

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Tazria

March 31, 2011

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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Tazria

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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1. The Motivating Factor Makes the Difference

The Torah states regarding the mitzvah of circumcision, **“On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.”** The Midrash states, “We see that the Torah does not require any special expenditure regarding the performance of the mitzvah of circumcision. However, come and see to what degree the Jewish people esteem the mitzvos and demonstrate their love for them! They incur great expenditures to fulfill the mitzvos and rejoice in them.” Because the Jewish people esteem the mitzvos, the expense is never an impediment to fulfill the mitzvah. In contrast, they spare no expense to celebrate the mitzvah. The Midrash continues, “G’d said, ‘Because you fulfill the mitzvos with joy, I will add to you an even greater level of joy.’ As it states, ‘Those who are humble will receive another level of joy.’” What is the relationship between one’s humility and the joy pertaining to the fulfillment of the mitzvah of circumcision?

The verse in Yechezkel tells us that before the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt, they were in a “naked” state. Chazal tell us that this is because they were devoid of mitzvos and thus not worthy of redemption. It was because of this that G’d provided them with two mitzvos as a prerequisite to redemption: the mitzvah of circumcision and the mitzvah of the Pascal lamb. The mitzvah of circumcision reestablished the covenant between the Jewish people and G’d. The sacrifice of the Pascal lamb terminated the relationship that the Jewish people had with the deity of Egypt, which was the sheep and the goat.

The Midrash tells us that there was a debate between Rebbe Akiva and Tornistropis, the Roman governor of Jerusalem (who was the one who ultimately put Rebbe Akiva to death). Tornistropis said to Rebbe Akiva, “You Jews believe in G’d and His perfection. If a child is born with a foreskin as G’d’s creation, then why do you remove it through circumcision? How do you tamper with the perfection of G’d’s creation?” Rebbe

Akiva answered, “You do not understand. The world and man are in an imperfect state. Man’s responsibility is to perfect himself and the world. Thus, the removal of the foreskin is an act of perfection and not an act of mutilation.” When one circumcises himself or his child it demonstrates his submission to G’d and a negation of one’s self. Thus, it is an act of humility. This is the meaning of the verse, “Those who are humble will receive another level of joy.” When one fulfills and esteems G’d’s mitzvos to indicate that His Will is the ultimate, it is a demonstration of one’s humility. Thus, G’d will add joy to this individual.

Sforno explains that the fulfillment of all statutes (*chukim*) which are laws that cannot be understood within a rational context, are a demonstration of one’s love for G’d. When a Jew adheres to dietary laws and the prohibition of wearing a garment that has a combination of wool and linen (*shatnez*) he exhibits his love and reverence for G’d, because these laws have no rationale other than being the Will of G’d. If one does not possess humility, he will not perform the mitzvah unless he is able to put it within a rational context. In contrast, if one performs regardless of one’s understanding, it is only because one submits to the Will of G’d. This is truly a demonstration of one’s humility. This is the basis for the humble individual to experience joy when he performs G’d’s Will. To this individual G’d will bestow upon him even greater joy.

2. Appreciating the Gift of Circumcision

The Midrash tells us that there was a dialogue between Rebbe Akiva and Tornistropis, the Roman governor of Jerusalem, “Tornistropis had asked Rebbe Akiva, ‘Whose accomplishments are more perfect – G’d’s or man’s?’ Rebbe Akiva responded, ‘Man’s accomplishments are more perfect.’ Tornistropis asked, ‘Could man replicate the creation of heaven and earth?’ Rebbe Akiva replied, ‘We are not discussing something that is beyond the human capacity. Rather, regarding something that is relevant to man, it is man’s accomplishments that are more perfect.’ Tornistropis

asked, 'Why do you Jews circumcise yourselves?' Rebbe Akiva replied, 'I understood from the beginning that this was the intent of your question. It is because of this that I responded that man's accomplishments are more perfect than G'd's.' Rebbe Akiva then placed before him sheaves of wheat and fully baked loaves of bread. He said, 'The sheaves of wheat are the handiwork of G'd and the finished loaves of bread are the product of man's accomplishment. Which of the two is more perfect? The unprocessed sheaves of wheat or the finished loaves of bread?' Tornistropis replied, 'If G'd intended the Jew to be circumcised, why did He not create him to be born in a circumcised state?' Rebbe Akiva responded, 'G'd gave the Jewish people the mitzvos in order to perfect themselves and be purged from impurity. As it states in Psalms, 'The Word of G'd purges and perfects ...' G'd presented man with an imperfect world and gave the Torah to the Jewish people in order to facilitate its perfection.'"

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that Adam was initially created without a foreskin; however, as a result of partaking of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, which innately possessed evil, the foreskin developed. The foreskin was an expression of the impurity that Adam had brought within himself. The foreskin, which is a covering of the male organ, represents impurity and thus is an obstruction to spirituality. The mitzvah of circumcision was given to the Jew to remove that impurity to allow him to come upon spiritual horizons. G'd's initial Handiwork contained no impurity. It was because Adam had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge that evil was introduced into himself and all existence. Why did the impurity caused by the sin of Adam manifest itself with the foreskin, which covers the male organ?

The Gemara in Tractate Avidah Zorah tells us that at Sinai, the Jewish people reached the pinnacle of their spiritual ascent. With their declaration, "Naaseh V'nishma (we will do and we will listen)," they assumed the profile of angels. However soon thereafter, the Jewish people sinned with the Golden Calf. How is it possible that after achieving such a level of clarity that they could have transgressed so severely? The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin explains, "The Jewish people served the Golden Calf in order to permit to themselves the sexual relations that were forbidden them (by the Torah)." After Sinai, many of the relationships that were initially permitted became forbidden. Because of the undercurrent of the sexual drive, that they were denied, caused the Jewish people to return to idolatry, which is a denial of the Omnipotent G'd.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that when Adam had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, he was classified as a heretic. Before his sin, he had a level of clarity that enabled him to see from one end of world to the other. With that level of clarity, it is not possible to defy the Will of G'd unless at that moment one denies His existence. The fact that Adam did eat the Tree, is an indication that at that moment Adam was a heretic. When one denies the existence of G'd, based on one's conflicts of interest, there is no behavior that cannot be justified. The sexual drive in a human, being the all encompassing drive, will therefore control one's behavior regarding spirituality. The Torah states, "**You shall be holy, for I am holy...**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain that in order to assume a state of holiness the Jew must separate himself from forbidden sexual relations. Ramban explains that even permitted indulgence in the area of sexuality is a breach of sanctity. The individual assumes the status of "one who behaves despicably but does not violate any laws (*menuval breshus haTorah*)." One who lives as a hedonist has not relevance to holiness. The mitzvah of circumcision is performed on the male organ by removing the foreskin in order to allow him to have a relationship with G'd. The impurity of the Tree of Knowledge manifested itself in the sexual area because it is the area that causes one to be the most conflicted. Thus, if one's sexual drive is suppressed, he will have greater relevance to clarity.

Chazal tell us that the Egyptian society was depraved because they were immersed in deviant sexual behavior. When Yosef assumed the position of Viceroy he ordered that all the Egyptian males be circumcised before the Jewish people came to Egypt. Arizal explains that Yosef did this so that the Egyptian people should be elevated by tempering their sexual drive. Yosef did this so that the Jewish people should enter into an environment that did not affected them negatively. Rambam writes in the Guide to the Perplexed that one of the reasons that G'd gave the mitzvah of circumcision to the Jewish people is to curb the sexual drive. If does not have this area of his life under control, then he will be subject to conflict.

3. Understanding the Consequences of One's Speech

The Torah states regarding the person who develops a lesion resembling that of leprosy, "**The Kohan must see him...**" Sforno explains in his commentary that

the contaminated or pure status of the *metzora* can only come about through the pronouncement of the Kohen. The qualification of the Kohen is based on a verse in *Malachi*, “The lips of the Kohen are the keepers of the *daas* (wisdom/Torah).” After the Kohen pronounces the individual as *tamei* (contaminated), he instructs the leper how to introspect and reflect on his behavior because *tzaras* (leprosy) only comes about because of a spiritual failing. The Kohen instructs him to pray that his *teshuvah* (repentance) should be received by G’d and the Kohen will pray on his behalf as well. The Talmud tells us that *tzaras* is a “*Mizbeach kapara* – an altar of atonement.” The state of leprosy sensitizes the person to appreciate his failing and make the proper corrections. When the individual is pronounced a leper, he is sent outside of all the camps.

After the person is pronounced to be a leper and is sent out of all the camps, the Torah states, “**And the person with tzaras in whom there is the affliction – his garments shall be torn, the hair on his head shall be unshorn, and he shall cloak himself up to his lips; he is to call out “Contaminated! Contaminated!”**” Rashi explains that he must conduct himself as one who is in a state of mourning. The leper becomes a pariah and is not permitted to return to the camp until his recovery. This entire process is to cause the leper to appreciate the wrong that he has done and to allow him to atone for it.

The Chofetz Chaim writes in his work *Shmiras HaLashon* (Guarding One’s Tongue), that when Moshe was engaged in dialogue with G’d at the burning bush, he had said regarding the Jewish people, “They will not listen to me. They will not believe me.” G’d said to Moshe to throw his staff on the ground and it became a snake. Then Moshe was told to put his hand onto his chest area and it became leprous. The symbolism of the snake and the leprosy was to communicate to Moshe that firstly he assumed the posture of the snake by speaking *lashon hara* against the Jewish people. Secondly, his hand becoming leprous demonstrated that *tzaras* is the consequence of speaking *lashon hara*.

The Chofetz Chaim explains that G’d said to Moshe to take hold of the tail of the snake, and Moshe did so immediately. When Moshe took hold of its tail, the snake reverted into a staff. Usually taking hold of the tail of a snake leaves one more susceptible for being bitten; however, Moshe took hold of the tail without hesitation. Moshe did so because he fully appreciated and understood that he had sinned by speaking *lashon hara*, thus he wished to atone immediately. Because he fully recognized

his failing he was not bitten by the snake, rather it reverted back to a staff – indicating that he had been atoned. The Chofetz Chaim concludes based on this that recognition and admission of one’s spiritual failing is in itself a basis for atonement.

We find this also to be the case regarding the brothers of Yosef. The Torah tells us that Yosef’s brothers realized that their difficulties in Egypt were not due to the accusations of the Viceroy of Egypt but to G’d meting out Justice for their past spiritual failing. Initially when they had sold their brother Yosef into slavery they were convinced that they had acted correctly. However, their difficulties in Egypt caused them to realize their misconception. This realization was their atonement.

The way one silences prosecution (from satan) is to acknowledge one’s guilt. If the prosecutor is prosecuting and one admits his own guilt, the prosecutor has no reason to prosecute any longer. Judgment comes about because of prosecution.

The Rabbis legislated that whenever (G’d forbid) tragedies come upon a Jew, he must say the blessing of, “*Baruch Dayan HaEmes* – Blessed is the True Judge!” One must understand that his difficulties are not because of physical matters, economic conditions, or anything other than G’d’s Judgment because of his own spiritual failing. When one declares “*Baruch Dayan HaEmes*,” he is acknowledging that Judgment of G’d is truthful and is thereby admitting his failing. If a person truly internalized this fact he would silence prosecution against him and be atoned. This is similar to the leper introspecting and thus recognizing his failing through the instruction of the Kohen. The Rabbis understood the value of acknowledging this reality. Therefore, they enacted the recitation of “*Baruch Dayan HaEmes*.”

Thus, if one experiences difficulties, the sooner he acknowledges and recognizes the basis for his problem, the sooner he will recover. It is the recognition of the problem that initiates the rehabilitation.

4. Torah, Under Duress

The Torah states, “...**When a woman conceives and gives birth...**” The Midrash cites a verse from Psalms, “ ‘Before and after You have restricted me (achar v’kedem tzartani)...’ Adam had said, ‘After G’d had created all of the animals, birds, insects, and creatures, He created me.’ Meaning, Adam had understood that before

he was created, G'd had brought about all existence to accommodate him...Similarly, the fetus before it leaves the womb of its mother, G'd commands it, 'This you are permitted to eat and this is not permitted to eat. This is contaminating to you and this is not contaminating to you.' Only after the fetus had accepted upon itself all of the commandments of the Torah, does G'd allow it to be born. This is the reason the Portion of Shemini, which discusses all of the permitted and forbidden species, precedes the portion of Tazria, which discusses the conception and birth of a child." Thus, the sequential order of the Portions teaches us that the child is first taught all of the laws regarding what is permitted and forbidden, and then it comes into existence.

This is similar to what is stated in the Gemara in Tractate Nidah, that a child in-utero is taught the Torah in its entirety by an angel. While the child is in the womb, it has a level of clarity that enables it to "see from one end of the world to the other." A moment before the child is born, the angel makes it take an oath to adhere to all of the mitzvos that it was taught. Only then is it allowed to be born.

It is interesting to note that the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that at the time of the giving of the Torah at Sinai, G'd held the mountain over them. G'd had given them an ultimatum saying, "If you accept the Torah it shall be good for you. If not, there shall you be buried." If the Jewish people had not accepted the Torah, the world would have reverted back to a state of preexistence. The Gemara concludes that because of this ultimatum, it is considered that the Torah was given under duress. Is this truly considered under duress? If one wishes to be hired for a position that requires an unusual level of commitment, it is understood that the employee must meet its requirements and responsibilities. This employment is not considered to be under duress, because the employee agrees to meet all of the conditions of the employer. G'd's only objective in creating existence was that it should be the setting for the Jewish people to fulfill the Torah. If they had chosen not to accept the Torah, then the sole objective of creation would never be met. It is understood that G'd would cause the world to revert to a state of non-existence, if the Jewish People did not accept the Torah. With this understanding, duress assumes another connotation. Rather than understanding it to mean "being forced" to do something against one's will, it becomes appreciating the reality of one's predicament and then acting wisely.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) states, "...against your will you are formed, against your will you are born, against your will you live, against your will you die..." As was explained by the Gemara in Tractate Nidah and the Midrash, the child in-utero has no choice but to accept the Torah that it was taught. This is replicating the setting of Sinai. Just as the Jewish people understood with clarity, the consequences of rejecting the Torah, so too does the child, because of its level of understanding, accepts the Torah.

When one understands the consequences of his actions with absolute clarity, he has no choice but to act wisely – doing the Will of G'd. This is the commonality between the child in-utero and the Jewish people at the foot of Sinai. However, one must aspire to transcend this level of understanding and accept the Word of G'd not for the sake of existence, but rather, to feel privileged to be able to serve his Master.

5. G'd Providing Opportunity

The Torah states, "**...When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male...If she gives birth to a female...**" The Midrash states, "If the woman had ovulated by the time of cohabitation, the child conceived will be a male. However if she had not yet ovulated at the time of cohabitation, the child will be a female. Reb Chiya Bar Aba says, 'From this we see that the (conception of) male (child) is dependant on the female and the (conception of a) female (child) is dependant on the male.'... As it states, Avraham was informed 'Milka (female) had given birth to sons to Nochor, your brother...' We see also from the verse, 'Bisuel (Male) had fathered Rivka.' Thus, the female identifies with the conception of a male and the male is identified with the conception of the female." Why did G'd create the world in this manner – that the conception of the male is determined by the woman and the conception of the female is determined by the man?

Ksav Sofer (the son of the Chasam Sofer) explains that since the female is not obligated in many of the mitzvos that the man is obligated to perform, she is denied the spiritual benefit of those mitzvos from which she is exempt. For example, while a man is obligated in the study of Torah, which in relationship to other mitzvos is the ultimate, a woman is not. G'd created existence in a way to allow each person to be able to be a spiritual beneficiary of all the mitzvos. Thus, by allowing the female to be the cause of the conception of the male, she is in essence the

one responsible from bringing him into existence. Therefore, all the spiritual accomplishments that the son will achieve in his lifetime will accrue to the mother who initially conceived him. It is in this manner that the woman can reap the merit and spiritual benefits of the mitzvos that do not pertain to her. Similarly, there are many mitzvos that pertain only to the woman, such as the laws of family purity (counting days towards purity, emersion in a mikvah, etc.), to which the male has no relevance. Therefore, G'd allowed the male to be the cause of the conception of the female in order for him to be a beneficiary of his daughter's spiritual accomplishments.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin states, "The son brings merit to the father but the father does not bring merit to the son." Meaning, if the father was evil and he had a righteous son, he would be a beneficiary of the spiritual accomplishments of his son. However, if a righteous father were to have an evil son, the son's spiritual record will not be enhanced by the spiritual accomplishments of the father. Although the evil son may be presented with special spiritual opportunities in his lifetime, because he is the son of a righteous individual; the righteousness of his father will not be attributed to him. This is because the father is the cause of the son's existence, which is not the case regarding the son versus the father.

Based on the principle that a son brings merit to the father, the Mishna in Tractate Bava Metzvia tells us that if one comes upon the lost object of his father and the lost object of a third party, returning the object to the father takes precedence over the other. Because, "His father had brought him into existence." The Mishna continues - if one finds the lost object of his father and the lost object of his rebbe (spiritual mentor), returning the object of his mentor takes precedence, because "His father brought him into the physical world; however, his rebbe gave him relevance to the world to come ..." Eternal existence has greater value than the limited existence in this world. Therefore, the rebbe takes precedence over the father.

Ramah writes in his glosses on the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) that if one provides for the Jewish education of another, he is considered to be the equivalent of his mentor (rabo muvak), although he never engaged in the study of Torah with the recipient of his support. This is because without the benefactor's financial support, the student would have never been able to develop as a Torah Jew. He is thus directly responsible for the spiritual development of the student. Consequently, all the

spiritual accomplishments of the student accrue to the benefactor.

Chofetz Chaim writes that if one provides the means for an individual or a family to become more observant and they actually advance spiritually, the initial supporter will reap all the merit that will be generated by the family until the end of existence. This is because the benefactor was the catalyst that allowed the spiritual advancement to come about.

G'd provided the Jewish people with a setting and mechanism that allows them to reap maximum benefit from mitzvah performance. Regardless of how removed one may be from the actualization of the performance of the Torah Itself, the benefactor who supports it will be the beneficiary of all that came about as a result of his support. Similarly, G'd created the male and the female in a way that each of them will be the beneficiary of the other gender's mitzvah performance.

YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos (Maharal)
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar – Duties of the Heart
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Sanhedrin
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:30 – 12:30pm	Talmud: Chagigah Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
1:00-2:00 pm	Ramchal: Derech Hashem Location: Cedarview Capital 1Penn Plaza (45 th FL.)

Tuesday

12:10 - 1:10pm	Torah Insight Based on the Parsha Location: Yad Avraham
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Wednesday

11:30 – 12:30 pm	Talmud: Chagigah Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
1:00—2:00 pm	Rambam Hilchos Talmud Torah Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

11:00 –12:00pm	Duties of The Heart Location: Yad Avraham
12:30 – 1:30 pm	Talmud: Chagigah Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL)