

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series

Portion of Beshalach

Sponsored by the Briefel Family
For the Yahrzeit of their beloved and revered father
Berich Bernard Briefel,
Dov Ben David, z'l
May His Neshama Have an Aliyah

February 2, 2012

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
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B"H

Beshalach

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. Self Negation, the Precursor to Becoming G'd's People

The Torah tells us that before the Jewish people left Egypt, G'd gave them two mitzvos: circumcision and the Pascal Sacrifice. Why were these mitzvos given to the Jewish people at this time? The Prophet Yechezkel states, "And you are naked and devoid." Chazal explain that Yechezkel the prophet is referring to the spiritual state of the Jewish people that they were devoid of mitzvos. Since they were pagans until this moment, they needed sufficient merit to be taken out of Egypt. Thus, G'd presented them with the opportunity to perform the mitzvos of circumcision and the Pascal lamb. These two mitzvos were prerequisites for their redemption as the Prophet Yechezkel concludes, "It is through the bloods that you shall live, through the bloods that you shall live..." Chazal explain that the repetition of "through the bloods that you shall live" is referring to the blood of circumcision and the blood of the Pascal Sacrifice. Why were the Jewish people specifically given these two mitzvos?

At a simple level one could understand, that since circumcision is the sign of the covenant between G'd and the Jewish people, it was something that needed to be reinstated. After the passing of the generation of Yosef, the Jewish people ceased to circumcise themselves which demonstrated their desire to assimilate into the Egyptian culture and abandon the ways of their forefathers. By circumcising themselves before the exodus, they expressed their interest to once again uphold their covenant with G'd and act as His people. In addition, the slaughtering of the Pascal lamb, which was the deity of Egypt, was a demonstration and declaration that they were terminating their relationship with idolatry.

The Midrash tells us that on the Shabbos preceding the 14th of Nissan, which was the day that the Pascal lamb was slaughtered before the exodus, the Egyptian masters entered into the homes of the Jews and

noticed that each family had a sheep tied to their bedposts. They had asked them, "What are you doing with the sheep?" The Jews answered, "We are going to slaughter it as an offering to our G'd." The Egyptian masters gritted their teeth and walked out. This is the basis for the Shabbos preceding Passover to be called, the "Great Shabbos (*Shabbos HaGadol*). It is the Shabbos that the Jewish people experienced a miracle that they were not killed by their masters.

In addition, besides terminating their relationship with idolatry by sacrificing the Pascal Lamb, they demonstrated that they were willing to risk their lives for G'd. Despite the fact that they were slaughtering the deity of their masters, they did not waiver. Circumcision, although it is an unnatural act since the male is born with a foreskin, was an act of self-negation to G'd's Will. In order to serve G'd fully, one needs to negate himself regardless of how he is seen and perceived by others. Consequently, nothing will interfere with his service of G'd. For example, the Torah tells us that Pinchas, the son of Elazar, had killed Zimri, the prince of the tribe of Shimon through an act of zealotry. Pinchas put his life in jeopardy in order to eradicate the desecration of G'd's Name. He thus defused the Wrath of G'd that would have consumed the Jewish people.

The Torah states, "**Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the Kohen, turned back My wrath from the Children of Israel...**" Rashi cites the Midrash which states, "It would have been sufficient for the Torah to tell us that Pinchas was the son of Elazar. Why does it need to trace his lineage back to Aaron the Kohen? It is because the tribes had criticized Pinchas saying, 'How does Pinchas have the audacity to kill a prince of Israel when he descends from a lineage of people who had fattened calves for idolatry.' Thus, the Torah identifies Pinchas as a person of great pedigree because he descends from the prestigious line of Aaron the High Priest." If the Torah states, "**...He turned back My**

Wrath from upon the Children of Israel, when he zealously avenged Me, so I did not consume the Children of Israel in My vengeance...” how could he have been criticized for killing Zimri? If not for his selfless act the Jewish people would have been destroyed.

A prince is an individual of special status. He is revered because of his dimension of person. His presence is overwhelming and intimidating to all those who are not of his peer group. It was thus difficult for the Jewish people to understand how was Pinchas able to act as a zealot to kill Zimri. Evidently, Pinchas, although he was of a lesser pedigree had no inhibition to kill a person of special acclaim and status. The criticism of Pinchas was not that he killed Zimri, which saved the Jewish people from destruction, but rather it is a reflection on his quality of person. He did not have the capacity to revere anyone of special status. The Torah therefore identifies Pinchas as a person of a greater pedigree, the grandson of Aaron the Kohen. Pinchas was thus perceived as an equal of Zimri which put him in a positive light.

In truth, Pinchas' act of zealotry was not precipitated because he had seen someone of equal status desecrating G'd's Name, but rather, because of his own sense of negation to G'd when he saw G'd's Name being desecrated. At that moment, all that existed was G'd's Honor. He thus acted and responded as a zealot. The significance of the sacrificing of the Pascal Lamb was the killing the deity of their masters. It was an indication that the Jew was negated to G'd's Will to the point that his Egyptian master became irrelevant. When G'd's Honor was in question, the Egyptian who was a pagan was irrelevant. This mindset was a precursor and prerequisite to become G'd's people at Sinai.

2. Failing, an Opportunity for Advancement

The Torah tells us that only one-fifth of the Jewish people left Egypt. Four-fifths of the Jewish people died during the days of darkness. If they had witnessed the Hand of G'd through revealed miracles that were performed on their behalf, why would four-fifths of the Jewish people choose not to leave Egypt?

Those who had no interest to leave Egypt, despite the fact that they were slaves in bondage, did so because it was a setting in which they had felt secure. Although they were dominated by their masters, they did not want to go into a location such as the desert where they could not survive without G'd's continuous intervention. They

would have always needed to be concerned if G'd would in fact perform a miracle on their behalf in the desert. The only Jew who survived the days of darkness were those who had an interest to leave. If they chose to stay, they could not continue to live. Those who chose to remain in Egypt were considered evil (*reshaaim*). In contrast, G'd extolled the one-fifth that had left Egypt as being special because their going out into the desert was a testament of their faith in Him. In the Musaf Service of Rosh Hashanah, in the portion of (*Zichronos* (Remembrances)) we quote a verse which was communicated by G'd through the prophet Yermiya, "I (G'd) will always remember on your behalf the kindness of your youth that you followed Me into an unplanted desert." This "kindness" will stand on behalf of the Jewish people until the end of time.

The Torah states in the Portion of Bo, **"...They baked the dough that they took out from Egypt into unleavened cakes, for they could not be leavened, for they were driven from Egypt for they could not delay, nor had they made provisions for themselves."** The reason the dough could not become leavened was because the Jewish people did not have sufficient time to prepare the bread before they were driven out. Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "This is to give praise to the Jewish people that they did not ask G'd, 'How are we to go out into a barren desert without sufficient provisions?' Rather, they believed and they went...What was their reward for this? They were sanctified to be the holy people of G'd." Their going out into the desert was a confirmation of their belief and faith in G'd.

It is interesting to note that the Jewish people had been informed at the beginning of the month of Nissan that they would be leaving on the 15th of the month. This was in fact the exact time of the exodus. If this is so, why did the dough not have sufficient time to rise? It should have been prepared together with their provisions for their imminent departure. Reb Moshe Feinstein z'tl explains that the Jewish people did not prepare themselves for their imminent exodus from Egypt because they had been previously disappointed by Pharaoh who had reneged on his commitment to release them. He had agreed to release them many times and he then changed his mind. The Jewish people, because of their many disappointments had difficulty accepting that they would actually leave until they witnessed it with their own eyes. The basis for their dough not to be leavened was a result of their lack of faith.

Reb Moshe Feinstein z'tl explains that the lesson to be learned from the unleavened bread (*matzah*) that the

Jew must believe that despite the fact that the circumstances seemed bleak and salvation was improbable, “G’d’s salvation comes like the blink of an eye.” We eat the matzah to remind us of this fact.

Because the Jewish people lacked faith and thus the dough remained unleavened and there were no provisions prepared for their departure, it created a setting for the ultimate opportunity to demonstrate their faith in G’d. If they had initially believed that the exodus was imminent, the going into the desert would have not been an expression of faith because they would have prepared for that eventuality. It was only because they initially lacked in faith and did not prepare provisions to go into an unplanted desert, that it was considered a kindness demonstrated by the Jewish people towards G’d. G’d will never forget this kindness until the end of time. Every Rosh Hashanah at the time of the most intense level of prosecution, this fact along with the sounding of the shofar will silence satan forever.

3. The Culpability of Pharaoh and the Nations of the World

The Torah states, “**Hashem went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them on the way...**” The Midrash asks, “Why is it important for the torah to tell us that G’d went before the Jewish people in the desert in a pillar of cloud when the entire world is filled with His Glory? It is to inform the nations of the world of the special love that G’d has for the Jewish people so that they should demonstrate the proper respect and honor to them. However, not only do the nations of the world not regard them with respect, they subject them to the most cruel forms of death and oppression. G’d says, ‘At the end of time I will gather all of the nations and take them to the Valley of Yehoshafat where they will be judged for what they have done to My nation which has been scattered throughout the world.’ It does not say that the nations will be judged for adultery, murder, and idolatry that they had committed, but only upon the injustice that they brought upon the Jewish people. Egypt will be desolate. Edom will be a desolate desert...I will avenge their blood.”

G’d led the Jewish people with a pillar of cloud to inform the world of His special love for them. Because G’d revealed His special love for the Jewish people it is an indication that it is important for the world to appreciate the uniqueness and innate special value of the Jewish people. Thus, when they are persecuted and killed it is an affront to G’d.

The Torah tells us that after Miriam had spoken critically of her brother Moshe to Aaron, G’d reprimanded her saying, “**Mouth to mouth do I speak to him (Moshe), in a clear vision and not in riddles, at the image of Hashem does he gaze. Why did you not fear to speak against My servant Moshe?**” It is important to note that G’d did not say to Miriam, “How could you have spoken so critically about Moshe?” Rather, He said, “Why did you not fear to speak against *My servant, Moshe.*” Chazal explain that if Miriam had understood and appreciated the true dimension of her brother Moshe, she would have revered him to such a degree that she would not have spoken critically of him. It was obvious that Miriam did not have sufficient level of appreciation for the dimension of Moshe. Thus, Miriam became a leper, which was public knowledge in order for the Jewish people to understand that the level of Moshe’s prophecy was one of a kind. G’d had communicated to Moshe at a level of “face to face.” Similarly, the nations of the world by not demonstrating a sufficient level of respect for the Jewish people, despite G’d publicly revealing His love for them, deserve to be destroyed at the end of time for not acknowledging and accepting His evaluation of the Jewish people.

The Torah states when G’d sent Moshe to speak with Pharaoh regarding the release of the Jewish people, “**You shall say to Pharaoh, ‘So said Hashem, My firstborn son Israel. So I say to you, Send out My son that he may serve Me...’**” Rashi cites Chazal who explain that G’d, by referring to the Jewish people as “His firstborn” is acknowledging and confirming that the blessing that Yaakov our Patriarch received from his father Yitzchak was valid. The nations of the world could have said, “How are we to respect a people that descends from one who deceived his father in order to take what was not rightfully his?” G’d wanted Pharaoh to understand and appreciate that his enslavement of the Jewish people was unjustified. Rather, it was unconscionable because they are considered to be His firstborn. If Pharaoh did not appreciate this fact and release them, then the plagues would come upon him because he was defying G’d. The destruction of Egypt through the revealed miracles was predicated on Pharaoh not being willing to acknowledge that the Jewish people are His Beloved.

4. Splitting of the Sea, a Prerequisite for Becoming G’d’s Chosen People

After the Sea had closed upon the Egyptian army, Moshe and the Jewish people had sung the song of the Sea. The splitting of the Sea was the most magnificent of all the miracles that ever took place. There is an argument in the Hagada of Passover regarding the number of miracles that had transpired at the time of the splitting of the Sea. Were there 50, 200, or 250? The magnitude of revelation was overwhelming. In the song that had been sung by the Jewish people it states **“Behold, this is my G’d I will glorify Him!”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that G’d’s Presence was so palpable that one could point his finger at Him. Chazal tell us that what the maidservant at the Sea had seen (regarding the Divine Presence), Yechezkel the prophet did not see. (Although what the maidservant had witnessed was greater than Yechezkel, factually he was greater than she.) What did the maidservant at the Sea witness that was not seen by Yechezkel?

We recite in the blessing following the Shema in the evening service, “And His Kingship they accepted upon themselves willingly. Moshe and the Children of Israel raised their voices to You in song with abundant joy and said unanimously ‘Who is like You....Your children beheld Your Kingship as You split the sea before Moshe: ‘This is my G’d!’ they exclaimed. Then they said, ‘Hashem shall reign for all eternity.’” What was witnessed at the time of the splitting of the Sea was an expression of G’d’s Kingship as the Supreme Being who Reigns over all existence.

The Jewish people had witnessed revealed miracles in Egypt that touched upon and affected every aspect of existence. Regardless of the awesomeness and pervasiveness of those miracles, they had not witnessed His Kingship. The magnitude of revelation that came about at the splitting of the Sea was a demonstration of His Kingship. The ultimate revelation of G’d to the Jewish people which was an open communication with them in a wake-state took place at Sinai. Why was it important for them to witness His Kingship at the Sea prior to Sinai?

A prerequisite for the Jewish people to be taken as G’d’s Chosen at Sinai was that they needed to be negated to the point that when they were offered the Torah they would respond with **“Naaseh V’ Nishmah** (we will do and we will listen).” That expression is used by angels who are negated to G’d’s Will. This level of clarity was only possible to achieve through the witnessing of G’d’s Kingship at the splitting of the Sea.

The Torah states, **“For seven days the animal should remain with its mother (after its birth). On the eighth day it qualifies to be brought as a sacrifice...”** The Yalkut (Midrash) explains, “...This is analogous to a king who visits one of his provinces and proclaims to his subjects: No one may have an audience with me until they first see and meet with the matron. So too G’d said to the Jewish people, ‘My children, do not bring before Me a sacrifice until it has been exposed to the (holiness of the) Shabbos.’ Within every seven-day period there is a Shabbos. Similarly, we find that circumcision is only valid after the child has been exposed to the Shabbos. This is why the circumcision is performed on the eighth day.”

In order for a child to be qualified to enter in to the “Holy Covenant” (circumcision), which is the equivalent of coming before the Divine Presence, he must first be exposed to the holiness of Shabbos as a prerequisite. This is similar to the Jewish people needing to first witness G’d’s Kingship at the splitting of the Sea before ascending to the level of seeing the King “face to face.”

5. The Absorption Quotient

In the Hagada of Passover, it states that G’d calculated the exact moment that the Jewish people needed to leave Egypt. The commentators explain that the Jewish people in Egypt had fallen to the lowest level of spiritual impurity, which is known as the 49th level of spiritual impurity. Had they remained in Egypt a moment longer, they would have become spiritually extinct because they would have reached the 50th level from which there is no return or reinstatement. Thus, the Jewish people needed to leave Egypt at that exact moment.

The commentators explain that the ten plagues in Egypt had a dual purpose. One objective was to punish the Egyptians for oppressing the Jewish people and denying G’d’s Will to allow His people to leave. In addition, the plagues were intended to communicate to the Jewish people that the Supreme Being was interceding on their behalf. With each plague, the Jewish people came to a more advanced level of understanding of G’d. This understanding was to be transmitted from generation to generation as a testament of what G’d had done for them. One would think that after being exposed to such a level of revealed miracles and witnessing the Hand of G’d, the Jewish people would have advanced spiritually during their last year in Egypt. Yet, they needed to leave Egypt exactly at the moment that G’d had said or else they would have gone into spiritual oblivion. This irrefutably indicates

that despite the miracles that they had witnessed the Jewish people remained at the 49th level of spiritual impurity.

Being in Egypt, regardless of what they had witnessed, the Jewish people were continuously exposed to the impurity of Egypt. Maharal of Prague explains that Egypt was the location of the most intense impurity in the entire world. The Jewish people intellectually understood to some degree what they were witnessing but because of their innate impurity, they could not internalize it to become part of their belief. It was only when they left the abominable environment of Egypt and entered into the holy atmosphere that G'd had created for them in the desert, could they begin the spiritual purification process in order give them the capacity to internalize what they had witnessed. They were surrounded by the Clouds of Glory and were sustained by supernatural means in the desert. They thus began extricating and purging themselves from the impurity of Egypt during the 49 days which led to Sinai, where they reached the pinnacle of their spirituality.

Reb Yisroel Selanter z'tl explains that the furthest distance in existence is from one's head to one's heart. Despite the fact that the physical distance between the two is small, in order for one to be able to appreciate and internalize what one intellectually comprehends is the most significant accomplishment.

At Sinai the Jewish people reached the 49th level of spiritual purity and were thus qualified to receive the Torah. The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that at the time of the sin of Adam, the snake came upon Chava and infused her with the most intense level of spiritual impurity (*zuhama*). Consequently, all humanity (including the Jewish people) after Adam was affected by this impurity which acts as an obstruction to spirituality. It was only at Sinai after the Jewish people were exposed to G'd's Presence that the impurity had been removed, (*paskah zuhamuson.*)” The Gemara explains that although they had sinned with the Golden Calf, the impurity that had been introduced by the snake did not return to them. The Jewish people are thus the only people in existence who are not infected with the “zuhama” of the snake. The nations of the world continue to have an innate obstruction to spirituality because of this.

It is interesting to note that the nations of the world are commanded only with the Seven Noahide Laws, which are negative commandments meant to maintain

whatever level of spirituality with which they were endowed by G'd. Why were they not given positive commandments through which they could advance spiritually? Why did they not accept the Torah? The Midrash tells us that when G'd had offered the Torah to the nations of the world, they asked, “What is written in it?” G'd responded to each nation accordingly and subsequently each nation chose to reject the Torah. This was because their grasp of what G'd was offering them was only comprehended on an intellectual level. Their spiritual blockage prevented them from truly appreciating the innateness of Torah. In contrast, the Jewish people were able to accept the Torah with the declaration of “Naaseh V'Nishma – We will do and we will listen” after ascending to the 49th level of spiritual purity. Because the obstruction was removed, the Jewish people had the capacity to assume the responsibility of fulfilling the 613 mitzvos of the Torah.