

JYad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES
Parshas Chukas-Balak
 July 7, 2006

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
July 7, 2006

B"H

Parshas Chukas-Balak

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*
Dean

1. The Secret of the Red Heifer

The Portion begins with the law of the *parah adumah* (the red heifer), “**Zos chukas ha'Torah...This is the statute of the Torah, which Hashem has commanded...**” Rashi cites the Midrash which states, “Satan and the nations of the world approached the Jewish people with a claim, ‘What is this commandment? What is its rationale?’ G'd responded, ‘This is My Statute, you have no right to question its validity.’” A “*chok*” is a law that cannot be understood within the realm of rational thinking. It is beyond the grasp of the human mind.

Chazal tell us that the ultimate *chok* (Statute) is that of the *parah adumah* because it is the most difficult to understand. King Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, had said regarding the statute of *parah adumah*, “It is distant from me.” Meaning, he was able, through his unique level of wisdom, to come upon the rationale for every *chok* contained within the Torah with the exception of the *parah adumah*. Why is the *chok* of *parah adumah*, which is the only procedure for the removal of the spiritual contamination of the dead, specifically the most difficult Statute to understand and beyond human grasp?

There is a correlation between the law of *parah aduma* and the Sin of the Golden Calf. In the Portion of *Chukas*, Rashi cites Rav Moshe HaDarshon who explains this relationship with a parable. The young child of one of the maidservants had soiled the palace of the king. The king commanded the mother of the child to clean up after her child. Identically the *para*, the cow, which is the mother of the calf, was designated by G'd to cleanse the spiritual contamination that was brought about by its calf – the *Eigel HaZahav* (Golden Calf).

The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah tells us that at the time of the receiving of the Torah at Sinai, the Jewish people had reached the pinnacle of their spirituality when they had unequivocally proclaimed, “Naaseh V'Nishma – thus causing them to revert back to the spiritual state that was equivalent to that of Adam before

the sin. At that moment death no longer had relevance to them. Had the Jewish people not failed with the Golden Calf they would have lived eternally. However because they sinned with idolatry, they reverted back to being mortal beings, who are subject to death. Why did the declaration of “Naaseh V'Nishma” cause them to become immortal?

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that when the Jewish people had declared “Naaseh V'Nishma” G'd had said, “Who revealed this secret to My children – that they have used the expression of the angels who serve Me?” The Jewish people at Sinai had ascended to the level of angels. An angel, because of its level of clarity is completely and singularly focused on doing the Will of G'd without question. By declaring “Naaseh V'Nishma” the Jewish people had assumed the posture of the angel because they accepted upon themselves the Torah without knowing the extent of obligation. Just as an angel has no relevance to death, identically the Jewish people had ascended at Sinai to that same level.

G'd had commanded Adam not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, saying “for on the day that you will eat from it, you will surely die.” Why then did Adam eat from the Tree? It is only because he rationalized, that he allowed himself to partake of its fruit. Although his justification in his own mind was correct, nevertheless he failed because it was contrary to the Will of G'd. Adam was not able to negate himself to the point of full submission to His Maker. The failing of Adam was corrected at Sinai, when the Jewish people negated themselves by declaring “Naaseh V'Nishma.” They had expressed themselves as angels. It was a total submission to G'd. When one negates himself to that level, one has no relevance to death – just as Adam was meant to be before the sin.

The only contamination that cannot be removed through emersion in a mikvah, is the contamination of the dead. The only procedure that can remove this most extreme level of contamination is the sprinkling of the

para aduma. This is because *para aduma* represents the ultimate *chok*. This is the only Statute that even the wisest man to every live, King Solomon, was not able to come upon its rationale. It is beyond the human intellect. Therefore it is fitting that the only way that the contamination of the dead, which was precipitated into existence a result of man not willing to negate his intellect, should only be removed through a ritual involving the *para aduma* which is beyond the intellect of man. It is the ultimate negation of rational thinking. It is only within this context of complete self-negation that one can attain purity from the contamination of the dead and be reinstated to a state that has a semblance to Adam before the sin. The *para aduma*, to a degree has a commonality with the declaration of “Naaseh V’Nishma.”

2. Putting Things in Proper Perspective

The Torah states, “**They journeyed from Kadesh and the Children of Israel arrived – the entire assembly – at Mount Hor. Hashem said to Moshe and Aaron at Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying, ‘Aaron shall be gathered to his people (pass away), for he shall not enter the Land...’**” Why does the Torah associate the location of the border of the land of Edom with the passing of Aaron?

Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “From here we see that because they had attached themselves and had become close to Esav the evil one, their actions were breached and thus they had lost this tzaddik (Aaron). When one attaches/associates himself with a rasha (evil), his status is undermined.” As a result of being in the proximity of the land of Edom we do not see that the Jewish people were influenced negatively to any degree. There is no indication of any spiritual failing as a result of this association. What then is basis for the loss of the tzaddik, Aaron? What atonement was necessary at this moment, which caused Aaron’s demise?

Initially, the Jewish people wanted to pass through the land of Edom in order to enter into Canaan. Moshe sent agents to the king of Edom to ask permission to allow them passage through their land. They had said to the king of Edom, “**So said your brother Israel: You know all of the hardship that has befallen us...Let us pass through your land...**” The king of Edom replied, “**You shall not pass through me- lest I come against you with the sword!**” The Midrash tells us that the King of Edom replied in this threatening manner because he had understood that Moshe was communicating to him that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt as a result of

their prayers to G’d – which is the power that emanates from their mouths. Moshe was telling the king of Edom that the power of speech, which the Jew possesses (prayer and Torah) is a result of the blessing received from their forefather Yitzchak when he had said, “The voice is the voice of Yaakov...” The response of the Edomites was, “We too have a blessing from our forefather, Yitzchak, ‘By the sword you shall live.’” Subsequently, Moshe chose to circumvent the land of Edom and not pass through it.

Moshe had expressed his request to the king of Edom in a manner which indicated that there is a level of relationship between the Jewish people and the Edomites. He referred to the Jewish people as the “brother” of Esav. By identifying themselves in this manner the Jewish people were attached and associated with Esav, the evil one.

If one were to observe an evil person succeeding in his life, one could be in a position to envy that individual. However, the true reality of the material blessing in the life of this evil person is classified as *rasha v’tov lo* (an evil person who experiences good fortune). The verse states regarding the success of the evil, “G’d compensates His enemies in order to destroy them.” The good fortune of the rasha is in essence a depletion of his spiritual merits in the world to come. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos tells us that the reward for a mitzvah in the physical realm is not possible. This is because the consequence of mitzvah has eternal value. Something of unlimited reward cannot be paid in a limited/physical existence. Therefore, it is not possible to receive reward even for the most minute mitzvah in this world. A rasha who performs a good deed in his lifetime is deserving of compensation/reward. However, because he has no interest in the world to come/spiritual realm, G’d must compensate him in the limited and material world. In essence he is only receiving an infinitesimal amount of what he truly deserves. But, because he has no interest in spirituality, this limited compensation is acceptable to him. However, the value of the limited reward that is exchanged for something of infinite value manifests itself as overwhelming material blessing.

What is perceived as blessing is in essence the ultimate curse and it is something that should not be envied. When G’d compensates the rasha He is in fact bring about his ultimate destruction. The rasha who experiences good fortune is experiencing the Attribute of Justice (Midas HaDin). The Attribute of Mercy would have dictated that the rasha should not be compensated in this world – despite his preference of the material over the spiritual. However, because his classification is evil his

reward is meted out under the auspices of the Attribute of Justice.

The predicament of the Edomites in the physical existence was to succeed materially and have superiority in the world. This itself is a manifestation of the Attribute of Justice. When the Jewish people attached and associated themselves to the Edomites, they became subject to the same Attribute of Justice. However, the Attribute of Justice manifested itself differently regarding the Jewish people. Because the classification of the Jewish people was not G'd forbid, evil, the Attribute of Justice impacted upon them in the most exacting manner – causing them to be subject to scrutiny. There is no record that is perfect. Thus, the Jewish people's actions/record were breached-causing the tzaddik Aaron to be taken from their midst.

We are now able to understand the words of Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) in a different light. The Mishna states, "Distance yourself from a bad neighbor; do not attach yourself to an evil person; and do not despair from tragedy." Chazal explain if one attaches himself to the rasha by establishing a relationship with him for the sake of personal benefit, ultimately the individual will be share in the downfall of the rasha. However, with our understanding of connecting oneself to the rasha, we can understand that when one subjects himself to the Attribute, which the rasha himself is experiencing, he will be subject to the Attribute of Justice Itself. Although this Attribute is manifested regarding the rasha as material blessing; however, regarding the Jew it will manifest itself as tragedy.

If one is able to put this principle of *rasha v'tov* lo in perspective – rather than envying the material success of the those who transgress the Torah one would be abhorred by their predicament.

3. G'd Behind the Scenes

The Torah states, "**Then Israel sang this song: Come up, O well, announce it!**" The Jewish people sang a song of praise to G'd after they had seen the wellspring flowing through the mountains. They had seen human remains washing through the mountains and flowing before their eyes. It was only then that they realized that G'd had performed a great miracle for them. Rashi cites the Midrash which explains that the Emorites had planned to destroy the Jewish people as they were going to pass through the mountains. They had taken positions atop the mountains in caves and were going to hurl boulders upon the Jewish people as they passed below them. Before the

Jewish people were going to pass through, G'd brought the mountains that were located on both sides of the valley together and caused the Emorites who were hiding in the caves to be crushed by the protruding rocks that were extending from the corresponding mountain on the other side. G'd then returned the mountains to their original positions and the wellspring flowed through the caves revealing the miracle that had transpired.

The Midrash tells us that after G'd had performed the miracle, He had said, "Let My children recognize the miracle that I have performed for them. They should understand that had I not done so, they would have been destroyed." There are many beneficial occurrences that take place in our lives of which we are not aware. It is only when G'd chooses to reveal these events, that we are able to recognize that we are the beneficiaries of His kindness.

In their song of praise to G'd, the Jewish people had said, "**A gift from the Desert...**" 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 and selflessly dedicates his priorities to G'd/observance of the Torah, He will give the Torah to him as a gift. Just as a desert is desolate and has no need or identity, one must negate his own interests and submit himself to Torah.

The Jewish people in the desert believed that their existence was mostly attributed to their own initiative and responsible lifestyle. It was only when they realized that G'd had performed a miracle for them, by destroying the Emorites, that they understood that had He not interceded, they would have been destroyed. Thus, unless G'd is continuously involved in their existence, they could not survive. They understood that their initiative and effort was unrelated to their degree of success. This was a humbling and illuminating realization. One only needs to take the initiative because of the failing of Adam. As RAMCHAL explains in his work, Path of the Just- after Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge, G'd had said, "**It is by the sweat of your brow that you shall eat bread.**" Thus, one's initiative is only required because of this curse. However, the initiative has no relevance to one's actual success. One's financial allocation for the year is determined on Rosh Hashanah. In essence, G'd is the Provider. After being the beneficiaries of the miracle of the wellspring, the Jewish people had reached a level of negation to assume the posture of the desert. They were able to internalize the fact that G'd is the Provider. Thus they had expressed themselves unequivocally stating that their initiative was unrelated to their success.

Consequently their primary focus must be to the acquisition of Torah (a gift from the desert).

If one is not privy to revealed miracles then how could he come to this vital realization that G'd is the Provider and his initiative is only an exercise to activate the blessing? It is only by engaging and delving in Torah study that one could have an appreciation of G'd. Chazal tell us that there is an innate enlightenment in Torah that gives a Jew a sense of his own spirituality and ultimately G'd Himself.

4. One Should Not Trivialize Even the Most Deficient Mitzvah

The Torah tells us that Bilaam, the evil one, wanted to curse the Jewish people. However, despite his desire and efforts G'd did not allow him to do so. Ultimately rather than cursing them, Bilaam blessed them. One of the many attempts that Bilaam had made was that he told Balak to build a number of altars and bring sacrifices to G'd. Bilaam had thought that perhaps in the merit of Balak's offerings, he would be allowed to curse the Jewish people. Balak's intent was not to acknowledge, serve and revere G'd but rather it was a means to bring a curse upon the Jewish people.

The Gemara in Tractate Nazir states, "It is worthwhile to engage in Torah and mitzvos even if it is without a pure intent (*shelo l'shma*). This is because if one engages in a mitzvah *shelo l'shma* it will lead him to perform it with a pure intent (*l'shma*). In the merit of the 42 offerings which were brought by Balak, the evil one, he merited that Ruth the Moabite should be his descendant (although he had done the mitzvah without a pure intent)..." Ruth the Moabite was the grandmother of King David from whom Moshiach will descend.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos cites a verse which states, "You should bring desolation upon the land..." The Gemara tells us that one should not read the word in the verse as "shamos- desolation" but rather it should be read as "sheimos- names." From here, we learn "shma k'gorim" that the name that one possesses indicates one's potential and destiny. The Gemara continues, "The reason Ruth (Rus) was given such a name was because she was destined to have a grandson who would sate G'd with song and praise (merave HaKadosh Baruch b'shiros v'tishbachos)." Within the name "Ruth" lies the spiritual potential of King David who would author Tehillim.

It is interesting to note that as a consequence of Balak bringing the 42 offerings, although it was with a sinister intent (*shelo l'shma*), he merited to be the forbearer of Ruth, who was the forbearer of King David – establishing the Davidic line through which Moshiach will descend. We see that even a mitzvah that is performed at the most deficient level is able to generate merit/blessing that has phenomenal far-reaching ramifications. King David would have come into being regardless of Balak's actions; however, the issue is through whom will he come into existence. The Gemara states a principle that "merit comes to those who are meritorious and tragedy comes through those who are undeserving." Balak is considered meritorious because of the 42 offerings that he had brought.

We are not able to determine to what degree Balak is deserving of reward for being responsible for the chain of events, which evolved because of his actions. As we see in the Mishna in Tractate Bava Metzia. The Mishna tells us that one has the obligation to return a lost article of his own father before returning the lost article of a stranger because one must be beholden to his parent for bringing him into existence. Without the parent fathering the child, all opportunity that presents itself in the life would have not been. The Mishna continues to say that one has the obligation to return the lost article of his spiritual mentor (*rabo*) before returning that of his father. This is because one must be more beholden to his rebbe/mentor for giving him a share in the world to come, which is eternal.

If such far-reaching merit came upon one who performed a mitzvah with a sinister intent, how much merit will one have when one performs a mitzvah with a pure intent? Consequently, one should not underestimate/minimize the seemingly most trivial mitzvah because its value cannot be appreciated or imagined.

5. Seeing is Believing

The Torah tells us that Bilaam arose early in the morning and hitched his own donkey to curse the Jewish people. The Torah states, **"The donkey saw the angel of Hashem standing on the road with his sword drawn...Bilaam's anger flared and he struck the donkey with his staff...Then Hashem opened Bilaam's eyes and he saw the angel of Hashem standing on the road..."**

The verse states, **"Hashem opened Bilaam's eyes and he saw..."** The Midrash asks, "Was Bilaam blind?"

He certainly was not. From here, we learn that even the eye that can see will only see that which is allowed by G'd. . Bilaam did not see the angel because G'd did not allow him." One would think that the human eye was created to be able to perceive and notice that which exists in the physical realm. When the prophet experiences a prophetic vision it is visualized by the mind's eye and not his physical eyes. However, the Torah tells us that G'd "opened Bilaam's eyes" indicating that one sees only what G'd wants him to see even regarding perceiving an angel which is a spiritual entity. What one is not meant to see will remain hidden.

Chazal tell us that before Avraham was circumcised he was called "Avram" (without the letter "hey"). The name "Avram" (with the letter "hey" deleted) is numerically equivalent of 243, indicating that before he was circumcised he did not have full control over all 248 parts of his body, which is the totality of man. He did not have full control over five aspects of his physicality- his two eyes, two ears, and his male organ. After his circumcision, G'd added the letter "hey" to his name and he became Avraham (which is numerically 248). His total physicality became sanctified/spiritualized and was thus under his full control. Although he was a spiritual being prior to this transformation, Avraham's eyes had a degree of relevance to the physical. After the circumcision, his eyes only noticed that which had relevance to spirituality.

When Avraham was on the way to the Akeidah (Binding of Yitzchak) with his son Yitzchak, Yishmael and Eliezer, his servant, accompanied them. When Avraham approached the mountain (the location of the Akeidah), he saw a cloud suspended over it from afar. He asked the two lads who accompanied him if they noticed anything above the mountain. Their response was in the negative. When he asked his son Yitzchak the question, he responded that he saw a cloud. This was a clear indication to Avraham that Yishmael and Eliezer were not sufficiently spiritualized to have relevance to that location. Thus, he left them behind.

It is known that the Chofetz Chaim had trained himself in the area of lashon ha'rah (evil speech) to such a degree that if he were to begin hearing something that had any semblance of negativity, his ability to hear would shut down. One would think that when one hears whatever can be heard, he has no choice but to hear it. However, the Chofetz Chaim was able, through the spiritualization of his senses, to gain control over his physicality.

King David states in Tehillim (Psalms), "(G'd) Open my eyes through Your Torah." One would normally

understand the words of King David as an expression that connotes gaining understanding through the Torah. However, the words of King David go beyond this simple understanding. One is exposed to many things but is only able to perceive/experience them within a limited context. The one who is able to see and perceive realities of existence, which others cannot, does so because of the spiritualization that comes through the Torah itself. Through the study of Torah one's grasp and even one's vision assumes another level - thus exposing the individual to what G'd wants him to see or protecting him from that which G'd does not want him to see.

The city of Vilna in the 19th Century was the main hub for the Jewish enlightenment movement, which sought to undermine traditional Torah Judaism. Simultaneously, Vilna was known as the "Jerusalem of Lithuania." The most prestigious Torah institutions and renowned Torah sages were located in Vilna. Depending on one's orientation and mindset, it was possible to experience Vilna on two levels that have no relevance to one another. One could return from his visit to Vilna and speak about the Yiddish theater and the Jewish cultural centers that had overtaken and dispelled any remnant of "primitive" Judaism. Conversely, one could return after experiencing Vilna as a changed person. He could become more spiritualized after being exposed to the world's most spiritual and well-known Torah sages. The eye perceives and sees that which is consistent with the person's level.

The Torah tells us that Hagar and her son Yishmael were driven from the home of Avraham, our Patriarch. They were in the wilderness without food or water. The Torah states, "**G'd heard the beseeching of the lad and G'd opened her eyes (Hagar) and she saw a wellspring.**" The Torah does not tell us that G'd performed a miracle to create a wellspring where there was none. Rather, He only opened her eyes to see and notice something that was already there. She merited having her eyes opened because G'd heard the supplications of Yishmael.

Every day in the morning blessings we recite, "... (G'd) opens the eyes of the blind." The Tur writes that one should recite this blessing upon opening one's eyes in the morning. We can say, based on the Midrash that this blessing goes beyond acknowledging G'd for giving one the physical ability to see. Rather, He opens our eyes to see that which others cannot.

6. Recognizing Good Fortune for What it Truly Is (from Korach)

The Torah states after the mutiny of Korach and the destruction of his community G'd designated the Levites for their particular tasks in the Mishkan. The verse states, **“And I- Behold! I have taken your brethren the Levites from amongst the Children of Israel; to you they are given as a gift, to perform the service of the Tent of the Meeting.”**

Ramban writes regarding the verse **“...as a gift, to perform the service...”** that “G'd had given the service of the Priesthood as a gift. One could think that performing the service of the Priesthood is similar to the service of a mortal king, in which the servant has no choice but to perform his burdensome task. Thus, the Torah tells us that the service of G'd is a gift that brings glory and splendor to the one who was chosen. Unlike the service of a mortal king where the objective has no relevance to the glory of the individual.”

Baal HaTurim explains the “gift of performing the service of the Priesthood,” “One who gives a gift could do so either because he was compelled to do so or because he wished to give the gift wholeheartedly. G'd gave the Priesthood so that it should be a gift. He was not compelled to do so.”

When the Torah refers to the vestments of the Priest it states that they are for the sake of bringing “glory and splendor” to him so that he can be seen by the Jewish people in a special light. The service of G'd is not a burden, rather it is a gift that glorifies the subject who serves the Master.

The only nation that qualified for the receiving of the Torah was the Jewish people. The nations of the world had failed. One could think that G'd was thus compelled to give the Torah to the Jewish people because they were the only ones who remained qualified. To this, the Torah tells us that G'd chose the Jewish people to serve Him as a gift. He was not compelled- they were truly deserving of His gift.

The blessing that precedes the Shema concludes, “...He chose His nation Israel with love.” This connotes that G'd did not simply choose the Jewish people by default, but rather it was because of His love for them. They were truly qualified.

It is important for one to understand and appreciate that one's obligation to serve G'd is the ultimate privilege and not a burden. G'd chose the Jewish people to serve Him- giving them the opportunity to be glorified through His service. King David was consumed with his love for G'd and continuously throughout Psalms expresses his sense of privilege for being able to perform the mitzvos. As he states, “Fortunate are those who dwell in His house...” Similarly every morning we recite after the introductory morning blessings, “We are fortunate-how good is our portion, how pleasant our lot, and how beautiful our heritage!” It is not enough for one to merely say these words, but rather, one must truly appreciate what he is expressing.

The Jew is commanded to be engaged in Torah study every waking moment. One could perceive this as a burden with no respite. In addition, the recitation of the first paragraph of the Shema is the acceptance of the yoke of heaven. This could connote and further indicate that in fact mitzvos are a burden. Just as a “yoke” rests heavily upon the animal to control it, so too do the mitzvos rest upon the Jew. Reb Chaim of Volozhin z'tl explains that a yoke is not a burden to the animal, rather it causes the animal only to be able to see a straight line before itself without being distracted by what is off to its side. The yoke secures the animal's head so that it is not able to turn it in either direction. Similarly, when one accepts the yoke of heaven, it causes him to be focused on performing the Will of G'd and not be distracted by anything that does not pertain to His Will. It is only in this way that one will appreciate and understand the true value and privilege of doing His Will. Thus, the yoke is a means for one to recognize that he is a beneficiary of the ultimate gift, which is the service of G'd.

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- 7:25 am	Halacha
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna
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 **Derech Hashem**
Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**
Location: Yad Avraham

12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Taanis** Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington