

JYad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES
Parshas Pinchas
July 14, 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
July 14, 2006

B"H

Parshas Pinchas

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*
Dean

1. Appreciating the Culpability of Zimri

The Torah tells us that Zimri, the Prince of the Tribe of Shimon, committed a public desecration of G'd's Name when he had openly engaged sexually with Cozbi, the Midianite Princess. Zimri's behavior was one of the motivating factors that caused the Jewish men to involve themselves with the Midianite women. Ultimately, Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the Kohen killed Zimri and Cozbi by impaling them both with a spear while they were engaged in the sexual act. Pinchas' act of zealotry put an end to a devastating plague that had claimed 24,000 lives in retribution for the immorality and idolatry committed with the Midianite women.

The Torah goes out of its way to identify Zimri, the Prince of the Tribe of Shimon as the one who perpetrated this public desecration of G'd's Name. What is the significance of this information?

The Midrash states, "Whoever damages/tarnishes his own reputation damages the reputation of his family. The Torah states the name and lineage of Zimri (from the Tribe of Shimon) because one is taken aback that someone of such pedigree should fail so severely. King Solomon writes, 'The one who breaches the fence should be bitten by a snake.' Because Zimri breached the fence (of promiscuity), he not only violated it, he caused others to violate. He breached the fence established by his forefather." What is the fence that was breached? The Torah tells us that Dina, the sister of Shimon and Levi, the children of Yaakov was raped by Shechem (Prince of Canaan). Shimon and Levi could not tolerate that such a despicable act had been committed to the daughter of Yaakov. They killed Shechem and destroyed the city with all of its males. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that because of the Great Flood, which was brought about because of promiscuous sexual behavior, the nations of the world accepted upon themselves not to breach the standards of proper sexual behavior. By raping Dina, Shechem not only violated the Word of G'd, he breached the fence established by humanity regarding proper

conduct. Shimon and Levi secured and reinforced the fence by destroying Shechem. Zimri, the descendent of Shimon, by engaging sexually with Cozbi, breached the fence that was secured and established by his forefather. Thus, the claim against him is more severe.

One only has a sense of clarity and can be insulated from the influences of the world's values through the merits of the Patriarchs and one's forefathers. Because of Zimri's pedigree and lineage, he merited a level of clarity that was indicative of one who was the Prince of the Tribe of Shimon; nevertheless, he chose to behave immorally and perpetrate the most extreme public desecration of G'd's Name.

The Gemara in Tractate Taanis tells us that lashon hara (evil speech) has a unique characteristic that is similar to the behavior of the snake. At the end of time, all the animals will sit in judgment regarding the snake. The snake will be asked, "Every animal that kills and devours its prey has physical benefit from its actions. However, you bite your victim and slither away leaving him to die without benefiting from your actions in any way? How can you justify such behavior?" The snake will respond, "And what about the one who speaks lashon hara? Is man who speaks negatively about his fellow with no benefit any better than I?" Chofetz Chaim explains that when man fails because of his animalistic drives and desires, although he is transgressing the Word of G'd, it is not seen as defiance because it is connected to his natural inclinations. However, loшон hara does not emanate from the animal within the person, rather it comes from pure evil- without any physical benefit. Just as the snake, which represents evil does not have any benefit from killing its prey- so too does the one who speaks lashon hara have no benefit from damaging his fellow. One who speaks lashon hara, does so out of something that borders on maliciousness – causing one to have a greater level of culpability. One should have a natural level of clarity to recognize the evil of this act.

It is interesting to note that the consequence of one who breaches a fence is that he should be bitten by a snake. King Solomon does not simply write that he should die or be killed through the fence that he had breached, but rather he specifically states that his demise should come about through a snakebite. Why does King Solomon state that this is a just punishment? One who breaches a fence is not compelled because of desire or societal influence, but rather, it is a rational decision, to undermine the law. He has a clarity and understanding of the consequences of his actions, despite this he chooses to breach the fence to accommodate his own agenda. He is therefore deserving of a fate through a creature that reflects his own behavior. This is truly measure for measure.

2. *The Far Reaching Consequences of Moshe's Statement*

The Torah tells us that the daughters of Tzelofchad approached Moshe with a claim to their father's inheritance- as he had died with no male heirs. They posed the question of inheritance to him since at this time it was thought that a daughter was not a qualified heir. Moshe was not able to respond. The Torah states, "**Moshe brought their claim before G'd.**" Rashi cites Chazal who say that the law pertaining to the order of inheritance was withheld from Moshe.

After the hierarchy of the judicial system (higher and lower courts) was established because of Yisro's suggestion, Moshe had said, "**The most difficult issues you will bring to me.**" Despite the fact that Moshe was the most humble person who ever lived, since he expressed himself in this manner, Chazal explain, "he had taken a crown (of glory), therefore G'd withheld the law of inheritance from him." Since Moshe's statement could be construed to mean that he had a unique ability, which was attributed to himself, G'd punished him by withholding from him the law of inheritance (if a daughter was a legitimate heir).

The incident regarding the daughters of Tzelofchad was not the only situation in which the law was concealed from Moshe. The Midrash tells us that at the time of the incident of Zimri (when he was cohabiting with the Midianite princess), Pinchas approached Moshe and asked, "What action should be taken in this situation?" Moshe did not know how to respond. He had forgotten the law. Pinchas continued to question his teacher Moshe by saying, "Did you not teach us that in the case where a Jew openly cohabits with a gentile woman, if one were a zealot, he has the right to kill the perpetrator?" Moshe said

to Pinchas, "Since you recalled the law and I did not, you should carry out the mitzvah." Chazal do not attribute Moshe's forgetting of this particular law as punishment for "taking the crown of glory" - "**The most difficult issues you will bring to me...**"

The Torah tells that if one is contaminated with the dead, he is disqualified from bringing the Pascal offering. When the Pascal offering was brought in the desert, two individuals had been contaminated by the dead. They approached Moshe and asked, "Why should we be excluded from bringing the Pascal offering?" Moshe was unable to respond. He needed to present the question before G'd (regarding *Pesach Sheini*- the make up Pesach). There is no mention of this as an example of Moshe being punished by G'd for expressing himself inappropriately - **The most difficult issues you will bring to me.**" It is because the law of Pesach Sheini was not communicated to Moshe prior to this moment.

There are two examples in which the law was hidden from Moshe – regarding the laws of inheritance and the issue of how to respond to chillul Hashem. Yet Chazal tell us that the punishment for "taking the crown of glory for himself" only manifested itself regarding the law of inheritance. Why was Moshe's forgetting the law regarding the act of zealotry not considered another manifestation of punishment?

Moshe was the most humble person who ever lived. When he said regarding the judicial system, "**The most difficult issues you will bring to me** (and I will personally adjudicate them.)," he did not do so because of a lack of humility. Yet Moshe was faulted as it is stated, "he took the crown of glory for himself." Why was he culpable?

Despite that fact that G'd had said to Moshe at Sinai, "**The Jewish people will believe in you forever,**" Korach attempted to usurp his authority and undermine his credibility as G'd's spokesman. Until Sinai, all of the miracles that had transpired through Moshe could have been attributed to sorcery or something other than Moshe acting as G'd's Agent. It was not until Sinai when the entire Jewish people witnessed G'd speaking to Moshe as His agent that it was confirmed that he was in fact G'd's spokesman. If this was so, then how could Korach and his community, who witnessed Sinai, have questioned the authenticity of Torah?

Korach and his community had questioned the source of Torah. It was understood that G'd had a special relationship with Moshe. Thus, the question was- Is the

Torah that is being presented by Moshe his word and endorsed by G'd? Or was the Torah that was transmitted by Moshe truly the Word of G'd (independent of Moshe)? Korach, because of his self-interest and lack of humility, believed that the only reason he was rejected as the High Priest was that Moshe had chosen his brother Aaron to assume that role. Moshe suggested his brother to be the High Priest and it was fully endorsed by G'd. Thus, Korach believed that the essence of the Torah was only G'd's endorsement of Moshe's own agenda.

When Moshe decided to strike the rock rather than speak to it as G'd had commanded him, he was punished by not being allowed to enter into the Land. Because he chose not to publicly sanctify the Name of G'd by speaking to the rock, he was destined to pass away before the Jewish people would enter into the Land. What appears to have happened was that although G'd had commanded Moshe to speak to the rock, he chose to strike it because he believed that the Jews were only worthy of witnessing a miracle that did come about through human intervention (which is a lesser miracle). G'd thus punished Moshe in this manner, and was not willing to accept Moshe's supplications to annul the degree, so that Korach's claim should be refuted beyond any doubt forever. The integrity of Torah should never be questioned.

For someone of Moshe's dimension of spirituality and intimate relationship with G'd to say, "**The most difficult issues you will bring to me**" could have been misconstrued to mean something similar to Korach's understanding – that Moshe would be the one to decide what Torah should be. G'd needed to demonstrate to the Jewish people that Moshe was not in fact acting independent of Him, rather he was only the conduit between G'd and the Jewish people. In order to correctly understand the statement of Moshe "**The most difficult issues you will bring to me**" G'd needed to deny him clarity regarding the laws of inheritance, which pertained to receiving a portion in the Land. It is interesting to note that the same individual who was denied entry into the Land for acting in a manner that could distort the reality of Torah is identified with the law that pertains to a woman being a legitimate heir to inherit- thus being deserving of a portion in the Land. It will be known forever that the statement of Moshe "**The most difficult issues you will bring to me**" does not mean that he will decide what Torah should be, but rather Moshe is only transmitting the Word of G'd.

3. The Value of Seeing Something for What it Truly Is

After the incident of Baal Peor, the Torah states, "G'd spoke to Moshe saying, '**Harass the Midianites and smite them; for they harassed you...they conspired against you in the matter of Peor...**'" Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the Midianites had intentionally brought disaster upon the Jewish people through the sexual enticement of their women and the idolatry of Baal Peor. Although those who were directly involved with the women perished in the plague; nevertheless, the remaining Jewish males were negatively impacted by what they had seen. Despite the fact that they would not consider violating the areas of sexuality and idolatry, having a degree of interest/desire in these areas prevents the Jewish people from being fully atoned.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues that if one has any desire for something that is forbidden, the teshuvah process (repentance) does not bring about full atonement. One needs to purge himself of that interest/positive perspective of the wrong. Thus, G'd commanded the Jewish people, "**You should Harass the Midianites**" so that they should see them in the most negative/undesirable light. The Jewish people needed to internalize the fact that the Midianites and what they represented was a deterrent to them. It was only after the Jewish people were able to perceive the Midianites as the true enemy in every regard that they had no interest and detested everything that was associated with them. Thus, this mindset in conjunction with teshuvah reinstated them to their pure status. This concept is expressed by King David in Psalms, "I shall hate those who hate You (G'd)." If one does not despise and hate that which is contrary to the Will of G'd he will be susceptible to its influences. One cannot take a neutral or "middle of the road" position regarding something that is contrary to the Will of G'd.

The only way we can safeguard our spirituality from negative influences is to have a conscious disdain for the positions that are not in conformance with the Torah. We say in the aleinu prayer before we acknowledge G'd as the King, "It is our duty to praise the Master...He has not assigned us our portion like theirs nor our lot like all the multitudes. For they bow to vanity and emptiness and pray to a god which helps not. But we bend our knees and bow...before the King Who reigns over kings, the Holy One..." We only acknowledge our belief and gratitude for being G'd's people, after we have expressed our recognition of the negativity and detestability of idolatry. Only after one has internalized that whatever is contrary to

the Will of G'd is abhorrent and destructive will one not be distracted by those influences. It is then that he can fully appreciate the path of spirituality.

There is a positive commandment to “remember what Amalek had done to us.” In addition, there is another mitzvah to “obliterate Amalek from existence.” It is only after one reflects, understands, and appreciates the evil of Amalek will he obliterate them with the proper understanding that evil must be purged from existence.

Moshe at the end of the Book of Devarim refers to the idols as “**dung and their putrid rodents.**” If idolatry is perceived as something that is truly revolting and disgusting as dung and putrid rodents, there is no concern that one may be influenced by its existence. Similarly, one must perceive the beliefs and lifestyles that are contrary to the Torah as something that is truly inappropriate and unacceptable. King David would attend summits that were frequented by the kings and dignitaries of the world. Rather than being impressed by their discussions or values to any degree and attempt to be sociable, he would only speak about Torah values without any compunction or embarrassment. As he states, “I spoke of Your Testaments in the presence of kings and I was not embarrassed.” The only way one can truly shield himself from values and beliefs that are false is to see them in the most negative light. This mindset can only be developed through the study of Torah within the context of dialogue with true Torah luminaries.

4. Yehoshua Ben Nun's Qualification for Leadership

The Torah states, “**G'd said to Moshe, ‘You shall see it (the Land) and you shall be gathered up unto your people (pass away)...because you rebelled against My word...’**” Since Moshe understood that he would pass away and not enter into the Land, he asked G'd to appoint a successor. The Torah states, “**G'd said to Moshe, ‘Take to yourself Yehoshua Ben Nun, a man in whom there is spirit...’**”

Rashi cites the Midrash, “Moshe had asked G'd to appoint someone to succeed him as the leader of the Jewish people saying, ‘The time has come to ask for my own needs. Perhaps my children should assume my role as leader. G'd responded to him, ‘That was not My intent. It is worthwhile that Yehoshua should be rewarded because he accommodated you by not removing himself from the tent. As King Solomon writes, ‘The one who cares for the fig tree is the one who will eat its fruit.’”

Because Yehoshua attached himself to Moshe and did not remove himself from the tent (the tent of Torah), he was rewarded by G'd to be qualified to be Moshe's successor. This reward should not be regarded as payment for his good deeds, but rather it is an indication of what he had become as a result of being Moshe's devoted student. Reb Chaim Vital z'tl writes that just as Chazal tell us that the 248 positive commandments in the Torah correspond to the 248 parts of the body, so too do they correspond to the 248 parts of the soul. By performing a mitzvah, one perfects the corresponding aspect of his soul and sanctifies it. Aside from one's reward in the world to come by fulfilling the Torah, one is rewarded in this world as a result of being developed into a person with a spiritual capacity, as Yehoshua had become by attaching himself to Moshe. Since he was the one who “cared for the tree” (by studying Torah from Moshe without distraction) he was the beneficiary of the fruit- meaning he became a dimension of person that was qualified to lead the Jewish people.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) states, “Moshe received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua...” Rashi asks, “Why did Moshe not transmit the Torah to Elazar, Pinchas, or the Seventy Elders of Israel? It was only because of Yehoshua's dedication and conviction to Torah was such that he did not remove himself from the tent, that he merited to be the recipient/guardian of Torah.”

There is a Positive Commandment of “*Bo Tidbok-* to Him you shall attach yourself.” The Gemara in Tractate Pesachim asks, “How can one attach himself to G'd, since He is a consuming fire?” The Gemara answers that the way a Jew becomes attached to G'd is by providing financial opportunities for a Torah Sage, eating and drinking with him, or marrying his daughter. Through this level of association and attachment to the Torah Sage, who is the embodiment of Torah, it is considered as if he is attaching himself to G'd.

Moshe was the most dedicated and faithful servant of G'd that ever lived. There was never a lapse or moment that he was not fully consumed with G'd. His level of attachment to G'd was unique. Since he was a person who negated himself to the point of non-self-existence there was nothing to interfere with his cleaving to G'd. Moshe, unlike any other human being was able to cleave to G'd in a manner that there was no differentiation between himself and the Omnipotent One. Thus, by unceasingly attaching himself to Moshe, Yehoshua in essence attached himself to G'd. Therefore he was the most qualified individual to be Moshe's successor.

The Torah tells us in the Book of Devarim that Moshe said to the Jewish people that after he will pass away, they would become idolaters. Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “The Jews in fact did not become idolaters until the passing of Yehoshua. How then do we understand the words of Moshe? As long as the student (Yehoshua) was alive it is as if his teacher/rebbe (Moshe) was alive.” Meaning, the influences of Yehoshua, within a certain context were no less than that of Moshe. Thus, they were prevented from becoming idolaters until after the death of Yehoshua.

The Gemara states, “The face of Moshe is like the face of the sun, and the face of Yehoshua is like the face of the moon.” Because of the unceasing attachment of Yehoshua to Moshe, his rebbe, there was no aspect of Yehoshua that did not reflect his teacher.

The Mishna in Tractate Bava Metzia states that if one finds the lost object of his father and that of his rebbe (mentor) the obligation to return the object of the rebbe takes precedence over that of the father. It is because a father brings one into the physical life and the rebbe that mentors the student in Torah brings him into the eternal life of the world to come. The rebbe of the Mishna is more than a teacher who had taught the student Torah. He is the one who taught the student the majority of his Torah knowledge and is thus considered the one who had mentored him in spirituality. Because of this unique level of relationship/attachment, the student becomes attached with the rebbe. He reflects the teachings of his teacher. Even after the rebbe passes away that attachment continues, since the student’s Torah is that of the rebbe.

The more one invests himself in Torah, which is part of eternity, the more he will have relevance to that eternity. If one studies unceasingly, without distraction, his relevance to spirituality will be reflected in everything that he does.

5. Bilaam’s Understanding of the Jew’s Unique Capacity for Truth (from Balak)

The Torah tells us that Bilaam, the evil one, was initially commissioned by Balak to curse the Jewish people. Bilaam was unable to curse them because of their special relationship with G’d. He ultimately blessed them, saying, **“He (G’d) perceived no iniquity in Yaakov, and saw no perversity in Israel. Hashem his G’d is with him and the special love of the King is in him.”** Targum Unklus explains the words of Bilaam, “G’d gazed upon the

Children of Israel and saw that there were no idolaters in their midst. He also saw that they were not involved in falsehood. Therefore G’d is with the Jewish people and His Divine Presence rests with them.” Bilaam understood that the reason G’d has a special love for the Jewish people and does not cast them aside is because they are not idolaters.

At the time that Bilaam was quantifying the Jewish people, it was their fortieth year since leaving Egypt where they had been idolaters. During their trek in the desert, the Jewish people lived a life of spirituality engulfed with the Clouds of Glory and partaking of the Manna. It is true that there was no idolatry amongst the Jewish people at that particular moment. Is this the reason that G’d will not forsake the Jewish people in the future, despite their beliefs? There were many events throughout history in which the Jewish people engaged in idolatry. The Jewish people were idolaters in Egypt. When G’d was about to destroy the Egyptian army that was pursuing the Jewish people in the Sea, the angels issued a prosecution against them saying, “These (the Jewish people) are idolaters and these (the Egyptians)! Why are You (G’d) differentiating between the Egyptians and the Jewish people? The Jewish people are no less culpable.” After the Sinai event, they engaged with idolatry- the Golden Calf. Towards the end of their trek in the desert, they failed with the Baal Peor (deity of the Midianites). The Gemara in Tractate Yomah tells us that one of the reasons that the First Temple was destroyed was because of idolatry. For the majority of the First Temple period, the Jewish people were involved with idolatry. The Gemara in Tractates Yomah tells us that had the Men of the Great Assembly not destroyed the evil inclination for idol worship, it would have overwhelmed the Jewish people. Given all of these incidents, why did Bilaam view the Jewish people differently regarding idolatry?

The Gemara in Tractate Zevachim tells us that when G’d was giving the Torah at Sinai to the Jewish people, the earth quaked so violently that the nations of the world believed that the world was coming to an end. They came to Bilaam, their prophet, with their concern. They said to him, “The world is coming to an end.” Bilaam responded, “Do you not realize that the world is not being destroyed because after the Great Flood G’d made a covenant with existence that He would not destroy it.” They replied, “G’d only promised not to destroy the world with water. Perhaps it is being destroyed by fire.” Bilaam said to them, “You fools! Do you not realize that G’d is giving His strength/power to the Jewish people (which is the Torah). It is because of this monumental moment that the world is quaking.” To this the nations of the world

responded, "G'd blesses His people with Shalom." Despite the fact that Bilaam had given them an understanding of the gravity of the moment, they turned their backs and returned to their idolatrous and evil ways. They did not have the capacity to appreciate and process what had transpired. Conversely, the Jewish people, despite the fact that they were idolaters in Egypt, accepted upon themselves the yolk of heaven at Sinai, despite the beliefs of the world.

It is true that the Jewish people had failed regarding idolatry; however, it was not their essence. G'd responded to the angels at the Sea by saying, "The Jewish people were not idolaters in Egypt because of their own free will. They were slaves who were compelled because of their circumstance. Therefore, whenever they failed with idolatry it was an incidental. It did not emanate from their essence." Meaning, if the setting of the Jew is proper, he has the capacity and clarity to see the falseness of idolatry. It is only when he is compelled or placed in an unstable spiritual setting that he may fail, otherwise the Jew will naturally reject idolatry and falseness. The nations of the world, despite their setting, do not have the capacity to do the same. They cannot extricate themselves from their limited beliefs.

Chazal tells us that when the curses of the Torah come upon the Jewish people, they are atoned and are strengthened in their spirituality. The Jew, unlike the nations of the world, has the capacity to recognize his mistakes and shortcomings through difficult times- thus making the necessary corrections. On the other hand, the nations of the world choose to reject G'd even more vehemently when Divine retribution comes upon them. Because Bilaam understood the unique capacity of the Jewish people, he therefore appreciated G'd's special love for them.

YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos (Maharal)
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30- 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.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: Taanis 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: Taanis Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington