

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES
Parshas Mattos-Masei
 July 21, 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
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B"H

Parshas Mattos-Masei

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

Dean

1. How Man's Initiative Alters History

The Torah tells us that after the incident of Baal Peor that was precipitated by the Midianites and the Moabites, G'd commanded Moshe to destroy Midian. Although the Moabite women engaged with the Jewish males and precipitated the plague, G'd did not command Moshe to destroy the Moabite people. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the reason the Moabites were spared was because two special women were destined to come from Moab and Amon. Ruth, the grandmother of King David was a Moabite who had converted. If Moab were destroyed, Ruth would not have come into being and consequently there would not have been a Davidic line. In addition, Naama who was a righteous convert was destined to come from Amon. Thus, the Amonites were also spared.

Ramban explains, "Based on a simple understanding, G'd did not allow Amon and Moab, who were the descendents of Lot (Avraham's nephew), to be destroyed and their land conquered because He had given the land to them as an inheritance. It was in the merit of Lot, their ancestor who joined his uncle Avraham, the tzaddik, in exile and attended to his needs. Lot allowed himself to be exiled from his homeland to wander with Avraham. He merited having the land as an inheritance for his descendants. It is because of this merit that G'd told Moshe to spare the Amonites and Moabites. However, despite the merit of their ancestor, they personally had failed as a people because they did not offer bread and water to the Jewish people in the desert. Consequently, G'd punished them by keeping them separate from His people. The Torah tells us that even if a Moabite or Amonite converts, he is to be considered illegitimate and never to marry into the Jewish people. This punishment is measure for measure – just as they had kept the Jewish people at a distance from themselves in the desert, so too will they be distanced from the Jewish people by not being allowed to marry within them." It is because of the special

merit of Lot, who went into exile with Avraham, our Patriarch, that Lot's descendants (Amon and Moab) were spared, despite the physical and spiritual devastation they had brought upon the Jewish people through the Baal Peor.

In the Portion of Lech Lecha, G'd told Avraham to leave his homeland, community, and family. It was only after he extricated himself completely from his surroundings and family would he have relevance to the Divine Presence and all of G'd's blessings. When Avraham left his homeland, Lot, his nephew accompanied him. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that Lot accompanied his uncle without the endorsement or encouragement from Avraham. Although Avraham understood that Lot would be a spiritual detriment to him, he did not turn him away because he was orphaned after his father had given his life for the sake of G'd. The Torah tells us that G'd appeared to Avraham "only after Lot had separated himself from him."

It is interesting to note that although Lot's accompaniment of Avraham into exile was an obstacle to Avraham's relationship with G'd, he nevertheless reaped far-reaching reward for accommodating the needs of his uncle. It was because of this merit that Amon and Moab were not destroyed, despite their culpability regarding the incident of the Baal Peor. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that Amon and Moab had encouraged Nebuchadnezzar (Babylonian emperor) to conquer the Land of Israel, which ultimately led to the destruction of the First Temple. Although Nebuchadnezzar was initially hesitant to go, he was convinced by Amon and Moab enticements. They had said, "The graves of the Jews in Israel are more beautiful than the palaces of Babylon."

We see how valuable and far-reaching are the effects of accommodating a tzaddik. Even if an action is done out of self-interest and against the will of the tzaddik,

if in fact the tzaddik is a beneficiary of the individual's association/action he is deserving of exceptional reward.

After the battle between the Four Kings and the Five Kings, Lot was taken captive by the Four mighty Kings. The Midrash tells us that Og, the king of Basha, was the only one to survive the battle. He went to Avraham and informed him that his nephew Lot was taken captive by the victors. Og's ulterior motive was to encourage Avraham to go to war against the Four kings so that he should be killed. Og would then be able to take Sarah, the wife of Avraham, as his own. Because of Og's information, Avraham went into battle and miraculously defeated the Four mighty Kings. The Midrash tells us that because Og benefited Avraham by informing him about the capture of Lot, he merited having his life extended hundreds of years. The Torah tells us that many generations later when Moshe was going into battle against Og, he was fearful that he would not succeed. G'd responded, "Moshe do not be afraid." Rashi cites Chazal, "Moshe was not frightened when he went to kill Sichon the king of Emori, who was a giant as powerful as Og. Why was he only frightened from the confrontation with Og? It was because Moshe was concerned that Og still had retained some of the merit for accommodating Avraham, hundreds of years earlier." Once again, we see the far-reaching value of one's contribution to a tzaddik, although it may seem to be something that is insignificant and lacking in purity and proper motive.

2. Pitting the Power of the Jew against the Nations of the World

The Torah states regarding the destruction of the kings of Midian, **"They killed the kings of Midian... and Bilaam son of Beor they slew with the sword."** Rashi cites the Midrash, "Why does the Torah reveal to us specifically that Bilaam was killed by the sword? It is because he came against the Jewish people by exchanging his vocation for the vocation of the Jewish people. The power of the Jew lies within his verbal expression of prayer and supplicating G'd. Bilaam chose to assume the profile of the Jewish people by attempting to curse them through his verbal expression. Thus, the Jewish people assumed the profile/vocation of the nations of the world and killed Bilaam with the sword. As the verse states (regarding the vocation of the world), 'By the sword you shall live.'"

The Torah tells us that Yitzchak blessed Yaakov and Esav by saying, "The voice is the voice of Yaakov and

the hands are the hands of Esav." He had said to his son Esav, "By the sword you shall live." Yitzchak had quantified the power of Yaakov as emanating from his power of speech. On the other hand, the power of Esav rests in his sword. Seemingly, just as Yaakov's ability was unique to him, so too was Esav's blessing unique to him. However, the Midrash cited earlier states, "...The Jewish people assumed the profile/vocation of the nations of the world (by killing Bilaam with the sword)..." This implies that the blessing of "By the sword you shall live" is not limited to Esav, but rather it is the profile of the nations of the world.

Esav was the first-born of Yitzchak his father and believed that he was the rightful heir apparent to the future of the Jewish people. However, when Yitzchak realized that his first-born had sold his birthright to Yaakov, he had said, "The hands are the hands of Esav..." Meaning that Esav was being quantified as being no different than the nations of the world who have no relevance to spirituality. Yitzchak's statement was only a quantification of the reality of his son Esav. It was only Yaakov, who was "the perfect man who dwelt in the tent (of Torah)" that possessed the unique level of spirituality.

The Midrash in Eichah explains the words of Yitzchak "The voice is the voice of Yaakov..." to mean, "As long as there are chirpings (verbal expression of Torah study and tefillah (prayer)) in the synagogues and study halls, G'd will not allow the hands to be the hands of Esav. However, if there are no chirpings (the Jews are not engaged in Torah study and prayer), then G'd forbid the hands will be the hands of Esav." Esav would assume a dominant position to be able to inflict serious harm upon the Jewish people. As long as the Jew engages in his spirituality through Torah study and prayer, the nations of the world will not be able to overpower the Jew. However, when the Jewish people falter in the area of spirituality, the nations of the world are empowered.

Given the grave and tenuous situation in Israel and the world at large, we must remember that our victory does not lie in military prowess and strategic capability alone. Rather, it is in our verbal expression of Torah and prayer/tefillah. This is the only way we will surely incapacitate and defeat our enemies.

3. The Subtlety of One's Decision Reveals One's True Intent

The Torah states, **“The children of Reuvain and the children of Gad had abundant livestock –very great.”** Because of their enormous herds and flocks, the tribes of Reuvain and Gad needed vast grazing land. They approached Moshe and requested that they be allowed to remain on the other side of the Jordan (not receiving a share in the Land of Israel). Moshe initially did not react well to their request; however, G’d stipulated that if they assisted their brothers in the conquest of the Land, they would be permitted to settle in the location that they had requested.

The Midrash states, “G’d created three gifts for the world – wisdom, power, and wealth. If one merits any one of them, it is considered that he has achieved something of the most precious value. If one has wisdom, he has everything. If one has power, he has everything. If one has wealth, he has everything. When is it considered the ultimate good fortune? It is when it is a gift of G’d and it emanates from Him directly. The wisdom, power and wealth created by man is meaningless. As King Solomon writes, ‘Those who are swift, will not be able to run. Those who are powerful will not be victorious in war...’ If these gifts are not granted to the individual by G’d Himself, they will ultimately come to an end. There were two wise men that existed in the world – one of them a Jew, the other a gentile – Achitofel was the wise man of the Jewish people, and Bilaam was the wise gentile. Both of them were lost from this world and the world to come. There were two powerful people who existed in the world ...Shimshon was from the Jewish people and Goliath was from the nations of the world. Both of them were lost from this world and the world to come. There were two wealthy people...Korach from the Jewish people and Haman from the nations of the world. Both of them were lost from this world and the world to come. Why were they lost? It is because the wisdom, power, and wealth that they had, was not a gift from G’d, but rather it was something that they had grabbed for themselves. We see that the tribe of Reuvain and Gad had abundant livestock. They greatly valued their wealth. It is because of their attachment to their wealth that they were willing to settle outside of the Land of Israel and separate themselves from their Jewish brethren. Because they chose to live outside of the Land and were willing to remove themselves from their brethren, that they were the first of the tribes to be exiled before the destruction of the First Temple (by Sancheirev, the Assyrian king).” The tribes of Reuvain and Gad were two of the holy tribes of Israel that are referred to by King David as “the Tribes of G’d.” They had experienced the miracles of the desert and Sinai. How could they justify

separating themselves from the Jewish people because of their livestock/for the sake of monetary gain? There must have been some basis of justification for their decision.

The Torah tells us that before Moshe passed away he blessed the tribes of Israel. Regarding Gad he had said, **“...Blessed is He Who broadens Gad...He chose the first portion for himself, for that is where the lawgiver’s plot is hidden...”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Reuvain and Gad chose the land on the trans Jordan side outside of Israel because they knew that Moshe (the lawgiver) would be buried there. The justification to settle outside of the Land of Israel was that they would settle in the location in which Moshe, the holiest person to ever live, was buried. This was sufficient reason for them to equate the trans Jordan side to the Land of Israel itself. While this may have been a justification; however, the driving force for them to settle outside of the Land was the degree to which they valued their monetary possessions. In fact they had said to Moshe that when they had made the offer to join their brothers in conquest of the Land, that they would first build barns and corrals to protect their herds/flocks and then build homes for their families. Moshe responded to them by saying that they had their priorities reversed. Their first priority should be to protect their families and address their needs. Secondly, they should accommodate the needs of their possessions.

The Torah by emphasizing the point that Reuvain and Gad had abundant cattle reveals to us that the basis for their decision not to enter the Land and separate themselves from their brothers was their wealth. Because their priorities were not proper, G’d considered their wealth not as His gift, but rather something that they had grabbed for themselves. Just as those who did not receive the gift of wealth from G’d were lost from this world and the world to come (Korach and Haman), so too was the wealth of these two tribes to their detriment. It was because of their unjustified priority (wealth before the Land of Israel and community) that they were ultimately the first to be exiled.

4. Recognizing G’d’s Kindness on a Spiritual and Physical Plane

Towards the end of the forty-year period of wandering in the desert, Moshe was told by G’d to recount to the Jewish people all of the locations to which they had journeyed during this period of time. Why was it important for Moshe to identify these locations to the Jewish people?

Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "It was important for Moshe to recount all of these locations to the Jewish people to inform us of the Kindness (Chesed) of G'd. Although G'd had decreed that the Jewish people were to wander in the desert for a period of forty years as a punishment for the sin of the spies, one could think that they were wandering during this period without a respite. The Torah informs us that the Jewish people had only traveled over this period to 42 locations. However, before G'd issued the decree they already had traveled to 14 of these locations. In the fortieth year, they had traveled an additional eight locations. In essence, they had only traveled to 20 locations over a 38-year period. Thus revealing to us G'd's Kindness that they did in fact have a respite." Although the Jewish people, during their first year in the desert had failed seriously with the Golden Calf, G'd chose to forgive them after Moshe had supplicated Him. At that point, they were meant to enter into the Promised Land, the Land of Israel. Until that point, the Jewish people had witnessed the revealed Hand of G'd in many guises – the Ten Plagues in Egypt, the Splitting of the Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army, the Manna, the wellspring of Miriam, the Clouds of Glory, and experiencing G'd face-to-face at the time of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Despite their familiarity with G'd and understanding His commitment to the Jewish people, they chose to send spies to scout out the Land. The initial request itself was an indication of a lack of trust/faith in G'd and especially when it manifested itself with slanderous reports about the Land. They had believed that G'd's intent was to take them into the Land to be destroyed. The Jewish people's failing at this moment was unforgivable because of G'd's credibility and intent had already been proven beyond any doubt. G'd thus decreed that the generation between the ages of 20 and 60 were to wander and perish over a forty-year trek in the desert. It seems that the punishment was commensurate with the gravity of the sin. Even if the Jews' wandering was continuous without any respite over the forty-year period, if it was necessary for their spiritual rehabilitation, why should it be perceived as cruel? Why would G'd need to demonstrate any level of Kindness if the punishment was equitable to address their transgression?

The Torah is revealing to us that despite the graveness of their failing, G'd chose to rehabilitate them without the need for continuous wandering. In essence, what the Jewish people truly needed for their spiritual rehabilitation was an unceasing/uninterrupted sense of

displacement. It was only because of G'd's Kindness that their rehabilitation came about despite their respite. For example, if one needs to undergo a certain type of therapy in order to be cured from a serious illness, despite the fact that the therapy may be painful and lengthy, the patient does not see it as cruelty, but rather, as fortunate. Although the patient may wish and hope that the duration of the therapy should be over a short period of time, he understands that in order to bring about the desirable result, it is not possible. Similarly, although the Jewish people needed to wander the desert for forty years uninterruptedly in order to be fully rehabilitated, G'd's Kindness (Chesed) dictated that this was not necessary. Rather they were to travel to only 28 locations in order to bring about that same result.

Rambam writes in his work, Guide to the Perplexed, "Why was it necessary for Moshe to recount the 42 journeys of the Jewish people in the desert? It is so that the future generations would understand and appreciate the continuous miracles that were performed on their behalf that allowed them to exist in the desert. The generation that personally experienced the miracles would have no difficulty believing in them, because they were beneficiaries of those events. However, the generations in the future who did not witness the miracles will question the basis of the survival of the Jewish people. They would say that it was only because the Jewish people's travels were within the proximity of civilization that they were able to survive. They were able to purchase all of the provisions that were necessary to continue in the desert. Therefore, the Torah recounts the locations that were traveled by the Jewish people to dispel this notion. Identifying the locations communicates that without G'd's Intervention and providing miraculously for all of their needs, the Jewish people would not have been able to survive the desolation of the desert."

It is important for all future generations to draw from the events and experiences of the Jewish people in the desert. Just as G'd provided for them in the desert, despite their predicament, so too is He involved in our lives continuously enabling us to exist. As Ramban explains in his commentary in the Portion of Bo, that the natural order of existence is in fact a concealed miracle because it only continues due to G'd continuous Willing of nature.

5. The Power of Speech is the Spiritual Expression of the Jew (From Pinchas)

The Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Laws) states, "One is obligated to fast on the ninth of Av, 17th of Tammuz, 3rd of Tishrei, and the tenth of Teves. These four fasts are based on verses and were legislated by the prophets. The reason one must fast during these times is to commemorate all of the tragedies that occurred on those dates." The Chofetz Chaim in his commentary Mishna Brurah writes, "One must fast on these days in order to arouse feelings of repentance for one's shortcomings. It is because of our conduct and the behavior of our forefathers that tragedy befalls the Jewish people. By remembering the tragedies, which occurred in the past, it will cause one to introspect... The essence of the value of the fasts is to improve oneself and correct the wrong that was committed."

The three-week period begins with the fast of the 17th of Tammuz and concludes with the fast on the 9th of Av. The event, which took place on the 17th of Tammuz, was the breach of the walls of Jerusalem, which ultimately led to the destruction of the Second Temple on the 9th of Av. This three-week period is a time of reflection and introspection.

Chofetz Chaim z'tl cites in his work Chofetz Chaim that although the Babylonian Talmud explains that the Second Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred (sinaas chinam) between Jews, the Jerusalem Talmud states that the primary failing was lashon hara (evil speech). Lashon hara is an expression of sinaas chinam. The failing in the area of negative speech is one with grave and far-reaching consequences.

The power of speech is one of the most powerful aspects of the human being. For example, if one only meditates upon his prayers but does not verbalize them, they have no value and have no effect. Similarly, the study of Torah, in order to have a greater effect, must be articulated.

When one damages and putrefies his power of speech by engaging in negative speech (lashon hara)/slander his verbal expression becomes greatly compromised. Consequently, the value of his supplications and Torah study are diminished. The power of speech is a discerning feature that separates man and the animal. It is an expression of his spiritual essence/soul. If one engages in lashon hara/forbidden speech, he is using this Divine tool to perpetrate evil. Thus, his power of speech is greatly minimized. It is because of this that despite the intensity of our prayers and Torah study; G'd does not respond.

The Jewish people continue to remain vulnerable and subject to tragedy.

Every day in the Amidah, we pray that the evil doers should be destroyed and the enemies of the Jewish people should be cut off. Why do our enemies have the ability to compromise our existence? The Jewish people are the chosen nation of G'd, yet we find that we are continuously subject to attack.

Currently the situation in Israel is of devastating proportions. This, in conjunction with all of the other conflicts worldwide, indicates that civilization is teetering on disaster. Despite all of our prayers and efforts, why is this occurring? One may speculate that it is due to a variety of political and global dynamics. Regardless of the world's situation, the Jewish people would not be vulnerable to harm if we were living our lives in conformance with the Torah. All that happens in existence happens for a reason. If the Jewish people transgress, they are deserving of punishment, which may come through the persecution/oppression of the nations of the world. When we pray to G'd to alleviate our plight, if that plea is expressed by a person who has breached the laws of proper speech, the likelihood of G'd responding is remote. The reason for this is the words that emanate from this person's mouth are contaminated by the inappropriate words that had been previously expressed.

As Jews, we must understand and appreciate that tragedy only befalls an individual when there is a spiritual shortcoming. It is only through introspection and proper teshuvah that we can be worthy of G'd's protection and mercy. The power of speech, being such a vital component of a Jew's function, must be preserved and maintained in order to be effective.

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 (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th 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