

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Vayakhel

March 3, 2016

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Yad Avraham Institute
New York
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B"H

Vayakhel

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita
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1. The Objective of One's Existence

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, “Our Rabbis who are experts in homilies (aggadita) say, ‘There is no portion in the entire Torah that begins with the word ‘Vayakhel’ other than this portion.’ 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 and to rule on the laws that pertain to 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 to become proficient in its laws, but rather to ultimately bring glory to G’d’s Name, that he should to be extolled by His children. What is the relevance between the study of laws that pertain to what is forbidden and permitted to extolling G’d?

The Midrash continues, “From here it is learned, Moshe established for the Jewish people that they should study the laws of Pesach on Pesach, the laws of Atzeres on Atzeres, the laws of Sukkos on Sukkos. Moshe said to the Jewish people, ‘If you will follow this prescription, then G’d will consider it as if you coronated Him in this world and that you attest to His existence.”

The Gemara in a number of locations states, “I (G’d) have created the evil inclination and the Torah as its antidote.” Meaning, the only antidote for the evil inclination is the Torah itself. One cannot succeed in diminishing, dispelling, and incapacitating his inclination without the Divine Assistance that he is given through the study of Torah. This is because man is a physical being who processes and understands everything through his physical senses and environment. Since he is bound in every respect to the physical, one does not have the ability to independently supersede and rise above the confines of his material framework in order to be able to understand and internalize spiritual matters. The evil inclination is

something that is part of the physical context in which man is bound. It obscures truth and prevents man from being able to sense spirituality. This is what is meant by the verse in the Torah, “Man is evil from the moment is cast from his mother’s womb.” How can one undermine and evade this inclination which is a part of man’s natural essence? The Gemara tells us that it is only through the study of Torah that one can have relevance to the spiritual and be able to override the physical system in which he was born. When one studies Torah, it brings about a spiritualization so that he can have a sense for truth. As King Solomon writes in Proverbs, ‘*Neir mitzvah v’Torah ohr* (the mitzvah is the fuel and the Torah is the light/illumination).”

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that it is only when the Torah is studied for its own sake (*l’shmah*), that it has the capacity to act as an antidote against the evil inclination and protect the individual from its influence. However, the Torah that is studied not for its own sake (*shelo l’shmah*) will not bring about this effect. It will not be an antidote against the evil inclination. Why is this so? The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos cites a verse from Proverbs, “It brings length of days to the right and to the left it brings wealth and honor.... The Gemara explains that when one who engages in Torah study and mitzvah performance for the sake of G’d (*l’shmah*), which is the equivalent of the “right” one will merit length of days, which is eternity of the world to come. On the other hand, the one who study Torah with an ulterior motive, it is the equivalent of the “left” because it is not being studied with the proper intent, it will bring wealth and honor. If one engages in Torah and mitzvos for the sake of G’d, he does not take into consideration his own interests and desires, but rather, he is focused on doing the Will of G’d. This is the reason that studying Torah for its own sake causes a length of days and the spiritualization of the individual. Whereas if one has an ulterior motive, which is rooted in his own self interest, he is physicalizing the Torah as a means to achieve his own interests. Thus, this study of Torah is limited to the physical which is wealth and honor. Therefore, this form of Torah study only reinforces the evil inclination rather than undermine it.

If one studies Torah for its own sake, it will have the ability to spiritualize him, thus Moshe was commanded by G'd to gather the Jewish people in large assemblies so that they could be able to be spiritualized through the study of Torah so that they could recognize His Name and extol Him.

2. One's Need for Ongoing Advocacy

The Midrash states, "G'd said to the Jewish people, '**Observe My Mitzvos and My Statutes.**' Why? Because the reward for performing a mitzvah is a mitzvah and the consequence of a sin is another sin. Ben Azai explains that this is the concept of *mitzvah goreres mitzvah* and *aveira goreres aveira* (a mitzvah encourages another mitzvah and a transgression encourages another transgression). Reb Meir says, 'For every mitzvah that one performs, G'd sends an angel to protect him.' The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers tells us, that when one performs a mitzvah, he creates an angel that will be his advocate at the time of judgment. We see from the words of the Midrash that in addition to being an advocate, the angel that one creates through the performance of a mitzvah performance also protects him.

The Midrash continues, "If one performs one mitzvah, he receives one angel. If he performs many mitzvos, he receives many angels to protect him. As it states in Psalms, 'The angels were commanded to protect you...'" It is interesting to note that the angels to whom King David is referring in the verse are angels that one creates for himself through the performance of mitzvos that serve not only as advocates but also as protectors. In what context do these angels "protect" the individual who created them?

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that when one walks into a courtyard that will lead to a public domain, it is the equivalent of walking into a courtroom. When one walks into the market, it is the equivalent of going before a judge who will pronounce a judgment of execution. Since man is not perfect, he is continuously subject to prosecution due to the Attribute of Justice. The Attribute of Justice dictates that if one sins he must be punished. In order for one to be protected from this prosecution, one needs to have G'd's Mercy, which one merits due to his own spiritual endeavors. When one is engaged in mitzvos, he creates angels who will be his advocates against the continuous prosecution due to his spiritual failings. In essence, the angels that one creates through mitzvah performance will not only be advocates on the ultimate day of judgment when one passes away,

they also protect the individual all the days of his life against prosecution. This is the reason King David writes, "The angels were commanded to protect you..." Thus, not only will the performance of a mitzvah bring about another mitzvah (*mitzvah goreres mitzvah*) it will also bring about an angel that will protect the individual.

The Midrash continues, "In addition to meriting angels for protection, if one is engaged in many mitzvos he creates for himself a 'good name.' We find that an individual is identified by three names – the name that his parents gave him, one that he is called by others, and one that he acquires for himself. The greatest of the three is the one that he creates for himself... As it states in Ecclesiastes, 'Better is a good name from the most fragrant oil and better is the day of one's death than the day of one's birth.'...King Solomon explains that when one is born one does not know how the child will develop. (Will he be good or will he be evil) However, when one passes away with a good name... people will come to give their proper last respects to him..."

The essence of a Jew is his spirituality. If his spirituality is dormant, his physicality will become more prominent and dominate the individual. However, if one performs mitzvos, he will strengthen and empower his spirituality to allow it to develop and dominate his physicality. The "good name" that one creates for himself is based on the advancement of his spirituality which he brings about through his mitzvah performance. The advancement of one's spirituality is the objective of one coming into the world. In fact, this is the objective that angel addresses with the unborn fetus in utero, when he is taught the entire Torah.

3. The Devoutly Live with Unswerving Faith

The Torah states, "**See, Hashem has proclaimed by name, Betzalel son of Uri son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehudah....**" Moshe told the Jewish people that the only one qualified to oversee the building of the Mishkan was Betzalel. The Midrash cites a verse from Proverbs, " 'He found charm and good understanding in the Eyes of G'd and the eyes of man...' What was the special charm? G'd had explained in detail to Moshe every aspect of the building of the Mishkan and the formation of its vessels. As it states, '**You should see the form as it was shown...**' Moshe initially believed that since he was being instructed in such detail, that he was to be the one to build the Mishkan. As it states, '**You should make the beams...You should make the altar....You should make the laver**' Moshe asked G'd, 'Who shall be the one

to build the Mishkan?' G'd replied, 'I proclaim by name, Bezalel son of Uri son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehudah should be the one to build the Mishkan.' Moshe descended from the Mountain and told the Jewish people about all the materials and the process of the building the Mishkan as G'd had told him. They asked him, 'Who will be the one to do all this?' He said to them, 'Betzael.' (Betzael was the nephew of Moshe). The Jewish people began to murmur saying, 'Is it possible that G'd told Moshe that Betzael should be the one to build the Mishkan? But rather, it must be Moshe's own choice to appoint Betzael to do so. It is because he is Moshe's relative. Moshe is the king, Aaron his brother is the High Priest, Aaron's sons are the assistant priests, the children of Kahas will carry the Mishkan. It is all so that Moshe and his family should have control over the Mishkan. This is the reason, Betzael was chosen by him (it was thought to be nepotism).' Moshe said to them, 'There is nothing that I do of my own choice. It is only the Will of G'd that I do.' Moshe therefore revealed to them how Betzael was endowed with special and unique wisdom that no one else possessed. It was because of this that Betzael found charm in the eyes of G'd and in the eyes of man. The Jewish people were thus satisfied with Moshe's response."

After all the Jewish people had witnessed that Moshe had done on their behalf, who is it possible that there would be murmurings amongst them regarding the building of the Mishkan? How could they believe that Moshe's decisions regarding the Mishkan were his own and not the directive of G'd? The Torah tells us that Moshe had ascended to heaven for forty days and forty nights to receive the Torah on behalf of the Jewish people. After the Jewish people sinned with the golden calf, Moshe again ascended to heaven to supplicate G'd on their behalf so that they should not be destroyed. He returned to the Jewish people with the second set of Tablets which indicated that the Jewish people were fully reinstated by G'd due to Moshe's supplications. The Torah tells us that Moshe needed to wear a special face covering because he radiated such a level of holiness that no one could gaze upon him. Despite all this, when Moshe explained to them that G'd instructed him that Betzael will be the one to build the Mishkan so that the Divine Presence may dwell in their midst, the Jewish people suspected him of nepotism. Their level of distrust of Moshe is something that is difficult to understand. It was only after they had appreciated Betzael's dimension of being and capacity, that he was endowed with special Divine wisdom, that they believed Moshe. In fact, the basis to believe Moshe was based on their own level of satisfaction in understanding the truth.

Although Moshe demonstrated to the Jewish people that Betzael was the most qualified to oversee the building of the Mishkan, the suspicion of nepotism was not completely removed from the minds of the Jewish people. The suspicion of the Jewish people that existed before they were convinced of Betzael's qualifications, was no different than that of Korach. Korach sought to usurp Moshe's authority with the same claim that Moshe's choice of Aaron as the High Priest was nepotism. Regarding Korach's claim, the Jewish people had no answer or response. They thus were open to embrace Korach perception of Moshe. Had the Jewish people not been satisfied with absolute clarity that Betzael was truly unique and the only one qualified to build the Mishkan, they would have remained with the claim of nepotism.

Korach, understanding and appreciating that the seeds of the suspicion of nepotism were already planted in the minds of the Jewish people, took advantage of this weakness and attempted to usurp Moshe's authority. It was only after Korach and his community were ultimately swallowed up by the earth did the Jewish people finally accept the word of Moshe to be synonymous with the Word of G'd. Although the Jewish people had witnessed G'd saying to Moshe, **"Tell them such and such..."** they did not have sufficient faith. When witnessing events that cannot be understood, how does one process them? The Gemara cites the verse of the Prophet, "The devoutly righteous with his faith, lives..." Meaning, the devoutly righteous, because of their dimension of faith they never question. Unlike the Jewish people who needed Moshe to demonstrate Betzael's qualifications, the tzaddik does not need to receive answers because he has total faith in G'd.

4. One's Expression, An Indication of One's Intent

The Torah tells us that the Princes of Israel donated the precious stones (*avnei shoham* and *avnei miluim*) that were used on the Ephod and in the breastplate that were worn by the High Priest. When the Torah writes the word **"Princes (Niseeim)"**, regarding the building of the Mishkan, it is written in a deleted form. Meaning, the letter "yud", which reflects the plural in the word *"Niseeim"*, is omitted. Rashi cites the Midrash which states, "Rav Nason says, 'When it came to inaugurating the Mishkan, the Princes were the first to participate with their offerings and gifts. However, regarding the construction of the Mishkan, the Princes were the last to participate. They had said, 'Let the Jewish people participate in the building of the Mishkan to the extent that they can, and whatever remains unfinished we will

complete.' The Jewish people actually provided all of the materials that were needed for the building of the Mishkan. The Princes asked, 'If all the materials were already provided what is there left for us to do?' They therefore provided the precious stones. However, when it was time to inaugurate the Mishkan, the Princes did not repeat their mistake, which was rooted in their laziness, by waiting to see what was left for them to do. They were thus the first to provide their offerings and gifts."

When the Torah enumerates the materials that were needed for the building of the Mishkan, it lists them in descending order of preciousness/value, beginning with **"gold, silver, and copper..."**. However, the list concludes with, **"the shoham stones and the stones for the setting for the Ephod and the Breastplate."** These were precious colored gems that had even greater in value than gold and silver. Why are the *avnei shoham* and *avnei miluim* mentioned last if they are the most valuable?

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that although the intrinsic material value of the *avnei shoham* and *avnei miluim* was greater than gold and silver, they are mentioned last because the intent behind the giving of the Princes was deficient. Thus, the innate spiritual value was the least of all that was donated to the Mishkan. The order in which the Torah enumerates the materials needed for the Mishkan not only reflects the intrinsic material value but also how G'd values the materials, which is based on the intent of the individuals.

The states tells us that when Avraham sent Eliezer to seek out the appropriate wife for Yitzchak, to be the future Matriarch of the Jewish people, **"The servant said to him (Avraham), 'Perhaps (ulie) the woman shall not wish to follow me to this land...'"** Chazal explain that the Torah writes the word **"perhaps (ulie)"** in its deficient form, with the letter "vav" deleted, to indicate Eliezer's question was based on his personal conflict of interest. Eliezer had a daughter who was devoutly righteous and he believed that perhaps she would be suitable to be Yitzchak's wife, the future Matriarch. Avraham understood the basis for Eliezer's question (*ulie*), was his own personal conflict of interest. He had only asked the question because he believed that his own daughter was qualified to be the wife of Yitzchak. Avraham said to Eliezer, "It is not possible for your daughter to marry my son because you come from a cursed stock and I come from a blessed stock. Something that is cursed cannot cleave to something that is blessed." We see that Eliezer's conflict of interest manifested itself in his question. Similarly, the Princes because of their laziness had devised a calculation that they would only contribute

what the Jewish people were not able to contribute. Understanding that the building of the Mishkan was the ultimate spiritual opportunity, to provide a location for the Divine Presence, the Princes should have been motivated to be the first to participate. However, because of their laziness, they deluded themselves by saying that they would complete what the Jewish people would complete.

The Torah tells us that Moshe did not participate in the building of the Mishkan, rather he allowed the Jewish people to have the merit to build it. The Midrash states, "G'd saw that Moshe was in a melancholy state. He asked, 'Why are you melancholy?' Moshe replied, 'I did not participate in the building of the Mishkan.' G'd asked, 'Why did you not participate in the building of the Mishkan?' Moshe answered, 'I wanted to give the opportunity to the Jewish people to build it and whatever they could not complete, I would.' G'd said, 'I swear on your life that your contribution shall be greater than theirs. You shall be the one to erect the Mishkan.'" Based on the words of the Midrash, Moshe like the Princes, chose to wait until the end to participate in the building of the Mishkan. However, G'd only reprimanded the Princes and extolled Moshe for his non-participation. Why is this so?

Moshe was the most humble person who ever lived. He was completely negated to G'd. As the Torah states, "What are we (Nachnu Mah)..." If this is so, when Moshe assumed his position of not participating in the Mishkan, there was no self-interest whatsoever regarding his waiting to see what was needed to complete the Mishkan. In contrast, when the Princes delayed it was due to their own self-interest which caused them to not have sufficient appreciation for the building of the Mishkan. Therefore, when Moshe did not participate initially it was truly to allow the Jewish people to have the spiritual opportunity. This was rooted in Moshe's exceptional humility and thus was praiseworthy.

5. Moshe's Exceptional Love of G'd (From Ki Sisa)

The Torah tells us that after the Jewish people sinned with the golden calf G'd said to Moshe, **"...And now allow Me. Let My wrath flare up against them and I shall annihilate them; and I shall make you a great nation."** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that because G'd said to Moshe, **"Allow Me"** regarding the destruction of the Jewish people, he understood that if he were to sufficiently plead on their behalf with prayer, there was a possibility that he could nullify the decree by evoking the Attribute of Mercy. Moshe said to G'd, **"And now if You**

would but forgive their sin! – But if not, obliterate me now from this book that You have written (Torah)."

Sforno explains, "What is the meaning of 'Obliterate me now from this book...?' Moshe had said to G'd, 'If You chose not to forgive their sin then eliminate all of my spiritual merits and give them to the Jewish people.'" Rambam in the Laws of Repentance writes, based on the Gemara in Tractate Yomah, that the classification of "tzaddik (devoutly righteous)" is one whose merits/accomplishments outweigh his sins. The classification of "rasha (evil)" is one whose sins outweigh his merits/accomplishments. Rambam explains that this evaluation by G'd is qualitative and not quantitative. It is based on "Divine understanding" that cannot be fathomed by the mortal mind. Since the Jewish people had sinned with the golden calf, which was a grave sin on the most extreme level, their classification had become "evil." In order to counter this evaluation, Moshe said to G'd to take all of his spiritual merits and accomplishments and accredit them to the Jewish people so as to sway the evaluation to the positive. As a result of this, they would not be destroyed. However, after G'd would transfer Moshe's spiritual record to the Jewish people, he would no longer be mentioned in the Torah since he would have forfeited his spiritual standing. Moshe was thus willing to forgo all of his life's accomplishments for the sake of the Jewish people. It is the ultimate demonstration of his love for his fellow Jew "ahavas Israel" that Moshe was willing to forgo his share in eternity for the sake of the survival of the Jewish people.

The Gemara in Tractate XYZ asks, "Why does the Torah juxtapose the death of the sons of Aaron to the portion of Yom Kippur? It is to teach us that just as Yom Kippur atones for sin, so too does the death of the devoutly righteous atone for the sins of the Jewish people." When G'd decides to take the tzaddik, G'd does not consult with him if he wishes to be taken at that particular time in order to atone for the sins of the generation. Why would the tzaddik agree to having his life taken at that moment or being cut short for the sake of atoning for the sins of the generation.

There is a positive commandment which is mentioned in the Shema, **"To love Hashem, your G'd with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your assets...."** The Gemara explains that "with all of your soul" teaches us that one must be willing to give his life for the sake of his love of G'd. There are certain situations which may arise such as being faced with committing one of the three cardinal sins or transgressing a custom during a time when there is a concerted effort to

uproot Judaism, when a Jew is obligated to forfeit his life rather than transgressing. The basis for the Jew sacrificing his life in these instances is a demonstration of one's love for G'd. When one sacrifices his life in order to sanctify G'd's Name, it is the ultimate expression of love for G'd.

The tzaddik chose to be devoutly righteous because of his exceptional love for G'd. He is thus willing to forfeit his life for the sake of G'd at any time. The tzaddik understands that if he were to sacrifice his life for the sake of atonement for the generation, it would be a demonstration of his love for his fellow Jew, which in itself the ultimate demonstration of his love for G'd. Moshe, negated himself completely to G'd and His Glory. He understood that G'd's Glory was dependent on the continued existence of the Jewish people. If they were to be destroyed, there would no longer be a representation of G'd in existence, since they are the only people qualified to perfect existence through the study and performance of Torah. If there would be no Jewish people it would be the ultimate desecration of G'd's Name and existence would come to an end because "there is no King without a people." Therefore, Moshe was willing to forfeit his eternity because of his love for G'd. The Jewish people were only a means to glorify Him. G'd refers to the Jewish people as "My firstborn son." Moshe was willing to forfeit his life for the Jewish people because he understood what they meant to Him.