torah. He is inextricably connected to the Torah. It is not something that he does, but rather, it is something that he is.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues that the one who is classified as "*yidvenu leibo*" is the one who will give only up to a certain point. He will not give to the degree that it will infringe on his own personal needs. In contrast, the one who is "*nidiv leiv*" gives without consideration for his own needs or taking into account his own limitations. It is the equivalent of one who is classified by the Torah as "*nisaoh leibo* – inspired heart." It is due to the cause that the individual is inspired and is totally consumed to bring about the objective, thereby ignoring his own needs. At that moment, the only thing of importance for him is the cause and his own being becomes irrelevant

The Gemara in Tractate Chagigah tells us that G'd values the paces (ascent) of all the Jewish people when they visit the Temple Mount during the three festivals of the year. The Gemara cites a verse from the Song of Songs, where King Solomon states, "How beautiful are your steps (paces), the daughter of the benefactor (*bas nidiv*)." The Jewish people are referred to as the "daughter of *nidiv*" because they are the descendants of "Avraham who gave of his heart to heaven (*nidiv leiv*)." Avraham gave of himself without limitation. There was nothing that was too difficult for Avraham to assume regarding the service of G'd.

Chazal tell us that we learn the principle of, "Love disrupts (supersedes) protocol" from the behavior of Avraham, our Patriarch regarding the Akeidah. When one is truly subsumed by love for something, at the moment that he wants to address an issue relating to what he loves, nothing else exists when he is addressing that objective. Although Avraham was advanced in years (137 years old) and world-renowned and one of the most wealthy individuals of his time, he hitched his own donkey to go to the Akeidah (binding of Yitzchak). Although Avraham could have had one of his servants to do this menial and burdensome task, Avraham chose to do it himself because he understood that he was going to achieve the ultimate test to fulfill the Will of G'd. At that moment, everything else was negated to that cause.

On the third day of his circumcision (which is the most difficult day of recovery), Avraham sat at the entrance of his tent in a state of distress because he had no guests to host and with whom to engage. G'd had caused it to be the hottest day since the beginning of creation in order to give him a respite to recover. However, he was pained by the fact that he could not interact with pagans through his hospitality to bring them to a state of truth, monotheism. When G'd presented him with three wayfarers Avraham immediately ran towards them, despite his infirm condition. The Midrash tells us that as he ran towards his guests droplets of blood dripped from his wound upon the ground. Despite the pain and harm that he was bringing upon himself, it did not deter him from going out to offer the three wayfarers his hospitality with zeal. Because his essence was dedicated to G'd and was negated to that purpose, he did not feel or sense anything that was happening to him on a personal level. His essence was "*nidiv leiv*."

The Torah states regarding the building of the Holy Ark, which was the vessel that contained the Torah, **"...You shall cover it with pure gold, from within and from without you shall cover it."** The Gemara in Tractate Yomah explains that by specifying that the Ark must be covered with gold on the inside as well as on the outside, the Torah is teaching us that, "A Torah Sage whose inside is not the same as his outside is not a Torah Sage." Meaning, in order for one to be classified as a Torah Sage, his inner purity of commitment should be fully consistent with his outer demeanor and persona. A Torah Sage is not merely a repository of information, but rather, he must be genuine and sincere in his service of G'd in every aspect of his life. The Torah that he possesses is fully internalized. The Torah Sage, regarding Torah, is similar to the "*nidiv leiv*" because his values and behavior is a reflection of his essence.

#### 4. Wisdom to the Wise

The Torah states regarding the building of the Mishkan, **"G'd said to Moshe, 'I will fill him with the Spirit of G'd with wisdom...'"** The Midrash states, "G'd filled Bezalel with wisdom because he already possessed wisdom. This is to teach us that G'd gives wisdom only to those who already possess wisdom." Reb Chaim of Volozhin writes in his work Nefesh HaChaim, "If one is not born with wisdom and G'd only gives wisdom to those who already possess it, how does one initially acquire wisdom?" King David writes in Psalms, "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of heaven..." If one has the fear of

heaven, he will have the ability to appreciate and esteem G'd's Wisdom. He is therefore deserving of that endowment.

The Midrash continues, "A matronly woman asked Reb Yosi Bar Chalafta, 'What is the meaning of the verse (Daniel): G'd gives wisdom to those who are wise? It should have stated: G'd gives wisdom to those who are fools. Why would G'd need to give wisdom to someone who already possesses it?' Reb Yosi Bar Chalafta asked her, 'If two individuals approached you for a loan – one of them being wealthy and the other poor, to whom would you lend the money?' The matronly woman answered, 'To the wealthy one.' Reb Yosi Ben Chalafta asked, 'Why?' She replied, 'If the wealthy man were to somehow lose the money that I lent him, he would be able to repay me because he is wealthy. However, if the poor man were to lose my money, he would have no means to repay the loan.' Reb Yosi Ben Chalafta said, 'Your ears should hear what your mouth is saying. If G'd endowed the fools with wisdom they would sit in unclean locations and bathhouses. They would desecrate the wisdom that G'd had given them. However, if G'd endows the wise person with wisdom, he will sit in the study hall and in the synagogue and engage in Torah dialogue. He would not only preserve the pristine quality of the wisdom that G'd gave him, he would actually develop and advance it by interfacing with the elders..."

The Gemara in Tractate Yomah states, "The storage location for one's Torah is one's fear of heaven." As it is stated in the verse, **"The fear of G'd is its storage location."** If one does not have sufficient fear of G'd, then he will not merit the Divine Assistance that is necessary to retain it. Reb Chaim of Volozhin in his work Nefesh HaChaim explains the Gemara with an allegory. If one wished to give a large amount of wheat as a gift to his son and he did not have a location to store it, the father will withhold the gift because the wheat will be scattered and trampled upon and ultimately be destroyed. However, if the son would have a storage location to protect and store the wheat, the father would gladly give him a large amount of wheat to his son. Similarly, it is the one who fears G'd who will have the ability to esteem and revere the Torah sufficiently and thus preserving its holiness. This individual will be endowed by G'd with the ability to acquire Torah. Regardless of how intelligent one may be if he does not possess a sufficient level of fear of heaven, G'd will not give him the Divine Assistance needed to come upon the truth of Torah.

G'd will not endow the foolish with wisdom because He understands that it will be abused and desecrated. Rambam writes in the Laws of Torah Study, "One can only teach Torah to one who is a proper student. If one teaches Torah to such a student, who does not have the necessary qualities to process the Torah, Chazal tell us it is similar to throwing a stone at Marculos." The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah explains that the pagan ritual of worshipping Marculos entailed placing a horizontal stone upon a vertical stone and then throwing stones at the structure. One would think that by stoning this idol, one is actually disgracing it; however, because it is its method of worship, it is considered bona fide idol worship. Thus, one would be subject to the death penalty. One may think that regardless of one's innate characteristics or beliefs it would be beneficial to teach this individual Torah; however Chazal teach us differently. It is equated to the worship of Marculos, which indicates that one's intention is unrelated to what is the reality of the situation. Although one may think otherwise, it is a desecration of the holy Torah.

It is only the one who has sufficient fear of heaven will be able to appreciate and thus have the sensitivity in maintaining and processing the Torah. This individual is considered to be a qualified repository for the acquisition and storage of G'd's wisdom.

## ***5. The Jewish Perspective of the Performance of Mitzvos***

The Torah tells in the Portion of Vayakhel that Bezalel son of Uri, son of Chur was appointed to be the one to oversee the building of the Mishkan. The Midrash tells us that when Moshe was in heaven receiving the second set of Tablets he was instructed and taught by G'd all the aspects relating to the building of the Mishkan. G'd informed Moshe that he would not be the one to oversee its building, but rather it would be Bezalel. Moshe had initially believed that he would be the one to be responsible for its building because he was the most qualified to infuse the necessary intent into all of its components. Nevertheless, G'd informed Moshe that Bezalel would be the one.

The Midrash continues to tell us that when Moshe returned to the Jewish people and told them that they were to commence building the Mishkan, they had asked him, "Who will be the one to oversee its building?" He responded, "Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Chur." They were taken aback because Bezalel was the nephew of Moshe.

The Jewish people said, "Moshe, you are the king over the people. Your brother Aaron has been chosen to be the High Priest. His sons are the priests and his assistants. Your family carries the most important vessels of the Mishkan. Now you appoint Bezalel, who is the grandson of your sister Miriam to be the one to oversee the building of the Mishkan. It seems that you are taking all of the positions of honor for yourself. (Moshe was accused of nepotism)." Moshe responded, "This is what G'd has commanded me." Meaning, Moshe was not the one who chose Bezalel to be the overseer, but rather it was G'd Himself Who had chosen him. Upon hearing this, the Jewish people were satisfied and no longer had a question regarding Bezalel's appointment. Why were they placated so easily when initially they had suspected Moshe of nepotism?

The Torah tells us that the process of the purification of the Red Heifer is the ultimate statute. It is something that is a contradiction within itself. The sprinkling of the ashes of the Red Heifer purifies the one who is contaminated and contaminates the one who is pure. It is something of an enigma. King Solomon, who was the wisest man to ever live said that this particular law of the Red Heifer was "far from my grasp." He understood all the Statutes of the Torah with the exception of the Red Heifer.

The Torah states regarding this mitzvah, "**This is the Statute (Chukas) of the Torah, which Hashem has commanded, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel, and they shall take to you a completely red cow...**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the nations of the world and satan will come to ridicule the Jewish people for following a law that is a self-contradictory edict. A Statute (Chok) is a law that cannot be comprehended on a rational basis. Examples of this category of law is the Red Heifer and dietary laws, etc. On the other hand, an Ordinance (Mishpat) is a law which one can understand on a rational basis, thus appreciating its necessity and importance. Examples of this are the laws forbidding stealing and murder. G'd said to the Jewish people regarding the Red Heifer, "This is the Statute of the Torah. You are not permitted to reflect upon it in order to try to understand it. It is beyond the human capacity to comprehend its wisdom." As a result of G'd identifying the Red Heifer as the ultimate "Statute" the Jewish people accepted it without question. They were no longer susceptible to the ridicule of the nations of the world or satan because they understood that it is a commandment that must be

followed solely because it is the Will of G'd. It is within their capacity to understand it.

When one believes that he is capable of understanding something and coming upon a certain truth, he will delve and analyze it, attempting to fathom its meaning. However, when the Jewish people understood that the law of the Red Heifer is beyond the human intellect, they did not question its veracity. They understood that it can only be comprehended by the Divine Mind. This approach and perspective is the essence of the Jew's understanding of Torah concepts. The human mind is limited; however, the wisdom of the Torah is unlimited because it is G'd's Wisdom. When Moshe told the Jewish people that it was G'd's dictate that Bezalel be the one to oversee the building of the Mishkan, they were satisfied. They had initially believed that the appointment was Moshe's, thus allowing them to pose the question. However, once they were informed that it was G'd's choice, which emanates from His Divinity, there is no basis for question. At Sinai, the Jewish people were given thirteen methodologies through which the Written Law can be deciphered and understood. One is able to cull the Oral interpretation through these methodologies. G'd has made it clear what is within the capacity of the human intellect and what is beyond its limitation.

We find that whenever the Torah mentions Statues and Ordinances the Statute is always mentioned first. One would think that G'd would present the more rational and logical laws before presenting the esoteric and unfathomable dictates. Nevertheless, Statues precede Ordinances in order to communicate that in essence, all laws, including the Ordinances are in fact Statues. The Ordinances are laws that one is able to relate to their value, although it is not the basis for G'd's dictate. G'd never revealed the innate value of the Ordinances regarding the spirituality of the Jew. Just as one observes dietary laws, which cannot be understood within a rational context, identically when one observes Ordinances such as giving charity, the basis for its value cannot be come upon. The basis for one observing the Ordinances is purely to do the Will of G'd and not for the sake of one's benefit. Thus, the Jew refrains from stealing not because the action is inappropriate because it does not adhere to the norms of societal behavior, but rather because it is the dictate of G'd as stated in the Torah.