

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
The Portion of
Vayakhel

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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, Hashkafa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Yad Avraham Institute
New York
March 15, 2012

B"H

Vayakhel

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita
Dean

1. Actualizing G'd

The Torah states, **“Moses assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them,” These are the things that Hashem commanded to do.”**

The Midrash states, “G'd said to Moshe, ‘Gather large assemblies of Jews and lecture before them in a public setting the laws of Shabbos so that future generations may learn from your behavior –to gather large assemblies of Jews each Shabbos in the study halls to learn. They will learn the laws of what is “forbidden” and what is “permitted”. You shall do this so that My Great Name shall be praised/extolled among My children.” The purpose of assembling and lecturing to large assemblies of Jews is not for the sake of the study of Torah, but rather to ultimately bring glory to G'd's Name through His children's praises.

The Prophet Yeshaya states, “I (G'd) created it (this existence) for My glory.” The only objective of creation is to glorify G'd. All that exists was created for that purpose. In order for one to have the capacity and clarity to internalize the value of G'd, one must study Torah through which he will understand what is forbidden and what is permitted to him. By living a life that is in conformance with G'd's Will, within His parameters, it will give the individual the ability to sense G'd's Presence and value. This realization will cause one to revere and glorify Him.

The first portion of the Shema states, **“You shall love Hashem, your G'd with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your resources...speak of them (words of Torah) while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way...”** One must love G'd to the degree that he is willing to forgo all of his possessions and even his life. Chazal explain that the only way one can come to this level of selfless love is to engage in and articulate the words of the Torah in all settings and predicaments. The

ongoing articulation of the words of the Torah will touch the spirituality of the Jew in a way that will give him a sense of G'd's omnipotence. Thus, it will evoke an overwhelming level of love that will allow him to act selflessly on His behalf.

The Midrash states, "The face and the structure of the head were created by G'd in a specific manner. There are many streams of fluids that flow through the head of a human being. The fluid of the eye contains salt.... The fluid that is located in the ear is fatty.... The fluid of the nose is putrid... The fluid that is in the mouth is sweet. Why is the fluid in the mouth sweet? There are times when one may eat something that does not agree with him and cause him to regurgitate. The sweetness of the mouth is to minimize its negative effect. In addition, one uses his mouth to study and read the Torah. As it states in Psalms, 'The Torah is sweeter than honey...' Since the Torah is sweet it must be associated with something that will not detract from its sweetness. Thus the saliva in the mouth is sweet."

Chazal tell us that the fluid in the mouth is sweet because the mouth's primary function is to engage in the articulation of the words of the Torah that are sweet. Although the taste buds in the mouth were created to experience physical sensation, the sense of taste in the mouth also has relevance to spirituality. This is indicated through the saliva that is found in the mouth, which is different from all the other fluids in the body. The Gemara in Tractate Eruvin cites a verse, "It brings life to those who come upon it..." The Gemara tells us that it should not be understood as "those who come upon it" rather it should be understood as "those who enunciate its word." The greatest impact and effect of Torah upon one's spirituality is when it is articulated through the mouth. The sweetness of the fluid found in the mouth is a confirmation of this verse.

The Gemara in Tractate Eruvin tells us that Bruria, the wife of Rebbe Meir, was passing a student who was

studying silently without verbalizing what he was learning. She rebuked him and said that his manner of study was incorrect because the verse states, "Life comes to the one who comes upon them" which is meant to be understood as, "life comes to the one who articulates its words with one's mouth." Why is meditating in Torah not sufficient, since in fact one is reflecting upon G'd's Word? It is only through the enunciation of the words of the Torah and engaging in dialogue that one can truly experience its true spiritual value and not merely as abstract intellectualism.

The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin cites a verse from Psalms, "King David writes '...When they (the students of Torah) speak with enemies at the gate' What is implied by the words 'enemies at the gate'?" Reb Chiya bar Abba says: It refers even to a father and his son, or a teacher and his student who are studying Torah together. At first they become enemies of one another (through the process of debate, neither scholar is willing to accept the position of the other and vehemently tries to disprove it.) However, ultimately they become intimate friends through coming upon the truth of Torah." When one engages in the process of elucidating Torah concepts, he is engaged in the quest for truth. Thus, when one enters into Torah dialogue with his fellow, each one believing that his position is more cogent than the other, it will cause a strain between the two of them. This is the equivalent of being enemies. However, after debating the issues and coming upon a common understanding, this creates a good feeling and love between them because through their intellectual participation they came upon Divine truth, which is the Torah.

G'd commanded Moshe to gather large assemblies and teach them the laws of Shabbos. Through the process of engagement in Torah, the masses would gain an appreciation for G'd and thus evoke an intense level of reverence and love.

2. The Spiritual Potential Of the Jew

The Midrash states, "G'd said to the Jewish people, 'Keep My Mitzvos and My Statutes. Because the reward for performing a mitzvah is a mitzvah and the consequence of a sin is a sin....'" The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) states, "Reward for a mitzvah in this world does not exist." This is because the consequence of a mitzvah is infinite/eternal. Something of unlimited value cannot be given within a limited context. If one were to be rewarded for a mitzvah in the physical realm, it would be miniscule compared to what he truly

deserves. Therefore, G'd rewards the individual who had performed a mitzvah by presenting him with an opportunity to perform another mitzvah, which in its innateness has relevance to the infinite.

Conversely, when one transgresses he is presented with another spiritual pitfall that will lead him to transgress further. This is because when one sins, he creates a spiritual deficiency that causes him to be vulnerable to transgression.

The Midrash continues, "Ben Azai explains that this is the concept of *mitzvah goreres mitzvah* and *aveira goreres aveira* (a mitzvah encourages another mitzvah and a transgression encourages another transgression)." Reb Chaim of Volozhin explains, based on the Zohar, that when one performs a mitzvah a pure spiritual energy is created that engulfs the individual. The majority of this energy detaches itself and ascends to the spiritual realm. One's share in the world to come is comprised of all of the positive energies that were created over the course of one's lifetime through mitzvah performance and Torah study. A trace of the positive energy remains with the individual to motivate him to perform another mitzvah.

When one transgresses, a contaminated force/influence is created that engulfs the individual. The majority of this impure force ascends to the spiritual realm. This force is the *geheim* that one is subjected to after he passes away. All the impurity that was created by transgressing during one's lifetime accumulates to create one's *geheim*. A remnant of that contaminated force remains with the individual to act as an addictive influence that seduces the individual to transgress. However, if one should repent, the negative force is dispelled and the individual is free of this influence.

The Midrash continues, "Reb Meir says, 'For every mitzvah that one performs, G'd sends an angel to protect him. If one performs one mitzvah, he receives one angel. If he performs many mitzvos, he receives many angels to protect him. As it states in Psalms, 'The angels were commanded to protect you...'" In order for one to be protected from prosecution, one needs to have G'd's Mercy. The Attribute of Mercy is implemented through angels who protect the individual. Therefore if one had performed multiple mitzvos, his level of protection would be great. The Mercy of G'd manifests itself in two guises; firstly, the individual should not be prosecuted for his failings. Secondly, the individual is protected from sin/temptation.

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

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos explains that the name that is given to one at the time of one’s birth determines his destiny. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the naming of a child by its parents is semi-prophetic. G’d reveals the intended name of the child to the parents. Although the name that the child is given determines the potential of that child, it is uncertain whether he will meet his potential. One will only know if he had actualized his potential on the day of his death. The actualization of one’s potential manifests itself through multiple proper choices throughout one’s lifetime. Thus, the good name that one creates for himself is based on his personal positive initiative. The process that G’d had created for one to achieve this goal, is based on the principle that each mitzvah generates a circumstance that allows one to perform another. This mechanism is crucial and necessary for the Jew to actualize his potential.

3. The Essence of the Torah

The Torah states, “**It was given to Moshe when it was completed....**” The Midrash explains, “Reb Avohu says, ‘For the forty days and nights that Moshe was in heaven, he was taught the entire Torah and at the end of each day he would forget what he was taught by G’d. After forty days Moshe said to G’d, ‘Master of the Universe, I have studied the entire Torah every day for forty days and I do not remember any of it.’ When the forty days were completed, G’d gave the Torah to Moshe as a gift. This is the reason the verse states, ‘It was given to Moshe....’” Moshe’s retention of the Torah was not based upon his own intellectual capacity, but rather endowed to him by G’d as a gift.

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah states, “One who says ‘I have toiled (in Torah) and have come upon it’ –he should be believed. One who says, ‘I have not toiled and I have come upon it’ – he should not be believed.” Reb Chaim of Brisk explains that the Gemara does not say that if says he toils in Torah that he came to understand it, but rather it states that he had “come upon it/found it.” It is the equivalent of coming upon a lost item. One’s initiative has no relevance to what is found. It is only when one sufficiently toils in Torah will G’d give him the Divine Assistance to come upon its truth, unrelated to one’s intellectual capacity.

At the time of the receiving of the Torah at Sinai, the Torah states, “Moshe spoke and Hashem responded with a voice.” The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that, based on this verse, the audibility of G’d’s voice was no louder than Moshe’s communication to the Jewish people. Meaning, when G’d had spoken to Moshe, at Sinai, the Jewish people were able to hear what was being communicated. Subsequently, Moshe had transmitted to the Jewish people what he had heard from G’d.

Rambam writes in the Laws of the Study of Torah that the methodology for teaching Torah is through an intermediary, a meturgamon (spokesman). The rebbe (teacher) speaks at a level of audibility that can be heard by the students and the meturgamon repeats the words of the rebbe to the students verbatim, without any embellishment. Furthermore, the intermediary must speak at the same level of audibility as the teacher. When the students pose a question regarding the material that they had heard, they must present it to the meturgamon who subsequently poses it to the rebbe. Although the rebbe hears the question as it is being asked by the students, the rebbe does not respond directly to the student but rather, the answer is communicated through the meturgamon. This methodology of teaching seems to be superfluous and unnecessary.

The ability to understand and process Torah knowledge, to come upon its truth, is not based on one’s intellect or the teacher’s skill as a communicator. The ability of comprehending Torah is based upon Divine Assistance. Because the innate subject matter of Torah is spiritual and Divine (G’d’s Wisdom), it cannot be fathomed without His Assistance. Thus, unless one transmits and receives Torah as it was transmitted at Sinai, through an intermediary (meturgamon), one would not merit the necessary Divine Assistance to be able to

comprehend it. This methodology of transmission was chosen by G'd.

The Torah tells us that after Moshe had returned from being taught the Torah by G'd he had said to the Jewish people, "For forty days and forty nights bread I did not eat and water I did not drink." The Midrash asks, "Why was it necessary for Moshe to share this fact with the Jewish people?" Seemingly, it is irrelevant whether he ate or drank when he was in heaven receiving the Torah. Chazal explain that Moshe was saying to the Jewish people, "Just as I sacrificed my blood and fat for the sake of the acquisition of Torah, so too must you be willing to compromise on your physicality and material comforts in order to acquire Torah." Moshe was teaching the Jewish people that the formula he implemented to be worthy of acquiring Torah must be similar to his own. Only then will one merit G'd's Assistance to be able to comprehend It's truth.

4. The Jews' Perception of Moshe

The Midrash cites a verse from Proverbs, "You will find favor and good understanding in the eyes of G'd and man." To what is this referring? When G'd communicated the building of the Mishkan to Moshe he showed him how every vessel was to be developed...Moshe believed that since he was being instructed that he would be the one to oversee its building. As it states, You (Moshe) shall make the curtains...' 'You shall make the altar...' After everything was set in place in a specific order Moshe asked G'd, 'Who will oversee all of this?' G'd responded, 'See, I have proclaimed by name, Bezalel...' Moshe then communicated all that was told to him to the Jewish people...They asked, 'Who will oversee all of this?' Moshe responded, 'Bezalel will be the one.' The Jewish people began murmuring saying, 'G'd did not instruct Moshe to appoint Bezalel to oversee the building of the Mishkan, rather it was Moshe himself who decided to appoint him because he is a relative. Moshe is the king, his brother Aaron is the High Priest..etc. Moshe will dominate all of the building of the Mishkan. He is seeking for himself all of the glory by appointing only members of his family.' Moshe responded to them, 'There is nothing that I do that is my own initiative/decision, rather G'd Himself instructed me...' Moshe showed them clearly who Bezalel is. The Jewish people accepted Bezalel as the one to oversee the Mishkan. This is the meaning of 'You will find favor and good understanding in the eyes of G'd and man.'..."

The Jewish people saw clearly that Bezalel was truly chosen by G'd because he was infused with His spirit. They understood he possessed a Divine endowment that qualified him for this task. Chazal tell us that at the age of thirteen, Bezalel (whose name means "in the shadow of G'd" (*B'tzeil Kail*) understood the inner workings of existence. He understood how to conjugate the letter of the Hebrew alphabet to create energies that were similar to those that brought about creation.

After the Jewish people engaged in the sin of the Golden Calf, G'd wanted to destroy them. It was only because of the intense supplications of Moshe that they were spared. Moshe had said to G'd, **"If You destroy the Jewish people (as a result of their sin), You should erase me from Your Book."** Moshe was given a second set of Tablets on behalf of the Jewish people confirming that they were forgiven. G'd said to the Jewish people, **"Build for Me a Sanctuary so that I shall dwell in your midst."** Because of Moshe's efforts on their behalf, the Jewish people they were spared from destruction and were reinstated to have a relationship with G'd. Thus, they were instructed to build a Mishkan to be the medium for G'd to dwell in their midst. Despite Moshe's selfless dedication on behalf of the Jewish people(taking them out of Egypt, splitting the Sea, and receiving the Torah...);nevertheless, they suspected him of nepotism. His interest was only to glorify his own family. How could they have perceived Moshe in this critical light?

Although the mutiny of Korach had not yet taken place, the seeds of suspicion against Moshe were prevalent among all Jews. They had believed that within his leadership, Moshe had a degree of self-interest. Moshe was able to confirm that Bezalel was truly the qualified person who was chosen by G'd. The basis for the Jewish people being satisfied with Bezalel was not based upon their unwavering belief and faith in Moshe, as G'd's prophet. But rather, it was something that they had understood. Moshe's credibility had been breached by the people. This failing had far-reaching ramifications which resulted in the attempt of Korach to usurp the authority of Moshe- questioning the authenticity and validity of G'd's Word, the Torah.

If one questions the position of Torah sages and is only satisfied with their perspective after comprehending their view, it is considered a serious failing. It is a confirmation that the individual does not esteem the Torah sage as the ultimate authority, within the context of leadership. However, if one only questions for the sake of understanding the position of the Torah sage, not as a basis

for rejecting it, it is not seen as a failing. At Sinai, the Jewish people embraced G'd's Word unequivocally with the declaration "Naaseh v'nishma – we will do and we will listen." In contrast, the nations of the world had asked G'd "What is written in it?" The question of "what is written in it?" clearly identifies their position- that even if the nations of the world were to accept the Torah it would be on their terms and not G'd's. What had taken place at Sinai is an indication that every Jew has the ability to esteem G'd at a level that is unique to the Jewish people.

5. Torah, the Purifying Factor for the Jew

The Torah states, "**Bezalel made the Ark of acacia wood (atzei sheetim)...**" The Midrash explains, "The reason the wood used for the Ark was 'atzei sheetim (acacia wood) is because it was revealed before G'd that the Jewish people would sin in the location of Sheetim..." In Sheetim, the Jewish males sinned with the Baal Peor and had forbidden sexual relations with the Midianite women.

The Midrash continues, "Therefore G'd gave the commandment that the Ark should be made of sheetim wood so that they could be atoned for that sin that will occur in Sheetim. The verse states, 'He cast it (the Ark) with pure gold...' This is symbolic of students of Torah who are pure. Just as the casting of gold onto wood enhances the wood, so too the more the students study the Torah they become enhanced and glorified. If they engage sufficiently in Torah study, it will enter into their hearts causing purity of the heart and kidneys. They will be referred to as 'pure gold.'"

The Ark was the repository for the Tablets and the Torah. The Torah by specifying that the Ark must be made of "sheetim wood" is alluding to the fact that through the Ark, one can be atoned from the most severe level of sin (idolatry and promiscuity - as mentioned regarding the incident of Baal Peor). Secondly, the reason the wood of the Ark was cast in pure gold, is to teach us that the study of Torah purifies the hearts (and kidneys which symbolize wisdom) of those who study it. Just as the gold enhanced the wood, so too does the study of Torah enhance and purify the person who studies it.

One can only appreciate and value something that he possesses if he truly understands its intrinsic value. The more a Torah scholar engages in Torah study he gains a greater capacity to appreciate its value. The purification

process of Torah study causes one to gain a keener grasp and appreciation for the Torah itself.

Before World War II, an assembly of great rabbis and Torah sages convened in Warsaw. At this assembly, Reb Shimon Shkop z'tl, the Rosh HaYeshivah of Grodna Lithuania, had made a suggestion regarding certain issue which was summarily dismissed by many of the rabbis. Reb Baruch Ber Leibowitz z'tl, the Kaminetzer Rosh HaYeshivah (main disciple of Reb Chaim Brisker z'tl), had said, "Reb Shimon Shkop values Torah to such a degree that if he encounters a difficulty in one of the commentaries he becomes physically ill until he is able to understand it. How could a person of this level of dedication to Torah be dismissed so quickly?" Meaning because Reb Shimon Shkop's dedication and immersion was at such a level, he merited a unique clarity that should be considered.

Chazal are telling us that those who dedicate themselves to Torah study are purified and enhanced through it, because it offers them clarity and wisdom. As they advance in Torah knowledge, they gain a new understanding of how precious it is - consequently it motivates them to dedicate themselves, even to a greater degree, to Torah study. This is why King David writes in Psalms based on his own perspective of Torah, "The words of Torah have greater value than thousands of pieces of gold and silver."

On the Shabbos and the Yom Tov we pray to G'd in the Amidah (silent prayer) that He should purify our hearts to serve Him with Truth. The only path to truth is through the purity of heart. Purity of heart can only be achieved through intensive Torah study because its essence is Truth. As King Solomon writes in Proverbs, "Acquire Truth, do not sell it." We pray that the Torah we study should purify our hearts and minds to be able to appreciate the truthfulness of G'd.