

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES
Parshas Bamidbar

May 16, 2007

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Yad Avraham Institute
New York
May 16, 2007

B"H

Parshas Bamidbar

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*
Dean

1. The Quantification of the Physical vs. the Spiritual

The Midrash states, "G'd said to the Jewish people, you had said to Moshe, 'Why did you take us up out of Egypt to die in the desert?' Did I (G'd) treat you as if you were in a desert? If a mortal king were to go out into the desert, does he have the tranquility and comfort of his own palace? Does he have the same amount of food and drink available to him? You were mere slaves in Egypt, yet I took you out and placed you in the best location. Your setting was the same as that of a king. I gave you three redeemers to accommodate your needs. As it states, 'Send before you Moshe, Aaron and Miriam...' In the merit of Moshe you were given the Manna. In the merit of Aaron you were encircled with the Clouds of Glory. The Cloud that led you consumed all of the snakes and scorpions that were in your path. It equalized and leveled the mountains and valleys that you encountered and burned the briar bushes. The Smoke that billowed up from all that was consumed by the Cloud was seen by the kings of the East and of the West. What is the value of the smoke being seen? The kings would ask: who is it that is coming out of the desert? They would answer: It is the Jewish people the chosen nation of G'd. (In addition to protecting the Jewish people, the Clouds of Glory caused the nations of the world to be in awe of them). In the merit of Miriam, I gave you the wellspring. Yet you complained."

It is written in the Duties of the Heart that if one were to focus on all that G'd has given him, he would continuously be beholden to Him and his level of appreciation would be unlimited. Why then is one not appreciative of G'd? It is because one tends to focus on what he does not have, rather than seeing what he has. If G'd provides all of one's needs and more, why should one not be appreciative to Him? It is only because of one's ego that he believes that he needs more than what he actually has. Although one may have sufficient means for himself and his family, he will aspire to achieve and acquire

greater amounts of wealth to gain status and renown among his peers. If one has sufficient possessions to accommodate his needs the value of the additional acquisitions is only for the sake of acknowledgement and honor. As much as one may have, he will desire more because he does not have the renown of the one who is wealthier than he. In truth, this individual will never be satisfied. This is especially true for the one whose focus is on the material and physical. Thus he will never appreciate his blessing.

In contrast, the spiritual person recognizes and appreciates all that G'd does for him. For example, in the desert, G'd provided every need for the Jewish people. He created for them a setting in which all of their needs were provided for. This setting was intended to nurture and develop the spirituality of the Jewish people. Although all of their conceivable needs were provided for, they nevertheless complained. If one's focus is to satisfy his ego and physical needs, regardless of G'd's providing an insular environment in a desert to accommodate the spirituality of the Jewish people, they could not be satisfied. G'd is communicating to the Jewish people that if they had a basis to feel denied, it is only an indication that they have no interest in a relationship with Him or developing their own spirituality. If in fact spirituality was the focus and interest of the Jewish people, they would be continuously singing the praises of G'd.

2. The Far Reaching Effects of the Jew

The Torah tells us that G'd commanded Moshe to take a census of the Jewish people. Sforno explains, "Because the Jewish People were meant to enter into the Land immediately, Moshe needed to take a census of them. If it were not for the sin of the spies, they would have entered without delay. However, because they failed they were denied the right to enter into the Land. They perished over a forty-year period and only the future generation was permitted to enter. Initially, the Jewish

people would have entered into the Land without resistance from the Canaanite nations. They would have fled from the Land, allowing the Jewish people to settle there...However because of the sin of the spies, the Canaanite nations remained in the Land for an additional 40 years – during which they continued to sin.” Because of their extreme spiritual failing, it was deemed that the Canaanites must be annihilated.

It is interesting to note that the reason there is a Negative Commandment to not allow any of the Canaanite nations to live is only because the Jewish people sinned by believing the false reports of the spies. If they had sufficient faith in G'd they would have rejected the foreboding of the spies and would have entered immediately. It was their lack of faith that created a setting for the Canaanites to spiritually fail to the point of needing to be destroyed. We see that the settings and circumstances are impacted and determined by the behavior of the Jewish people.

The nations of the world were awestruck by the Jewish people after hearing about the miracles that had transpired at the time of the splitting of the Sea. The world stood in trepidation of them and did not consider attacking G'd's people. The Amalekites were not impacted or astounded by the events of the splitting of the Sea and thus attacked the Jewish people. Amalek demonstrated to the world that there was no basis to fear the Jewish people. They dispelled the image that the Jew is unapproachable and invincible. Chazal compare this to a scolding bath that everyone is hesitant and afraid to approach out of concern that they would be severely burned. A fool came about and jumped into the extremely hot bath and was scolded. Although he was burned, he cooled the bath for the others to enter. Identically, when the Amalekites attacked the Jewish people, although they were defeated and incapacitated, they dispelled the aura and reverence that the nations of the world had for the Jewish people. The impact of the Jewish people upon the world would no longer be as before the attack. Bilaam, the evil prophet of the nations prophesized, “Because the Amalekites were the first nation to attack the Jewish people, at the end of time they will be consumed.” Since they did not have the capacity to appreciate the revelation that had taken place at the splitting of the Sea, when G'd's Presence was blatant and obvious, it is a confirmation that they had no capacity to process or appreciate spirituality. Thus, they have no relevance or place at the end of time, when G'd's Glory will be made known to all mankind.

The only reason the Jewish people were vulnerable to the attack of the Amalekites was because of

their own spiritual failing that had taken place in Rephidim. The Torah states, “**Amalek came and battled Israel in Rephidim.**” Chazal explain that the reason the Torah identifies the location (Rephidim) of the battle with Amalek is, “Because the Jewish people's involvement in Torah study was not sufficiently intense, rather it was done in a haphazard and laidback manner.” As a result of the Jewish people not being fully spiritualized they were vulnerable to attack. Had the Jewish people not been lackadaisical in their study of Torah, the Amalekites, despite their disregard, disdain, and animosity towards G'd and His people, would not have been able to attack them. If the Jewish people would not have been attacked, the world would have come to a level of clarity to recognize G'd's Glory. However because of the failing of the Jewish people at Rephidim, that level of consecration of G'd's Name did not come about. In essence the Jewish people are fully responsible for the breach that had occurred.

The Torah states regarding Yitzchak's quantification of Yaakov, “**Hakol kol Yaakov v'hayadayim yidei Esav - the voice is the voice of Yaakov and the hands are the hands of Esav.**” Chazal explain this statement to mean that as long as the Jewish people utilize their “voice” as the “voice” of Yaakov (symbolic of Torah study) then they will not be subject to the hands of Esav (the Amalekites were a descendant of Esav). It is only when they are not sufficiently committed to Torah study that they will become vulnerable to the domination of Esav/Amalekites. As the Jewish people can affect existence negatively by sinning, so too can they affect the world positively by adhering to the Torah.

The Torah states, “**Yaakov departed from Beer-sheva and went toward Charan.**” Why is it important for the Torah communicate Yaakov's point of departure when the focus should be the destination to which he is going? Rashi cites the Midrash which states that when a tzaddik is in a location he is its “beauty”, “glory”, and “splendor.” Therefore when he departs from there the beauty, glory, and splendor depart with him. Yaakov's presence in Beer-sheva impacted and affected the community by affording them an exposure to the Divine- thus allowing them to gain clarity.

Chazon Ishe z'tl writes in one of his letters that if a community has people within it that study Torah for its own sake (l'shema) in purity and sanctity, the entire community will be afforded special Divine Assistance and clarity. Therefore it is a great merit to the community to have people within it who are dedicated to the study of Torah. Once again we see that the behavior of the Jew impacts upon all existence.

3. The Proprietorship of Torah

The Gemara in Tractate Shavuot tells us that a king is not permitted to waive his honor. However, if a Torah Sage chooses to waive his honor, he may do so. Although the obligation to give honor to the Torah surpasses that of honoring the king, because Torah is the ultimate, nevertheless it is the prerogative of the Torah Sage to waive his honor because the Torah that he possesses is considered to be “his Torah.” This ruling is based on a verse in Psalms which initially refers to the Torah as “G’d’s Torah” ; however, after one toils in its study, the verse refers to it as “his Torah (the Sage’s).” The only way one can acquire Torah is through toil and dedication. As it states in the Gemara in Tractate Megillah, if one claims that he has toiled in Torah and has come upon it, he is to be believed. However if one claims not to have toiled in Torah and has come upon it, that person is not to be believed. Thus, it is the prerogative of the Torah Sage to waive his honor since came about through his own initiative. How does the Torah, which is G’d’s Wisdom and is considered the ultimate, become the personal possession of mere limited mortal?

In order for one to be qualified to receive the Divine Assistance that is necessary to comprehend Torah to its fullest, one must toil in it. He must be willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of Torah. As the Gemara in Tractate Berachos states, “The Torah is acquired only by the one who is willing to die for it/sacrifice ...” It is the one who dedicates himself and sacrifices for the sake of Torah that merits Divine Assistance to comprehend the Torah. This is the reason the Torah is considered to be “his.”

The Torah states regarding the making of the Menorah, **“It shall be made....”** In contrast, regarding the other vessels of the Mishkan, the Torah states, “You shall make...” Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Moshe had difficulty fashioning the Menorah. Although he had seen in his prophetic vision its form, he was not able to create it. G’d told Moshe not to be concerned. He should take a block of gold and place it into the furnace and G’d Himself fashioned the Menorah. Why did Moshe have difficulty constructing the Menorah? Every aspect of the Mishkan needed to be infused with a specific intent in order for it to bring about the desired spiritual result.

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra tells us that the Menorah symbolizes the Oral Law, which is the elucidation of the Written Law. All the Divine Assistance that is needed to comprehend the Torah is brought about through the kindling of the Menorah. In order for it to be

effective, the Menorah needed to be infused and inculcated with the intent that corresponds to what it represents – the Oral Law. The Oral Law itself is infinite. Moshe, being a finite person, could not inculcate the Menorah with something that was beyond his limitation. Therefore G’d Himself had to infuse the Menorah with the specific intent of the Oral Law. If the making of the Menorah came about by the Hand of G’d, why was it necessary for Moshe to participate in its making by placing the block of gold into the furnace? Moshe’s initiative seems to be of inconsequential value. It is to teach us that regarding Torah, in order to merit the Divine Assistance that is necessary to comprehend it and plumb its depths one must apply himself to the best of his ability.

When one engages in Torah in a qualitative manner (*l’shma*), he cleaves and becomes enmeshed with G’d. As the Zohar writes, “The Jewish people, the Torah, and G’d are all one.” Meaning, the Jew’s relevance and capacity to acquire Torah and his relationship with G’d are interconnected. The degree to which one compromises on his physicality and is willing to negate himself will determine the level of Divine Assistance that he will receive. Moshe the most humble person to ever live had negated himself to the ultimate level. He was the equivalent of being nonexistent. He therefore was the most qualified to be the conduit of Torah to the Jewish people.

The Midrash asks, “If the Torah is the most precious commodity in existence, why was it given to the Jewish people in the desert which is location of desolation and waste? It is to teach us that in order for one to be qualified to acquire the Torah he must negate his ego – similar to the desert which has no intrinsic value.” It is only the one who humbles himself that has relevance to the Torah and G’d.

4. Moshe, Aaron, and Miriam – the Redeemers of Israel

The verse in Zecharya states, **“I will remove the three shepherds in one month...”** The verse is informing us that Moshe, Aaron, and Miriam would pass away in the same month. The Gemara in Tractate Taanis asks, “How do we reconcile this with the fact that Moshe, Aaron, and Miriam did not all pass away during the same month? Miriam passed away in the month of Nissan. Aaron passed away in the month of Av and Moshe passed away in the month of Adar.” The Gemara answers that the verse is informing us that when each of them passed away the gifts that the Jewish people merited through them no longer continued. The Gemara tells us that in the merit of

Moshe the Jewish people were given the gift of the Manna, which sustained them in the desert. In the merit of Aaron, they were given the gift of the Clouds of Glory, which protected them. In the merit of Miriam, they were given the living wellspring, which provided them with water. Each of these gifts ceased when each of them passed away. When Miriam passed away, the wellspring ceased and was reinstated in the merit of Moshe. When Aaron passed away, the Clouds of Glory ceased and were reinstated in the merit of Moshe. Consequently, when Moshe passed away, all three of the gifts ceased. Only then did the Jewish people sense the loss of all the “three shepherds” – Moshe, Aaron, and Miriam. Thus, it was the equivalent of all of the “shepherds” passing away during the same month.

It is interesting to note that the verse refers to Moshe, Aaron, and Miriam as “shepherds (*ro'im*)” The Gemara in Tractate Taanis refers to them as “communal leaders (*parnasim*).” However, the Midrash Tanchuma refers to them as, “redeemers (*goalim*).” There is no question that Moshe was the Redeemer, who took the Jewish people out of Egypt. However, why does the Midrash classify Aaron and Miriam also as “redeemers?” In what capacity did they function so as to be valued as “redeemers?”

Evidently, we see from the Midrash's classification of Aaron and Miriam that being a “redeemer” goes beyond taking the Jewish people out of Egypt. Had it not been for the Clouds of Glory to protect them and the wellspring, which miraculously provided them with water for forty years, they would not have been able to survive the trek in the desert. Without these miracles, leaving Egypt would have not been relevant. Therefore, it is true that Moshe is identified as “the Redeemer” because he was the one who had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt. However to bring about the ultimate value of redemption, Moshe, Aaron, and Miriam were all necessary to bring the process to completion.

Because of their integral role vis-à-vis the survival of the Jewish people, Aaron and Miriam were more than “shepherds” or “communal leaders.” They assumed the role of “redeemers” and thus each was a different dimension of person.

When the Midrash tells that it was in the merit of Miriam that the Jewish people had the wellspring, it identifies her as, “the one who led the women in song (after the splitting of the Sea).” Why does the Midrash identify Miriam in this manner? It would have been

enough to say that in the merit of Miriam, the Jewish people received the wellspring.

It is interesting to note that the wellspring was only needed after the splitting of the Sea. Seemingly, what the Midrash is communicating to us is that the basis for Miriam's merit to bring about the wellspring was that she led the women in song after the splitting of the Sea. Because she led the women in song, she brought them to another level of clarity and appreciation of G'd. In addition, the women's expression of praise was a public sanctification of G'd (*kiddush Hashem*). Through Miriam's articulation of what had transpired at the splitting of the Sea, she merited that the wellspring come about through her. Had it not been for this special merit, like the manna, the wellspring would have come about through Moshe,

Miriam is identified as a “redeemer” not only because she provided water for the Jewish people in the desert, but also because of her song at the Sea, through which she provided a new level of appreciation and understanding of G'd.

We see that the greatest level of merit that one could have is to bring others to an understanding and realization of G'd's Omnipotence. His involvement is in every aspect and nuance of existence. A Jew should surely sing the praises of G'd for everything he has been endowed with and for all that he receives, because it is only because G'd deems it so.

5. G'd's Interest in Existence (from *Bechokosai*)

The Torah states, “**If you will follow My Statutes (Bechukosai) and observe My Commandments (mitzvosai) and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time...**” If one adheres to the dictates of the Torah, G'd will provide unlimited blessing. However, regarding the curses (*Tochacha*) the Torah states, “**But if you will not listen to Me and will not perform...**” Rashi explains that “**you will not listen to Me**” does not refer to one violating the Torah, rather it refers to one who studies Torah with a lack of dedication/toil. If one does not dedicate himself fully to Torah study, this will initiate the curses to come upon him.

The Midrash states, “G'd says, ‘If you adhere to My Statutes the rains will come in their time. However if you do not follow My Word, the heavens will become like iron (without rain). Because of you the heavens will be consumed and the earth will destroy its produce. It is because of your sins that even the nations of the world will

be smitten.” All the blessing that comes to the world is through the Jewish people. If they are sufficiently engaged in Torah then blessing will come upon all creation. However, if they are not, then the entire world will suffer.

The Midrash continues, “If the nations of the world understood that the only reason that they are being denied blessing is because of the sins of the Jewish people, they would appoint two sentries to watch over every Jew to ensure that he fully adheres to the Torah. However, not only do the nations of the world not do this, they actually interfere with the observance of the Torah and disrupt Torah study. Throughout the ages the nations of the world have issued decrees that the Jewish people should not be allowed to observe and study the Torah.” Why should the behavior of the Jewish people affect the nations of the world in the positive and in the negative? It is only the Jewish people who are obligated to observe the Torah. Nevertheless, if they should fail, the entire world suffers.

The objective of creation is for G'd's Glory. As the Prophet states, “For My Glory, I created it (existence).” The only way G'd is glorified in this existence is if the Jewish people study the Torah and adhere to its commandments. The Torah begins, “*Bereishis bara Elokim- In the beginning G'd created ...*” Chazal explain that the opening words of the Torah mean to say that for the sake of Torah, which is “reishis (first/choicest)” G'd created heaven and earth. Meaning, that all existence only came into being for that specific purpose. Another interpretation for the opening words of the Torah is that G'd created the world for the sake of the Jewish people who are referred to as “reishis (chosen). In essence, the world was created only for the fulfillment of the Torah through a people who are worthy and qualified to receive it. The Jewish people happen to have met all of the criteria to be taken as the chosen nation of G'd. Since the Jewish people are the only nation that is qualified to bring glory to G'd, and existence was created for that objective, it is when they observe the Torah sufficiently and qualitatively will they merit to bring blessing into existence. However, if the Jewish people chose not to pursue their spiritual objective, then the purpose of existence is not being addressed. If that should be the case, G'd withholds blessing from existence resulting in curses coming upon the world.

There are times when the nations of the world experience blessing and good fortune while the Jewish people experience hardship and tragedy. If the blessing to the nations of the world is contingent on the performance of the Jew then how do we reconcile this disparity? If the Jewish people need to be awakened through punished, G'd

may cause them to recognize and witness how the world experiences bounty while they are being downtrodden and deprived. The blessing in this this case that comes upon the nations of the world is actually part of the punishment that comes upon the Jewish people.

The Gemara in Tractate Succah tells us that during the Festival of Succos seventy bulls were brought as sacrifices in the Temple which correspond to the seventy nations of the world. All of the blessing that the nations merit and receive throughout the year were due to those sacrifices that were brought on their behalf. Rather than encircling the Temple, which is the source of their blessing to protect it from destruction, the nations of the world themselves destroyed it because they did not understand its value. They are responsible for the deprivation of their own blessing.

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 – Derech Hashem
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah
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

11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Taanis**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street

12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Pesachim**
Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue
Between E.51st and E.52st

Tuesday

12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
Location: Yad Avraham

Wednesday

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Taanis**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street

1:00—2:00 pm **Daas Tevunos**
Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

10:30 –11:30am **Duties of the Heart**
Location: Yad Avraham

12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Taanis** Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL)