

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES
Parshas Chukas

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Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
<i>1. The Consequence is Determined by the Context</i>	2
<i>2. Experiencing the Pleasure of Torah</i>	3
<i>3. Blessing is the Ultimate Curse</i>	3
<i>4. Seeing Reality Through the Eyes of the Torah</i>	4
<i>5. Perceiving the Individual Who is not Understood</i>	5

Previous Topics

The Key to Come Upon Truth
 Appreciating the Evil of Dason and Aviram
 The Seeming Insanity of Korach's Assembly
 The Basis for the Distortion of Truth
 Maximizing on the Innate Worthiness of the Individual

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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Parshas Chukas

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. The Consequence is Determined by the Context

The Torah tells us that the only way one can be purified from the contamination of the dead is to undergo the ritual of the Red Heifer. In the course of this process the one who was contaminated will become pure and the one who was initially pure becomes contaminated. The Midrash cites a verse from Eyov, “‘Is it possible that something that is pure could emanate from something that is contaminated? There is only One (G’d) who could bring this forth.’ Where do we find that something pure came from something impure/contaminated? The Torah tells us that Avraham (our Patriarch who was pure), was the son of Terach, (who was evil). Chizkiyahu, the king of Judah, (who was pure), was the son of Achaz (the evil one)...The Jewish people who are pure were taken from the nations of the world (who are contaminated). The world to come, which is the ultimate in spiritual purity will emanate from this world, which is mundane and impure. (By utilizing the physical world as a medium to fulfill the Torah, man merits for himself the world to come). Who decreed this to be? Who commanded this to be so? Only G’d, the Blessed One is able to issue this decree.”

Yechezkel the prophet compares the Egyptian people to the donkey (chamor). As he states, “Their flesh is the flesh of donkeys (chamorim).” Maharal of Prague explains that the word “chamor”, is derived from the word chomer – which means material/physical/mundane – devoid of spirituality. Yechezkel quantifies the Egyptian people as chamorim. Among the seventy nations of the world the Egyptian people were the most devoid of spirituality. Because of their level of physicality, the Egyptian people sunk to the lowest depths of depravity such as incest, adultery, witchcraft, and pagan worship.

Maharal of Prague, in his work *Gevuras Hashem*, writes that the reason G’d chose Egypt as the location of bondage for the Jewish people was because it was the most devoid of spirituality. In order to bring about a great level of spiritual growth and advancement it must be in a setting

that possesses the most extreme level of physicality/spiritual contamination. Just as G’d brings forth light from darkness, so too He extracted the Jewish people from Egypt to become His Holy Nation at Sinai. Thus, in order for the Jewish people to develop to their fullest potential and be worthy of receiving the Torah, they had to be enslaved in Egypt for 210 years.

The Gemara tells us that there is nothing more glorious and precious than the Torah itself. G’d said to the Jewish people regarding the Torah, “I have given you My most precious commodity. My Torah you shall not abandon.” If this is so, then why did G’d choose to give the Torah to the Jewish people in the desert which is a setting of desolation and emptiness? One would think that it should have been given in a setting that was more befitting.

The Gemara in Tractate Nedarim explains that the Torah was given in the desert in order to teach us that the only one who can acquire the Torah is the one who negates himself like the desert. Just as the desert has no intrinsic value, so too must one negate his ego.

The Torah tells us that during their 40-year trek in the desert, the Jewish people camped in many locations. In some of the locations they had remained for an extended period of time while in other locations they remained as little as one day. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the reason they needed to camp in these various locations in the desert for specific amounts of time, was to extract the sparks of holiness that existed in this desolation. Although the desert is the primary location of the nether forces of existence, the sparks of holiness are nevertheless found there. Only the awesome spirituality of the Jewish people was able to extract these sparks to become part of their own spirituality.

Based on the principle stated by Maharal, because the desert was a location that is the antithesis of purity and holiness, it is only there that one is able to achieve and ascend to the most advanced level of spirituality. This is similar to the Jewish people evolving out of the impure

environment of Egypt. Because of the infinite preciousness of the Torah, the most appropriate location to bring it into being was the desert setting, which in itself represents the extreme opposite of holiness.

2. *Experiencing the Pleasure of Torah*

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

We beseech G’d in the blessing that is recited prior to the study of Torah that the Torah itself should be sweet in our mouths and in the mouths of our descendants. It is interesting to note that a blessing that is normally recited prior to the performance of a mitzvah does not contain within it a request. However, the blessing prior to the study of Torah contains the request that it should be pleasant in our mouth. The senses of a human being are only sensitive to the physical. How could a physical faculty experience something on a spiritual plane, such as the study of the Torah?

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

The Gemara in Tractate Pesachim tells us that when a person speaks, he must do so in a refined manner, as

the Torah expresses itself regarding G’d’s instruction to Noach. G’d told Noach to gather into the Ark the Kosher and non-Kosher species into the Ark. The Torah is very specific and exacting when choosing its wordage. If something could be stated in a more concise manner, the Torah prefers to express itself in that way rather than the lengthier. However we find an exception to this regarding the instruction of gathering in the non-Kosher species into the Ark. Noach was told to take, “**the pure animal and the not pure animal**” rather than stating, as the Torah could have said, the “pure animal and the contaminated animal.” The Torah chose to express itself in a more lengthy manner to teach us that since the word “contaminated” has a less refined connotation than “not pure” one should choose the more refined manner of expression. Since the mouth was created specifically to articulate the Torah, its expression must be refined.

The Torah states regarding the creation of Adam, “**And Hashem G’d formed the man, dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being (nefesh chaya).**” Targum Unkolus interprets the words “nefesh chaya” as “he (man) became a speaking species. It is with this unique soul that man has the ability to comprehend and speak.”

We see that the power of speech emanates from man’s spirituality/soul. Therefore one should only use his mouth to express words of Torah and that which is permitted by the Torah. It is through this that one sanctifies his mouth and fulfills the purpose of man. However, if one defiles his mouth by speaking negatively about another (Lashon Hara) or by speaking in an unrefined manner, than he is severely damaging the faculty that was created specifically for Torah.

3. *Blessing is the Ultimate Curse*

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 an evil person (rasha), 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 the basis for the loss of the tzaddik, Aaron? What atonement was necessary at this moment, which caused Aaron's passing?

The Gemara in Tractate Kesubos tells us that although the four death penalties are no longer implemented because there is no Sanhedrin (Jewish High Court), the equivalent of these penalties are in effect. For example, if one would have been liable for the death penalty through stoning, he will fall off a roof, which is the equivalent of stoning. If one would have been liable for the death penalty through burning, he would be bitten by a snake. The venom going through his veins is the equivalent of burning...etc. We see that although the four death penalties are not implemented by the court, they are still meted out through other means.

Although the four death penalties are still in effect on a continuous basis, we find people who violate every aspect of the Torah living long and successful lives. Why are they immune from G'd's retribution? Tosfos answers that these evil people are actually being given all of their reward in this world. Consequently, their merit will be depleted and they will not have a share in the world to come.

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 being experienced by the 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 merits in the world to come.

What is perceived as blessing in essence is the ultimate curse. 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) in its most potent form. 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 guise of the Attribute of Justice.

The Edomites who are the descendants of Esav were given dominance over the physicality. They are able to reap material bounty on an exceptional level. In fact, this

is a manifestation of the Attribute of Justice. They will not have a share in the world to come, despite some of the good that had brought about in their lifetime. When the Jewish people attached themselves and were associated with the Edomites by coming within their proximity and domain, they were subject to the same Attribute as the Edomites. This was the Attribute of Justice. However, the Attribute of Justice manifests itself differently regarding the Jewish people. Since the essence of the Jewish people is to bring about a spiritual objective, G'd does not want them to deplete their merit in this world. Thus, when they are under the influence of the Attribute of Justice, they are punished at the most extreme level (in the physical realm) for even the most minute infraction. As King Solomon states, "There is no tzaddik in the Land who does good and does not sin." Therefore, being exposed to Esav, caused the Jewish people's record to be breached. Thus resulting in the tzaddik, Aaron, to be taken from their midst for the sake of atonement.

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 share the fate of the rasha. With our understanding of attaching oneself to the rasha, we can say that it is because he is subject to the same Attribute as the rasha, that he will share his fate.

4. Seeing Reality Through the Eyes of the Torah

The Torah tells us that after Miriam passed away the wellspring ceased and the Jewish people had no water to drink in the desert. They began to quarrel with Moshe. The Torah states, "**Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, 'Take the staff and gather together the assembly...Your shall bring forth for them water from the rock and give drink to the assembly and to their animals...'**" The Midrash explains, "The verse tells us that G'd had provided water in the desert not only for the Jewish people but also for their animals. From here we learn that G'd is concerned for the possessions/assets of the Jewish people." One would think that since the rock that Moshe had struck gave forth water that was sufficient for millions of people it would have also been sufficient to water their animals. However, Chazal tell us differently. Although the rock, being able to give forth water for the entire Jewish people was a miracle, giving forth additional water that was sufficient for their animals was another dimension of miracle. This level of miracle was not discerned by the Jewish people.

The Mishna in Tractate Rosh Hashanah tells us that on the festival of Succos, G'd decrees the amount of water that the world will receive for the entire year. In the merit of bringing the water libations given in the Temple, G'd will cause rains of blessing to come upon the world. All that is needed to be watered will receive sufficient amounts of rain to engender the necessary blessing. However if the Jewish people are not deserving, the amount of rain that was decreed will fall into the oceans and rivers. By G'd telling Moshe to provide water for their animals, it is for us to understand that He is also concerned about the financial standing of the Jewish people.

The Torah states regarding the plague of frogs that came upon the Egyptian people, **“The River shall swarm with frogs and they shall ascend and come into your palace and your bedroom and your bed, and into the house of your servants and of your people, and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls...”** G'd did not simply unleash upon the Egyptian people an unlimited number of frogs that covered the land, but rather He directed the exact number of frogs to their specific locations to exact His retribution from the Egyptian people. As we see the verse delineates the different locations where the frogs were intended to strike as well as the various segments of Egyptian society that were to be affected by the plague. Similarly, regarding the plague of hail that came upon Egypt, the locations and individuals that were destroyed were not random, but rather, each aspect of devastation was intended to happen.

When one experiences material success it is not because of a prosperous financial climate. It is because G'd specifically endowed the individual with the exact amount of material success which was determined on Rosh Hashanah. With our understanding of the verse regarding the water that came forth from the rock, we are able to better appreciate the behavior of Yaakov our Patriarch regarding the small earthenware vessels.

The Torah tells us that Yaakov, our Patriarch returned alone to retrieve “small earthenware vessels” which he had forgotten. Rashi cites a Gemara in Tractate Chullin that states that the devoutly righteous (tzaddikim) value their property more than their own lives. The tzaddik understands that all of his possessions are gifts from G'd. From the most valuable asset to the most insignificant jug, Yaakov understood that G'd's material endowment is exact. Whatever he had was for a specific purpose. Therefore the tzaddik will not be wasteful because he understands that each item reflects another level of G'd's intervention and Divine Purpose. If G'd has concern for the assets of the

Jewish people as we learn from the incident of the rock, so too must the Jewish people cherish their possessions. Unlike the average person, the tzaddik is cognizant of this fact.

5. Perceiving the Individual Who is not Understood

In order to refute Korach's claim against Moshe he had said to Korach and his 250 followers, **“Let each man take his fire-pan and you shall place incense on them...”** Moshe forewarned them that only one of them would survive the test of the incense offering. Ultimately, 250 followers of Korach were burnt. Korach along with his community and their families were then swallowed up by the earth never to be seen again. After the Jewish people had witnessed the Wrath of G'd against Korach and his community, they came to Moshe and Aaron with a complaint, saying, **“You have killed the people of Hashem!”** The miracle that had transpired was not in question, nor was the authenticity of Moshe's prophecy. If this is so, then what was the basis for the people's claim against Moshe and Aaron?

Ramban explains that the basis for the complaint against Moshe and Aaron was that when they had suggested to the members of Korach's assembly to bring an incense offering, Moshe did not mention the Name of G'd. Rather it was his own suggestion. Moshe had chosen a context to verify the authenticity of his own prophecy. He could have chosen another proof, which would have not brought such tragedy upon so many innocent victims who were so special.

It is true that G'd did not suggest this method of verification to reveal the truth. One could also say that while Korach was evil, the 250 sages that comprised his assembly were seduced to follow him. Korach was an awesome personality. He descended from the most prestigious line of the Tribe of Levy- the same as Moshe and Aaron. He was the wealthiest commoner who had ever lived. In addition, he had exceptional wisdom. Thus his power of persuasion was overwhelming. It would seem that Moshe's approach to verify his position was too severe.

Immediately after the Jewish people complained against Moshe and Aaron, the Torah states, **“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Remove yourselves from among this assembly and I shall destroy them (the Jewish people) in an instant.”** When G'd heard that the Jewish people complained against Moshe and Aaron, He brought a plague upon them. It was only because Moshe had sent Aaron into the midst of the Jewish people with the incense

offering that the plague ceased. Why was G'd's reaction to the complaints of the Jewish people so devastating? Seemingly they had a valid claim since G'd did not instruct Moshe regarding the test that killed the 250 sages of Korach's assembly.

Moshe being the conduit of Torah to the Jewish people was a personification of G'd's Will. Every aspect of his being was permeated with G'd's Presence. Moshe's dimension of humility was to the point of total negation- he had only existed for G'd. Thus, any decision or position that was assumed by Moshe was the equivalent of the Word of G'd. Moshe saw the world through the eyes of G'd. This is the concept of "Daas Torah." One who is classified as a "Daas Torah (Torah mind)," All decisions that emanate from him are rooted in the Torah that he possesses. This was something that the Jewish people did not understand. The plague, which was G'd's response and reaction to their complaint, confirmed and established the principle of "Daas Torah."

It is through this lesson that we are able to understand and appreciate that Torah leaders possess a level of clarity, which is known as "Daas Torah." Although it may seem, because they are removed from the mundane, that they are incapable of evaluating and stating a position regarding the issues of the day, this is not so. It is only because people do not appreciate the special dimension of these people that they perceive them in this mistaken manner. Throughout history it has been proven that the most qualified leaders were the Torah sages who possessed "Daas Torah."

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—Chulin
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 (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
12:30 – 1:30pm	Talmud: Pesachim Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue Between E.51 st and E.52 st

Tuesday

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

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