

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
The Portion of
Va'eschanan
 August 14, 2008

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
1. <i>The Tzaddik's Perception of His Own Level of Accomplishment</i>	2
2. <i>Creating a Spiritual Mindset</i>	3
3. <i>Seeing A Torah Sage in His True Light</i>	4
4. <i>The Setting of Life</i>	5
5. <i>Dedication and Sacrifice Reflects Value</i>	6

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
August 14, 2008

B"H

Va'eschanan

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

Dean

1. The Tzaddik's Perception of His Own Level of Accomplishment

The Portion begins, **“I implored (va'eschanan) - Hashem at that time...”** Moshe supplicated G'd to allow him to enter into the Land of Israel despite the prior decree that he would not be allowed to do so. Rashi cites Sifri, **“‘Va'eschanan (I implore)’ is a term of supplication that implies that the basis for the request is rooted in G'd's graciousness. In essence, the supplicant is asking that G'd's response should be gratis. When a tzaddik prays to G'd, although he has sufficient merit upon which he could base his request, nevertheless, because he sees himself as unworthy, his request from G'd is to grant him a gift (matnas chinum).”**

One's spiritual potential is unlimited. It is not possible for one to know if he has fully addressed his potential until after his passing. Therefore, if one should come before G'd and base his request on his personal merit, it would imply that the individual believes that he had sufficiently addressed his potential, which would be arrogant if he did not. This individual's perception of himself is analogous to an employee who has been hired to work for an employer for a period of time in order to achieve an objective. Rather than meeting his obligation, the employee chose to work only a fraction of the time that was allotted to him. At the end of the day, when it was time to collect his wage, understanding that he did not work the requisite amount of time, he requested from the employer to be compensated for the minimal amount of time that he had worked. If this employee would understand and appreciate his level of failure, he would not have the audacity to ask his employer for the wage for the time that he had invested. In fact, he deserves no compensation because his investment of time had barely addressed the objective of his employment. Because of his negligence the objective failed. Similarly, the tzaddik, understanding the extent of his obligation/mission and believing that he may have fallen short of addressing it,

can only ask G'd to respond his prayers due to His graciousness (gift).

It is evident from the works of Chofetz Chaim that he was one of the leading Torah Sages of his generation. Nevertheless, he is not recognized and revered for his greatness in Torah; rather, he is renowned for his piety and devoutness. Rav Aaron Kotler z'tl (Lakewood Rosh HaYeshivah) once asked the Brisker Rav z'tl, **“Why is the Chofetz Chaim only known as the *chasid hador* - the most devoutly pious person of the generation, and not as the *gadol hador* - one of the leading Torah Sage of the generation?”** The Brisker Rav answered, **“The Chofetz Chaim understood his own proficiency and erudition of Torah. One's degree of knowledge is based on fact. Because of his exceptional level of piety and humility he prayed to G'd that he should not be recognized or acknowledged for his level of accomplishment. Based on the principle, the tzaddik decrees and G'd fulfills that decree, Chofetz Chaim is not acknowledged as a leading Torah Sage. However, regarding his classification as *‘chasid. (devoutly scrupulously pious)’*, he did not request that he should not be recognized as such because since he was in fact a chasid, an individual who possesses an unusual level of humility, he truly did not believe that he had addressed his spiritual potential sufficiently.**

The Sifri continues, **“Why did Moshe ask G'd to respond to him, although he felt that he was undeserving? It is because G'd had said to Moshe regarding His Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, ‘I shall be Gracious to the one to whom I will be Gracious.’”** Based on this Sifri it seems that had it not been for the fact that G'd had said to Moshe that He would demonstrate his Graciousness, Moshe would have not implored G'd to allow him to enter into the Land based on his own merit.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos states, **“Do not open your mouth to satan.”** The understanding of this principle is, one should not say something that is self-incriminating because this will allow satan to begin

prosecuting that individual. The Gemara tells a story of an individual who was grieving over the loss of a loved one. The mourner bemoaning his loss faulted himself by saying that was deserving of this punishment because his own sins had brought this tragedy upon him. A Torah scholar who was present at the time of this remark explained to him that one is not permitted to speak in this manner because he is “opening his mouth to satan.” When one incriminates himself by verbalizing that one’s suffering is due to one’s spiritual failing, this allows satan to bring prosecution upon that individual. If a tzaddik supplicates G’d based on His Graciousness and not on his own self worth, seemingly there a degree of self-incrimination. The tzaddik in essence is saying that he is in fact unworthy to be answered on his own merit. If this is so, how do we understand the words of the Sifri that states that the devoutly righteous only pray to G’d to respond to them based on His Attribute of Graciousness?

The principle that is stated in the Gemara in Berachos only applies to the one who articulates that his plight is due to his own shortcomings. It is at that time that he invites prosecution upon himself. However, the tzaddik, who does not supplicate G’d based on his own merit has no relevance to this principle. Since the basis for asking G’d to respond gratis is only attributed to the tzaddik’s humility and piety, it is seen as something that is special. It would be considered arrogant for one to feel confident that he had fulfilled his potential.

2. Creating a Spiritual Mindset

The Torah states, “(Moshe said to the Jewish people) **Your eyes have seen what Hashem did with Baal-peor, for every man that followed Baal-peor-Hashem your G’d, destroyed him from your midst. But you who cling to Hashem, your G’d, you are alive today (Vatem hadveikim ba’Shem Elokeichem chayim kulchem hayom).**” Moshe contrasted those who attached themselves to Baal-peor with those who cleave to G’d. The ones who engaged in idolatry were destroyed while those who cling to G’d are alive today because they attached themselves to the source of life, who is G’d Himself. Baal HaTurim points out that on the word “*hadveikim* (those who cling)” there is a crown on the letter “*kuf*” in the Torah scroll. The crown on the letter “*kuf*,” which has the numerical value of 100, alludes to the fact that one has the obligation to recite 100 blessings each day.

The Torah states, “ (Moshe said to the Jewish people) **Now...What (*ma*) does Hashem, your G’d, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem...**” The Gemara in Tractate

Menachos tells us that that the word “*ma* (what)” can be read as “*meiah* (100).” Chazal are teaching us that in order for one to fear G’d and ascend in one’s spirituality one should recite a minimum of 100 blessings in a day. If one properly recites 100 blessings each day, one will have the capacity to revere G’d and address his obligation as a Jew. Through the articulation of a 100 blessings, which touch upon many aspects of one’s existence, one acknowledges G’d as the Omnipotent Being and King of the Universe. When one is continuously cognizant of this fact, one will be sensitized to the fact that G’d Wills every aspect of his existence. Thus, causing him to revere G’d and follow His ways and dictates.

Rambam writes in the Laws of Blessings that there are three classifications of blessings. The classification of blessings known as “*birchas ha nehenin*” are those that are recited before one partakes of food or drink. The classification of blessings referred to as “*birchas ha mitzvah*” are those that are recited prior to the performance of a mitzvah. The third classification of blessings are referred to as “*birchas shevach v’hodaah*,” which are blessings of thanks and praise. Rambam writes that the third classification of blessing allows one to be continuously be cognizant of the Creator so that one should revere Him. (Although all blessings cause one to have a continuous cognizance of G’d, the third classification especially causes one to have a greater focus on this fact).

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that if one recites a blessing without mentioning the Name of G’d and identifying Him as “the King,” although the individual had G’d in mind, the blessing has no value. Why is this so? Since the objective of a blessing is to make one cognizant of G’d so that he should revere Him, the blessing needs to acknowledge and identify G’d for Who and What He is. It is important to acknowledge G’d as “King” because it implies that the one reciting the blessing is His subject. This will cause the individual to be subservient to his Master.

If one articulates a 100 blessings each day but does not focus on the content of the statement while reciting it, it will not impact upon the individual. The recitation of a blessing is more than uttering a specific phraseology. One must understand and appreciate firstly the dimension of one’s Master and His ability. If one wants to cleave to G’d and have relevance to Him, as the Master/King of the Universe, he must recite 100 blessings. This is confirmed through the crown that is placed on the letter “*kuf*” that is found in the Torah Scroll.

3. Seeing A Torah Sage in His True Light

The Torah tells us that Moshe supplicated G'd to allow him to cross the Jordan and enter into the Land of Israel; however, G'd rejected Moshe's request. The Torah states that Moshe rebuked the Jewish people saying, **"But Hashem became angry with me because of you, and He did not listen to me; Hashem said to me, 'It is too much for you! (rav lach) Do not continue to speak to Me further about this matter.'**" Rashi explains the words "rav lach" (It is too much for you) to mean, "G'd told Moshe to cease his supplications because if he persisted and G'd would not respond, it would reflect negatively on Him. People would say that the Master is harsh the student is obstinate and unrelenting. Another explanation of 'rav lach' is that although Moshe would not be allowed to enter into the Land, he already had much. Moshe's reward was great without him needing to enter into the Land." Why was it important for Moshe to share his dialogue with G'd to the Jewish people?

The Gemara in Tractate Yoma tells us what is considered to be a desecration of G'd's Name (*Chilul Hashem*). Reb Yochanan says that if he would walk four cubits without wearing tefillin or studying Torah it would be considered a *Chilul Hashem*. If one were to see him without tefillin or not studying Torah, although it could be justified because it is permitted for him to be disengaged for that moment; nevertheless, because it could be perceived by another in a negative light it is considered to be a *Chilul Hashem*. If one were able to draw from Reb Yochanan's behavior that one does not necessarily need to wear tefillin or study Torah, although it is a misperception of truth and reality; nevertheless, Reb Yochanan is culpable for causing a *Chilul Hashem* because his behavior was the cause of the misperception.

Rav says that if he did not pay his butcher on time it would be considered a *Chilul Hashem*. Rashi explains that it is because the butcher would say, "If the rabbi is permitted to steal, then I am permitted to steal." Although Rav's delayed payment is not considered stealing because he is only late in his payment of a debt (stealing is when one takes something that is not rightfully his), nevertheless, it is considered a *Chilul Hashem* because Rav is the cause of this misperception.

If Moshe would have stopped supplicating G'd, without offering the Jewish people an explanation, his standing would have been diminished their eyes. If in the past at the time of the sin of the Golden Calf and the sin of the Spies when G'd wanted to destroy the Jewish people,

Moshe did not cease to beseech Him on their behalf until he achieved his objective, why would he cease supplicating G'd regarding his own predicament? As a result of this unanswered question, they would have perceived Moshe in a negative light, thus diminishing his value in their eyes. Therefore his response to the Jewish people was, "If I were to continue supplicating G'd and He would reject my supplications, it would be perceived that the Master is harsh and the student is unrelenting." It would have reflected negatively on G'd as well as Moshe. If Moshe were minimized in the eyes of the Jewish people it would consequently minimize the infinite value of the Torah, because he was the conduit for Its transmission. It was therefore an imperative for Moshe to maintain his revered status.

There is a Positive Commandment, **"You shall fear (revere) G'd (*Es Hashem Elokecha tirah*)."** –you shall fear (revere) G'd." The Gemara explains that the word "es," which in its own right has no interpretation but indicates an adjunct to the subject matter that is being discussed (which is the reverence of G'd), comes to include Torah Sages. The Torah requires one to revere the Torah Sage no less than one must revere G'd Himself. Maharal of Prague explains that the reason for this is that since the Torah Sage is the conduit for the transmission of Torah, by revering and esteeming this classification of person to the degree that one reveres G'd, it will cause the Torah Sage to be influential and impress the dictates of the Torah upon the Jewish people.

Rambam writes in the Laws of the Study of Torah that one is not permitted to be in the bathhouse with his rebbe (teacher). He is not permitted to be present when his rebbe is taking a haircut. A rebbe should not joke with his students or interact with them in a jovial manner. The rebbe must maintain an elevated status regarding his students so that they will see him as special and thus esteem him. If they were to regard him as a peer, they would be less attentive to his teachings. If the rebbe is not revered sufficiently then the Torah that he imparts to his students will not have the proper effect. Although the students understand that the rebbe's human needs are no less than their own, by seeing him in a human context, it will detract from their perception of him and consequently minimize his Torah teachings.

Moshe needed to maintain the proper perception of who he was so that his actions should not be misconstrued and seen in a negative light. He therefore needed to tell the Jewish people that G'd had said, **"Do not continue to speak to Me further about this matter."**

4. The Setting of Life

The Torah states, “**I implored (va’eschanan) - Hashem at that time...**” Moshe supplicated G’d to allow him to enter into the Land of Israel despite the prior decree that he would not be allowed to do so. Rashi cites Chazal who explain based on Sifri, “‘*Va’eschanan* (I implore)’ is a term of supplication that implies that the basis for the request is rooted in G’d’s graciousness. As G’d had said, ‘I shall be Gracious to the one to whom I will be Gracious.’ In essence, the supplicant is asking that G’d’s response should be gratis.

The Midrash states, “Initially after the sin of the Golden Calf, when Moshe had asked G’d to reveal to him His Glory, Moshe asked, ‘Master of the Universe, with which one of Your Attributes do you interact with this world?’ G’d responded, ‘I will show you. I will bring all of My good upon you. You should understand that I do not owe a thing to any living creature. When one performs a mitzvah, the reward he receives is gratis. As it states, ‘I shall be Gracious to the one to whom I will be Gracious and I will be Merciful to the one to whom I will be Merciful.’ Moshe asked, ‘If this is so, then respond to my request (to enter into the Land) gratis.’ Therefore, the Torah states, ‘**I implored (va’eschanan).**’ Moshe beseeched G’d to allow him to enter into the Land despite the fact that he was undeserving. It would only be by the Graciousness of G’d that Moshe’s request would be fulfilled.

Chazal tell us that G’d created the world to be a setting for man to fulfill the Torah and advance himself spiritually, through the context of free choice. If one is deserving, because he made the correct choice, then he will be rewarded. However, if one makes the incorrect choice and fails, then he is culpable for choosing what is unacceptable. Thus, man can only be rewarded or punished because his actions are attributed to himself because of his own choices. If this is so, how do we understand the words of the Midrash – “G’d said to Moshe, ‘When one performs a mitzvah, the reward he receives is gratis.’” This implies that G’d rewards the individual for performing a mitzvah, despite the fact that he is undeserving of that reward. Meaning, the reward that one receives is unrelated to one’s mitzvah performance.

Eitz Yosef, a commentator on the Midrash, explains by citing a verse from Eyov, “G’d said to Eyov, ‘Who has done anything for Me that I should pay him?’ G’d said, ‘Has anyone performed the mitzvah of mezuzah without Me providing him with the house? (One is only

obligated on a Torah level in the mitzvah of mezuzah if one owns a house). Has anyone circumcised a son without Me providing him with that son?’ We find that man only performs a mitzvah after G’d has provided him with everything that he needs. Therefore, the reward that G’d bestows upon the individual is gratis.”

The Gemara in Tractate Nidah tells us that before a child is conceived an angel takes the droplet of semen before G’d, who pronounces upon it its destiny: “Strong or weak, wise or foolish, wealthy or poor...” This pronouncement is made before the conception of every human being. However the pronouncement of “*tzaddik* (righteous) or *rasha* (evil)” is not made because “All is predestined by heaven with the exception of the fear of G’d (heaven).”

The Mishna in Ethics of Our Fathers states, “Who is truly wealthy? He who is satisfied with his portion.” One’s material wealth is predetermined by G’d. It is not related to one’s ability or intelligence. Thus, the one who is truly wealthy is the one who understands that his financial predicament is not dependant upon himself. He is satisfied with his portion because he understands that it is the one that G’d has deemed for him. The one who is satisfied with his portion appreciates the fact that the only initiative that can be attributed to himself is his fear of heaven. The Mishna states, “Who is truly strong? He who is able to subdue his inclination.” One’s physical constitution is predetermined. Regardless of how much one may address his physical state, the result is only to the degree that G’d had predetermined. Thus, the one who is truly strong is the one who is able to subdue his evil inclination.

Factually speaking, if one does not take the initiative to pursue wealthy, one would not become wealthy. If so, if it as pronounced at the time of conception that one will be wealthy, how is it actualized if one chooses not to take the initiative? G’d compels the individual who is destined to become wealthy to pursue wealth. He motivates that individual to take the initiative to attain wealth. The individual has no choice in the matter because it was predestined. However, regarding one’s pursuit of spirituality, G’d does not compel him to do so. He does not put in one’s mind the desire to become a *tzaddik* nor does G’d compel one to become evil. This is the only aspect of one’s existence that is completely determined by one’s own choice.

G’d provides one with the material context in which one should be able to make the choices that are necessary. It is true that one cannot perform a circumcision

upon one's child unless G'd provides him with that child; however, the decision to perform the circumcision is one's own. Relatively speaking, one's initiative to perform a mitzvah is minute and inconsequential compared to all that G'd has given the individual to be able to perform that particular mitzvah. Therefore, since one's contribution to a mitzvah is actually a pittance compared to the totality of the setting. Thus, the reward that one receives is truly based on G'd's Graciousness and not on his own initiative. It is analogous to one who has been given a boat in the sea upon which to navigate and a current to carry the boat. The only initiative that one needs to take is in which direction to turn the rudder.

Moshe was endowed with extraordinary abilities and potential. Chazal tell us that when he was born the house radiated with holiness and he was able to speak and walk as a newborn infant. The Divine Presence was upon him. Thus, comparatively speaking to his own initiative, his dimension of being was unrelated to himself because it was based on G'd's endowment and thus predetermined. Therefore, when Moshe beseeched G'd he understood that his actual investment, his initiative, was miniscule compared to G'd's endowment. He thus asked G'd to answer his request gratis based on His Graciousness.

5. *Dedication and Sacrifice Reflects Value* (from Devarim)

The Torah tells us that before Moshe passed away he rebuked the Jewish people for many of their failings of the past. He recounted that at the time that Yisro had suggested that Moshe establish a hierarchical system of judges, the Jewish people responded, "**The thing that you propose to do is good.**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "The response of the Jewish people was for their own self-interest. They should have responded by saying, 'Our teacher Moshe, from whom is it better to learn from, you or your student? Is it not better to learn from you, who suffered and sacrificed for the sake of acquiring the Torah?' Since you did not respond in this manner I understand that you were acting out of self-interest..." Where do we see that Moshe had suffered for the sake of acquiring the Torah?

The Midrash states, "Moshe had suffered for the sake of the acquisition of Torah. He was denied physical sustenance for forty days and nights when he ascended to heaven to receive the Torah from G'd. As he told the Jewish people before his passing, 'Bread I did not eat. Water I did not drink...' Why is it relevant for Moshe to share this fact with the Jewish people? Moshe was teaching the Jewish people that the way to acquire Torah

must be similar to his own. He had said, 'Just as I sacrificed my blood and fat for the sake of the acquisition of Torah, so too must you be willing to sacrifice your physicality/ material comforts in order to acquire Torah.' Only then will you merit to come upon its truths."

A rebbe (teacher) is a conduit to the student for the transmission of Torah. The spiritual dimension of the rebbe will determine the degree of transmission to the student, if he is worthy. If the rebbe and the student are both of a special level, the student will be a beneficiary of a unique level of Torah. This is not based on one's intellectual capacity. One's level of selfless dedication to the acquisition of Torah, will determine one's level of success. The more one is willing to sacrifice for Its acquisition will he merit Divine Assistance.

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah states, "One who says 'I have toiled (in Torah) and have come upon it' – should be believed. One who says, 'I have not toiled and I did come upon it' –is not to be believed." One can only come upon the truth of Torah, through sacrifice, which is the toil and dedication to comprehend it. Why must one sacrifice to comprehend the Torah?

The verse in Proverbs states that G'd said to the Jewish people, "I (G'd) have given you a *lekach tov* (a good commodity) My Torah do not abandon." G'd Himself refers to the Torah as the most precious commodity in existence. He is only willing to impart it to one who values and esteems it as it should be. This is demonstrated through one's willingness to sacrifice for its acquisition. However, if one is not willing to sacrifice for it, it is an indication that he does not value it sufficiently. Therefore, G'd will not entrust His most precious gift with that individual.

Ramban writes in his introduction to the Torah that every letter contained in the Torah is part of one of the many unpronounceable Names of G'd. The letters of the Torah are only set in this manner to communicate the narrative that G'd wants to transmit. Thus, when one engages in Torah study, one is in fact engaging in what is the ultimate in holiness, which are the Names of G'd. When studying Torah with the proper reverence, one attaches himself to G'd in the most intimate way. This is indicated by one's application of oneself for Its acquisition. If one is not willing to sacrifice for something of this dimension value, then it is disgraceful. This is because when one has the opportunity to cleave to G'd but is not willing to sacrifice for the result, he is demonstrating a lack of reverence. The Torah Itself is the ultimate (*talmid Torah kineged kulum*) because it encompasses everything, as G'd Himself does.

The study of the Torah is the attachment of oneself to G'd because it is Its essence. Thus, it is only the one who is willing to sacrifice for It that will be worthy of Its truth. This is the reason Moshe said to the Jewish people, "Just as I sacrificed my blood and fat for the sake of the acquisition of Torah, so too must you be willing to compromise on your physicality/material comforts in order to acquire Torah."

YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos (Maharal)
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar – Derech Hashem
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Chulin
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

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

Tuesday

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

Wednesday

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

1:00—2:00 pm **Daas Tevunos**
Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

11:00 –12:00pm **Duties of The Heart**
Location: Yad Avraham
12:30 – 1:30 pm **Talmud: Megilah** Sunrise Capital 641
Lexington (25th FL)