

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Bamidbar

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Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
<i>1. G'd Providing the Ultimate Environment</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>2. Leadership Suffused with Power</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>3. Seeing the Obvious for What it Is</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>4. The Priceless Gift of Torah</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>5. The Essence of Shavuos</i>	<i>5</i>

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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Bamidbar

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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1. G'd Providing the Ultimate Environment

The Torah states, "**Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai...**" The Midrash cites the verse from Yirimiyah, "G'd said to the Jewish people, 'You are the generation that witnessed the Word of G'd. Have I been a desert to Israel, a land of darkness? Yet you came with a claim against Moshe saying: **Why did you take us up out of Egypt to die in the desert?**' Did I 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? Before you had gone out into the desert you were mere slaves in Egypt. Yet, I had taken you out and placed you in the choicest location in existence...I accommodated you with a setting that is the equivalent of a palace...In addition, I gave you three redeemers who attended to your needs...In the merit of Moshe, you were provided with the Manna. In the merit of Aaron, you were provided with the Clouds of Glory... In the merit of Miriam, who sang praises at the Sea, you were provided with the wellspring."

It is clear from the words of Chazal that the Jewish people were provided with every conceivable amenity to accommodate their needs. Not only did G'd provide for all of their physical needs through miracles, He gave them exceptional selflessly dedicated leaders such as Moshe, Aaron, and Miriam. In addition, He had an intimate relationship with His people. If this is so, then what was the basis for their complaint, "**Why did you take us up out of Egypt to die in the desert?**" In fact, the setting that G'd provided for them had no semblance of a desert.

The Torah states, "**In the third month from the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, on this day, they arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai.**" The Midrash asks, "Why did G'd not give the Torah to the Jewish people immediately after they had left Egypt? As the verse states, 'G'd said to Moshe, **when the people shall leave Egypt they will serve Hashem, Your G'd on this mountain...**' Why then did G'd wait until the third month to give the Torah to the Jewish people after leaving Egypt? Reb Yehudah bar Shalom explains it is analogous

to a prince who had just recovered from a serious illness. His father the king said to his guardian, 'We shall wait three months until my son fully recuperates before he returns to the house of his rebbe to continue his Torah study.' Similarly, when the Jewish people left Egypt they were spiritually blemished from the years of bondage. G'd had said, 'I will wait until they recover and heal. Then I will give them the Torah.'"

At the time of the exodus from Egypt, the Jewish people possessed the most intense level of impurity from their long bondage in Egypt. Since they had become idolaters in Egypt as a result of their circumstance of slavery and exposure to the Egyptian culture, they needed to be purged of these impurities in order to have the spiritual capacity to receive the Torah. Every day that the Jewish people came closer to the Sinai event, they shed another level of their spiritual impurity, thus allowing them to advance. Ultimately, at Sinai the Jewish people had reached the pinnacle of their spirituality. Although they had failed with the sin of the Golden Calf, they did not revert to the level that they had been at the time of the exodus. If they had advanced to such a degree at Sinai, why did the Jewish people complain regarding their lack of material in the desert? Why were they not focused on their spirituality?

Although the Jewish people had reached the pinnacle of their spirituality at Sinai, they still possessed a trace of impurity that caused the sin of the Golden Calf. Subsequently, there were other serious spiritual setbacks such as the sin of the spies, which caused them to wander the desert for forty years. Despite the fact that they were sustained with spiritual sustenance (the Manna), the clouds of glory, and the wellspring of Miriam, they were spiritually diminished as a result of their failings. The Midrash tells us that they needed to be immersed in a spiritual setting and environment prior to entering the Land of Israel because if they had entered the Land immediately they would have become preoccupied with their agricultural responsibilities and would not have pursued their spirituality sufficiently. Despite all of G'd's efforts to insulate the Jewish people and provide them with the ultimate spiritual setting, they nevertheless complained.

This was an indication that they had not sufficiently shed their impurity and thus needed to introspect and repent for the sake of advancement.

2. Leadership Suffused with Power

The Torah tells us that the Jewish people traveled in the desert as four camps, each comprised of three tribes. The camps were positioned in a specific formation and situated in the east, west, north or south. They would travel and camp in this formation. The camp of Yehudah, which was comprised of the tribes of Yehudah, Yissachar and Zevulun were the first in the formation to travel. They were to be in the forefront. It is understandable that the tribe of Yehudah should be the first to travel because Yehudah is the tribe of kingship. The king should be the one to lead the Jewish people. However, what is the significance of the tribes of Yissachar and Zevulun also being part of the king's formation?

The verse in Prophets refers to the tribe of Yissachar as "those who know time (*yodei eetim*)" Meaning their clarity of thought was so exceptional that they were able to perform all the calculations that were needed to determine the Jewish calendar. The Midrash Tanchuma in the Portion of Vayechi explains that the reason for their clarity was due to their level of immersion and focus in Torah. Since they were not responsible for any of their own material needs, they were not distracted to any degree from their Torah study. Zevulun provided them with every conceivable need and amenity. This was the special partnership that was established by Yaakov, our Patriarch. Yissachar was to dedicate himself to Torah study and his brother Zevulun was to support him in every way. Why do these two tribes constitute the initial camp that led the Jewish people in the desert? One would think that tribes who are adept in battle should be the ones to accompany the king.

When the Torah mentions the camps comprised of tribes in the desert it always states: "**this tribe and that tribe**"; however when the Torah mentions the tribes of Yissachar and Zevulun it omits the "and" (in Hebrew it is the letter "vav"). It states "*camp of Yissachar camp of Zevulun.*" Baal HaTurim explains that the reason the Torah does not present the tribes of Yissachar and Zevulun in the same manner as the other tribes is because the tribe of Zevulun was responsible for the full material support of the tribe of Yissachar, who were fully dedicated to Torah study. The Midrash tells us that the tribe of Zevulun, who were the benefactors of Yissachar, "placed sustenance in the mouth of Yissachar."

All Yissachar had to do was to consume the material that was provided for him. The Torah does not use the letter *vav* (and) to separate between the Tribe of Yissachar and the Tribe of Zevulun in order to indicate that they are the equivalent of one tribe. Zevulun is also the full beneficiary of the Torah study of Yissachar. This was the ultimate partnership. Baal HaTurim concludes that it is as if the verse states, "Yissachar, the Tribe of Zevulun" – one providing for the other as one."

We recite in our daily prayers the verse from Psalms, "Some with chariots, and some with horses, but we- in the Name of Hashem, our G'd we call out." While the nations of the world rely on their armaments and acumen, the Jewish people rely on G'd. The basis for the power and success of the Jew is his spirituality. The Torah states regarding Yitzchak's quantification of his children Yaakov and Esav, "**The voice is the voice of Yaakov and the hands are the hands of Esav...**" The power of the Jew lies in his power of speech which is his supplication of G'd and his Torah study. In contrast, the power of the nations of the world, is rooted in their physicality (the hands are the hands of Esav). The Midrash Eicha states, "As long as the voice is the voice of Yaakov, the hands will not be the hands of Esav." Therefore, the first to travel in the desert is camp pf Yehudah which was comprised of the tribes of Yissachar and Zevulun, who are the basis for the power of the Jewish people, because they are the embodiment Torah.

We recite in the Ashrei (Psalm), "G'd is close to all those who call upon Him in truth (*b'emmes*)."

Simply, one would understand this verse to mean that G'd responds to the one who calls upon Him with sincerity. However, one could understand it in another context. G'd responds to the one who possesses "*emmes* (truth)," which is the Torah Itself. As King Solomon states in Proverbs regarding the Torah, "Acquire Truth (Torah) and do not sell it." Torah is unadulterated Truth. Meaning, G'd responds to the one who possesses truth/Torah when he calls out to Him. Therefore, Yissachar and Zevulun who are the tribes who possess Torah on the purest level are the most qualified to accompany the tribe of Yehudah, which is kingship.

3. Seeing the Obvious for What it Is

The Midrash cites a verse from Psalms, " 'Your righteousness is like the mountains of G'd, Your judgments are like the great deep.' What is the meaning of this? 'Your righteousness is like the mountains...' is

referring to the Kindness of G'd which He bestows upon the world in an obvious manner. Just as the mountains are clearly visible, so too is the Kindness of G'd known to all existence. 'Your judgments...' is referring to G'd's Judgment of the world. Just as the source of all water in existence emanates from a location that is hidden deep below the earth, so too are G'd's Judgments meted out in a hidden manner. How is this demonstrated? When Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed it was on the Ninth of Av. When G'd had revealed this imminent event to the Prophet Yechezkel, He did not communicate to him the accurate date during which it would occur. G'd did not want to reveal the actual day, month, or year. However, when He wants to praise and glorify the Jewish people He makes it known to all. He reveals the day, month, year, and location of the event. As it states, **'Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of the Meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year...'**"

The Midrash tells us that G'd's Kindness in existence is as obvious as the mountains. It is interesting to note that in Jewish law if one sees a mountain range, that he had not seen previously within a thirty-day period, one must recite the blessing, "Blessed are You Hashem, our G'd King of the universe who makes the works of Creation." However, if one had seen the same mountain range within the thirty-day period one does not recite this blessing. It is because the sense of awe is not the same. It is only if one has been away from that setting for thirty days, coming upon it again would have an affect on an individual. One only acknowledges the awesomeness of creation only when one senses it. The Kindness of G'd is similar to the mountains. It is continuously obvious and blatantly clear before our eyes. Just as the mountains, although they are continuously present, one is not affected by their awesomeness, so too regarding the Kindness of G'd, because it is so abundant, one cannot appreciate its value without the appropriate level of focus.

King David sang G'd's praises because he was continuously conscious of His Presence in the world. When he gazed upon creation he saw G'd's glory. As he writes in Psalms, "The heavens speak G'd's Glory..." The verse in Psalms states, "In Your Kindness I trust, my heart will rejoice (*yageil*) in Your salvation." Malbim explains that in the Hebrew language there are a number of words which express various levels of joy. In this verse King David uses the term "*yageil*" which refers to the level of joy known as "gila." This joy is unexpected and comes upon the individual. When King David experienced G'd's Kindness and Salvation, although he had faith and was expecting it to come about, when he experienced it, he

internalized it at a level as if it had come upon him unexpectedly. He saw the imprint of G'd in every aspect of Creation. As he writes in Psalms, "How many (great) are your works – You have made all of them with Wisdom." Rabbi Moshe Cordovero in his work *Tomar Devorah* explains that this verse is communicating that the word "rabu (many)" should not be interpreted as "many" but rather it should be interpreted as "how great (exalted) are Your works." This is because they are encoded with the Wisdom of G'd. If one were able to internalize G'd's continuous Kindness in existence, he would be overwhelmed and awestruck. He would thus love and revere G'd.

The Jewish people and the Torah are the ultimate objective of existence. When G'd's kindness comes upon them, it is the equivalent of coming upon all existence. Therefore, G'd makes it known. Conversely, when tragedy comes upon them, which is the equivalent of all existence, G'd conceals that judgment. We praise G'd every day at end of the service with the Aleinu declaration that He did not make us like the nations of the world. We appreciate who we are and to Whom we submit and serve. If one would internalize the good fortune of his own life, despite what he believes is missing, he would appreciate his status as a Jew, thus seeing it as a privilege and opportunity and not as an obligation.

4. *The Priceless Gift of Torah*

The Torah states, **"Hashem spoke with Moshe in the Desert of Sinai..."** The Midrash states, "Why was the Desert of Sinai chosen to be the setting for the giving of the Torah? Our Rabbis of blessed memory tell us that the Torah was given with three things: fire, water, and desert... Why was the Torah given in the presence of fire, water and desert? It is because all of these have no cost associated with them. Fire, water, and desert are free of charge. Just as one may acquire these things at no cost, so too can the Torah be acquired at no cost..." In the Portion of Bechukosai, the Torah states, **"If you will follow My Statutes and observe My Commandments and perform them..."** Rashi cites the *Toras Kohanim* which states, **"If you will follow in My Statutes'** is referring specifically to the toil of Torah'. If one toils in the Study of Torah and is dedicated to the performance of its mitzvos then one will merit unlimited bounty. One must dedicate his entire life to the selfless study of Torah. If this is so, how can we understand the words of the Midrash which states that the acquisition of Torah is without cost? Although there is no monetary cost, the ultimate cost- fully investing one's life for its acquisition.

The Gemara in Tractate Chagiga cites a verse from Proverbs, “The words of the Torah are similar to a cattle prodder.’ The one who ploughs with the cow must insure that the cow does not veer to the right or to the left. If the cow should not walk the straight path then the furrows will not be formed properly for the land to give forth life. Identically, the words of the Torah direct the hearts of those who study it – from the path of death to the path of life. By engaging in Torah, one will be led along the proper path of goodness.” The Torah directs one long the path of life so that he may develop and advance. The Gemara continues, “Just as a nail is secure in the location in which it was implanted, so too do the words of Torah cause one to become secure and set in his position. However, one could say that when one implants a nail it causes a diminishment in the object in which it is implanted. King Solomon writes, ‘The nails (*masmeros*) are planted...’ The words of the Torah are like plantings. Just as when one plants it blossoms and produces fruits, so too when one engages in the words of Torah do they blossom within the individual and cause him to advance.”

Factually, there is a cost factor and investment of ability to come upon the truth of Torah. However, if one appreciates the return on that investment, although it may be the dedication of one’s life, it will become clear that it was acquired at virtually no cost. This is because the reward that one reaps from the acquisition of Torah is infinite. The fact that one dedicates his time in this world to the study of Torah it is considered insignificant compared to the eternal bounty that he will be rewarded. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that if a child answers “amen” even once in his lifetime, he shall have a share in the world to come. If this minimal level of initiative yields such and incalculable reward, how much more so is the reward if one answers “amen” multiple times or studies many words of Torah. Chazal tell us that the study of Torah is the equivalent of performing all of the mitzvos combined. Vilna Gaon explains that the value of studying even one word of Torah is equivalent to performing all of the mitzvos. Relative to one’s investment of ability and time, the acquisition of Torah is virtually without cost.

The Torah was given in the context of a desert to allude to the fact that one must negate his ego to assume a persona of humility to be qualified to be the repository for Torah. The Gemara in Tractate Nidarim tells us that one merits the Torah as a gift from G’d, only if one “makes himself ownerless like the desert.” Meaning, if one assumes the posture and characteristic of a desert by negating himself then he will be worth to receive the Torah

as a gift. Just as a desert is desolate and has no needs or identity, so too must one negate his own interests and submit himself to G’d for the acquisition of Torah.

5. *The Essence of Shavuos*

There is some degree of symbolism associated with each of the Holidays/Festivals. On Rosh Hashanah we blow the Shofar, which reminds G’d of the merit of the Akeidah (the binding of Yitzchak) and thus silences satan’s prosecution of the Jewish people. On Yom Kippur we repent and afflict ourselves by assuming the posture of heavenly angels accepting upon ourselves the five areas of deprivation. On Succos we commemorate the Clouds of Glory that protected us for forty years in the desert, with the Succah. We also take the four species, which symbolize the four segments of the Jewish people being united as one. On Pesach (Passover), we partake of the Pascal lamb and we eat matzah symbolizing the transition from bondage to freedom. However, regarding the Festival of Shavuos, “the time of the giving of our Torah” there is no symbolism whatsoever associated with this important day. It is customary to study Torah the entire night of Shavuos; however, this is only a custom and not a law. A Jew is obligated to study Torah every available moment throughout the year.

One is obligated to count the days of the Omer (Sefiras Ha’Omer) from Pesach to Shavuos. One counts forty-nine days concluding with the fiftieth, which is Shavuos – the day the Torah was given at Sinai. Chinuch explains the philosophical aspect and understanding of the counting of the Sefira. He writes, “The counting of Sefira is from the time of the exodus from Egypt to the receiving of the Torah at Sinai. We count in anticipation of that special moment which takes place 50 days from the time we begin counting. Just as the slave, who works in the sun longs and thirsts for the moment that he will have the relief of the shade, so too is our counting towards the giving of the Torah at Sinai.” Thus, Shavuos cannot be commemorated through a symbol. The essence of the Festival is the “feeling” of being privileged to be taken as G’d’s people through the receiving of the Torah. This can only be experienced by the individual who truly values his Jewishness and his relationship with G’d. This is the value and importance of the counting of the Sefira to Shavuos.

We say in our morning prayers, “Fortunate are we because of our good portion! How pleasant is our lot and how beautiful is our inheritance!” These statements are more than mere words. A Jew should feel fortunate and privileged to have been chosen from among all of the

nations of the world to be G'd's people – the people who were given the Torah. The Mishna in Tractate Shabbos states, “All Jewish people are considered princes.” The Torah refers to the Jewish people as “A kingly, priestly, and holy people.” This feeling of being privileged should be experienced as a reality by every Jew.

On Succos we dwell in the succah to commemorate the reality of being protected by the Clouds of Glory. On Pesach we eat the matzah to commemorate the reality of leaving Egypt in haste. The reality of Shavuos is the sense and feeling of being privileged. That reality is one that exists on an individual basis and cannot be symbolized. Each person will experience the anticipation and excitement of receiving the Torah to the extent of his own capacity to internalize the reality of being chosen to receive G'd's “most prized possession.”

The only way a Jew could truly experience his Judaism is through the Torah itself. The pride of feeling special as a Jew comes not from wearing Jewish symbols or participating in political/humanitarian causes; but rather, it is from immersing oneself and actualizing the Torah itself. The blessing recited on the Torah states, “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G'd, King of the universe, Who selected us from all the peoples and gave us His Torah...” Our privileged status from among the nations of the world is indicated by the fact that G'd gave us, and no other nation, His Torah. Shavuos is a time of experiencing the privileged feeling of being taken as G'd's people through His Torah.

The festival of Succos is a seven-day holiday. The day that follows the seven-day period of Succos is (Shemini) Atzeres. The Gemara tells us that although Shemini Atzeres is juxtaposed to the Festival of Succos, which seems to indicate that it is an extension of the holiday, it is considered an independent festival. On Shemini Atzeres we no longer dwell in the succah or take the four species. The Yalkut explains that in fact Shemini Atzeres should have been celebrated fifty days after Succos- similar to Shavuos following Pesach. However if that were the case Shemini Atzeres would fall out in the middle of winter and cause hardship for the Jew to return to Jerusalem in order to visit the Temple. G'd had mercy on the Jewish people and allowed us to celebrate (Shemini) Atzeres immediately after Succos, since we were already in Jerusalem. After sitting in the succah for seven days commemorating being protected and surrounded by the Clouds of Glory, we celebrate an additional day with G'd – (Shemini Atzeres). Shavuos is also referred to by the Torah as “Atzeres” which means to “hold back.” Chazal tell us that after seven days of

Succos, G'd says to the Jewish people, “Please remain with Me an additional day because the parting for Me is difficult.” “Atzeres” reflects G'd's love and desire to have an intimate relationship with the Jewish people.

If G'd wants to keep the Jew close to Him on “Atzeres” – on Shavuos should we not all feel privileged? If one is able to internalize and experience the privilege of being a Jew and performing mitzvos similar to the slave who anticipates the moment that he will be relieved by the shade, then one will be able to experience the essence of Shavuos. No symbol can encapsulate that feeling.

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 – Path of the Just
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Makkos
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi- Bava Basra
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)