

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
The Portion of

Mattos

July 24, 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 24, 2008

B"H

Mattos

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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1. *Yehoshua's Lethal Mistake*

The Torah states, "**G'd 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 explain 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 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 states regarding Moshe, "We see the praiseworthiness of Moshe that despite the fact that he understood that he would pass away, his response was without delay." The inference of the Midrash is that even for someone of Moshe's dimension of spirituality and level of clarity it was considered praiseworthy for him to act without delay, despite its consequence. Moshe could have justified extending his life for the sake of the Jewish people.

The Midrash continues, "It is written in Yehoshua, 'G'd said, 'As I was with Moshe, I will be with you...' Meaning, just as Moshe lived for 120 years so too would Yehoshua Bin Nun, his successor. If this is so, why were ten years removed from his life? When Moshe was commanded by G'd to take vengeance against the Midianites, although he understood that he would pass away after the war, he did not delay. He did not ponder, 'What is the value of my death? Perhaps I should extend my life by delaying the war.' Yehoshua, on the other hand, did not do follow the way of his rebbe (Moshe). When he was obligated to conquer the thirty-one kings of Canaan, he said, 'If I defeat them I will die immediately as my rebbe.' What did he do? After defeating one king, he delayed and prolonged the process of conquering Canaan, because he wanted to extend his life. G'd said to him, 'Is this the way you behave? I will thus remove ten years from your life because you did not act as your rebbe Moshe.'"

It is interesting to note that regarding Moshe, the Midrash tells us that his not delaying reveals to us his "praiseworthiness." Meaning, even for someone of

Moshe's dimension of spirituality and selfless dedication to G'd, his not delaying was praiseworthy. However, regarding Yehoshua, who was only the student of Moshe, his delay for the sake of prolonging his life is considered a failing and thus he was culpable.

It is true that for one to process and understand, within a particular context, the proper course of behavior, one needs to have the level of clarity of Moshe. Although it was considered to be praiseworthy even for one of Moshe's caliber; nevertheless, after Moshe had set the precedent of behavior, one must follow his approach. Yehoshua did not need to arrive at the correct decision based on his own understanding, he needed only to follow the precedent set by his rebbe. This he did not do. Rather he made his own calculation, thus justifying the delay of conquering the Canaanites. What was the value of Yehoshua extending his life?

It is stated in the Book of Devarim that G'd said to Moshe that the Jewish people would only become idolaters after his passing. Rashi cites the Midrash which tells us that this is not so because it is indicated in the book of Yehoshua that the Jewish people did not engage in idolatry until after the passing of Yehoshua Bin Nun, the student of Moshe. The Midrash explains that we learn from this that as long as one's disciple is alive it is as if the teacher is still present. Therefore, Yehoshua believed that as long as he was alive, he would delay the Jewish people from becoming pagans. He believed that perhaps the additional years of his leadership would be beneficial to the Jewish people. Although his intentions were honorable, he nevertheless failed because he did not follow the precedent set by his rebbe. Moshe, whose leadership and influence which was integral for the spiritual development of the Jewish people, did not justify delaying the war against the Midianites believing that he could extend his influence upon the Jewish people. How could have Yehoshua justified extending his leadership?

Baal Haturim cites a Midrash that explains that the reason that Moshe did not delay in his annihilation of the Midianites is related to an earlier incident with Pinchas. Initially when Pinchas had approached Moshe to ask him what course of action should be taken against Zimri, who

was publicly desecrating G'd's Name through his cohabitation with Cozbi the Midianite princess, Chazal tell us that Moshe was not able to respond because he had forgotten the law. Pinchas reminded Moshe, "Did you not teach us that if this level of desecration of G'd's Name is taking place, if one is a zealot, he should kill the perpetrator." Moshe responded to Pinchas, "Since you were the one to remember the law, you should be the one to take action and kill Zimri." The fact that Moshe did not act immediately himself to kill Zimri is considered a claim against him. He should have been the one to avenge G'd's Honor. Rather he allowed Pinchas to be the zealot. Therefore, as a correction for this initial failing, Moshe did not delay when he was told to take vengeance against the Midianites. Because Moshe understood that there was a claim against him and he needed to correct it.

Although Yehoshua should have followed Moshe's precedent, he did not. He differentiated between what Moshe had decided to do and his own personal situation. He believed that the reason that his rebbe did not delay taking vengeance against the Midianites was because Moshe needed to correct his initial failing. However, Yehoshua, who did not need to address or correct any past behavior, felt he could delay the conquest of Canaan for the sake of the Jewish people. The proper approach of Yehoshua should have been without calculation or rationalization. He should have followed the dictate of G'd as his rebbe had.

2. The Ramifications of A Rabbinic Fence

The Torah states regarding the taking of a vow, "**If a man takes a vow to Hashem or swears an oath to establish a prohibition upon himself, he shall not desecrate his word,**" This is the negative commandment that prohibits one from violating one's vow or oath that one has taken. The Gemara in Tractate Shavuot states, "For the sin of vows, one's wife and children will die (when they are minors)." Even if one were to deliberately violate the Shabbos, the Sanhedrin (High Court of Israel) will impose the death penalty upon the one who had transgressed; however, one's wife and children are not affected by heavenly decree. Why when one transgresses a vow, which is only a negative commandment that does not carry the death penalty, does it bring about such dire consequences?

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos states, "The Men of the Great Assembly had said, 'Make a fence for the Torah.'" Rabbeinu Yonah in his commentary on Pirkei Avos cites the words of Chazal regarding King Solomon's statement in the Song of Songs, "Your beloved is better than wine." Chazal explain the words of King Solomon to mean, "The words of the *sofrim* (rabbinic enactments/fences) are more beloved (to G'd) than the wine of the Torah (Biblical dictates)." He explains that the underlying purpose of all

the mitzvos in the Torah is to demonstrate one's fear of heaven (*yiras shamayim*). When one performs a dictate of G'd (mitzvah) it is a demonstration of that individual's fear of G'd. He is only adhering to the mitzvah because G'd had commanded him to do so. The purpose of a Rabbinic enactment/fence is to protect the Torah. Because of human frailty and lack of continuous cognizance one is vulnerable to transgression. When one observes a Rabbinic law and does not violate it, it is an indication to what degree that the individual reveres the Word of G'd. Because of his level of esteem for the Torah dictate, he observes the Rabbinic fence so that he should not be put in the position of transgressing the Torah. Therefore, the words of the *sofrim* (Rabbis) are more beloved to G'd than the Biblical dictate itself. What is the correlation between the Rabbinic fence and not profaning one's word, violating one's vow?

The Midrash states, "G'd said to the Jewish people, 'You must be extremely careful in the area of vows so that you should not breach them. It is because one who violates a vow will ultimately take an oath (in the Name of G'd) and violate it. One who violates an oath it is the equivalent of denying G'd, and he will not be forgiven.'

The Gemara in Tractate Shavuot tells us that if one has the ability to intervene to prevent another from transgressing the Torah and does not, he is held culpable. However, if he cannot prevent the transgression from taking place, he is not culpable. However, there is one exception to this principle, regarding an oath. Even if one does intervene or cannot intervene, if the oath is taken and violated, it brings about severe repercussions to all existence. This is because the world quaked when G'd communicated the commandment at Sinai, "**You shall not take the Name of Hashem, your G'd in vain, for Hashem will not absolve anyone who takes His Name in vain.**" According to the Midrash, not violating a vow is the equivalent of a Torah fence. If one makes a vow and profanes his word, by violating it, it is the equivalent of breaching a fence because he is not sensitive to what it may lead, which is the oath that will be violated. If in fact one would revere the Name of G'd, he would take every precaution to establish a distance from violating the oath. This is the reason the ramifications of violating one's vows is so severe. Regardless of the severity of transgressing the Shabbos, which carries the death penalty, it will not lead to the violation of an oath. Therefore, we can understand the words of the Gemara, "For the sin of vows, one's wife and children will die."

If one does not appreciate the importance of Rabbinic fences, which were only legislated and enacted to protect the Torah law, which is the word of G'd, it is an indication that he truly does not sufficiently value G'd's dictate. When one does abide by the Rabbinic fences meticulously he is demonstrating, through his behavior, an exceptional fear of heaven.

3. *Seeing Truth Through the Eyes of Moshe*

The Torah states, **“G’d spoke to Moshe saying, ‘Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites...”** The Midrash explains, “G’d had commanded Moshe himself to take vengeance against the Midianites on behalf of the Jewish people, yet we find that he sent others to wage war against them. As it states, **‘Arm men from among yourselves...’** If G’d said to Moshe that he should be the one to destroy the Midianites, why did he delegate it to others? It is because he had benefited from Midian. (He had spent many years in Midian under the tutelage of his father-in-law Yisro, who was the Priest of Midian.) Moshe had said, ‘It would be inappropriate for me to bring harm upon the Midianites since they had done good to me.’ It is analogous to a wellspring from which one had drunk. One should not throw a rock into that wellspring. Therefore Moshe delegated the responsibility to destroy the Midianites to others.” Although Moshe was commanded to destroy the Midianites, he understood, based on the principle of not being an ingrate, G’d had intended that he should delegate it through others.

The Torah tells us that when Moshe was three months old, his mother Yocheved, because she could no longer hide him, placed him in a box and set it upon the Nile. It was to protect him from Pharaoh’s decree that all Jewish newborn males should be killed. In addition, the Torah states, **“It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man, of his brethren...So he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.”** As a result of Moshe benefiting from the Nile (miraculously he did not drown) and the sand, in which he had hid the remains of the Egyptian, we find regarding the plagues of blood, frogs, and lice, that G’d commanded Moshe to tell his brother Aaron to bring about those plagues. As it states regarding the plague of blood, **“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt...’”** Regarding the plague of frogs the Torah states, **“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers...’”** Regarding the plague of lice, the Torah states, **“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the land...’”** Since Moshe benefited from the Nile and the earth, it would have been inappropriate for him to strike them. If there is a principle that one should not destroy that from which he had benefited, why did G’d need to tell Moshe to delegate these plagues through Aaron? In addition, if G’d asked Moshe to delegate the plagues to his brother because he had benefited from the water and the earth, why did G’d not ask Moshe to delegate the destruction of the Midianites through others, based on the principle that one

should not bring harm upon something from which he had benefited?

One could say that although Moshe had understood the principle that one should not bring harm upon something from which he benefited, thus causing him to be an ingrate, he nevertheless needed to be instructed that this principle also applies to that within the inanimate realm. It does not limited only to human beings. Since one would think that the principle does not apply to inanimate objects, G’d therefore needed to instruct Moshe to delegate the plagues through his brother, to extend this principle even to the inanimate. However, one could explain the delegation of the plagues through Aaron differently.

The plagues that came upon Egypt were revealed miracles. Moshe was the only one who had the ability to bring about miracles of this magnitude. G’d had revealed His Name (YKVK) to Moshe, which He did not reveal to the Patriarchs. Aaron, in his own right, could not bring about these revealed miracles because he was not of the spiritual dimension of his brother Moshe. It could only happen if Aaron was chosen by G’d to do so. Therefore, G’d needed to tell Moshe explicitly that Aaron could act as his agent/extension in bringing about the revealed miracles.

Regarding the war against the Midianites, a revealed miracle was not necessary to bring about their destruction. It was a conventional war which was conducted by merely summoning troops to go against the enemy. Although G’d commanded Moshe to take vengeance upon the Midianites, that task needed to be delegated through others based on the principle of not destroying something that one had benefited from. Since there were no revealed miracles needed to bring about victory against the Midianites, G’d did not need to specify to Moshe that the war needed to be done by others.

4. *G’d’s Glory, the Aspiration of the Jew*

The Torah states, **“G’d 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).’”** Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk writes, “Why could Moshe not have passed away before the destruction of the Midianites? If the war against Midian would have taken place after Moshe had passed away, people would have said that the reason Moshe did not destroy them in his lifetime was because he was flattering them. It was because he was the son-in-law of Yisro who was a Midianite and had spent many years in Midian. Therefore, the war against Midian needed to take place in Moshe’s lifetime.” If the world had believed that Moshe did not go to war against Midian, despite their wickedness, because he was flattering them it would have

been a desecration of G'd's Name. It would have been perceived that Moshe was compromising his characteristic of truth for the sake of flattery. Thus, G'd commanded Moshe to take vengeance against them before he passed away.

The Midrash states, "Why did G'd want Moshe to destroy the Midianites? It is because of what is stated in the verse, 'G'd does not want to deny the tzaddik, what he desires to see with his own eyes.' From here we learn that Moshe desired to see the destruction of Midian before he passed away. He thus requested from G'd that He should allow him to see their destruction. As it states in the verse in Psalms, 'The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance (of G'd), he will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.' 'The righteous will rejoice...' is referring to Moshe. He rejoiced in the destruction of the Midianites. '...wash his feet in the blood of the wicked' is referring to Bilaam, the evil one." Why did Moshe desire to see the destruction of the Midianites with his own eyes?

When one witnesses a sanctification of G'd's Name one should be elated with joy. If one is not, it is an indication that bringing glory to G'd is not a focal point in his life. Moshe lived every moment of his life for the sake of G'd's Glory. He was the ultimate faithful servant of G'd. Thus, when he witnessed the destruction of evil, whose mere existence is a desecration of G'd's Name and the antithesis of His Will, Moshe rejoiced. He desired to see the destruction of the Midianites because they were truly evil. Under Bilaam's direction, the Midianite women sexually engaged with the Jewish men and caused them to worship Baal Paor. As a result of this ploy, 24,000 Jewish men died in a plague. The continuation of the Midianite nation, who perpetrated such evil was a desecration of G'd's Name. Therefore, Moshe desired to witness their destruction, which is a sanctification of His Name.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh writes that if there would be ten Jewish men in a synagogue in any community in the world who truly desired the coming of Moshiach, G'd would bring him instantly. Although there are many Jews who desire the coming of Moshiach and yearn for the ultimate glorification of G'd, the fact that he has not yet come, is an indication that their quality of intent is not sufficient. Why does the Jew want the coming of Moshiach? Is it to put an end to the persecution of the Jewish people? Is it so that the world should recognize the special value and significance of the Jewish people? As long as Moshiach is not here, evil and falsehood continue to exist and thrive, which is an ongoing desecration of G'd's Name. The coming of Moshiach will be the ultimate glorification of G'd because it will be a time when evil will be vanquished from existence. One should desire the coming of Moshiach for the sake of His Glory, when truth will become evident and obvious.

In the Amidah (silent prayer) of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we ask G'd to instill fear and awe in all mankind. Additionally, we ask Him to give honor and glory to the Jewish people and reveal Himself and bring Moshiach. As a result, the devoutly righteous (*tzaddikim*), the straight (*yesharim*), and the scrupulously pious (*chasidim*), will rejoice. It would seem that if all mankind is brought to the realization of G'd and is in awe by His Presence, one would think that all mankind would become ecstatic as a result of this realization and revelation. Why do we single-out only these three levels of spiritually advanced individuals who will rejoice? It is because these exceptionally spiritual people have dedicated their lives to the sanctification of G'd and await His revelation and glory. However, the ordinary person who has devoted his life to the pursuit of his own success and interest does not have the capacity to internalize the value of that event, despite its awesomeness.

We say in the *Avinu Malkeinu*, "Our Father, our King, avenge before our eyes the spilled blood of Your servants." Is this because the Jewish people are vengeful? Since the Jewish people have been victimized and downtrodden throughout the ages, it is a desecration of G'd's Name because they are His chosen people. The Jewish people should rejoice with the destruction of those who spilled the blood of G'd's servants because their annihilation is a sanctification of G'd. Therefore, the Jewish people need to ask their Father and King to allow them to witness His vengeance upon their enemies. This is the reason Moshe desired to see with his own eyes the destruction of the Midianites.

5. *Self-Negation, Unrelated to Humility* (from Pinchas)

The Torah states when Bilaam went to curse the Jewish people, "**Bilaam arose in the morning and saddled his donkey...**" Rashi cites Chazal who state, "From here we learn '*sinah mekalkeles es hashura* – hate supersedes protocol.'" Although Bilaam was a self-centered and egotistical person with an insatiable desire for material and honor, he nevertheless saddled his own donkey. One would think that a person of Bilaam's stature – who believed that he was minimally worthy of a king's honor - would have had one of his servants prepare his donkey for riding. However, because he was driven by intense hate to curse the Jewish people, he chose to do this demeaning chore without hesitation.

The Torah states regarding Avraham, our Patriarch, "**Avraham arose in the morning and saddled his donkey...**" Despite the fact that Avraham was a person of world renown (father of all nations) and great wealth, he personally saddled his own donkey. Although Avraham was 137 years old and would have had one of his servants hitch his donkey, at this particular moment he attended to this chore himself because "Love supersedes

protocol." Why is it when one hates intensely, or conversely, loves intensely is all protocol overridden?

When Avraham was told by G'd to bring his son Yitzchak as a sacrifice, despite his unlimited love for his special son who was born to him at 100 years old, he acted with zeal to selflessly carryout the Will of G'd. Because of Avraham's overwhelming love for G'd, all that existed for Avraham was the execution of G'd's Will. Consequently, Avraham's own sense of self was totally negated to the point that his age and stature had no relevance to the moment. Identically, Bilaam, because of his intense hate for the Jewish people, was singularly focused to bring about their destruction. At that moment, the objective of annihilating the Jewish people was so paramount that nothing existed other than the task at hand. Therefore, despite his exaggerated level of self-centeredness and egotistic behavior he was able to hitch his own donkey without any hesitation. At that moment there was no Bilaam.

The Torah tells us that the Moabite women seduced the Jewish men in order to worship the Baal Peor. As a result of their idol worship and succumbing to temptation, the Torah states **"The wrath of Hashem flared up against Israel."** Consequently, a devastating plague came upon the Jewish people resulting in the death of 24,000 people. In addition, Zimri, the Prince of the Tribe of Shimon, publicly cohabited with Cozbi, a Midianite princess, causing a public Desecration of G'd's Name. Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the grandson of Aaron, acted zealously by taking a spear and piercing Zimri and Cozbi during their act of cohabitation, thus killing both of them. Pinchas' act of zealotry caused the plague to cease.

The Torah states, **"G'd said to Moshe, 'Pinchas... turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel, when he zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume the Children of Israel in My Vengeance."** Rashi explains that Pinchas expressed the anger and rage that G'd Himself would have expressed. Because Pinchas had internalized G'd's pain and acted upon it, the Jewish people were spared. Pinchas' zealotry emanated from his intense love for G'd. His love for G'd was so profound that he could not tolerate the desecration of His Name.

A Jew must feel the plight/pain of one's fellow. This is an expression of the mitzvah that a Jew must love his fellow as himself. Similarly, because of Pinchas' intense love for G'd, he acted with an intensity to purge the evil that was being perpetrated. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that a number of times every day a heavenly voice emanates saying, "Woe to the father who has exiled His children from His Table and Whose Sanctuary was burnt and lays in ruin." One who understands G'd's pain as a result of the Jewish people

being exiled and the Temple being destroyed will internalize that pain as a result of his love for G'd.

The Midrash tells us that under normal circumstances, it would have been impossible for Pinchas to kill Zimri. However, many miracles transpired to allow him to sanctify G'd's Name and to survive. He merited this level of protection because he acted only as a result of his overwhelming love for G'd.

The Torah tells us that although Pinchas, the grandson of Aaron, was born as a Levite, because of his act of zealotry he assumed the status of a Kohen (Priest). Because of his uncontained level of love for G'd he was willing to sacrifice all that he had for Him. An outgrowth of this level of attachment and dedication was that Pinchas should be considered one of those who is closest to G'd – such as the Kohen.

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)