

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
The Portion of
Mattos-Masei

July 16, 2009

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 16, 2009

B"H

Mattos-Masei

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*
Dean

1. Debt of Gratitude, To What Degree?

The Torah states, **“G’d spoke to Moshe saying, ‘Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites...’** The Midrash explains, “Moshe had sent a thousand men from each tribe (totaling 12,000) to go to war against the Midianites. G’d had commanded Moshe to take vengeance against the Midianites, himself, on behalf of the Jewish people; however, we find that he had sent others to wage war against them. As it states, **‘Arm men from among yourselves...’** Moshe sent others to engage in war against Midian because he was raised and established himself in Midian. He thus said, “It is inappropriate to do them harm because they had done good to me. I was a beneficiary of their hospitality.” (After Moshe had fled Egypt, he sought refuge in Midian where he had married the daughter of Yisro, the Midianite. He had spent many years there before returning to Egypt.) As the proverb states, ‘The well from which you had drunk water, do not throw into it a stone.’ Therefore Moshe delegated the responsibility to destroy Midian to others.” Although Moshe was commanded to destroy the Midianites, he understood, based on the principle of not being an ingrate, that G’d had intended that he should delegate it through others.

The Torah tells us that after Pharaoh decreed that all Jewish male newborns should be killed, Yocheved, the mother of Moshe, placed him in a box and set it upon the Nile. The 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 (he miraculously did not drown despite being placed in a box) and the sand, in which he had hidden the remains of the Egyptian so that his actions should be concealed, 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. This was so that Moshe should not be an ingrate because he had benefited from them. 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 and disrupt their function. When G’d told Moshe to take vengeance against the Midianites on behalf of the Jewish people, despite the fact that they were deserving of punishment for what they had perpetrated, Moshe understood from his experience regarding the plagues, that he had an obligation to demonstrate his gratitude, even to the inanimate. If it was required of him to demonstrate his gratitude to the inanimate, although his benefit was unrelated to its choice, how much more so should he refrain from destroying the Midianites himself, from whom he had so greatly benefited, from their land and community.

One of the tests that G’d had presented to Avraham, our Patriarch was to leave his land, his birthplace, and his father’s household. As it states in the Portion of Lech Lecha, **“Hashem said to Avraham, ‘Go for yourself from you land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house...’**” The Midrash tells us that because Avraham espoused monotheism he became a fugitive and needed to go into hiding for many years. He had become a pariah in his community and was despised by all. Avraham’s father, Terach, had taken him to Nimrod the king, in order to put him to death for destroying his idols. He was given an ultimatum by the king to either bow to the idol or be thrown into the fiery kiln. Avraham chose to give his life for G’d. If Avraham had become an individual who was despised and hated by his countrymen and family, how is G’d’s directive to leave them considered to be a test?

Avraham believed that he owed a great debt of gratitude to his father, Terach because he was the one who brought him into existence. Without Terach, there would not have been an Avraham to bring G'd to all mankind. Although Avraham's community were pagans who despised him, he believed that he owed them a debt of gratitude because his entire development was shaped by his interaction with them.

One must be thankful for all of the experiences that G'd brings upon one, because even if the experience is negative, if one learns from his mistake (especially one never to be repeated) it is considered something of great value.

Chavos HaLevavos writes that if one were to understand and appreciate the extent of G'd's Kindness in every aspect of one's life, one would have no difficulty in addressing his obligation to serve Him. One would always be beholden to his Benefactor. Although we recite the morning prayer, "*modeh ani*" upon rising, "I gratefully thank You, O living and eternal King..." and recite blessings throughout the day demonstrating our acknowledgement of G'd's providing for our needs, in order for one to be truly impacted by this reality, one must reflect upon and internalize these facts to sense a debt of gratitude to G'd.

2. *The Power of Speech vs. The Power of the Sword*

The Torah states regarding the war against the Midianites and the demise of Bilaam, "**They killed the kings of Midian...and Bilaam son of Beor they slew with the sword.**" Rashi cites Chazal who ask, "Why does the Torah chose to elucidate the point that Bilaam was killed with the sword? When Bilaam came against the Jewish people, he exchanged his craft with their craft. The Jew only advances through the articulation of his mouth through prayer and supplication. Bilaam came upon the Jewish people to curse them with his mouth. Therefore, when it was time to kill Bilaam, the sword was chosen to bring about his death to indicate that the Jewish people had exchanged their craft with the craft of the nations of the world, which is the sword. Where do we see that the craft of the nations of the world is the sword? As it states regarding the blessing that Yitzchak had given to his son Esav, '**By your sword you shall live.**'" The verse that is cited by the Midrash to establish that the sword is the craft of the nations of the world is drawn from the blessing that

Yitzchak had given his son Esav. Seemingly, this blessing is particular to Esav and the Edomites, his descendants, and not the nations of the world at large.

The conflict between Yaakov and Esav, regarding the birthright, was rooted in the issue of who would be the spiritual heir of their father Yitzchak. Esav, being evil, had no relevance to spirituality. However, being the firstborn of his father he initially had the right to be the future patriarch. He had chosen to forfeit his birthright by selling it to his brother Yaakov. In order for Yaakov to receive what was rightfully his, he needed to deceive his father by coming to him in the guise of his brother Esav. When Yitzchak had given his blessing to Esav, "**By your sword you shall live**" he was quantifying him as a physical being, who was no different than the nations of the world. He had no relevance or qualification to be the spiritual heir of his father. Yitzchak's words were only a revelation of Esav's essence, thus confirming that he was no different from every gentile. It is only because of the Midrash that is cited by Rashi that we are able to conclude that the words of Yitzchak "**By the sword you shall live**" is not particular to Esav, but rather a common characteristic that he shared with the nations of the world, who are devoid of spirituality.

The Torah states regarding the creation of man, "**And G'd formed the man, dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being (*nefesh chaya*).**" *Targum Unkolus* interprets the words "*nefesh chaya*" to mean "he (man) became a speaking species." It is because of his unique soul, that man has the ability to comprehend and have verbal expression. Although other creatures, such as a parrot, may be able to mimic speech, it is only man who has the Divine Soul which gives him the "power of speech".

Maharal explains that the word "Adam (man)" is derived from the word "*adamah* (earth)." Just as the earth has unlimited potential to yield its bounty if it is properly cultivated, so too does man have the innate ability to develop and advance his spirituality to an unlimited degree. However, because Adam had failed by eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he forfeited his classification as "Adam." He putrefied himself and all of existence when he introduced evil into himself by eating of the Tree. Thus, he was no longer qualified to actualize the potential of the "speaking species." It was not until Avraham, our Patriarch reintroduced G'd into existence that he assumed the posture of "Adam." As a result of his own spiritual metamorphosis, which was due to his own choices, Avraham and his descendants, the Jewish people,

were endowed with the unlimited potential that was initially given to Adam the first human being. In contrast, the nations of the world do not have that potential because they do not descend from the holy Patriarchs. Therefore, their ability to speak is not an expression of that unique spirituality, which has the spiritual ramifications of the power of speech of the Jew.

3. Following G'd's Will Without Calculations

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.’”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that despite the fact that Moshe understood that his demise was contingent on the destruction of the Midianites, he did not hesitate to perform the will of G'd. Rather, “He performed the mitzvah with joy and did not delay.” If Moshe had chosen not to act immediately upon the dictate of G'd, he would have extended his life.

The Midrash states regarding Moshe's decision to go to war, “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 caliber and dimension of spirituality it was considered praiseworthy for him to act with immediacy, despite its consequence.

The Midrash continues, “It is written in the Book of 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 their destruction, 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. When he was commanded to conquer the thirty-one kings of Canaan, he said, ‘If I defeat them I will die immediately as my rebbe Moshe.’ 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 should behave? I will thus remove ten years from your life because you did not act as your rebbe Moshe.’ Regarding this, King David writes in Psalms, ‘Many ideas pass through a man's heart (calculations), but G'd's plan will endure.’”

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 his dimension of person and selfless dedication to G'd, his attending to his obligation was considered praiseworthy. However, regarding Yehoshua, who was only the disciple of Moshe, his delay for the sake of prolonging his life is considered a failing and thus he became culpable.

It is true that for one to establish a correct mode of behavior in this particular context, 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 he had set the precedent for one's behavior, one is bound to that standard. Yehoshua is not culpable for not coming upon this truth based on his own understanding. He needed only to learn from the precedent that was set by his rebbe. Why did Yehoshua fail?

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra tells us that the face of Moshe is compared to the sun and the face of Yehoshua is compared to the moon. Meaning that although Yehoshua was qualified to be Moshe's successor to lead the Jewish people into the Promised Land, nevertheless, he was only a reflection of his teacher (as the moon reflects the light of the sun). Therefore, since the caliber of leadership of Yehoshua was not comparable to that of his teacher, Moshe could have justified delaying his death for the sake of the spiritual development of the Jewish people. Being under his tutelage and supervision would have advanced them to a greater degree than Yehoshua. If this is so, then what was the basis for Yehoshua to justify his delay?

It is stated in the Book of Devarim that Moshe had said to the Jewish people that after he will pass away, they would become idolaters. Rashi cites Chazal who ask, “This is not so. 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. We are able to learn from this that as long as one's disciple is alive, the teacher values it as if he himself is still living.” Yehoshua was therefore able to differentiate between his own situation and the decision that was made by his rebbe Moshe. Moshe had no reason to delay because his successor Yehoshua would be able to maintain the Jewish people at a level that they would not become pagans. However, Yehoshua understood that if he would not delay and thus pass away, the Jewish people would fall to the level of idolatry. This was the basis for Yehoshua to justify his decision and not draw from the precedent set by Moshe, his teacher. Although there is a difference between

Yehoshua's issues and Moshe's, regarding the future of the Jewish people; nevertheless, Yehoshua should have followed the dictate of G'd without delay. He should have learned from Moshe that when one is commanded by G'd to perform, one does not hesitate as a result of calculations of his own.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that Aaron, the High Priest, the brother of Moshe had made a similar error by justifying a manner of behavior. When the Jewish people were rallying to establish a god to lead them, which ultimately was the Golden Calf, Chur the son of Miriam initially opposed them. Subsequently, he was killed for interfering. Aaron understood that if he attempted to stop them, he would meet a similar fate and he therefore chose another approach. He told them to gather gold to make the Calf. By doing so, he would delay the process and thus allow Moshe to return. He had justified his action by saying, "If I were to go against them and they were to kill me, since I am a Priest and a prophet of G'd, there is no atonement for their actions. Therefore, it is better that I should be involved in idolatry than the Jewish people to never be atoned." Although Aaron's decision seems to be cogent, he was punished. Factually, the Torah vehemently prohibits any degree of involvement in idolatry. Regardless of his concern for the outcome of the Jewish people's behavior, Aaron had no right to participate in their abominable objective, idolatry. He should have not made any calculation but rather be put to death for the sake of sanctifying G'd's Name.

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 a 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. *Perceiving Truth, Despite Distraction* (from Pinchas)

After the Jewish people had heard and accepted the slanderous reports of the spies about the Promised Land, G'd decreed that the members of the generation that were between the ages of twenty and sixty should perish in the desert over a forty-year period. After that generation had passed, a new census of the Jewish people was taken. The Torah states, "**These are the ones counted by Moshe...For Hashem had said of them, 'They will surely die in the Wilderness,' and not a man was left of them...**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the reason the verse specifically states "not a man was left" is to indicate that none of those who had died as a result of the decree were women. Why were the women spared? The reason the women were not subject to the decree was because they rejected the report of the spies who had slandered the Land. Chazal tell us that the women did not

believe the spies because they had "a special love for the Land (*chibas ha'aretz*)."

Without the explanation of Chazal, one could have thought that the basis for the women's rejection of the slanderous report of the spies was because they had an innate intuition for truth. Thus, they sensed that the reports of the spies were false. We find a demonstration of this innate characteristic of the Jewish women in a statement of Chazal regarding the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt. Chazal tell us, "it was in the merit of the righteous women that our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt." The Jewish women in Egypt believed intuitively that the Jewish people would eventually be redeemed as G'd had promised, regardless of the bleakness of the situation. In fact, they had encouraged their husbands to procreate in order to guarantee the future of the Jewish people. Rashi cites the Midrash that states, "The daughters of Israel had in their possession copper mirrors, which they would look into when they would beautify themselves... When their husbands would be fatigued from the back-breaking work that was imposed upon them by the Egyptians, the women would go and bring their husbands food and drink, and feed them. Then they would take the copper mirrors and view themselves together with their husbands in the mirror, enticing him by saying, 'I am more attractive than you.' By this means, they would bring their husbands to desire, and consequently they would cohabit with them and conceive." Because the women intuitively had faith in G'd's promise, they not only did not despair. What is the basis for this special intuition that is possessed by the woman?

The Gemara in Tractate Nidah explains that the reason a woman enters into adulthood a year before the male is because she has "an additional level of perception that was given to her at the time of creation." It is because of this special perception that the woman has greater sense of right and wrong than the male. Thus, the Jewish women in Egypt did not despair because they had internalized their faith in G'd's promise that they would be redeemed. One would think that it is because of this innate sense of faith in G'd that they rejected the slanderous reports of the spies. However, Chazal tell us that it was only because of their "special love for the Land" that they did not accept the slanderous reports.

Because of the special love of the Land that the women had, they were not distracted by the reports of the spies. If one loves and esteems another and is told slanderous information about him, one's love and relationship for that individual will not allow him to accept or consider the validity of the information. Similarly, the

women, because of their special love for the Land would not give any credence to the reports of the spies.. Had the men loved and yearned for the Land as the women had, they would also rejected the reports of the spies and thus would not have needed to die in the desert.

There is a positive commandment to **“Love Hashem, your G’d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your resources.”** Despite all of the difficult and unanswerable questions that one may face in life, if one has sufficient love for G’d, then his faith will remain unswerving. Despite the fact that the Jewish people throughout history have endured holocausts and exiles, their faith in G’d and the promise of His ultimate redemption has not been weakened because of their love for Him.

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 – Path of the Just
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Chulin –Gid Hanasheh
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi- Bava Kamah
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:30 – 12:30pm	Talmud: Megilah Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
1:00-2:00 pm	Ramchal: Derech Hashem Location: Cedarview Capital 1Penn Plaza (45 th FL.)

Tuesday

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

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