

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
The Portion of
Masei
 July 31, 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
New York
July 31, 2008

B"H

Masei

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

Dean

1. Looking Back to Go Forward

The Mishna in Tractate Taanis tells us that five tragedies occurred on the 9th of Av (*Tisha B'Av*). The decree that the generation of the spies needed to perish in the desert over a forty-year period, the destruction of the First and Second Temple, and the destruction of the community of Beita (Bar Kochva led a rebellion against the Romans and consequently the entire community of Beitar was destroyed. Rambam writes that this tragedy was the equivalent of the destruction of the Temple.). The fifth tragedy that occurred on *Tisha B'Av* was the city of Jerusalem was plowed under. After the Jewish people were driven from the Land, the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem so that there should be no remnant of the Jewish past. How are Chazal able to equate the fifth tragedy with the first four mentioned in the Mishna? Seemingly, the plowing under of Jerusalem, which was only the destruction of the material and physical, is not in the same realm of tragedy as the first four, which was the destruction and exile of the people themselves. However because Chazal did list it together with the others, evidently there is an aspect of the plowing under of the city that is as tragic as the others that are mentioned.

The Romans understood that if they destroyed the past, the history of the Jewish people, they would effectively destroy their future. If there was no remnant of the holy city of Jerusalem, which was the location of the Temple and all of its influences, then the Jewish people would have no frame of reference regarding their spiritual identity. If one is aware of his past, he can have a future if he chooses to pursue it. By plowing under the city, the Romans believed that the Jew would cease to have relevance to his spiritual origins. Without a connection to the past, the Jewish people would become extinct. Thus, the plowing of the city was as tragic if not more so than the others enumerated in the Mishna.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that Reb Yochanon went to visit Rebbe Elazar, a colleague who was ill. When Reb Yochanon entered the room, he saw that it was in completely darkness. Reb Yochanon exposed his arm, that had been covered and caused the room to become illuminated. He radiated holiness, beauty, and a light that was one of a kind. He noticed that Rebbe Elazar was crying. He asked him, "Why are you crying? Is it because you feel that you did not study a sufficient amount of Torah? We had learned that as long as one had studied with the proper intent, for the sake of G'd, it is not relevant how much one actually learned. As it is stated in the Gemara in Tractate Menachos, 'One who does more or one who does less, as long as he intends for the sake of heaven (spiritual standing)'. Are you crying that you did not merit the two tables (the table of Torah and the Table of wealth)? Not everyone merits these two tables..." Rebbe Elazar answered, 'I am crying because of that beauty (referring to the beauty of Reb Yochanon) that will decompose in the earth.' Upon hearing this, Reb Yochanon began to cry also. Reb Yochanon said to Reb Elazar, "This is something worthwhile to cry for."

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia tells us that Reb Yochanon had said about himself that his beauty and radiance was a remnant of those who lived in Jerusalem at the time of the Temple. Although Reb Yochanon had lived hundreds of years after the destruction of the Second Temple, he nevertheless retained that level of holiness. If one wanted to have an inkling of the dimension of holiness that had existed during the Second Temple period, he needed only to gaze upon Reb Yochanon. If one would want to aspire to greatness in spirituality, Reb Yochanon was that special model. However, when Reb Yochanon would pass away that representation of holiness would no longer exist. Thus it would be an end of a spiritual era.

This is the reason Reb Yochanon and Rebbe Elazar cried over that beauty that will decompose in the earth.

Similarly, when the Romans plowed under the city of Jerusalem they attempted to obliterate the spiritual past of the Jewish people, and thus sealing their fate forever.

2. G'd Altering Nature for Who?

Ramban in his commentary cites Rambam's Guide for the Perplexed, "What is the value of the Torah recounting the 42 travels of the Jewish people in the desert, which took place over a 40-year period? The miracles, signs and wonders, which had transpired on behalf of the Jewish people in the desert, were a vivid reality of the Hand of G'd for those who experienced them. The revealed miracles of the Manna and wellspring of Miriam were a factual part of history for the generation of the desert. However, future generations will claim that these events were merely folklore and myth and they did not actually take place. The Jewish people experienced these miracles in the desert in locations that were desolate and far from civilization. They were locations that had no vegetation, bread, or wine. Despite this, G'd provided them with all of their sustenance. G'd understands and knows that with the passage of time people will deny these facts. People will say that the Jewish people survived in the desert because they traveled near the peripheries of communities and therefore were able to secure their needs from those communities. They would come to believe that in fact, there were no miracles. The Jewish people survived in the desert as the nomads do...Therefore the Torah wanted to dispel any consideration that the miracles of the desert never occurred. G'd told Moshe that he must record all that had transpired in the desert so that the future generations should understand that their survival was based on miracle." What is the value of understanding that the Jewish people survived in the desert due to G'd's miracles?

One could say that the reason G'd performed great miracles and wonders on behalf of the Jewish people to survive their trek in the desert was because they are His Chosen People. However, we see from the Midrash that the basis for G'd's miracles goes beyond the fact that the Jewish people are His Chosen.

The Midrash states, "G'd said to the Jewish people, 'My children, be careful regarding the observance of My mitzvos and keeping of My Torah. Understand how many miracles and wonders I have performed for you from the time that I had taken you from Egypt. I have toppled

your enemies. I took you across the Sea and brought fear and dread upon your enemies... I have destroyed the Amorites and the giants. During the 40-year period that you were in the desert, I did not for a moment leave you unattended. Many enemies came upon you and you did not need to flee from them. How many snakes and scorpions did I kill in your presence in the desert? I did not allow them to harm you. It is because of all these miracles that I want you (Moshe) to record all of the travels of the Jewish people in the desert so that they should know the many miracles that I performed for them within every travel." G'd provided the Jewish people with miracles so that they should be able to observe the Torah without distraction or hindrance. Thus, G'd is willing to alter nature and ward off all tragedy from the Jewish people when they are engaged with the Torah and its mitzvos.

It is true, as Rambam states in the Guide for the Perplexed that it is necessary for the Torah to recount all of the 42 travels of the Jewish people so that they should always remember that G'd did in fact perform miracles on their behalf that allowed them to survive. However, He had only altered nature and protected them from their enemies was to allow them to focus on their Torah in an undistracted state.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that Chizkiyahu, the king of Yehudah had established a setting for the Jewish people that was the equivalent of the time of the coming of Moshiach. When he assumed the throne as king, he had given the Jewish people an ultimatum by placing a sword along side a Torah scroll. He had said, "You can either live by the Torah or be pierced by the sword." It was because of this that the Jewish people were fully engaged in Torah study to the degree that even the women and children were fully proficient in the laws pertaining to spiritual purity. Because the Jewish people were engaged in Torah in an undistracted manner, G'd performed a miracle that was the equivalent of the wonders of the desert. When the Assyrian king, Sancherev descended upon Jerusalem with millions of troops to destroy the Temple and the Jewish people, G'd sent the angel Gavriel to annihilate them in an instant. It was because of their selfless dedication to Torah study and mitzvos that the Jewish people merited such a miracle. Similarly, the Torah recounts the 42 locations that the Jewish people traveled so that one should understand and appreciate that G'd performs and alters nature for the Jew who is fully engaged in His Torah and mitzvos. However, if one does not, then he will be subject to the realities of life that exist within the natural order.

3. Setting the Stage for the Jewish People

The Torah states, **“These are the journeys of the Children of Israel...”** The Midrash cites a verse from Psalms, “ ‘You led (*nacheesa*) Your people, like a flock of sheep, by the hand of Moshe and Aaron.’ What is the significance of the word ‘*nacheesa* (You led)’? The word *nacheesa* is an acronym. (The word *nacheesa* is comprised of the letters ‘*nun*,’ ‘*ches*,’ ‘*yud*,’ and ‘*tuf*.’) . Reb Eliezer explains, ‘The ‘*nun*’ refers to the ‘*nissim* (miracles)’ that You performed on behalf of the Jewish people. The ‘*ches*’ refers to ‘*chaim* (life)’ that You gave them. ‘*Yud*’ refers to the ‘*yam suf*’ (the Sea)’ that You split for them. ‘*Tuf*’ refers to the Torah that You gave to them. All of which came through the hand of Moshe and Aaron. (All of the miracles that G’d performed on behalf of the Jewish people culminated with the ultimate objective of giving them the Torah). Reb Yehoshua explains, ‘*nun*’ refers to the *niflaos* (wonders) that You performed for them. ‘*Ches*’ refers to the *cheirus* (freedom) that You gave to them. ‘*Yud*’ refers to Your Right Hand ‘*yamincha*’, through which You led and assisted them. ‘*Tuf*’ refers to the ‘*talui rosh* (prominence/standing)’ that You gave to them. All through the hand of Moshe and Aaron... Rebbe says ‘*nun*’ refers to the *neveim* (prophets) that You established for them. ‘*Ches*’ refers to the *chasidim* (devoutly pious) that You established for them. ‘*Yud*’ refers to the *yesharim* (straight/righteous) that You established for them. ‘*Tuf*’ refers to the *tamimim* (spiritually unblemished) that You established for them through the hand of Moshe and Aaron.”

It is understood that G’d led the Jewish people on a supernatural level. He performed miracles on their behalf, through which He gave them freedom and Torah; however, according to the interpretation of Rebbe who says that G’d established prophets, devoutly righteous, spiritually straight, and unblemished people for the Jewish people, how do we reconcile this with the statement of the Gemara in Tractate Nidah? The Gemara in Tractate Nidah states, “Everything is predestined, except for one’s fear of heaven.” G’d predetermines everything in existence with the exception of one’s spiritual status; whether he will be righteous or evil. This is determined by one’s choice. If so, how do we understand the interpretation of Rebbe?

G’d provides the setting and context within which one is able to make choices. There may be many challenges and difficulties that are presented to the individual; however, through one’s correct choices that are

in conformance with the Torah, one can advance himself spiritually. If one utilizes the opportunities of life properly and meets the challenges as G’d intended, one can ascend to the level of *tzaddik* (righteous), or *chasid* (devoutly pious), or even to the more advanced level of *yashar* (straight). G’d created a context of choice through the hand of Moshe and Aaron who led the Jewish people in a direction to actualize their potential to become prophets and devoutly righteous. The setting of the desert was difficult and replete with challenges. However, there were those who were able to overcome them and establish themselves as righteous, despite the difficulties. G’d did not predetermine their spiritual status, but rather, He provided the setting through which these individuals were able to ascend. This is the meaning of the words of Rebbe.

The verse from Psalms cited by the Midrash states, “You led Your people like a flock of sheep...” The sheep is a docile creature which connotes something that is helpless. Is this the reality of the Jewish people? – a helpless pitiful flock. Rather the Midrash explains, “What is the meaning of ‘like a flock of sheep?’ Sheep can be left out in the fields and do not need to be brought in for protection. Similarly, the Jewish people wandered the desert for forty years. Sheep have no storehouses of food to rely upon for their sustenance. They depend on their grazing in the desert. Similarly, the Jewish people were in the desert for forty years without storehouses of food. They were sustained every day through the Kindness of G’d (by receiving a daily allocation of Manna). Sheep follow the direction of their shepherd. Similarly, the Jewish people followed the direction of Moshe and Aaron throughout the forty years in the desert. Despite the trying times, Jewish people adhered to the direction of their leaders.”

The Jew has inculcated within his spiritual essence a unique level of faith and trust in G’d. He is able to survive from day to day by relying solely upon his trust in G’d. The Jew is thus not encumbered to give charity with an open hand because he has an innate trust that G’d will provide for his needs. He therefore addresses his obligation of charity without concern. The Jew is able to take out time in his day to study Torah and to pray within the context of a quorum, although that time could be utilized for material gain. Through the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvos the Jew is able to appreciate G’d as his Shepherd, upon Whom he can fully rely. He understands that the challenges of life that are presented to him are provided by G’d to allow him to actualize his spiritual potential through proper choices. Thus, the Jew has within his spiritual make up the characteristic of the

sheep that follows its shepherd and does not need to rely on anything but His direction.

4. *The Dynamic of Existence*

The Midrash asks, “Why did the 42 locations to which the Jewish people traveled in the desert merit to be mentioned in the Torah? It is because they accommodated the Jewish people. Ultimately, G’d will give these locations their just reward. As it states in the Prophet Yeshaya, ‘This parched desert will rejoice. It will blossom and sprout...’ If this inanimate and desolate location merited reward for accommodating the Jewish people, how much more so will one merit great blessing/reward for hosting a Torah scholar in one’s home. At the end of time the desert will become a settled location and the communities that are settled will become like a desert. Where do find that the desert will become a settled and fertile location? The verse states, ‘The desert will become a location of flowing brooks of water...’ Where do find that the settled locations will become like a desert? It states, ‘I despised Esav and Edom (*Har Seir*) will be turned into a desert...’ Today we find no trees in the desert. However at the end of time there will be trees...Today the caravans that travel the desert are only guided on their way by the zodiac; however, at the end of time there will be roads in the desert....” Therefore, the 42 desolate locations of the desert to which the Jewish people traveled are mentioned in the Torah to communicate to us that they will receive their just reward for accommodating G’d’s children.

The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah tells us that at the end of time G’d will sit with a Torah Scroll in His lap and He will announce to the world, “Whoever has a share in this Torah, let him come and take his portion (reward)!” The first nation that will come to claim their reward will be the Romans (who destroyed the Second Temple). They will claim, “Whatever we accomplished in this world such building market places, boulevards, bathhouses, and going to battle to amass large amounts of money was all so that the Jewish people should be able to engage in Torah. Therefore we deserve reward.” G’d will respond, “You fools! Everything that you did was for your own self-interest.” G’d will then dismiss them from His Presence and they will leave in a distraught state. All the nations of the world will come before G’d with a similar claim that all that they had accomplished was to accommodate the Jewish people to study the Torah. All of them will be rejected on the same grounds as the Romans. Whatever they had accomplished was for their own sake and not for the Jewish people.

The Brisker Rav z’tl asks, “How is it possible that at the end of time, which is a time of Truth, the nations of the world can come before G’d and blatantly lie that all of their initiatives and successes were only to facilitate the study of Torah for the Jewish people?” He explains that at the end of time truth will become known to all mankind and the nations of the world will realize that existence has only one purpose- to accommodate the Torah and the Jewish people who study it. Consequently, unless an event is directly or indirectly related to that objective it could not come about. As the first verse of the Torah states, **“Bereishis bara Elokeem ais hashemayim v’ais haaretz – In the beginning of G’d created the heaven and the earth...”** The Midrash explains, that the world was created only for the sake of Torah, which is referred to as “*reishis* (first/choicest)” and the Jewish people who are also referred to as “*reishis* (chosen).”

Although at the time the nations of the world were engaged in their pursuits they believed that it had no relevance to Torah or the Jewish people, it will ultimately be revealed to them, that they were only able to succeed because it was G’d’s objective in Creation. Realizing in retrospect that their initiatives did in fact assist the Jewish people, they will come before G’d and claim their reward. However, G’d will dismiss them by saying that because their intent was purely for themselves and unrelated to Torah, they are not deserving of any reward.

The desert, as all existence, was created to accommodate the Jewish people and their pursuit of Torah. The 42 locations in the desert were initially created to host them after the sin of the spies, which resulted in their wandering the desert for forty years. This forty-year period in the desert was the setting for the spiritual rehabilitation for the Jewish people. It allowed them to atone for the sin of the spies and become worthy to enter into the Land that G’d had promised them. In addition, Chazal tell us, “The Torah was given, only to those who ate the Manna.” The Midrash tells us that if the Jewish people would not have transgressed with the spies and had immediately entered into the Land, they would have become preoccupied with tending to their vineyards and fields that each would receive as his rightful portion. They would not have had sufficient time to study and internalize the Torah and its precepts properly. Therefore, G’d brought about a setting in which the Jewish people would be tested and fail so that they could be the beneficiaries of an environment that was removed from material responsibility for forty years. G’d provided all that was needed for their existence for this period of time. Thus, they were able to internalize the Torah to qualify them to be able to transmit it from generation to generation.

The only reason the desert was initially desolate was so that it should fulfill its purpose of providing the location for the rehabilitation of the Jewish people. After fulfilling its purpose as G'd had decreed, the desert at the end of time will merit to become a fertile and settled location. However, the locations of Edom which were only self-serving and were opposed to G'd and His Torah, will be turned into desolation.

The Gemara in Tractate Kesubos tells us that the only one who will be resurrected at the end of time will be the one who had engaged in Torah study. Even the ignorant person (*aam haaretz*), although he did not study Torah himself, if he had assisted a Torah scholar to some degree, he will also merit resurrection. This is because if one is engaged in the objective of existence, which is the fulfillment of Torah, he will merit reward. Since the Torah is eternal, one's reward for engaging in it, even as much as assisting a Torah scholar in his life, will also qualify him to become eternal.

5. Abuse of Rights

The Mishna in Tractate Taanis tells us that five tragedies occurred on the 9th of Av (*Tisha B'Av*). The first tragedy that took place on *Tisha B'Av* was that G'd had decreed that the generation of the spies needed to perish in the desert over a forty-year period. The spies had returned with slanderous and evil reports about the Land that G'd had promised the Jewish people. Rather than having faith and trust in Him they said, **"...It is a land that devours its inhabitants!"** The Jewish people believed the reports of the spies and became distraught. The Torah states, **"The entire assembly raised up and issued its voice; the people wept that night."** The Gemara in Tractate Taanis tells us that in response to their weeping G'd said, "Because you cried for naught (without basis), this day (*Tisha B'Av*) shall be a day of crying for all generations." Consequently, the First and Second Temple, the destruction of the community of Beitar, and the city of Jerusalem was plowed under on the 9th of Av. All of these tragedies came about because the Jewish people chose to believe he spies and cry about their predicament, rather than having faith in G'd.

The Gemara in Tractate Yomah tells us that the First Temple was destroyed because the Jewish people had violated the three cardinal sins – murder, idolatry, and forbidden sexual relations. The Second Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred between Jews (*sinaas chinam*). If the First and Second Temple were destroyed

for the reasons mentioned in the Gemara, unrelated to what had preceded this period of time, why does the Gemara say that their destruction came about because of the baseless crying of the Jewish people on *Tisha B'Av*?

At the time of the sin of the spies, the level of clarity that the Jewish people possessed was unique. They had witnessed the revealed miracles of Egypt. They had experienced the splitting of the Sea. They stood at Sinai and G'd had communicated to them face to face as they heard the Ten Commandments. They survived in the desert with the Manna, the living wellspring, and the Clouds of Glory. Despite, their understanding of G'd and His dedication to them, they did not have sufficient trust in Him. They believed the reports of the spies rather than trusting G'd's Word. After the Jewish people wept, G'd said, **"How long will this people provoke Me, and how long will they not have faith in Me, despite all of the signs that I performed in their midst?"**

When the Jewish people were enslaved in Egypt they were idolaters. Through the revealed miracles that G'd performed on their behalf, He endowed them with a unique level of clarity of which they were not worthy at that time. Their perception of truth was a gift from G'd. Despite this exceptional gift, they chose to see their situation incorrectly. They bemoaned their fate and cried upon hearing the reports of the spies, which was incongruous with what they had witnessed previously. Since at that time they had the ability, because of the clarity with which they were endowed, to make the proper choice and they did not, G'd withdrew the His gift of clarity from them. The Jewish people sinned during the First Temple period through violating the three cardinal sins because of a lack of clarity. Their behavior was considered irrational. Despite the fact that G'd's Presence dwelt in their midst in the Temple, they nevertheless succumbed to the three cardinal sins. G'd's punishment for failing with the spies was measure for measure. Just as they had chosen to ignore truth despite their clarity, G'd chose to withdraw their clarity because it was ignored.

Rambam writes in the Laws of Repentance that when G'd hardened the heart of Pharaoh He withdrew his power of free choice. If one is only culpable for doing evil because he had the choice to refrain from it, then why was Pharaoh culpable for withholding the Jewish people and not heeding the Word of G'd to free them? Rambam explains that initially Pharaoh did have the ability to choose between right and wrong but because he chose to defy G'd, despite the fact that he had openly witnessed the hand of G'd through the first five plagues, G'd revoked his power of choice. Pharaoh had sufficient clarity as a result

of the first five plagues to submit to the Will of G'd; however, he chose to ignore Him. Therefore, G'd withdrew His privilege of choice from Pharaoh so that he could no longer make a choice. This is the meaning of "**I (G'd) have hardened his heart.**" Although Pharaoh's continued perpetration of evil was not within his control, he is held fully culpable for his behavior because it was his choice not to have choice.

G'd provides one with exceptional opportunities in life. However, if one chooses to ignore them or undervalue their significance, G'd will withdraw those opportunity. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos tells us that if one accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah, G'd removes from him the yoke of material and government. However, if one does not accept upon himself the yoke of Torah, G'd will place upon him the yoke of material and government. As it states, "whoever fulfills the Torah in a state of poverty, will be endowed with ability to fulfill it in a state of wealth. Whoever violates the Torah in a state of wealth, will be ultimately violate it in a state of poverty." If one utilizes the gifts that G'd grants him, He will provide more of the same. However, if one abuses or ignores these gifts, then G'd will withdraw them.

YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos (Maharal)
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar – Derech Hashem
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate 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

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

Tuesday

12:10 - 1:10pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
 Location: Yad Avraham

Wednesday

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

1:00—2:00 pm **Daas Tevunos**

Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

11:00 –12:00pm **Duties of The Heart**

Location: Yad Avraham

12:30 – 1:30 pm **Talmud: Megilah** Sunrise Capital 641
 Lexington (25th FL)