

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES

Parshas Va'eschanan

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Sponsored in Loving Memory of our Son

Yehoshua Yitzchak Ben Avraham Meir z'l – Joshua Waitman z'l
(Yartzeit Av 18)

By Dr. Albert and Bat-Sheva Waitman

May His 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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Parshas Va'eschanan

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. *Suffering, an Integral Part of Jewish History*

Before Moshe passed away, he addressed the Jewish people saying, **"Hashem became angry with me because of you, and He did not listen to me..."** One would think that Moshe was referring to his failing when he had struck the rock. Since the Jewish people had spoken disrespectfully about G'd, he became angered by them and struck the rock. Thus, he was denied entering into the Promised Land despite his pleading for forgiveness. The Jewish people were at fault. However, the simple reading of the verse does not indicate that this is what Moshe had meant.

Sforno explains, "Moshe had said that his only desire to enter into the Land was to establish the Jewish people on a permanent basis in the Land, so that they should never be exiled. However because of the sin of the spies, G'd had decreed that their descendents shall be scattered among the nations of the world." Thus, despite his supplications, Moshe could not be allowed to enter into the Land because G'd already had decreed that the Jewish people should be scattered. Had Moshe been allowed to enter, they would have never faced exile. The level of influence that Moshe would have had on the people would have protected them from exile. Therefore, G'd was not willing to forgive Moshe, despite his repentance and pleas, because of the previous decree that the Jewish people had to be scattered among the nations of the world. Why did G'd not allow His Attribute of Mercy to intercede and overturn the decree requiring the Jews to be exiled? Evidently, the Jewish people needed to be exiled in order to be fully atoned for their sin of the spies.

If one needs to be rehabilitated through a painful procedure/therapy then despite the level of pain, he must endure to enable him to survive. To deny that individual the necessary procedure would not be an act of mercy – rather it would be considered cruelty. Because of the seriousness of the sin of the spies, the Jewish people needed spiritual rehabilitation that called for being

scattered among the nations. If Moshe would have entered the Land, they would have never received or experienced that atonement. Therefore, for the sake of the Jewish people, Moshe needed to be denied entrance into the Land. It was because of them that G'd was unforgiving to Moshe.

Shelah HaKadosh writes that throughout history all of the untold suffering experienced by the Jewish people in their exile has great value to purge and atone for the spiritual failings of the people. He explains that if one mourns the destruction of the Temple on the Ninth of Av (Tisha B'Av), as if it were his personal loss, the value of that grieving would be the equivalent of the destruction of the Temple itself. When one transgresses, an impure force is created that must be dispelled. The suffering endured by the Jewish people on Tisha B'Av is needed and necessary in order to incapacitate and dispel the powers of impurity that were brought about by the sins that caused the destruction of the Temple. One should regard suffering as means to bring about spiritual rehabilitation – thus causing the reinstatement of our relationship with G'd. This is the reason the Mishna in Tractate Berachos states, "Just as one blesses G'd for the good, he must bless G'd for the bad." Even the most tragic event that was experienced by us as a Jewish people is for the ultimate good- although we do not have the capacity to appreciate its value.

2. *The Innate Value of Mitzvos*

The Torah states, **"Moshe said to the Children of Israel: Now, O Israel listen to the Statutes (Chukim) and to the Ordinances (Mishpatim) that I teach you to perform so that you may live, and you will come to possess the Land that Hashem the G'd of your forefathers, gives you. You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor shall you subtract from it..."** Statutes (*Chukim*) are laws that cannot be understood within a rational context. They are observed purely because they are Divine Decrees. For example, dietary laws, Red Heifer (Parah Adumah), prohibition of *shatnez* (prohibition of wearing wool and linen in one garment) are Statutes. Ordinances (*Mishpatim*) on the other hand, are

laws that can be understood within a rational context. For example, laws pertaining to stealing, murder, damaging another's possession, etc. are Ordinances. Chazal tell us that if these laws would have not dictated by G'd, they would have been legislated by man since they are fundamental requirements to maintain a civil society.

Whenever the Torah mentions Statutes (Chukim) and Ordinances (Mishpatim), it always predicates the Ordinances with Statutes. One would think that when the Torah presents obligations it would first present the laws that can be understood on a rational basis and then the more difficult laws/Statutes, which are dictates that are incomprehensible. The Torah predicates the Ordinances with Statutes to teach us that although Mishpatim can be understood and processed within the human context, the intrinsic value is unrelated to our understanding. The Torah never intimated the true understanding of the Mishpatim. They are in essence no different from the Statute - both are Dictates of G'd. Thus, although one may relate to the value of the rational laws, one must adhere to them purely because they are the Word of G'd. The actual value of the Mishpat is as incomprehensible (in its true essence) as the Chok because they relate to the spirituality of the Jew. Only G'd, the Creator, knows the correlation between the commandments and the spiritual make-up of the Jew (soul).

Chazal tell us in Pirkei Avos, "One should be careful with a seemingly less stringent mitzvah as with a more stringent mitzvah because one does not know the (true) reward of mitzvos." What evaluation system is applied to distinguish between a "less stringent" and a "more stringent" mitzvah? If one does make a distinction between the two, it must be based on his own rational understanding of the value of mitzvos. Since man does not have the capacity to evaluate the mitzvos, any such distinction or discernment will be flawed and false because the innate value is based on its spiritual relevance to our existence.

After mentioning the Statutes (Chukim) and Ordinances (Mishpatim), in this specific order, the Torah then states, "**You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor shall you subtract from it...**" From the sequence of presenting the obligations of Statutes and Ordinances, the Torah establishes the true essence of an Ordinance. Based on that understanding, it is obvious that one cannot add or detract from the mitzvos of the Torah since one does not comprehend the inner workings of spirituality. This beyond the grasp of man. It is only G'd Himself who knows the necessity and extent of the spiritual ramifications that emanate from the mitzvos of

the Torah. Therefore for man to add or detract from the Torah it would be considered absurd.

It is important to understand that "detracting or adding" that is mentioned by the Torah does not necessarily mean eliminating a mitzvah in its entirety or adding an entirely new mitzvah. Rather, one may choose to modify and alter the mitzvah - such as adding a fifth parchment to the tefillin. This addition is considered a detraction because this is not the mitzvah. Conversely, one may also choose to perform a mitzvah in a deficient manner- such as using three species rather than four regarding the mitzvah of lulav (on Succos). These considerations are only possible if one does not appreciate the innate value of a mitzvah - which is its spiritual value. If one adds or subtracts from the Torah, it is an indication that his performance of the mitzvah is based on his own rationale and evaluation system.

The Torah continues, "**You will cling to Hashem you G'd - you are all alive today.**" There is a Positive Commandment of "*Bo Tidbok*- to Him you shall attach yourself." The Gemara in Tractate Pesachim asks, "How could one attach himself to G'd, since He is a consuming fire?" The Gemara answers that the way a Jew attaches himself to G'd is by providing financial opportunities to a Torah Scholar, eating and drinking with him, or giving one's daughter in marriage to him. Through these various levels of association, it is considered as if the individual is attaching himself directly to G'd. The Sage, through his Torah knowledge and his internalization of mitzvos, becomes sanctified and spiritualized, thus becoming an embodiment of G'd's Torah. Therefore, by cleaving and attaching oneself to him, in actuality he is attaching himself to G'd. It is only through the study of Torah that one can appreciate what he does not understand.

3. The Need of Moshe to be Forgiven by the Jewish People

The Torah tells us that Moshe pleaded with G'd to allow him to enter the Land. G'd rejected his request. The Midrash tells us that when the time of his passing approached he was told, "The moment of your passing from this world has come. Moshe went to the Jewish people and said, 'I have pained you for the sake of the Torah and mitzvos. Now I ask you for your forgiveness.' They responded, 'Our teacher, our master, we forgive you. We have angered you and brought difficulties upon you with our conduct. Please forgive us.' Moshe said, 'I forgive you.'"

Any pain or suffering that Moshe had brought upon the Jewish people was necessary because it was for the sake of the Torah. Whatever Moshe had done was purely to fulfill the Will of G'd. He was chosen by G'd to be His spokesman. G'd personally attests to the fact that Moshe was the most humble man who ever walked the face of the earth. Since this is so, why was he in need of forgiveness? In addition, there is a positive commandment that one must admonish his fellow when he transgresses the Torah. It is understandable that the Jewish people must ask forgiveness from Moshe because they had behaved inappropriately to him. Does a parent need to ask forgiveness from his child when acting in his best interest although the child may have not approved?

The commentators provide many interpretations regarding the failing of Moshe at the time of the striking of the rock. Rashi explains that Moshe's failing was that he was told by G'd to speak to the rock to bring forth water rather he chose to strike it. Another interpretation is that prior to the incident of the striking of the rock, Moshe had spoken to the Jewish people in a way that was considered disrespectful. G'd refers to His people as, "Priestly, kingly, and holy nation." They are His most valued possession. Yet because Moshe was angered by their disrespectful behavior, he addressed them as "a rebellious people." Moshe should not have rebuked the people in this manner. It was a disrespectful way to address G'd's chosen people. Moshe's failing was not that he admonished them, rather it was the manner of admonishment. Because of this disrespect, he was not allowed to enter into the Promised Land. Therefore, Moshe needed to ask for forgiveness from the people.

Even if one would understand Moshe's failing was striking the rock rather than speaking to it (not heeding the Word of G'd); nevertheless, he had to ask forgiveness from the Jewish people. Factually, he did address them pejoratively in his state of anger. It is true that Moshe's motivation to reprimand the Jewish people was only for the sake of G'd; however, because he had done so in a disrespectful manner, he was in need of forgiveness. His failing was due to his state of anger.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in his work Shaare Teshuvah (Gates of Repentance) that because man was created "in the image of G'd (b'tzelem Elokim) one cannot refer to him (even a child) in a pejorative manner. If one understood the true essence of the Jew, he would not refer to his fellow in a derogatory way regardless of his good intentions/positive feelings.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states, "The world exists in the merit of the vapor (the words of Torah) from the young Jewish children who study Torah from their rabbis." Rav Papa said to Abbaye, "What about mine (Torah) and yours?" He answered, "There is no comparison between vapor (words of Torah) that is tainted with sin and vapor (word of Torah) that is free of sin." Abbaye and Rav Papa were of the greatest elucidators of the Mishna, yet they understood that the value of a young child's Torah was greater than theirs – because of the purity of the child. Regardless of the spiritual dimension and devout piety of Abbaye and Rav Papa, they were not able to compare the potency/value of their Torah with that of the Torah studied by the young children.

The Mishna in Tractate Sanhedrin states, "One who maintains (rescues) the life of one Jew it is as if he saved the entire world." We see that the value of a single Jew is the equivalent of all existence. Therefore, if one were to speak negatively about his fellow it has grave consequences because his value is the equivalent of the entire world. Although Moshe had the purest motives and intentions, he still was in need of forgiveness for rebuking the Jewish people in a manner that was not befitting their spiritual stature.

4. Guaranteeing the Vibrancy and Fulfillment of the Torah

The Torah states, "**Moshe said to the Jewish people, '...Beware for yourself and greatly beware for your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have beheld and lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children and your children's children - the day that you stood before Hashem, your G'd...'**" Rashi explains that Moshe is referring to the meticulous observance of the mitzvos. In order for the Jewish people to be considered by the nations of the world as "wise and discerning," they must recall with accuracy all that they were told at Sinai. If the mitzvos are not adhered to as prescribed at Sinai, the Jewish people will be seen by the world as fools. Ramban in his commentary rejects Rashi's interpretation of the verse. He explains that Moshe is telling the Jewish people that they must never forget the Sinai experience.

Ramban explains the verse to mean, "You should not forget what you saw with your eyes at Sinai – the lightning, the thunder, His Glory, and the words that you heard from the midst of the fire. This must be taught to your children and your children's children forever (as part of the mesorah (tradition)). Every detail of the Sinai event must be taught throughout your generations because it was

through this event that every Jew was impacted forever. Because of the Sinai experience, the Jewish people were instilled with awe, fear and reverence for G'd. In order to impress upon one's children and future generations that same level of understanding of G'd's Omnipotence, one must recall every aspect of the Sinai event. ..."

Ramban continues, "The reason the Jewish people needed to witness His Voice with their own eyes and hear it with their own ears rather than it being communicated through Moshe His Prophet is because if a false prophet should arise in the future to counter the prophecy of Moshe (contest the authenticity of the Torah) it would be rejected. This may be the case for the generation who had witnessed first hand the Sinai event. However, how will their children and future generations maintain and guarantee the immutability of Torah? The Sinai event, with all of its details, must be transmitted from parent to child, from generation to generation, until the end of time. It is a known fact that a parent will not teach his child falsehood. Therefore when the parent teaches his child, his words will be accepted as truth." Although a parent will not communicate to a child something that is false, what will guarantee that the child will be receptive to his parent's words?

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk writes in his commentary on the Portion of Kedoshim, that the Torah is adamant regarding the relationship between a child and his parent. There is a mitzvah for a child to honor and revere his parents. He must understand that they are not his peers. It is important that their relationship be strictly defined because the transmission of Torah is dependent on the strength/integrity of the relationship between parent and child. The immutability of Torah is rooted and contingent upon in mesorah (tradition). If the child reveres his parents, then he will give credence and value to what they teach him, more so than if he came from any other individual. The mesorah is maintained because the parent will not communicate falsehood to his child and the child will be receptive to that communication because of the degree to which he esteems the parents.

It is not enough for the parent to merely transmit fact to the child he must communicate the value and privilege of being taken as G'd's Chosen people. The mitzvah as described by Ramban is to transmit the awe, fear, and trepidation of the experience to one's child. Only when the child can appreciate, through the description of the parent, will he truly feel special and blessed.

5. *Achieving Clarity in Retrospect* (from Devqarim)

The Torah tells us that the Jewish people had defeated the two fierce giants, Sichon, king of Cheshbon and Og, king of Bashan, who had waged war against them. After their defeat, the Torah states, "**From this day I shall place dread and fear of you on all the nations under the entire heaven, when they hear of your reputation. They will tremble.**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain "**all the nations under the entire heaven**" to mean that the day that Moshe killed Og the sun was fixed in the sky and did not set. When the nations of the world saw this unusual phenomenon, they understood that Og had been killed. This monumental event caused them to tremble in fear of the Jewish people since they had defeated a giant who humanly could not be toppled.

The Torah tells us in the Portion of Noach that every kosher and non-kosher species entered into the Ark. Any living species that did not enter into the Ark perished from the Great Flood. The Gemara in Tractate Zevachim tells that Og was not able to enter into the ark because of his physical dimension. He clung onto the outside of the Ark and was sustained by Noach. Although the waters of the Great Flood were hot and sulfuric, capable of dissolving anything within it, G'd made a miracle that the waters surrounding the ark itself were cool and ordinary. Thus, the Ark did not dissolve in the waters and Og was able to survive. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that even Noach, who was identified as a tzaddik (devoutly righteous) and perfect in his generations should have not survived the Flood except that he had found "special favor" in G'd's eyes. If Noach was not sufficiently worthy to survive together with his family, then what merit did Og possess in order to survive?

The Torah tells us that during the time of Avraham, our Patriarch, there was a war between the Four Kings and the Five Kings, in which the Four kings were victorious. After the victory, Lot, Avraham's nephew, was taken captive by the Four mighty kings. An escapee who had fled from the battle informed Avraham that his nephew had been taken captive. Avraham immediately rallied his men to go to battle against the Four kings, to save Lot. Chazal tell us that the escapee was Og. He had only informed Avraham of his nephew's capture so that he should go to battle and be killed, thus allowing him to take Avraham's wife Sarah as his own. This was the sinister motive behind Og's informing Avraham about his nephew.

Avraham and his servant Eliezer, miraculously defeated the Four mighty kings by themselves and rescued Lot. The nations of the world were awed by this victory. It

was clear to them that Avraham's accomplishment came about through miracle because he was favored by G'd. Because Avraham was revered by all he was coronated as the "father of all nations." This event was the ultimate in kiddush Hashem (sanctification of G'd's Name). Avraham, the person who had introduced monotheism to mankind was accepted and installed as the father of all nations. Ironically, this unique level of kiddush Hashem was only brought about because of the actions of Og – although his intention was sinister. Why did G'd want Og to be the one to inform Avraham of his nephew's capture? It could have been anyone.

When Moshe was told to go to battle against Og, the Torah states, "**G'd said to Moshe, 'Do not be afraid...'**" Although Moshe had performed revealed miracles in Egypt, defeated Pharaoh and taken the Jewish people out of Egypt, split the Sea, and had ascended to heaven and received the Torah, he was nevertheless fearful of Og, the giant. Why should a man of this spiritual dimension and stature fear Og? Moshe was concerned that the merit that Og had as a result of facilitating Avraham's rescue of Lot was still in effect and would protect him. It was because Moshe understood that the merit that Og possessed as a result of assisting Avraham, the man who introduced G'd into existence, was formidable. If that merit was still in effect, Moshe was concerned that he would not be able to defeat Og. G'd assured Moshe that he had no reason to be afraid because that merit was expended. When Moshe defeated Og, all the nations of the world "under the heaven" would be awed by the power of the Jewish people.

Og had to be the one to inform Avraham of Lot's capture. He had to gain the merit to be able to live hundreds of years until the time of Moshe. Only by confronting a formidable foe such as Og, would the Jewish people be elevated in the eyes of the world. The sun was halted in the sky the day that Og was defeated so that the nations of the world would unquestionably recognize that G'd is behind the Jewish people.

One is not permitted to remind a convert or one who has repented of his past transgressions because he will be pained. However, we find that when Yisro is mentioned in the Torah, although it was after his conversion to monotheism, he is continuously referred to as "Kohen Midian – high priest of Midian." If it is not permitted to remind one of his negative past, then why does the Torah repeatedly emphasize that Yisro was the pagan leader of Midian? If the Torah had not referred to Yisro as the high priest of Midian, then we would not appreciate his ultimate conversion to monotheism. The

Midrash tells us that Yisro had worshipped every deity and had rejected them because of their falseness. He ultimately saw the truth of G'd. The reason the Torah continuously reiterates and emphasizes Yisro's position as high priest is to communicate the ultimate kiddush Hashem, which was the abandonment of paganism/idolatry. It was the equivalent of the leader of the Catholic Church denying all his previous beliefs and acknowledging Judaism as the true belief. An ordinary individual converting to monotheism could not have brought about such a level of kiddush Hashem.

Often we see evil prospering and assuming positions of power and we do not understand why G'd allows this to be. It is only because of His goal ultimately to bring about the most advanced level of Sanctification of His Name when evil will be expunged.

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—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: 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.52st

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: Taanis Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
1:00—2:00 pm	Daas Tevunos Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

10:30 –11:30am	Duties of the Heart Location: Yad Avraham
12:00 – 1:00 pm	Talmud: Taanis Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL)