

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES

Parshas Devarim

July 28, 2006

In Loving Memory of
Simcha Chaiya Bat Dada o'h

May her neshama have an aliyah

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 28, 2006

B"H

Parshas Devarim

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. The Jew's Relevance to the Unlimited

The Torah states that Moshe blessed the Jewish people by saying, **“May Hashem, the G'd of your forefathers, add to you a thousand times yourselves, and bless you as He has spoken to you.”** Rashi cites Chazal who state, “After receiving this blessing, the Jewish people said to Moshe, ‘G'd had blessed our forefather that we should be as numerous as the stars in the heavens (unlimited), yet your blessing states that we should only increase a thousand fold. Your blessing is limiting us to a finite number.’ Moshe responded, ‘My blessing is an addition to the one you have already received from G'd. He had blessed you to be unlimited and I am adding to His blessing that you should be a thousand fold of His unlimited number.’” At the time of Moshe's blessing the Jews numbered several million. Even if the blessing of the Jew was limited to Moshe's words, that they were to multiply a thousand fold, would it not be considered, relatively speaking, an unlimited blessing? Their numbers would be in the billions. Nevertheless, the Jewish people had a concern that Moshe's blessing was limiting their development.

Maharal of Prague explains that the concept of blessing is something of spiritual nature, which is unlimited. The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia states that blessing does not come upon something that is measured, weighed, or counted. Since blessing is a spiritual concept, which by nature is not finite, it does not have relevance to something that has been quantified. This was the basis for the reaction of the Jewish people to Moshe's blessing. Their claim to Moshe was that by quantifying them through a number, regardless of the dimension of that number, it is nevertheless a quantification - thus, denying them G'd's Blessing.

It is interesting to note that the reality of “unlimited/infinite” only has relevance to G'd Himself, Who is Unlimited. The basis for the Jew to have

relevance to G'd is to establish a commonality with Him. The Jew must reflect G'd's characteristics. As we find, there is a positive commandment that a Jew must “Walk in His ways.” Meaning, a Jew is obligated to emulate G'd's characteristics. As it is stated in the Gemara, “Just as G'd is merciful, you must be merciful. As He is gracious, you must be gracious, etc.” In addition, there is a positive commandment that a Jew must sanctify himself (*Kiddoshim ti'he'u*). The Torah when stating the obligation for the Jew to sanctify himself it states the reason, “Because I, your G'd, Am Holy.” A Jew through weaning himself from the material causes him to have greater relevance to G'd, Who is totally removed from the physical. It is only through establishing this commonality can one cleave to G'd.

If the Jew is quantified in any context, it interferes and lessens his commonality with the Omnipotent. Thus, when the Jewish people received the blessing of Moshe that they should increase a thousand fold, they saw this as a deterrent and obstacle to their relationship with G'd. Despite the enormity of their number, it was not appreciated as a blessing. To this Moshe responded and clarified his blessing by explaining that it was not a quantification, but rather that it was a thousand fold of the unlimited - thus, not interfering with their profile as G'd's people.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos states that one should be as careful in the performance of a seemingly less severe mitzvah as with a more severe mitzvah because one does not know the extent of reward for a mitzvah. Even if one would be able to fathom the extent of reward for a seemingly minor mitzvah, what effect would it have on the performance of the mitzvah? In addition, the Mishna states, “Reward for a mitzvah has no relevance to this world.” Meaning, since the reward for a mitzvah is of unlimited value, it cannot be received in a limited existence. Therefore, one cannot be rewarded even minimally for the performance of a mitzvah in this world.

If one were to be selective in his choice of mitzvos based on his understanding of their value, then he would be in essence quantifying the mitzvos. By doing so, he would be diminishing the essence of the mitzvah. By quantifying his service of G'd he would be undermining his relevance to G'd.

The Torah itself is unlimited because it is the Wisdom of G'd. In order for the Torah to have the maximum affect on the individual and all existence, it must be studied in an unlimited context. This is the reason the mitzvah of Torah study is stated, "And you shall engage in it day and night (continuously)." It is not possible to engage in Torah study unceasingly without any respite. One must attend to many basic personal amenities of existence. Nevertheless, the profile of the mitzvah is expressed as a continuous/unlimited obligation. If one studies Torah to his maximum ability, then it is the equivalent of engaging in Torah study in an unlimited manner. Thus, in essence one's capacity remains undefined. Thus it has relevance to the Infinite/G'd. It is only in this manner that one can truly cleave to G'd and have relevance to His Unlimited Wisdom/Torah.

2. The Secret Weapon of the Jewish People

The Torah tells us that Moshe recounted to the Jewish people all the events that had transpired over the 40-year trek in the desert. The Torah states, "**Moshe spoke to the Children of Israel...after he had smitten Sichon, king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Cheshbon, and Og, king of Bashan, who dwelt in Ashtaroth...**" Sichon and Og were both giants who were destroyed by Moshe.

The Midrash states, "I (G'd) have destroyed before you Sichon, king of the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan... In what merit were you able to defeat these giants? It was in the merit of Torah. Our Rabbis of Blessed Memory explain that Sichon ... was more powerful than any creature in existence and his height was greater than any tower. There was no human being that could defeat him. The Prophet Amos states, 'I (G'd) will destroy his fruits from above and his roots from below...' ... Our Rabbis of Blessed Memory tell us that it was more difficult to destroy Sichon and Og than Pharaoh and his entire army. As the Jewish people had given song of praise/thanks after the destruction of Pharaoh and his army, so too should have they done after the defeat of Sichon and Og. Yet they did not. It was not until King David, who authored the songs of praise for the

destruction of these giants. As King David writes, 'To him Who smote great kings, for His kindness endures forever...Sichon king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, for His kindness endures forever...'"

Despite the fact that the destruction of Sichon and Og was a greater miracle than the destruction of Pharaoh and his army, the Jewish people did not sing the praises of G'd after their defeat as they had done at the time of the closing of the Sea. After the destruction of the Egyptian army, Moshe articulated every aspect of the miracles that had transpired and the Jewish people responded to his words in unison. It was because they fully appreciated that they were beneficiaries of the miracles that had transpired. After the wellspring of Miriam had risen into the mountains and washed the dismembered body parts of the enemy out of the caves, the Jewish people sang praise to G'd. They recognized that they were the beneficiaries of a miracle – that G'd had destroyed the Amorites who were in the mountains waiting in hiding to destroy them. However, regarding the destruction of Sichon and Og, Moshe understood what level of miracle was necessary to topple the giants; however, the Jewish people had no inkling of what it truly entailed. Although it was not a claim against them for not expressing the praise of G'd, a song of praise needed to be said. The dimension of miracle that had transpired was not known until King David had stated it in Psalms.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that Chizkiyahu, the king of Yehudah was qualified to be Moshiach, yet it did not come to fruition. What was the basis for his disqualification? The Gemara tells us that the Attribute of Justice had come before G'd with a claim against him. After the miraculous destruction of Sancherev, the Assyrian king, and his camp of unlimited soldiers who were poised to destroy Jerusalem, he did not sing praise to G'd. The Gemara tells us that Chizkiyahu merited the miracle because of the standard of Torah study that he established among the Jewish people. When he had assumed the throne as king, he had given the Jewish people an ultimatum by placing a sword along side a Torah scroll. He had said to them, "You can either live by the Torah or be pierced by the sword." It was because of this that the Jewish people were fully engaged in Torah study to the degree that even the women and children were fully proficient in the laws pertaining to spiritual purity.

We see the far-reaching effects of Torah study. It activates forces and precipitates miracles that can vanquish enemies that are invincible within the physical

realm. It was the merit of the Torah that brought about the destruction of Sichon, Og and Sancherev. Although the Jewish people have historically always been the least numerous people in the world, we have always survived despite the odds and adversity. G'd had promised the Jewish people that they would never be destroyed. In addition, he had promised them that the words of Torah would never be forgotten from the Jewish people. The guarantee that the Torah would not be forgotten from their mouths is in essence the guarantee that the Jewish people would survive. The essence of the Jew is his spirituality and the Torah is his lifeline. It is only through the merit of Torah study that the Jewish people will be able to defeat their enemies despite the seemingly insurmountable odds.

3. Building One's Trust Account

One of the events that Moshe had recounted to the Jewish people was the incident of the spies. He had said, **“See-Hashem your G'd, has placed the Land before you...Do not fear...All of you approached me and said, ‘Let us send men ahead of us and let them spy out the Land...’The idea was good in my eyes, so I took from you twelve men, one man for each tribe...”**

G'd had promised the Jewish people that they would enter into a Land flowing with milk and honey. He had taken them out of Egypt with revealed miracles. He had split the Sea and destroyed Pharaoh and the Egyptian armies on their behalf. G'd altered nature for the sake of the Jewish people at a level that had never taken place since the beginning of existence. The request to send spies to scout out the Land was a blatant breach of faith/trust in G'd. The incident of the spies had disastrous consequences for the Jewish people because of the seriousness of the failing. They wandered in the desert for 40 years. Despite all of this, when Moshe recounted the incident of the spies and the request of the Jewish people he had said, **“The idea was good in my eyes...”**

The Midrash states, “Moshe said, ‘The idea was good in my eyes, but not in the Eyes of G'd.’ If the idea of sending spies found favor in his eyes, then why was he rebuking the Jewish people for their request? This can be understood with an allegory. A person wished to purchase a donkey. The potential buyer asked the seller, ‘Would you be agreeable to allow me to test and investigate the abilities and endurance of the donkey before I purchase it?’ The seller replied, ‘Definitely.’ The purchaser asked further, ‘Would it be agreeable to you that I test the donkey by taking it over mountains and through valleys to

determine its stamina?’ Again, the seller responded in the affirmative. When the buyer saw that the seller was agreeable and would not deny any of his requests, he understood that the donkey was truly without defect. Thus, he immediately offered to purchase the donkey without hesitation. He concluded that the seller was fully trustworthy because he did not resist his demands. He, the buyer, purchased the donkey without testing it at all because he trusted the seller. Similarly, Moshe believed that when the Jewish people asked him to send spies into the Land to determine if it was inhabitable/conquerable, if he were to refuse they would conclude that his refusal was a basis to confirm their own suspicions. Thus, when they did ask for the spies, he did not hesitate in approving their request. By complying, he believed that their fears and concerns would be dispelled. They would be convinced that the Promised Land was truly full of blessing. This is the meaning of “the idea was good in his eyes...” However when the Jewish people did actually send the spies it was a demonstration of their lack of faith. It was considered a serious failing because it was demonstration of their distrust in G'd, despite their previous relationship. Therefore G'd decreed that the generation that was between the ages of 20 and 60 should perish in the desert over a 40-year period.”

King David writes in Psalms, “Blessed is the person who has faith in G'd and G'd is the basis for his faith.” One cannot have total faith in a mortal king, regardless of his ability and dominion, because he is a mortal and thus limited. However, regarding having faith in G'd, Who is the Omnipotent and All-encompassing Being, there is no basis for one not to have full trust in Him. It is only the individual's conflicts within himself that do not allow him to fully trust in G'd. Therefore, King David states in Psalms that the one who has faith in G'd is truly blessed because he has no conflicts that interfere with his faith.

The basis for trust is having a proven record of performance. If one provides for the needs of another without fail over many years, there is no reason that the recipient of that goodness should believe that his benefactor will not continue to provide goodness for him. It is only when the individual does not understand or appreciate that his benefactor has in fact provided selflessly for him does he question the word of his benefactor. The Prophet Yeshaya writes, “Hashem, I will always thank You...” One only gives thanks to the one from whom he had benefited. If one recognizes continuously that all he has in life emanates from G'd's

goodness, and he is thus continuously thankful for all that he received, he will have trust in G'd into the future. This is because G'd had proven His selfless dedication to that individual. However if one believes that all of his blessing and success is attributed to his own initiative and "good fortune" then he has no reason to be thankful to G'd. Consequently, there is no basis to establish a record of trust with G'd. This person's faith in G'd will not be firm. He will function based on his own evaluation of reality.

4. The Downside of Clarity

The Torah states, "Moshe said to the Jewish people, **"...And in the desert, as you have seen, that Hashem, your G'd, bore you, as a man carries his son, on the entire way that you traveled, until you arrived at this place. Yet in this matter you do not believe in Hashem your G'd..."** Rashi cites the Midrash, "In what manner did G'd carry the Jewish people as a father carries a child? This can be understood with an analogy. A father was walking with his child and was attacked by bandits. The father took his child and placed him behind while he fought off the bandits. He continued to walk and was attacked by wolves. The father lifted the child and fought off the wolves...." Despite the fact that G'd had proven Himself to the Jewish people, Moshe had said, "You still do not believe in Him..."

G'd had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt with great miracles. He split the Sea on their behalf and closed it upon Pharaoh and his armies- thus destroying them. He provided them with the Manna and the Clouds of Glory in the desert. However, when they were lacking in water, the Jewish people said to Moshe, "Is G'd in our midst or not?" This statement was an indication that they did not truly believe that G'd was dedicated to provide for them as they had previously thought. There was a lack of trust in G'd. After the Jewish people complained, they were attacked by the Amalekites. Just as G'd rewards an individual measure for measure so too does He punish. Since the Jewish people, through their statement, expressed a lack of faith in G'd, they were attacked by the nation that did not believe in G'd – Amalek. Although the Amalekites had heard about all of the miracles that G'd had performed on behalf of the Jewish people, they nevertheless attacked them without any trepidation.

The Jewish people in the desert, despite the fact that they had been beneficiaries of numerous miracles, did not believe that G'd was truly with them- just as the child who did not have sufficient faith in his father, despite his selfless sacrifice on his behalf. In fact, because of their

lack of faith the Jews deserved a similar fate as they had experienced with the Amalekites. This is because G'd had sufficiently proven that He would provide for them.

Reb Yaakov Emdin writes in the introduction to his siddur, that although there are no longer revealed miracles, the survival of the Jewish people as a people throughout the millennia of exile, is the equivalent of a revealed miracle. The Jewish people, since the destruction of the Second Temple, have experienced untold persecutions and holocausts through which they should have become extinct as a people. However, through the Mercy of G'd, the Jewish people exist intact as a spiritually thriving entity. The Midrash tells us that the Roman emperor had said to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya that the Jewish people were a tenacious/tough flock. Meaning, that despite the decrees and persecutions of the Romans, they still survive and function. Rabbi Yehoshua's response to the Roman emperor was, "It is not due to the tenacity of the Jewish people. Rather it is due to their tough shepherd, G'd Himself."

Despite the fact that our predicament throughout history has been precarious and uncertain, we nevertheless continue to succeed as a Jewish people. This should cause us to understand that G'd is continuously with us. If one should behave in a manner which reflects a lack of trust/faith in G'd (G'd forbid), it could evoke an extreme response from Him (the Attribute of Justice). Therefore, despite the difficulties of life, one's trust and faith must remain firm and unswerving.

When tragedy befalls the Jewish people, as it is currently the case with all of the events in the world, one must not question G'd's concern for His people. Rather, we must introspect and reflect upon ourselves and seek to perfect and advance our spirituality. It is only through mitzvah observance and dedicated Torah study will we merit G'd's Mercy.

5. Torah & Mitzvos the Mechanism that Activates the Jewish Psyche (from Mattos-Masei)

The Midrash states, "G'd said to the Jewish people, **"My children, be careful regarding the observance of My mitzvos and keep the Torah and see how many miracles and wonders I have performed for you from the time that I had taken you from Egypt. I have toppled your enemies. I took you across the Sea and brought fear and dread upon your enemies... I have destroyed the Amorites and the giants. During**

the 40-year period that you were in the desert, I did not for a moment leave you unattended. Many enemies came upon you and you did not need to flee from them. How many snakes and scorpions did I kill in your presence in the desert? I did not allow them to harm you. It is because of all these miracles that I want you (Moshe) to record all of the travels of the Jewish people in the desert so that they should know the many miracles that I performed for them within every travel. How will the Jewish people come to know about the miracles? – when they will read about their travels. ” G'd commanded Moshe to recount the 42 locations in which Jewish people had journeyed during their 40-year trek in the desert so that they should “see” and appreciate all of the miracles He had performed on their behalf. Why must this be predicated upon “... be careful regarding the observance of My mitzvos and keep the Torah...” which is cited at the beginning of the Midrash?

The Midrash states that G'd intended that the Jewish people “see” how many miracles He had performed for them. The sense of sight allows one to experience whatever he sees as a reality. This is one of the reasons the Gemara tells us that a blind person is the equivalent of one who is dead. It is because he is unable to experience the reality of existence although he can employ his other senses. G'd wanted the Jewish people to internalize and appreciate the numerous miracles He had performed to a degree that is no less than “seeing” them. The only way one can have a capacity to sense G'd and His Miracles is if one observes the mitzvos and is engaged in continuous Torah study. One must condition and acclimate his being in a spiritual context. This is the reason G'd predicated the “seeing” of the miracles on meticulous mitzvah observance and Torah study. It is only then that one will be impacted when hearing about the miracles of G'd. However, no impact will be made if the mitzvos are performed with the mindset that one is fulfilling an obligation; if this is the case then the process of appreciation will only be intellectual.

The Torah tells us that the natural tendency of man when he achieves material success is to attribute it to his own initiative. As the verse states, “**The power of my hand has brought about all of this wealth...**” This individual is blind to the reality that success and blessing emanates only from G'd. His own initiatives and abilities regarding his success are in truth irrelevant. This lack of perception of reality is only a result of one's lack of mitzvah and Torah study involvement. By engaging in

Torah study and living a life that conforms with the mitzvos, one creates a sensitivity to see and appreciate life for what it truly is. As King Solomon writes in Proverbs, “The mitzvos are the candle and the Torah is the light.”

The Mishna tells us that if one forgets his Torah knowledge as a result of his own negligence, he is culpable with his life. Why is he held liable to such a degree? Chazal are teaching us that Torah knowledge is essential and basic for one's function as a Jew. Since one only has relevance to the perception of truth through Torah, if one should put that clarity into jeopardy, then it is the equivalent of one forfeiting his life. Therefore, one must continuously address his spirituality in order to maintain his clarity.

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