

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
The Portion of
Beha'aloscha

June 12, 2008

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
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B"H

Beha'aloscha

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. The Levy, the Beloved of G'd

The Torah states, **“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, ‘Speak to Aaron and say to him: When you kindle the lamps...’”** Rashi cites the Midrash which asks, “Why does the Torah juxtapose the portion that pertains to the kindling of the Menorah with the portion of the inauguration of the Altar?” The Midrash answers that Aaron had felt slighted that he and his tribe were not included in the inauguration of the Mishkan. All of the other tribes had brought offerings and gifts for the inauguration; however, the Tribe of Levy was not included. G'd spoke to Aaron saying, “Yours is greater than theirs.” Meaning, the lighting of the Menorah has greater value than all of the offerings and gifts that were brought. However, the Midrash Tanchuma explains the juxtaposition differently.

The Midrash states, “We find that the twelve tribes had brought offerings for the inauguration of the Altar, but the tribe of Levy did not. The Levites were pained and said, ‘Why did G'd distance us from the celebration of the inauguration of the Altar?’ This can be understood with an analogy. A king made a festive banquet and every day he would invite various guilds to partake of the festivities. The king did not invite his intimate friend who loved him greatly. The beloved subject of the king was pained and thought, ‘Perhaps the king has a claim in his heart against me of which I am not aware? This must be the reason the king did not invite me.’ After all the days of celebration had concluded, the king summoned his beloved friend. He said to him, ‘It is true I have made great banquets and festivities to which your fellow countrymen were invited. However, I did not invite you until this day because I wished to have a private celebration with my beloved friend. You are special and beloved to me.’ Similarly, the king of kings... G'd had spoken to Aaron and his children saying, ‘I wanted all of the tribes to celebrate the inauguration of the Altar by themselves. However, now that they have completed their celebration, you will have

your own.’ Thus, the verse states, **‘...When you kindle the lamps...’**”

It is interesting to note that over the seven days of the Festival of Sukkos, seventy oxen were brought as sacrifices in the Temple each corresponding to one of the seventy root nations of the world. The Jewish people were not included among these offerings. It is not until Shemini Atzeres, the eighth day following the seven days of Sukkos, that a single ox was brought to correspond to the Jewish people. G'd wanted their offering be brought exclusively and separate from the others, indicating the special relationship that G'd has with the Jewish people. Chazal explain this with an analogy that is similar to the Midrash cited above. They explain, regarding Shemini Atzeres, “G'd said to the Jewish people, ‘Now that the nations of the world have brought their offerings, make for Me a small meal so that we may have an intimate meeting.’”

The relationship that G'd has with Aaron and the Levites, is more intimate than that of the Jewish people. His love for them is special because they were the only tribe that did not participate in the sin of the Golden Calf. Prior to the Golden Calf, the Jewish people had ascended to the spiritual level of Adam prior to the sin. However because they had succumbed to the Golden Calf, they became tainted. Despite the spiritual failing of the Jewish people, the Levites remained steadfast in their belief in G'd and thus merited to be on a spiritual level unto themselves. The Torah tells us that when Moshe was told by G'd to count the Jewish people, the tribe of Levy was not counted among them. He was told that they should be counted separately because in the words of Chazal, “They are the legion of the king.”

Although the Levites did not participate in the sin of the Golden Calf, they were nevertheless spiritually diminished because they are in fact part of the Jewish people. This is based on the principle of “*areivus*” that all the Jewish people are considered to be one spiritual entity.

Despite their diminished spiritual state, they retained their purity. G'd therefore, wanted them to celebrate separately from rest of the Jewish people. Relatively speaking, the difference between the Levites and the rest of the Jewish people is similar to the difference between the Jewish people and the seventy root nations of the world.

It is interesting to note that the participation of the Levites in the inauguration of the Mishkan was through the kindling of the Menorah and not any of the other rituals that are performed by the Kohen (Priest). The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra tells us that the Menorah represents the Oral Law, which is an elucidation of the written Torah. Regardless of the failings of the Jewish people, the Torah remains untainted and pristine. Just as the Torah remains untainted so too did the tribe of Levy remain untarnished. Therefore, the Kohen, who is the chosen of the tribe of Levy, was given the mitzvah of kindling the Menorah, which draws the spiritual influences and Divine Assistance that is needed for the elucidation of the Torah.

2. Divine Retribution, an Expression of Love

The Torah tells us that G'd had chosen the Levites to be the officiants of the Kohanim (Priests) to assist them in the service of the Mishkan. The Levites had assumed the position that had been the responsibility of the first-born before the sin of the Golden Calf. Since the Jewish people had become tainted through idolatry, the first-born were disqualified to be the officiants in the Mishkan. The Torah states, **“Then I assigned the Levites to be presented to Aaron and his sons from among the Children of Israel to perform the service of the Children of Israel in the Tent of the Meeting and to provide atonement for the Children of Israel, so that there will not be a plague among the Children of Israel when the Children of Israel approach the Sanctuary.”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “In one verse we find that the Jewish people are referred to as ‘the Children of Israel’ five times. What does this indicate? It is to reveal the special love that G'd has for the Jewish people. (The Midrash tells us that when one loves his child, whenever the father repeats his name it evokes a special love.) The reason the appellation ‘Children of Israel’ is repeated five times is to correspond to the five books of the Torah.”

Simply, one could understand the words of Chazal to mean that the repetition of their name is to reveal the special love that G'd has for the Jewish people. He chose to repeat their name five times because they were the ones who had received the Torah, which is comprised of five books. However, the Torah is revealing something more

profound. G'd's special love for the Jewish people emanates from the fact that they are the only nation in existence that has the spiritual capacity to process and internalize the precepts of the Torah.

The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers tells us that G'd had presented Avraham, our Patriarch with ten tests. Why did He choose the number ten? The tests presented to Avraham could have been more or less. Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the significance of the number ten is based on what is stated in the Mishna, “With Ten Utterances the world was created.” G'd brought about existence through His Ten Utterances. Therefore, we find many instances where the number ten is reflected to indicate that its context essential to existence. For example, Creation came about for the sake of the Torah and the Jewish people who were meant to fulfill it. The world as a whole had rejected G'd's existence and assumed pagan beliefs. Avraham, our Patriarch, through his own quest for truth came upon G'd and began espousing His existence. He thus merited to become the founding father of the Jewish people. Avraham needed to be confronted with ten tests in order to qualify him to be the spiritual person who would be the Patriarch of G'd's people, who would ultimately receive the Torah at Sinai. G'd chose to test Avraham in ten areas to guarantee that the objective of the Ten initial Utterances would met, which is the Torah and the Jewish people.

The Torah states, **“Moshe said to the Jewish people, ‘Just as when a father punishes his son so too does G'd punish you...’”** Meaning, just as a father when he disciplines his child with corporal punishment, it is not to harm him, but rather it is only a way for him to correct his ways, so too does G'd punish the Jewish people. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh states that one may ask, “Why does G'd bring greater retribution upon the Jewish people than the nations of the world despite their corrupt and abominable behavior?” He explains that just as a father reacts strongly to the misbehavior of his own child because of his love for him, and does not react in a similar vein to another's child (despite the reprehensive behavior), so too does G'd react to the inappropriate behavior of the Jewish people because of His love for them. The nations of the world may be considered “His handiwork and His creation” but the relationship of a Father to a child is exclusive to the Jewish people. When G'd punishes the Jewish people it is only because they had not addressed their unique potential. In addition, if they should fail in their mission, existence would no longer have any value.

3. *The All-Encompassing Ramification of the Kindling of the Menorah*

The Torah states, **“Speak to Aaron and say to him: When you kindle the lamps, toward the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light.”** The Midrash states, “G’d said to Moshe, ‘It is not because I need the light of mortal man that I command you to kindle the Menorah, rather it is to give you merit.’ G’d said, ‘You should be careful that when you kindle the lights it should be for Me. If you do it for My sake you will merit that at the end of time I will illuminate for you a great light. The nations of the world will walk in the light that radiates from you...’”

The Torah states regarding the kindling of the Menorah, **“Aaron did so...”** The Midrash explains, “The Torah tells us this to inform us the praiseworthiness of Aaron – that he did not deviate regarding the kindling of the Menorah.” The kindling of the Menorah was a relatively simple mitzvah to fulfill. Why would one have even considered that Aaron would have deviated from fulfilling it correctly?

King Solomon writes in Proverbs, “Acquire truth and do not sell it.” The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah explains that this verse is referring to Torah. Rambam rules in *The Laws of the Study of Torah* that although one may have incurred financial costs to gain a Torah education, he should not charge others for imparting to them the Torah knowledge that he had acquired. Torah is quantified as “unadulterated Truth.” The Talmud tells us that “the Signet of G’d is Truth.” If this is so, it is understandable to say that G’d’s Wisdom reflects that Signet, which is Truth. If one engages in Torah study not for its own sake (shelo l’shma), the mitzvah that was performed is considered deficient. Since the mitzvah of studying Torah is to engage in the ultimate Truth, it would be considered incongruous for one to engage in it with an ulterior motive, which is not commensurate with the essence of what is being studied. In truth, there should be no spiritual value of studying Torah without the proper intent. However, this is not the case because of the principle that is stated in the Gemara in Tractate Pesachim – “Through one’s engaging in a mitzvah not for its own sake, one can achieve a level of pure intent to perform the mitzvah for its own sake.”

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra tells us that the illumination of the Menorah symbolizes the Oral Law, which is the elucidation of the Written Law. The Talmud tells us that if one wishes to gain wisdom when he prays,

he should pray in a southerly direction because the Menorah in the Temple was situated on the southern wall. All the Divine Assistance that is needed to understand the truth of Torah emanates from the kindling of the Menorah. Therefore when Aaron kindled the Menorah, which was the mechanism that provides one with the ability to comprehend truth, he needed to do so with the purest intent. If Aaron’s intent was lacking, even as much as an iota, the level of Divine Assistance that would be provided would be deficient.

Rashi in the beginning of the Portion cites the Midrash, “Why does the Torah juxtapose the portion of the celebration of the Princes (at the time of the inauguration of the Mishkan) to the kindling of the Menorah?” The Midrash explains that when Aaron had seen all of the Princes participating in the celebration of the completion of the Mishkan, he was taken aback and offended (he and his tribe felt that their exclusion was due to their unworthiness). G’d said to him, “Your participation is greater than theirs.” Aaron was given the mitzvah of the kindling the Menorah.

Ramban asks, “Why did G’d need to console Aaron by giving him the mitzvah of kindling the Menorah? He was qualified to officiate in all aspects of Mishkan/Bais HaMikdash, which were exclusive to him and his children. In addition, no other person was qualified to officiate on Yom Kippur other than the High Priest. If so why was Aaron offended for not being included?”

The Torah tells us that the twelve Princes, representing each of the Tribes of Israel contributed the identical offering and gifts to the inauguration of the Mishkan. In relating this, the Torah repeats itself almost verbatim (with the exception of the day and name of the Prince) for the twelve-day period that the Princes brought their gifts. If every letter of the Torah has to have a specific intent and there is nothing contained within it that is superfluous, then why does the Torah repeat each of the gifts of the Princes, which were identical?

Each of the twelve Tribes represented another element and component of the spiritual infrastructure of the Jewish people. Although the physical gifts and offerings were identical, each Prince needed to infuse his offering and gift with the intent that reflected his Tribe. The Tribe of Levy was not represented in this process because Aaron was not asked to participate. Seemingly the Tribe of Levy had no relevance to the spiritual infrastructure of the Jewish people- indicating that neither Aaron or his Tribe were worthy of a representation among the other Tribes.

The essence and heartbeat of the Jewish people is the Torah. Aaron was commanded to kindle the Menorah which represents the unadulterated Truth of G'd's Wisdom, namely the Oral Law. Aaron's contribution addressed the essence of the spiritual infrastructure that was created by the Princes. Without the Divine Assistance to merit the truth of Torah, the Jewish people have no value. This is the reason G'd had said to him, "Your contribution is greater than theirs."

Aaron, understanding his profound contribution to the Jewish people, could have prided himself. If this would have been so, Aaron would have diminished the value of kindling the Menorah. This would have been a compromise of the unadulterated Truth of Torah. Despite the dimension of Aaron's accomplishment, he was not affected as much as an iota. Consequently his kindling of the Menorah was able to activate the most profound influence to bring about the most advanced level of truth. This is communicated by the Torah stating, "**Aaron did so.**"

4. The Innate Qualification of the Levy and His Role as Representative of the Jewish People

The Torah states regarding the installation of the Levites, "**Thereafter the Levites shall come to serve the Tent of the Meeting; you shall purify them and you shall wave them as a wave-service. For given, given (*nisunim. nisunim*) are they to Me from among the Children of Israel...**" What is the significance of the reiteration the expression, "given, given (*nisunim, nisunim*)?"

Sforno explains, "The Torah reiterates the expression 'nisunim, nisunim' to communicate to us the two ways in which the Levites were given to G'd. Firstly, the Levites gave of themselves to serve G'd. After the sin of the Golden Calf Moshe wanted to purge the camp of idolaters. He declared, 'Whoever is for G'd come with me!' The Levites were the only ones who responded to Moshe's calling. This is how they gave of themselves to G'd. Secondly, the Levites were given from the midst of the Children of Israel because the Jewish people must give to the Levy from their tithes in order to support them in place of their service to G'd. Since the Levites serve G'd on behalf of the Jewish people, every Jew is considered as if he participated in the service of G'd." G'd wants every Jew to have a level of participation in His service.

The Torah tells us that Yaakov, our Patriarch established a partnership between Yissachar and Zevulun.

The Tribe of Zevulun was responsible to provide for all of Yissachar's needs in order to allow them to engage in Torah study without distraction. Sforno explains that this is similar to the concept of the giving of tithes to the Kohen (Priest) and Levy. The Tribe of Levy was chosen by G'd to be the ones to be completely immersed in Torah study. Therefore by providing sustenance for Kohen and Levy through tithes, every Jew becomes a partner in their Torah study. Regardless of one's own degree of dedication to Torah study, he will have a share in Torah.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that the majority of "*amei haaretz* – a sect of Jews who were not meticulous and sensitive to many areas of Jewish Law" gave the proper tithes to the Levy which is 10% of the produce grown in Israel. However, there was a minority of them who did not. Because of this minority, the Rabbis legislated that if one purchased produce from the "*aam haaretz*" one must tithe 10%. The commentators ask if under normal circumstances when a questionable situation arises regarding an event, one has a right to follow the principle of majority. One does not need to be concerned that he is violating the Law because it is purely based on probability. If this is so then why was it necessary for the Rabbis to legislate a law to address the minority. Since the minority was significant, the Rabbis felt that it was necessary to promulgate this law of tithing. Seemingly, the question is still difficult. Based on our understanding of the significance of the tithe to the Levy, we are able to appreciate the Rabbinic Law on a more profound level.

The Levy is responsible for the spirituality of the Jewish people by engaging in Torah study and the service of G'd at an undistracted level. Since the Levy is totally dedicated to the spiritual matters of the Jewish people, they must provide for him and in so doing they assume a share in the Levy's service. However, if the Levy does not receive a sufficient amount of support because of a significant minority who do not participate in tithing their produce, then their service will be undermined. Ultimately, the spiritual stature of the Jewish people will be weakened.

5. The Dual Value of Transferring the Status of the Firstborn to the Levites

The Torah tells us that a consequence of the sin of the Golden Calf was that the firstborn, who were initially qualified to be the officiants of G'd (Priests), were tainted and thus disqualified. The Torah states, "**Moshe, Aaron, and the entire assembly of the Children of Israel (*kol***

adas Bnei Yisroel) did to the Levites according to everything that Hashem had commanded Moshe about the Levites, so did the Children of Israel (Bnei Yisroel) do to them.” The conclusion of the verse seems to be superfluous. The verse had already stated **“the entire assembly of the Children of Israel did...”** Why is it necessary to conclude, **“...so did the Children of Israel.”**

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that “the entire assembly of the Children of Israel (*kol adas Bnei Yisroel*)” represents one segment of the Jewish people while “Children of Israel (*Bnei Yisroel*)” represents another. The expression “Benei Yisroel” is referring to the segment of the people who possess special spiritual status, namely the firstborn. “Kol adas Bnei Yisroel” refers to the entire Jewish people. The reason the verse concludes with the “Benei Yisroel” (firstborn) is to communicate to us that although they had eternally forfeited their special status to the Levites, which would normally cause great anguish, in this particular situation the transfer of status was done wholeheartedly.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues, “When a mitzvah is difficult or painful one normally executes it haphazardly in a deficient manner. However regarding the firstborn, they had fulfilled the mitzvah meticulously and wholeheartedly.”

The Torah tells us regarding Moshe, that he and his progeny were meant to be the Kohanim (Priests). However, because he was obstinate and did not readily accept G'd's appointing him as the Redeemer of Israel at the burning bush, he forfeited the Priesthood to his brother Aaron the Levy. Until the end of time it is only the descendants of Aaron who are qualified to be the Priests because of Moshe's lack of reverence towards G'd. The loss of the Priesthood was considered an atonement for his failing. When Moshe was told by G'd to install Aaron and his sons as the Kohanim, the Torah goes to great length to delineate every aspect and detail of the process. This seems to be unnecessary. Much of the information seems to be superfluous because there is no reason to reiterate many of the details.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that although Moshe was atoned for his failing at the burning bush by forfeiting the Priesthood, nevertheless there was a trace of sin that remained that needed to be purged. Moshe, in order to be fully reinstated with G'd, had to install Aaron and his children with joy and wholeheartedness. This state of mind is only possible if one truly understands and internalizes the fact that punishment is ultimately for the good of the individual. The Torah attests that Moshe succeeded in this endeavor.

Just as G'd had provided Moshe with the opportunity to be fully reinstated by installing Aaron and his children as Priests, identically the firstborn were presented with the same opportunity to bring about full atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. The Torah attests that the firstborn did so meticulously and wholeheartedly.

With our understanding of the value of Moshe's and the firstborn's level of participation in the initiation process of Aaron and the Levites, we are able to appreciate the profoundness of the Mishna in Tractate Berachos. It states, “Just as one blesses G'd for the good, so too must he bless G'd for the bad.” Even when one experiences tragedy one must acknowledge G'd in an identical manner as when one experiences good fortune.

The only reason one experiences difficulty, or G'd forbid tragedy, is because G'd is providing the individual with an opportunity to be atoned for a spiritual deficiency and thus be reinstated. If one accepts the tragedy with the same level of value as the good fortune, although he is experiencing pain, simultaneously he will sense the value and benefit from that experience. Only then will he be fully reinstated. However, if one does not internalize the experience at this level, although he achieves atonement there will still remain a trace of impurity, which will interfere with full reinstatement.