

***Yad Avraham Institute***  
**Weekly Torah Commentaries Series**

**Portion of Beshalach**

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**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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## **Beshalach**

*Presented by*

**Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

**Dean**

### ***1. The Multiple Benefit of Borrowing the Personal Effects of the Egyptians***

The Torah states, **“G’d said to Moshe, ‘...Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow silver vessels and gold vessels.’ Hashem granted the people favor in the eyes of Egypt...”** Why does the Torah use the term “please” to indicate that Moshe needed to plead with the Jewish people to borrow the precious vessels from the Egyptians? Perhaps one could say that since the Jewish people were concerned about the reaction of their Egyptian taskmasters, they were hesitant to request to borrow their precious vessels. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos explains that because the Jewish people suffered as slaves for such an extended period of time, their only interest was to leave Egypt. If they were to borrow the precious vessels of their masters, it would delay their freedom. Since they were so consumed with the need to be redeemed, Moshe had to plead with them to borrow the precious vessels from the Egyptians.

After the ten plagues had devastated Egypt and the entire country was reduced to rubble, the only financial security that remained in Egypt was the personal wealth of each Egyptian. When the Jewish people asked the Egyptians to borrow their gold and silver vessels, they believed that the intent of the Jew was to borrow and not to retain these possessions. However, after the Jewish people left Egypt, the Egyptians realized that they were deceived and the Jewish people did not intend to return what had been taken. Sforno explains that Moshe needed to plead with the Jewish people to borrow the precious vessels because they were afraid that it would give cause for the Egyptians to pursue them after they left Egypt. Therefore, Moshe needed to plead with the people so that they should not be concerned about being pursued. In addition, Sforno concludes that they needed to borrow the precious vessels, because it is through them that the Jewish people would see their ultimate redemption.

Because the Jewish people were pursued by the Egyptian armies they were able to witness the revealed miracles at the splitting of the Sea, which the greatest

revelation of the Divine Presence. In addition, the Jewish people were able to see the Egyptian armies drowning before their eyes when the Sea closed up upon them. Thus, they were rid of their masters.

The purpose of the ten plagues that came upon Egypt was to punish the Egyptians as well as to extricate the Jewish people from their pagan beliefs that they had assumed as slaves. Each revealed miracle was intended to elevate the Jewish people to another level of understanding to ultimately become G’d’s Holy people. Thus, when they borrowed the wealth from the Egyptians, it not only fulfilled the promise that G’d had made to Avraham that his offspring would leave Egypt with great wealth, it also precipitated the true redemption that they would experience at the splitting of the Sea. At the Sea the Jewish people experienced G’d’s Presence to such a degree that they were able to point to Him and exclaim, **“This is my G’d...”** Thus, the borrowing of the vessels precipitated a context in which the Jewish people were able to advance spiritually at the splitting of the Sea.

Moshe had said in the Name of G’d to the Jewish people that they would experience the four levels of redemption. The Jewish people, however could not truly feel free until they were assured that the Egyptians would never be able to pursue them again. It was not until they saw the Sea closing up upon the Egyptian armies that the Jewish people could truly experience the expressions of redemption. Therefore, as Sforno explains, it was through the precious vessels that the Jewish people were able to experience their true redemption.

### ***2. Witnessing G’d’s Kingship***

The Torah states at the splitting of the Sea, **“Israel saw the great hand that G’d had inflicted upon Egypt, and the people revered G’d and they had faith in G’d and Moshe His servant.”** 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 that is mentioned in the Hagada of Passover regarding the number of revealed miracles that had taken place at the time of the splitting of the Sea. Were there 50, 200, or 250 miracles? At the Sea the Jewish people saw the "Hand of G'd" whereas in Egypt they had only seen the "finger of G'd." The word "finger (eitzba)" connotes the ten plagues, and the word "Hand (yad)" connotes "five" since the hand has five fingers. The dimension of revelation at the splitting of the Sea was magnified five times what it had been in Egypt (with the plagues). 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 had seen at the Sea, Yechezkel the prophet did not see. What did the maidservant witness at the Sea that was not seen by Yechezkel?

The maidservant had seen the "great Hand of G'd." which is five times what was seen in Egypt. This was the Kingship of G'd, which they accepted upon themselves forever. As it states, **"G'd shall reign for all eternity!"** 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.'" The great Hand of G'd that was witnessed at the time of the splitting of the Sea was an expression of G'd's Kingship as the Supreme Omnipotent Being who Reigns over all existence.

The Prophet Yechezkel was not privy to the level of prophecy that the lowly maidservant was exposed to at the splitting of the Sea because a prophet is only given a glimpse of the Divine to the extent that he needs to prophesize to Jewish people. In contrast, the maidservant at the Sea witnessed the "great Hand of G'd" which is the totality of His Presence and not only one aspect.

King Solomon writes in Proverbs, "A King through justice establishes the land...." It is the role of a king to establish and institute justice in order to establish and maintain society. G'd displayed His Kingship by bringing judgment upon the Egyptians, affecting every plane of existence. This was demonstrated in Egypt

through the "finger of G'd", the ten plagues. At the Sea the Jewish people witnessed the Hand of G'd magnified. At the Sea, they saw His Presence in its totality, whereas the Prophet only sees aspects of His Presence. When the Jewish people saw the totality of the Divine Presence (the great Hand of G'd), they were able to point to Him and exclaim, "this is my G'd I will extol Him!"

### ***3. The Effectiveness of Prayer***

The Torah states when the Jewish people found themselves caught between the Sea and the advancing Egyptian army they began complaining, **"Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us out to die in the wilderness?"** Moshe said to the people, **"Do not fear! Stand fast and see the salvation of Hashem...He shall do battle for you, and you shall remain silent."** Initially when the Jewish people saw that they were caught between the Sea and the Egyptian army, they began to pray as Chazal tell us, "They took hold of the craft of their forefathers..." However, G'd did not respond to their supplication.

The Torah continues, **"G'd said to Moshe, 'Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the Children of Israel and let them journey forth!...'"** Rashi cites Chazal, "We learn from G'd's statement that Moshe was praying on behalf of the Jewish people. G'd said to him, 'This is not the time to be lengthily involved in prayer, because it is a moment of trouble for the Jewish people. You should tell them to journey forth.'" As the verse continues, **"And you lift up your staff and stretch out your arm over the sea and split it; and the Children of Israel shall come into the midst of the sea on dry land."**

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks, "One would think that the most appropriate time to engage in prayer is when one is in a state of great difficulty. If so, why did G'd tell Moshe not to continue praying?" After the Jewish people witnessed the ten plagues of Egypt, which were all revealed miracles, they found themselves confronted with the Egyptian army. They said to Moshe, **"Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the desert?"** Their expression of complaint to Moshe was an indication of their lack of belief and faith in G'd. They believed that He had put their existence in a state of jeopardy and they would possibly die. Although this complaint had come from one segment of the people, it evoked an intense level of prosecution from the Attribute of Justice upon the entire Jewish people. It was so severe, that supplication would

have been (prayer) ineffective. It is only within the context of the Attribute of Mercy that prayer would be meaningful.

With this degree of intense prosecution upon them, the Jewish people needed to take an extraordinary initiative that would demonstrate a level of belief and trust in G'd that would quell the Attribute of Justice, to allow the Attribute of Mercy to come into effect. They needed to negate themselves and totally submit to G'd's Will. Thus, G'd told them to journey forth into the Sea. If they would travel directly into the Sea without concern for their safety, it would indicate their absolute trust in G'd. This degree of negation and subjugation to G'd's Will would rectify their previous failing. Only then would they merit the reinstatement of the Attribute of Mercy to be saved.

Chofetz Chaim writes in the Mishna Brurah that the format of the morning prayer service begins with verses of praise (pesukei d'zimrah), then the blessings of the Shema and its recitation, and then the Amidah (silent prayer), which includes personal requests. He explains that there is always a degree of prosecution that exists upon every individual. By reciting the verses of praise to extol G'd and sing His Praises through these verses of Psalms, it affords G'd respect by identifying and appreciating Him as the Almighty One, the prosecution is silenced. Once the prosecution is silenced, then one can approach G'd with his own personal requests, which address every aspect of one's physical and spiritual needs. This is because prayer is only effective within the context of the Attribute of Mercy. We see this clearly demonstrated at the Sea, when even the prayers of Moshe, the most perfect Jew to ever live, could not be effective until the Jewish people took the initiative to travel into the Sea in order to silence the prosecution against them, and thus reinstate the Attribute of Mercy so that they should merit the ultimate miracle, the splitting of the Sea.

#### ***4. Amalek's Culpability***

The Torah tells us that after the splitting of the Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian armies, the Jewish people were attacked by the Amalekites. Despite the fact that the entire world stood in awe of the Jewish people and trembled before them because of the revealed miracles that G'd had performed on their behalf, the Amalekites were unmoved and unaffected to any degree. Chazal depict the Amalekites as "the fool who jumped into the scalding bath. Although he is scalded by the hot water, he nevertheless cools the bath for others." After the splitting of the Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian armies, the nations of the

world revered and feared the Jewish people and would not dare engaging with G'd's people after witnessing His wrath. However, because Amalek chose to attack the Jewish people, although they were defeated, they diminished the perception of the Jewish people in the eyes of the world. As a result of this diminishment, the Jewish people, who are G'd's representation in the world, were rendered less effective in their ability to achieve their objective in existence as the Nation of G'd. Since the Jewish people were diminished by Amalek, G'd said, "My Throne is not complete until the memory of Amalek is obliterated from under the heavens." Why does G'd consider His Throne not complete as long as Amalek exists?

On a simple level, one could say that if the Jewish people would have remained at the esteemed level that was revered by humanity they would have been able to be the role model of spirituality in existence. They would have been able to influence the nations of the world and bring existence to a state of perfection. Thus, G'd's Throne would have been established eternally. However, since Amalek attacked and diminished the Jewish people, they would not be able to bring about this level of perfection in the world. Consequently, G'd's Throne would not be complete until the memory of Amalek is obliterated from existence.

It is stated in the Ten Commandments, "**Do not covet your fellow's house...your fellow's wife...nor anything that belongs to your fellow.**" How is it possible for one who has an interest in his fellow's belongings to control this inappropriate desire? Ibn Ezra explains this with an allegory. When the Prince chooses to marry a princess with all of her special beauty and qualities, the commoner will not envy the Prince for marrying her. He will not desire to have the princess for himself. This is because the commoner understands with certainty, that status of the Prince has no relevance to him since he is a commoner. There is not even a basis for consideration, since she is not within his context of choice. Identically, if one would understand and internalize that every individual's personal predicament is unique and specific for that person through G'd's endowment, then he will not be envious of his fellow's successes or possessions, because they have no relevance to his existence. If one in fact does have designs on his fellow's possessions, it is only because he believes that he is an equal or superior to his fellow. He thus feels that he deserves whatever belongs to his fellow.

Before the Jewish people were attacked by Amalek, they were regarded by the world as princes of G'd. They were perceived as being at another level in existence. The nations of the world understood that they had no relevance to the Jewish people because they were G'd's chosen people, who were saved by His Hand through revealed miracles. They thus did not desire or have any designs on the existence of the Jewish people because they were similar to the commoner who understands that he has no relevance to desiring the possessions of the prince. However, after the attack of Amalek, the Jewish people were diminished in the eyes of the world and thus regarded by the nations as their peers. There was no longer a special aura surrounding the Jewish people and the nations desired whatever belonged to them since they were considered as equals.

When one regards his fellow as an equal, he believes that he has relevance to his possessions. When one has designs on his fellow's possessions or station in life and he does not receive equal compensation, he will envy his fellow. That envy translates into the evil eye (ayin ha'ra). In contrast, the commoner will not give the evil eye to the Prince when he marries the princess, because he understands that he has no relevance to his level.

Despite experiencing the greatest revealed miracles in the history of Creation and standing at Sinai where they received the Torah from G'd, the Jewish people failed with the sin of the Golden Calf. Their failing of idolatry took place only forty days after G'd had openly communicated with them. How is it possible that after reaching such spiritual heights, could the Jewish people have been involved with idolatry? The Midrash states, "The Jewish people only served the Golden Calf, because of the evil eye." Since the Sinai event was a public event that was witnessed by the entire world, the nations gave the evil eye to the Jewish people when they received the Torah. Had the Jewish people not failed with the Golden Calf, they would have ascended to a level of Adam before the sin of the Tree and brought existence to a level of perfection and established G'd's Throne forever. However, since Amalek diminished the aura of the Jewish people with their attack, they were viewed by the nations of the world as their peers, thus making them vulnerable to the evil eye. The evil eye of the nations, ultimately caused them to sin with the Golden Calf. Thus, the cause of G'd's Throne not being complete is Amalek's attack against the Jewish people.

## ***5. The Symbolism of the Donkey***

The Torah states regarding the positive commandment of redeeming the firstborn, "**...you shall set apart every first issue of the womb to G'd...Every first issue donkey you shall redeem with a lamb or kid...**" The firstborn of every domesticated kosher species assumes a state of sanctity upon its birth. The donkey, although it is a non-kosher species, also assumes a consecrated status upon its birth and it must be redeemed by giving a sheep to the Kohen. Rashi cites Chazal who offer two explanations why the firstborn of the donkey assumes a sanctified status. The first explanation offered by the Midrash is that since the donkey was the pack animal that assisted the Jewish people to transport the wealth out of Egypt, fulfilling G'd's promise to Avraham at the covenant between the parts, its firstborn thus assumes a consecrated status. The other interpretation cited by Rashi states that the Egyptians are referred to by the prophet Yechezkel as "donkeys." As it is stated by the prophet, "Their flesh is the flesh of donkeys." One can understand that the firstborn of the donkey assumes a consecrated status because the donkey was crucial and essential to the promise to Avraham to be fulfilled. However, what relevance does the classification of the Egyptian people as "donkeys" have to sanctity? One would think that since the Egyptians had enslaved and victimized the Jewish people, the donkey represent something that is the antithesis of sanctity.

Ramban in his commentary asks, "Why were the Egyptians punished for enslaving the Jewish people? It was something that was ordained by G'd at the covenant between the parts." He cites an opinion that although it was ordained that the Jewish people were to be enslaved, the Egyptian people did not need to be the ones to fulfill that decree. It could have been carried out by another nation. Ramban rejects this opinion because the fulfillment of G'd's Will is a mitzvah. If so, there is a principle that states whoever is the first to fulfill the dictate of G'd is meritorious. Thus, the Egyptians should be classified as meritorious. If so, why were they punished for the enslavement of the Jewish people? Ramban explains that although the enslavement of the Jewish people was the Will of G'd, the Egyptians did not enslave them in order to fulfill His Will but rather it was because of their insecurity and hate, that they imposed bondage upon them. The enslavement of the Jewish people did not emanate from a holy source.

The Jewish people needed to be enslaved in Egypt in order to be purged of the impurities that existed within

their spirituality. The Torah refers to the Egyptian experience as “the iron smelter.” Just as the smelter removes the impurities of iron by smelting them away, so too did the bondage of Egypt purify the Jewish people. As a result of this purification process the Jewish people were able to stand at Sinai to receive the Torah. Since the Egyptians were the ones who facilitated the purification process on behalf of the Jewish people they have relevance to the consecrated status of the Jewish people. The Torah thus gives the firstborn of the donkey a holy status to indicate that it was due to the Egyptians who are classified as “donkeys” that the Jewish people attained their sanctity.

Maharal of Prague z'tl explains that the word “*chamor (donkey)*”, is derived from the word “*chomer*,” which means material. Meaning, of the seventy root nations of the world, the Egyptian people were the most devoid of spirituality. Thus, they have the greatest relevance to the mundane. They are therefore referred to as *chamorim*, to indicate that their essence is merely physical.

The Maharal cites a Midrash which asks, “Where do see that G'd extracts light from darkness? Avraham from Terach.” Although Terach, the father of Avraham, was a pagan and evil, Avraham his son was the light that was extracted from the darkness because he illuminated the world by introducing G'd's Presence. There is a principle that the ultimate level of spirituality, must emanate from a location that is the most devoid of spirituality. The Jewish people thus needed to be in Egypt, which was the location that was the most devoid of spirituality in order to ascend to the pinnacle of their spirituality at Sinai. Thus, the Egyptians, who are referred to as “donkeys” were the direct cause of the Jewish people to be qualified to stand at Sinai. Therefore the donkey is the only non-kosher species that has relevance to sanctity.

The Torah tells us that there is a negative commandment that prohibits one from afflicting an Egyptian, because “**you were strangers in the land of Egypt.**” Rashi cites Chazal who explains that since the Egyptians hosted the Jewish people in their country, the Jew has a debt of gratitude. If the Egyptians had inflicted untold suffering upon the Jewish people, why should they have a debt of gratitude towards them? It is because Egypt was the host country at a time of their suffering. Although they had embittered the lives of the Jewish people, they would not have been able to achieve their holy status without experiencing the bondage in that location. They are thus indebted to the Egyptians.