

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Tazria

March 27, 2014

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. Celebrating our Relationship with G'd

The Torah states regarding the mitzvah of circumcision, **“On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.”** The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin explains that on the eighth day after the birth of a son, the obligation of circumcising him comes upon the father. If for whatever reason the father does not fulfill his obligation, it is incumbent upon the Jewish Court (Bais Din) to ensure that every Jewish male child is circumcised. If the Bais Din does not have the child circumcised, then he has an obligation to circumcise himself when he becomes an adult. 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. 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 to G'd will receive another level of joy.’” The joy that G'd will bestow upon the individual who performed the mitzvah with joy can be understood in one of two ways. It could be understood that G'd will endow the individual with joy in his life that will surpass the joy of one fulfilling the mitzvah. Or, it could be understood to mean that G'd will give the individual a greater capacity to value the mitzvah so that he should have an even greater level of joy within the context of fulfilling it.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh cites Zohar who explains that Adam was initially created without a foreskin. However, as a result of partaking of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the foreskin evolved. The foreskin is an expression of the impurity and evil that Adam had brought within himself as a result of eating of the fruit of the Tree. The foreskin, which is a covering of the male organ, represents the evil contained within the fruit, which creates an impurity within the person and thus does not allow one to have a sense of spirituality. One's capacity for spirituality is totally obstructed. With the

foreskin in place, one is not able to internalize spirituality or be sensitive to spiritual concepts. It is because the individual is entombed in the impurity that is represented by the foreskin. G'd gave the mitzvah of circumcision to the Jewish people to remove that impurity to give them a capacity to come upon spiritual horizons.

With this, we can understand and appreciate the severity of the liability for remaining in an uncircumcised state. The bringing the Pascal sacrifice and circumcision are the only two positive commandments that if one remains in a passive state and does not fulfill them, he will be liable for spiritual excision. Regarding all other instances of the liability of spiritual excision, one needs to actively transgress a negative commandment in order to be cut-off from G'd. It is because, if one is uncircumcised he does not have the capacity to have a relationship with G'd because he is entombed in spiritual impurity.

The Torah states regarding the consumption of non-kosher species, **“Do not make your souls abominable by means of any creeping thing; do not contaminate yourselves through them lest you become contaminated (v'nitmasim) through them.”** The Gemara in Tractate Yomah explains that the word “v'nitmasim” (contaminated)” is written with the “aleph” deleted. Thus without the vowels, it can be read as “v'nitamtem (closed/sealed).” The Torah is telling us that when the Jew consumes non-kosher species it causes him to become spiritually desensitized. He loses his natural sensitivity to spirituality because he introduced into himself an impurity that acts as a covering on his heart. Consequently, he is obstructed. The Zohar discusses the concept of “klipa (husk/covering).” Just as the husk of a plant covers the fruit and obscures it from the environment, so too does “klipa” (impurity) cover and entomb the spirituality of the Jew, and obstructs it from G'd. If the Jew wants to cleave to G'd to be connected to the source of life, he cannot ingest non-kosher species.

The Torah states in the Portion of Ki Seitzei, **“When you will go out to war...and you will see a**

woman who is beautiful of form (*aishis yifas toar*) and you desire her, you may take her to yourself for a wife.” The Torah permits the one who is in battle to take a woman that he desires. Although she is a gentile, the Torah permits him to convert her and marry her. This also applies to a gentile woman who is not at all beautiful. Nevertheless, if the Jewish male finds her attractive, he is permitted to take her with all the conditions that are prescribed by the Torah. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the attraction to the woman is not rooted in her physicality but rather it relates to the nature of her soul. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh writes that at the time of the sin of Adam, satan had captured some of the most special souls and concealed them among the nations of the world. Ruth, the Moabite was one of these special souls and she was subsequently released to become a Jewess through conversion. Just as these special souls are released if the Jewish male chooses to take the gentile woman in battle, in a similar vein, the Jew is released from his entombment when he is circumcised. As a result of the circumcision, his spiritual systems are activated.

Since the Jew is given the opportunity to release his soul from being entombed in impurity to have a relationship with G'd, it is certainly a time of great joy. It is mentioned in certain works that at the time of circumcision a special soul enters into the child. Until the foreskin is removed, because it is the representation of ultimate impurity, the soul cannot enter into the child. This is also the reason that there is a custom not to reveal the name of the child until after the circumcision. Since the spiritual destiny of the child lies within the name of the child, one does not want his child's future to be tainted by the state of impurity that the child possesses before circumcision.

Although the child is being cut and seemingly wounded, the Jew nevertheless rejoices with great joy for having the opportunity to establish a potential for the child to have a relationship with G'd. This joy is a sanctification of G'd's Name. One is rejoicing because he has the opportunity to give his child the ability to address his purpose in life.

2. The Mitzvos, a Reflection of Man's Spiritual Needs

The Midrash tells us that there was a dialogue between Rebbe Akiva and Tornistropis, the Roman governor of Jerusalem, “Tornistropis 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 initially understood 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 placed before him sheaves of wheat and 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 human being 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 cites Zohar who explains that Adam was initially created without a foreskin. Adam only had one commandment to not eat from the Tree of Knowledge. If he had adhered to G'd's Word, Adam would have brought the world to a state of perfection. However, because he transgressed and ate of the Tree; consequently, the evil that he had introduced within himself manifested itself as the foreskin. Seemingly, the Zohar is contradictory to the Midrash, which states that he was created in an uncircumcised.

G'd initially created Adam without a foreskin; however, by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, he introduced evil into himself which is represented by the foreskin. Adam's eating of the Tree is the equivalent of a fully functional person who chooses to bring harm upon himself, thus causing him to become limited and handicapped. Adam's sin brought about untold damage to his spirituality and thus it needed to be spiritually rehabilitated.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that before G'd gave the Torah to the Jewish people, the angels in heaven requested of G'd to leave His Glory (the Torah) in heaven and not to give it to mankind. G'd told Moshe

to respond to the angels that they have no relevance to the mitzvos that are contained in the Torah for the reasons that he had stated. It is understood that the angels were aware that the Torah that G'd was going to give the Jewish people contained the mitzvos such as tefilin, dietary laws, and the observance of the Shabbos, which all have relevance to the physical realm. If this is so, how could the angels have even considered that they had relevance to receive the Torah? The mitzvos that were communicated to the Jewish people at Sinai are only physical manifestations of the spirituality that is represented within the mitzvos. They had to manifest themselves as they did (in a physical context), because the Torah was given to the Jewish people, who are physical beings. However, each mitzvah represents and symbolizes a spiritual element that exists within the spiritual realm. It was this spiritual representation that the angels believed had relevance to them. They thus asked that G'd to leave His Glory in heaven.

Had Adam not sinned, there would have been a different application of the Torah to address his spiritual advancement in his perfect state. However, because he did sin and became putrefied through spiritual contamination, the Torah needed to manifest itself in the manner that it did, in order to address every aspect of the spirituality of the Jew. Through the performance of the mitzvos, the Jew perfects himself and the world. Thus, it is the mission and the objective of the Jew to bring about this perfection by addressing his spiritual potential through the performance of mitzvos.

3. Adam's Double Failing

The Midrash states, "G'd does not want to find anyone guilty. This is based on the verse, 'G'd does not want evil to come upon anyone.' He is not a G'd that seeks out evil. As it states in Yechezkel, 'G'd says, 'I do not want the evil one to be liable for death, but rather, I want him to repent and live.' What does G'd want? He wants to vindicate His Creation...When G'd created Adam, he placed him in the Garden of Eden and commanded him, '**From this you shall eat but from that (the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil) you shall not eat. For on the day that you will eat from it, you shall surely die.**' Adam transgressed and ate of the fruit of the Tree. As a result, G'd brought judgment upon him, but allowed him the time of Shabbos to reflect upon what he had done. G'd thought, 'Perhaps he will repent.' G'd called out to him with the hope that Adam would repent. As it states, 'G'd called to Adam, '**Where are you?**'

Meaning, Adam was to introspect and reflect upon where he was, regarding his spirituality by understanding his failing and thus having remorse for the wrong that he had done. G'd brought His Attribute of Mercy upon Adam before bringing upon him the Attribute of Justice with the intent that he should repent...However, Adam did not repent. G'd said to him, '**By the sweat of your brow shall you eat...until you return to the ground...**' When G'd said 'you return to the ground' the word 'return' alluded to Adam that he could still return to G'd by repenting. He did not, thus he was driven out of the Garden of Eden."

If Adam would have repented when G'd alluded to him to do so, he would have been allowed to remain in the Garden of Eden. His own spirituality would have been reinstated, although he had sinned. However, because he did not repent, mankind together with all existence was diminished and thus evil has a context in which to be empowered. Why did Adam not repent although he understood the gravity of his sin?

The Torah states in the Portion of Vaykira, "**When a man (adam) among you brings an offering...**" The Midrash Tanchuma asks, "Why does the Torah refer to the person as "*adam*" and not "*ishe*" in the opening verse of the Portion of Vayikra, which discusses the laws that pertain to offerings? The Torah refers to man as '*adam*' regarding the offerings, to teach us that if one sins as Adam had, he can bring a sacrifice for atonement." Adam, although he knew that it was forbidden to eat from the Tree, rationalized and justified to eat what was forbidden to eat, thus transgressing the Word of G'd. Although when one sins inadvertently, G'd gives him the opportunity to atone for the wrong that he had done by bringing an offering, Adam was not given that opportunity. Why?

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that initially Adam was pure in his essence and was not tainted with evil. He was able to perceive existence with a unique level of clarity. Since this was so, there is no basis for him to bring a sacrifice to atone for an inadvertent sin. It is because his transgression had no relevance to being inadvertent due to his level of clarity. His sin cannot be classified as inadvertent. It was due to Adam's choice that he ate of the Tree. Thus, his transgression is classified deliberate.

As a result of his eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam introduced evil into existence, thus tainting humanity with impurity. This impurity creates

and causes a diminishment of clarity in man, thus giving him relevance to inadvertency. Thus, the Torah tells us that the man, who is a descendant of Adam, can bring a sacrifice because he has been affected and diminished due to Adam's transgression. Despite not being able to atone through a sacrifice, Adam was given the opportunity to recognize his wrong and repent, but he did not. Cain was also given the opportunity to repent after killing his brother Hevel, but he chose not to do so because he was truly evil. However, Adam the handiwork of G'd was righteous. If so, why did he not repent?

After Adam was driven out of the Garden of Eden, Chazal tell us that he separated himself from his wife for 130 years and was in a state of penitence and fasting. Why did he not repent when he was initially given the opportunity to do so, which would have avoided his expulsion from the Garden of Eden? It is evident that after one sins, it is not a simple matter to repent sufficiently.

The Midrash states, "The sons of Korach did not die. (They were not swallowed up by the earth as their father and his community)" Samuel the prophet was a descendant of one of Korach's sons who did not die. Why did they not die together with their father and his assembly? When Moshe entered into the tent of Korach to reason with him to recognize his mistake, his two sons were seated on either side of him. When his sons saw Moshe enter into the tent they covered their faces and gazed upon the ground, because they were embarrassed to face him. They were in a quandary. If they were to stand for Moshe (as the law dictates that they should) they would disgrace their father. It would be a dishonor to him to acknowledge their father's adversary. However if they were to remain seated, it would be a disrespect to Moshe. They decided to stand for Moshe to acknowledge his presence, despite the disgrace to their father. At that moment, they had stirrings of repentance in their heart." In the merit of standing for Moshe, they merited Divine Assistance to have the capacity to repent and were thus able to extricate themselves from the congregation of their father Korach.

After Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge he understood that he had transgressed; however, in order for him to do a proper repentance he needed to fully internalize the wrong in order to have a depth of remorse to be worthy of reinstatement. Because he did not achieve this level of remorse at was expected of him, he was driven from the Garden of Eden.

4. The Human Being – a Composite of Physical and Spiritual

The Torah tells us that the Kohen is the only person qualified for evaluating lesions and determining whether they are leprous or not. The pronouncement of the Kohen of either "*tamei* - contaminated" or "*tahor* - pure" determines the status of that individual. If the Kohen pronounces the person as contaminated then he is classified as a leper and must be sent out of all the camps of Israel. He must remain there in a solitary state and is not permitted to interact with other individuals. In order for the leper to be reinstated into the camp of Israel, the lesion must heal and only then can the Kohen pronounce him as "pure" to be reinstated. The Gemara tells us that the cause of *tzaras* (leprosy) is *lashon hara* (evil speech).

The Commentators explain that the leprosy discussed in the Torah is not the degenerative disease that we know as leprosy, but rather it is a lesion of a particular color that develops on the skin. The leprosy discussed in the Torah no longer exists. It is interesting to note that the Gemara in Tractate *Shabbos* states, "There is no death without sin." Meaning, spiritual deficiencies manifest themselves in the degeneration of one's physical well-being. This is true regarding every sin except for *lashon hara*, which does not cause a breakdown of the physical but only a discoloration of the skin. When the *tzaras* lesion develops it is a confirmation from G'd that this person has failed in the area of *lashon hara*. Why should the sin of *lashon hara* manifest itself differently than other spiritual failings?

The Gemara in Tractate *Taanis* tells us that at the end of time the animals of the forest will put the snake on trial. They will say in an accusatory manner to the snake, "The lion tramples its prey and devours it to satisfy its hunger. The bear kills its prey and takes it back to its den to devour it. Each creature kills and devours its prey to satisfy its hunger and maintain its existence; however, you (the snake) bite your victim and slither away without necessarily consuming it. What benefit do you have from victimizing your victim?" The snake responds, "Why should I be more culpable than man who speaks *lashon hara*?" The person who speaks *lashon hara* also victimizes his victim without having any physical benefit. The snake continues by saying, "Why should I be vilified more than the human being? Why is my failing greater than his?" Why is the need to satisfy one's desire to speak *lashon hara* any less than a need to want to satisfy his physical desire?

A human being is a composite of the physical and the spiritual. The body represents the animal. All the animalistic drives emanate from the physicality of the human being. The soul (*neshama*) is the spirituality of the human being. The *neshama* has no interest in anything unless it has some relevance to spirituality. Therefore, when one fails spiritually and sins, it is attributed to the physicality of the person – not the spirituality. The claim the animals of the forest against the snake was that its need is not found within the animal makeup. The animal drive has relevance only to satisfy a physical need – not some other level of satisfaction. Thus, the snake's desire to bite its victim and slither off without having any physical benefit is an anathema. It is something that is intrinsically evil. We can understand the snake's response to be, "I am no more culpable than the human being who speaks *lashon hara*, which does not emanate from his physicality, because it is something that has no relevance to the animal."

Since *lashon hara* does not emanate from the physical (animalistic) need, its consequences do not manifest themselves in a typically physical nature. Thus, the lesion is not something that is degenerative, but rather it is only an indicator that there is a serious spiritual deficiency. The Gemara in Tractate *Taanis* tells us that Torah itself can be either a "Potion of Life" or a "Potion of Death". If one studies the Torah for its own sake (*l'shma*) it is a life potion. On the other hand if one studies the Torah not for its own sake (as *Tosfos* explains with an evil or sinister intent to undermine another), then it is a death potion. Torah studied with the sinister intent has a commonality with *lashon hara*. Just as *lashon hara* does not emanate from the physical but rather from something inherently evil in the person, identically Torah studied with a sinister intent is unrelated to the physical but emanates from the same evil within the person.

If one would recognize his own failings, he would not speak negatively about another individual. The only reason one does speak *lashon hara* is because he does not appreciate and understand to what degree he himself is flawed. As a spiritual being, a person does focus on the positive aspects of another. When one speaks *lashon hara* it impacts most seriously on his spirituality as we explained because of where it emanates from – he must be sent out of all the camps. He only returns and is reinstated when he reflects and introspects regarding his failings.

5. 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.

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 Kiddushin
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: Beiah Location: Sunrise Capital 600 Lexington (23 rd 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: Beiah Location: Sunrise Capital 600 Lexington (23 rd FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
1:00—2:00 pm	Maharal Gevuras Hashem Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

11:00 –12:00pm	Duties of The Heart Location: Yad Avraham
12:30 – 1:30 pm	Talmud: Beiah Sunrise Capital 600 Lexington (23 rd FL)