

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES

Parshas Mattos

July 28, 2005

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, NY
July 28, 2005

B"H

Parshas Mattos

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. What Does G'd Want from the Jew?

The Torah states, **“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, ‘Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered unto your people (Moshe will pass away).’”** Rashi cites Chazal who state that despite the fact that Moshe understood that he was going to pass away after fulfilling the commandment to destroy the Midianites, “he nevertheless performed the Mitzvah with joy and he did not delay.” If Moshe had decided not to act immediately upon the dictate of G'd, he would have extended his life.

The Midrash extols Moshe by stating, “we see the praiseworthiness of Moshe that his response was without delay.” It is inferred from the Midrash that even for a person of Moshe's dimension to act as he had done is considered “praiseworthy.” Although Moshe's level of prophecy was one of a kind, nevertheless if he would have not acted immediately, it would have not been considered a failing. It is clear from the words of Chazal that even Moshe, at his special level, had difficulty adhering to the dictate of G'd without delay. Had this not been the case, his actions would not have been considered “praiseworthy.”

The Torah states in the Portion of Shelach, **“Send for yourself men (spies).”** Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that “for yourself” means that it is in Moshe's best interest to send the spies. If the Jewish people had entered the Land immediately, Moshe would have passed away. However, because of their lack of faith, the Jews wandered in the desert for 40 years. Moshe's life was thus extended for an additional thirty-nine years. During this period the Jews benefited greatly from his presence, influence and the continuous transmission of Torah. Under Moshe's tutelage and leadership the Jewish people were brought to another level

The Torah tells us that G'd said to Moshe (in the Book of Devarim) that the Jews will not engage in idolatry

until after his passing. Rashi in his commentary cites the Midrash, which asks why the Jews had only become idolaters after the passing of Moshe's disciple, Yehoshua Bin Nun, and not immediately after his passing. The Midrash answers that we are able to learn from this verse that as long as his disciple was alive it was as if Moshe's own influence was still in effect. The Gemara tells us that the face of Moshe is compared to the sun and the face of Yehoshua is compared to the moon. Meaning although Moshe had passed on, Yehoshua (his disciple) reflected the greatness and holiness of his teacher (as the moon reflects the light of the sun). Moshe's conflict, regarding immediately waging war against the Midianites, was since his continued presence had greatly enhanced the spirituality of the Jewish people (until this point), he would be able to justify delaying the war with the Midianites. However, he chose not to delay and immediately addressed his obligation. He is therefore extolled for his decision.

Yehoshua Bin Nun had led the Jewish people into the Land of Israel. Upon entry, G'd commanded him to conquer and divide the Land among the twelve tribes. Yehoshua understood that after the conquest and dividing of the Land, he would pass away. He therefore chose to delay in order to extend his life. He did so because he understood that as long as he was alive the Jewish people would not engage in idol worship. The Midrash tells us that initially he was meant to live 120 years like his Rebbe, Moshe; however, because of his delay, G'd shortened his life by ten years. Although Yehoshua's delay was purely for the sake of G'd, he nevertheless forfeited ten years of his life for this failing.

If Chazal speak of Moshe's “praiseworthiness” for his decision not to delay in destroying the Midianites, why was Yehoshua culpable and punished for his decision to delay? Despite Moshe's dimension of person and clarity, he would not have been faulted if he had delayed. Why then was Yehoshua, his successor, punished for not performing a “praiseworthy” act.

Once Moshe Rabbeinu established a precedent in this circumstance, although it was considered “praiseworthy” (for him), nevertheless it must be followed without deviation. Moshe’s decision established and dictated that one should not take into account what he personally believes to be in the best interest of the Jewish people. Rather one must adhere to the mitzvah at hand. When G’d gives a Commandment, it should be fulfilled without delay despite the consequences that will follow. Yehoshua, the disciple of Moshe, should have followed the precedent set by his rebbe Moshe. Because he failed, G’d took ten years from his life.

There are many instances when we want to establish proper behavior. Regardless of our mindset, justification, and good intentions, the Torah has set the standard. We must follow the Law regardless of the consequences. There is no basis to compromise the standard that was set forth by the Torah for any reason. This is what the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) is teaching us, “Make for yourself a Rav... (Mentor).” A Rav is a Torah personality who has clarity and proficiency in Torah and therefore is able to communicate the standard that is expected by the Torah. If we follow this prescription of life, despite our conflicts, we will follow the proper path.

2. When Is One Sufficiently Qualified to Swear in the Name of G’d

The Gemara tells us that if one violates a vow or an oath there are grave consequences. The Midrash states, “One must be careful regarding vows, that he should not breach them, because if one breaches a vow he will come to violate an oath.” The Torah states, “**Do not desecrate your word.**” Chazal explain that if one desecrates his word through breaching a vow, he will ultimately come to violate his oath. The Midrash continues, “One who violates his oath is considered a heretic. It is as if he is denying the existence of G’d. This individual will not be forgiven. As it states, “**G’d will not vindicate the one who pronounces His Name in vain.**”

Why, if one violates his oath, is he considered a heretic? Seemingly, violating an oath is more serious than violating a vow. In order for an oath to be considered valid, it must contain the Name of G’d. Thus, if one were to violate his oath, it is considered a desecration of the Name of G’d. When one breaches his oath, or swears falsely, he is demonstrating a disregard for G’d and is thus considered a heretic.

The Midrash states, “G’d said to the Jewish people. ‘Do not make an oath – even if it is done truthfully. Do not utilize My Name. It is only if one possesses certain special/unique characteristics can one swear with My Name. As it states, ‘**You must fear G’d...**’ and ‘**You must serve Him and cleave to Him...**’ One must be similar to those who are referred to as ‘G’d-fearing.’ Who are these individuals? Avraham, Job, and Yosef. Regarding Avraham the verse states, ‘...**I know that you revere G’d because you did not withhold your son from Me.**’ Regarding Job the verse states, ‘...**he feared G’d...**’ Regarding Yosef the Torah states, ‘**I (Yosef) revere G’d...**’” Avraham demonstrated his reverence for G’d when he did not withhold his son Yitzchak from being brought as a sacrifice. We see from this that one needs to demonstrate a level of reverence for G’d similar to that of Avraham our Patriarch who was willing to sacrifice his only son. True reverence for G’d is demonstrated in situations that are difficult and not only when one experiences good fortune.

The Torah tells us that before Yosef had revealed himself to his brothers, he had said to them “I fear G’d.” He said this when he had retained Shimon his brother as a hostage. Yosef made this declaration to assure his brothers that his intentions were sincere and he had no interest in harming them. Despite Yosef’s inner conflict with his brothers who had sold him into slavery, he did not allow these feelings to interfere with his proper conduct because he feared G’d. He ultimately accommodated his brothers in Egypt to prepare the way for the Jewish exile that was going to take place. He had assumed full responsibility for all their material needs. Had it not been for Yosef, the Jewish people would not have been able to survive and ultimately be redeemed from Egypt. His reverence for G’d superseded was his primary focus.

It is this dimension of person, who is imbued with the fear of G’d and whose priority is only to do G’d’s Will, who is allowed to swear in His Name. This individual, because of his degree of reverence will not utilize His Name in vain. If one does not possess this special level of reverence, he does not have the needed sensitivity; therefore, he is not permitted to swear/take an oath – even truthfully.

It is interesting to note that the Gemara tells us in Tractate Taanis that the study of Torah could be either a “life potion” or a “death potion.” Tosfos explains that if one studies Torah with a sinister intent to undermine others, it is a death potion for that individual. Why should

the consequences of studying Torah with a negative intent be so extreme?

Ramban in his introduction to the Torah explains that the sanctity of a Torah scroll is based on the fact that the entire Torah is actually the various Names of G'd. The Torah reads only as it does because G'd had conjugated the letters of His Name to read as they do. If one letter or word was written incorrectly the entire Torah scroll is invalidated because one of the Names of G'd was not written correctly. Thus, one who studies Torah is actually engaging in the Names of G'd. Therefore, if he were to study the Torah with a sinister intent, it is understandable that it should affect him as a death potion. Just as the one who utilizes/enunciates the Name of G'd in vain when taking an oath is subject to grave consequences and is not forgiven, so too the one who engages in Torah study with a negative intent is misusing the Name of G'd. The Gemara tells us that is better that this individual should not have been born. Conversely, when one studies Torah with the proper intent it is an expression of reverence, which brings about the greatest level of blessing.

3. *One's Threshold for Chilul Hashem*

The Torah states regarding the battle against Midian, **“Moshe sent them – a thousand from each tribe for the legion – them and Pinchas son of Elazar the Kohan...”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that since the verse identifies the legion of soldiers as one entity and Pinchas as a separate entity, “them and Pinchas,” the Torah is indicating that Pinchas was the equivalent of the legion of 12,000 men. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks, “Why did Moshe choose to send Pinchas into battle with the 12,000 troops? This was not part of G'd's commandment.”

Pinchas had killed Zimri, the Prince of the tribe of Shimon, when he engaged in sexual relations with the Midianite princess. Zimri's behavior was a public chilul Hashem (desecration of G'd's Name) and could not be tolerated by Pinchas. He thus acted zealously (as the Torah allows) and killed Zimri, despite his prestigious status as a prince. It was because of Pinchas' zealotry that G'd did not destroy the entire Jewish people. In contrast to Pinchas, the remainder of the Jewish people remained silent in the face of the chilul Hashem. They were not moved by it to any degree, thus indicating that they were able to tolerate a public desecration of G'd's Name. Because of their silence and inaction, there was a claim against the Jewish people.

When Moshe sent the men into battle, he understood that in order to survive and be victorious in battle, one needs great merit. In a time of danger, satan prosecutes unrelentingly. The prosecution against the Jewish people would have been – why did they remain silent when a public chilul Hashem was being done in their presence? Thus, Moshe chose Pinchas, who could not tolerate G'd's Name being desecrated and thus did not remain silent, to lead the men into battle. In the merit of Pinchas, they all merited Divine Protection because satan's prosecution was silenced.

The Torah tells us that at the time of the sin of the Golden Calf, G'd wanted to destroy the Jewish people, although they were not actually engaged in its worship. Only the *eirev rav* (rabble), and not the Jewish people, were responsible for the Golden Calf. Sforno explains that the claim against the Jewish people was that they remained silent and did not stop a public desecration, at the most extreme level, of G'd's Name. After, hearing the Ten Commandments and receiving the Torah at Sinai, how could the Jews tolerate such a chilul Hashem? How could they have remained silent? Despite their level of clarity, they remained silent, indicating that they were able to tolerate the evil that was being perpetrated in their midst. Therefore, they deserved to be destroyed.

Moshe's response to the sin of the Golden Calf was that he called the Jewish people into action by saying, **“Whoever is for G'd come with me...”** The tribe of Levi, which was the smallest of the tribes, joined Moshe to kill those who were engaged in the idolatry. The remainder of the Jewish people remained silent and did not prevent Moshe and the Leviyim from killing the idolaters. Sforno explains that this second silence of the Jews was a correction for their first silence (when they did not react to the sin). Similarly, when the Jewish people remained silent, when Pinchas acted zealously by killing Zimri, it was a correction for their initial silence when they were not moved by Zimri's chilul Hashem.

The Gemara in Tractate Taanis states, “If one sees a Torah sage becoming angry, he should know that it is due to the fire of Torah that is burning within him. As the verse states, **‘My Words are like fire...’**” Rashi explains that because of his dimension of Torah, the sage has an appreciation and understanding of the wrong that is being perpetrated. He thus has difficulty tolerating a transgression.

When one sees a fellow Jew deviating from the path of Torah does it affect him in any way, or is it

ignored? If one sees his fellow/brother acting in a self-destructive manner does he remain silent? It is only the one who has clarity through the Torah and appreciates the gravity of the wrong, who will respond/react to the intolerable situation.

4. *Moshe's Intolerance of Idolatry*

The Torah tells us that the legion of 12,000 men and Pinchas returned from battle against Midian with the spoils of war. They had killed all the males; however, they spared the women. When Moshe was informed of this, he became angered with the leaders. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Moshe was angered only with the leaders because it was their responsibility to lead and direct the people. Moshe rebuked them saying, **“Did you let every female live? Behold - Hein, heina hayu l'bnei Yisroel- They, they caused the Children of Israel, by the word of Bilaam, to commit a betrayal against Hashem regarding the matter of Peor...”** Since it was the Midianite women who had seduced the Jewish men into promiscuity and the idolatrous act of Baal Peor, they deserved to die. Thus, Moshe gave the order to kill the women.

When Moshe referred to the Midianite women, the Torah states, **“Hein, heina hayu l'bnei Yisroel... (They, they caused the Children of Israel...)”** Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks, ‘Why does the Torah reiterate the expression “hein, heina – they, they...?” It would have been sufficient to say, “Hein – they.’ In addition, why did Pinchas and the men who accompanied him (who are referred as “anashim – men” – meaning tzaddikim) not understand the need to kill the Midianite women? Pinchas was the zealot who had no tolerance for chilul Hashem (desecration of G’d’s Name) as was demonstrated through his response to Zimri. How could he allow the women to live and be taken as spoils of war when they were responsible for this desecration of G’d’s Name?”

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that Bilaam understood that he would not be able to curse the Jewish people unless they engaged in forbidden sexual relations. Thus, Bilaam instructed Balak that the Midianite women should lure the Jewish men into promiscuity. The men of Midian agreed that their wives and daughters should engage sexually with the Jews to facilitate Bilaam’s curse. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that when the Midianite women were engaging with the Jewish males, they would only do so if the Jewish males would worship the idol of Baal Peor. The Midianite women had made worshipping Baal Peor a precondition to having sexual

relations with them. The Baal Peor was purely the initiative of the Midianite women.

Initially when the legion of Jewish men and Pinchas went to war with Midian, they had believed that the Midianite men bore the responsibility for causing the Jewish men to fail. They understood that the women, being completely under the jurisdiction and direction of their husbands/fathers, had little independent say in the matter. Thus, they were not fully culpable for this heinous act because they were acting under duress. Therefore, Pinchas and the legions spared the Midianite women. However, Moshe appreciated their culpability. It was true that they were coerced into promiscuity; however, they were the ones who initiated the sin of Baal Peor. Therefore, they must be killed. As the verse states regarding the killing of the women, Moshe said, **“...by the word of Bilaam... and the matter of Peor”** - indicating that the word of Bilaam was unrelated to the sin of Peor. Bilaam only suggested the sexual seduction of the Jewish males. However, the Midianite women initiated the matter of Baal Peor, which was idolatry. Moshe was the only one who fully grasped the situation in its entirety.

When Moshe realized that they had spared the Midianite women, he became angered. After this incident, the Torah tells us how the spoils of war that were taken from Midian (*Klei Midian- Midianite vessels*) should be purged. The Torah states, **“Elazar the Kohen said to the men...Only the gold and silver...everything that comes into fire – you shall pass through fire and it will be purified.”** Why was this commandment communicated by Elazar and not through Moshe?

Rashi cites Chazal who explain, that because Moshe had become angry, the halacha (law) was concealed from him. Thus, he was not able to communicate these laws. It is interesting to note that previously when Moshe was angered, he had also lost his clarity (regarding the striking of the rock). Moshe, being the ultimate person who had totally negated himself before G’d was one of absolute clarity. If this were so, why would Moshe become angry? Why was he not able to restrain himself regarding the women who had initiated Baal Peor?

The Torah tells us that Moshe was to be buried opposite the location of the (incident) Baal Peor. What relevance does Moshe have to Baal Peor – that his burial location should be in its proximity? Moshe represented and epitomized G’d at the most obvious and advanced level. For Moshe, idolatry was the ultimate affront to G’d. Because he internalized this to his essence, idolatry was

detested at the most extreme level. As, the most humble man who ever lived, Moshe was negated before G'd. Every aspect of his existence was only for G'd. Thus, he was the only one who could despise idolatry at this level, because it is the antithesis of G'd. Therefore, Moshe could not restrain himself regarding the women who initiated the Baal Peor. The basis for his anger was his absolute devotion to G'd. Moshe was the ultimate counterforce to idolatry. Therefore, his burial location is opposite the Baal Peor. If there were any prosecution against the Jewish people for the incident of Baal Peor, the merit of Moshe would counter and silence it.

Regarding Avraham, our Patriarch, he had personally hosted his guests (the three angels) with all the amenities that were needed except for water, which was provided through an intermediary. Chazal tell us that everything that Avraham provided himself, G'd rewarded the Jewish people in the desert directly. For those amenities that Avraham provided through an intermediary, G'd rewarded the Jewish people through an intermediary. Thus, performing the acts of hospitality himself had a greater value than through an intermediary. If this is so, then why did he not provide the water himself?

Avraham's objective in existence was to dispel paganism and espouse monotheism. Avraham was even willing to die for his beliefs. Avraham wanted his guests to cleanse their feet from the dust because he believed that they were idolaters who worshiped the dust. He did not want idolatry to be tracked into his home. Rather than providing the water himself, he offered it to them through an intermediary because he despised and detested any association with idolatry. He had suspected that it was the dust of idol worship – from which he wanted to be completely disassociated. Thus, the water in the desert needed to be extracted from the rock.

If Avraham, who refers to himself as “dust” (indicating his level of humility), detested idolatry to such a degree, how much more so did Moshe detest idolatry – as he refers to himself as “what are we (nothing).” Moshe's unique level of humility and negation to G'd was the basis of his anger.

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5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos
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: Sanhedrin 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: Sanhedrin Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th 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: Sanhedrin Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street

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