

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Va'eschanan

July 21, 2010

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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And over

Portion of Va'eschanan

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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1. The Two Aspects of Grieving on the Ninth of Av

The Gemara in Tractate Taanis tells us based on verses in Prophets regarding the destruction of the First Temple that the Babylonians had entered the Temple on the seventh of the month of Av. They disgraced the Temple on the eighth and the ninth and before sundown on the ninth of Av, they set the Temple on fire. It continued to burn through the tenth of Av, ultimately bringing about its destruction. Reb Yochanon states that if he had been present at the time that the Rabbis had legislated the fast on the ninth of Av (*Tisha b'Av*) he would have insisted that it should be commemorated on the tenth and not on the ninth. It was because factually the actual destruction of the Temple transpired on the tenth. The Rabbis disagree with Reb Yochanon because they established the date based on the cause, which was the time that the fire was set on the ninth of Av. The cause of the tragedy is what must be commemorated. Seemingly, the position of the Rabbis is more compelling and cogent than that of Reb Yochanon. It is irrelevant that the Temple actually was destroyed on the tenth, because the cause was set into motion and caused an inevitable chain of events on the ninth of Av. Why did Reb Yochanon believe that the tenth of Av would have been more appropriate date to mourn and grieve the destruction of the Temple?

The only reason the Babylonians were able to initially desecrate and ultimately ignite the Temple on the ninth of Av was because the Divine Presence had departed at that moment from the Temple. As the Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that the Babylonians were not destroying G'd Temple but rather only a façade made of stones and wood that had once contained the Divine Presence. They had no reason to gloat over their accomplishment because their act of destruction was no different than destroying any other edifice. We can now understand the position of the Rabbis on an even more profound level. What we mourn on the ninth of Av is the Divine Presence departing from the midst of the Jewish people. The intimate relationship that the Jewish people had with G'd was no longer. This was confirmed through the torching of the Temple.

Although the Divine Presence had departed the Temple on the ninth of Av before sundown, the Temple burned through the tenth of Av. In the eyes of the nations of the world, the Babylonians had successfully destroyed the House of G'd. This belief was a desecration of G'd's Name. The pagans of the world gloated over the fact that they were victorious over the G'd of the Jews. Reb Yochanon would have chosen to focus on the desecration of G'd's Name, rather than the cause of the destruction of the Temple. Therefore, the tenth of Av would have been a more appropriate day to mourn because of the desecration of G'd's Name.

The discussion between the Rabbis and Reb Yochanon was regarding what aspect of the destruction should be addressed and commemorated. We should keep in mind that in fact both aspects of the destruction should be addressed. We mourn and grieve on the ninth; however, on the tenth, the Jew is not permitted to celebrate and must continue to conduct himself in a semi-mourning state until mid-day. This is to commemorate the desecration of G'd's Name that had taken place on the tenth of Av. Recognizing and internalizing the true cause of our mourning will cause us to merit the coming of Moshiach. May he come speedily in our days.

2. The Basis for Moshe Being Denied Entry into the Land

The Torah tells us that Moshe supplicated G'd to allow him to enter into the Land; however, G'd did not heed his prayers. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the reason G'd did not annul the decree and allow Moshe to enter into the Land was because it would have been a detriment to the Jewish people. Anything in which Moshe had participated in developing and established assumed a permanent and eternal status and could not be destroyed. If Moshe would have entered into the Land, he would have built the Temple. In so doing, it could not have been destroyed. The verse in Prophets tells us that at the time of the destruction of the First Temple, "The Wrath of G'd had been poured out on the wood and stone." Chazal tell us that if G'd's Wrath had not been expended on the Temple

it would have had to come upon the Jewish people. This would have destroyed them. If Moshe would have built the Temple, the Jewish people would have been destroyed. The destruction of the First Temple was an act of Mercy, although it was an expression of the Attribute of Justice. Therefore, Moshe was not permitted to enter into the Land.

If in fact the explanation of Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh is correct, why did Moshe supplicate G'd to be allowed to enter into the Land if it would mean the certain destruction of the Jewish people? One must say that Moshe had believed that if he would have been given permission to enter into the Land together with the Jewish people, his level of influence and leadership would have not allowed them to sin. Thus, he would have established the Jewish people for eternity.

Sforno explains the reason G'd did not allow Moshe to enter into the Land differently. Moshe had said to the Jewish people, **“G'd has become enraged with me because of you.”** Sforno states, “Moshe could not enter into the Land so that there should be ‘crying for generations.’ What is meaning of ‘crying for generations?’ When the spies had returned with their slanderous reports about the Land, the Jewish people bewailed their predicament and cried believing what they had heard. Despite the fact that G'd had promised them that the Land would be filled with blessing and they would conquer it miraculously, they believed that they were doomed. They had said, ‘We, our wives and our children, will be disgraced and wasted.’ Because their cry was unwarranted and unfounded, G'd decreed, ‘Since you have cried today without a reason to do so, there will be crying throughout the generations with reason.’ G'd said, ‘Because of what you have said today, you will be the cause of your suffering in the future.’ What did the Jewish people say? They had said, ‘We, our wives and young children will be disgraced and wasted away.’ Based on what they had said, the generation between the ages of twenty and sixty perished in the desert. What happened to their young children? King David writes in Psalms, ‘So He raised His Hand against them, to cast them down in the desert, to throw down their progeny among the nations, and scatter them among the lands.’ Because the generation of the spies had said, “our young children will be disgraced and wasted away,” future generations of Jews are going to be destined for exile and be destroyed and assimilated among the nations. Thus, they will be disgraced.

Sforno continues, “If Moshe would have entered into the Land the future progeny of the Jewish people would have never sinned. Thus, they would not have been worthy of exile. The decree that G'd had made regarding

the future of the progeny would have never come to pass. The sin of the Jewish people bewailing their predicament was a desecration of G'd's Name. The only way the decree could have been annulled would have been if they would have repented out of love for G'd and not out of fear of him. G'd's punishment needed to be meted out. Therefore, Moshe was denied entry into the Land despite his supplications.”

3. *Maintaining One's Cognizance of G'd*

The Torah states, **“Moshe said to the Jewish people, ‘But you who cling to Hashem, your G'd- you are all alive today. (Vatem HaDevakim Ba'Shem Elokeichem Chayim Kulchem HaYom).’”** Meaning, the source of life for the Jew is rooted in his cleaving to G'd. Baal HaTurim states, “There is a crown on the letter ‘kuf’ in the word ‘*HaDevakim* (you who cling)’. The numerical equivalent of the letter ‘kuf’ is one hundred. This alludes to the one hundred blessing that one should recite each day.” The Torah states in the Book of Devarim, **“Moshe said to the Children of Israel: And Now, O Israel, what (mah) is Hashem, your G'd, asking of you?”** Chazal tell us that the word “mah (what)” should be read as “*meiah* (one hundred).” G'd is asking the Jew to acknowledge Him every day by reciting one hundred blessings. Through one's acknowledgement of G'd by reciting the one hundred blessings, it will create a sense of appreciation and gratitude to the Creator in every aspect of one's life. It is through this acknowledgement that the Jew will cleave to G'd.

Rambam writes in the Laws of Blessings that the only blessings that is a Torah obligation are the ones recited after one is satiated after eating a meal (*Birchas HaMazon- Grace After Meals*). Rambam writes, “All of the other blessings were legislated by the Rabbis. There are three classifications of blessings. ‘*Birchas HaNoya*’ (blessings that are recited before one benefits from something), ‘*Birchas Mitzvos*’ (blessings that one recites prior to performing a mitzvah) and ‘*Birchas Shevach v'Hodoyah*’ (blessings that are recited to express praise and thanks to G'd). What is the value and purpose of all of these blessings? It is to continuously be cognizant of G'd as the Creator and revere Him.”

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that a blessing is only valid if the Name of G'd is mentioned in the context of “His Kingship.” The text of the blessing must contain “Blessed are You Hashem, our G'd, **King of the universe....**” in order for it to be a valid blessing. Simply mentioning the Name of G'd would not be

sufficient. By continuously acknowledging G'd as the "King of the Universe" in every aspect of one's life, it will create a state of mind that will cause one to cleave to the source of life, Who is G'd Himself.

Chazal legislated blessings for every context of one's life. In addition to reciting blessings before partaking of a food item, or performing a mitzvah, there is blessing that one recites upon seeing a rainbow. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that it is to remember the covenant that G'd made with the world, that He would not destroy it again after the Great Flood, despite the fact that mankind may deserve to be destroyed. One also recites a blessing after hearing a clap thunder. The Gemara tells us that ever person has a certain distorted aspect in their heart. The sudden sound of thunder is intended to straighten that delusion by humbling the individual for that moment.

4. The Tzaddik's Understanding of his Obligation to G'd

The Torah tells us that G'd decreed that Moshe would not enter into the Land of Canaan, rather he would pass away on the trans-Jordan side. The Portion of Va'eschanan 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; however, G'd did not heed his request.

The Torah tells us that Moshe reprimanded the Jewish people for the sin of the spies. After the sin they bemoaned their predicament and cried. Despite their expression of remorse, G'd did not accept their repentance. Sforno explains that the reason G'd did not heed their cries was because they had caused a desecration of His Name by believing the slanderous reports of the spies, rather than having faith in G'd. The weeping of the Jewish people was a result of being informed by G'd that they would all perish in the desert. Thus, their crying was not out of love for G'd but rather they were repenting because of their own situation. Had their repentance been based upon the desecration of G'd's Name that they had brought about, rather than upon themselves, G'd would have forgiven them.

Although Moshe supplicated G'd for forgiveness to allow him to enter into the Land, his prayers were not heeded. Why was this so? Sforno explains that the Moshe's supplications were not accepted because he did not pray immediately upon being told of the decree. Rather

he waited until this very moment. As a result of the success of his past supplications on behalf of the Jewish people, Moshe believed that it was not necessary to beseech G'd immediately. He could do that at another time. However, he was mistaken. Since he did not pray immediately, G'd was not receptive to his plea.

When Moshe supplicated G'd he used the expression of "imploing (*va'eschanan*)."¹ 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 should respond despite his lack of being deserving. 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*)."

We say in the Amidah (Silent Prayer) that is recited on Shabbos morning, "Moshe rejoiced in the gift of his portion..." What was his portion? Moshe received a portion in Torah that will never be equaled by any person. He also was given a unique level of responsibility for the spiritual future of the Jewish people that was commensurate with his portion. Moshe rejoiced being privileged and honored for being able to serve G'd, the Omnipotent One and Master of existence. He was only able to appreciate this responsibility as the ultimate privilege because he was G'd's faithful servant. As it states, "You (G'd) called him a faithful servant." Because Moshe was the most humble person to ever walk the face of the earth, he was able to see G'd on a level that was unequalled by any other human being. He therefore rejoiced, despite his level of obligation.

He did not for one moment feel that he was deserving of reward for his unparalleled service of G'd, but rather, the honor of being able to serve His Maker itself was the reward. This is the reason Moshe did not feel that he was deserving of anything. It is only the tzaddik, who sees G'd as his benefactor and the ultimate master, who can experience serving G'd as a privilege. It is only the Jew who lives for himself, that cannot understand and appreciate who G'd is. He sees his obligation as a semi-burden and thus does not internalize it as a privilege. The blessing which one recites before the study of Torah states, "You have chosen us from all the nations to give us Your Torah."

The Jew must understand that he was chosen to be given something that has a dimension of value which is one of a kind. As King Solomon writes in Proverbs, "G'd said to the Jewish people, 'I have given you a special/good

commodity, do not abandon it.” If one truly understands this, one is able to comprehend what is stated in the Mishna in Ethics of Our Fathers, “If you had learned an enormous amount of Torah, do not pride yourself in it because it is for that that you were created.”

We find that the First and Second Temple are alluded to by the Torah as “the collateral” of the Jewish people. Meaning, that G’d destroyed the First and Second Temple rather than destroying the Jewish people. He had taken both Temples as collateral, rather than bringing total destruction upon His people. Moshe, not being allowed to enter into the Land guaranteed the survival of the Jewish people. This is because had he crossed into the Land and built the Temple, it could have never been destroyed. Anything with which Moshe had been associated assumed a dimension of eternity and permanence because of his own level of holiness. Although we are pained and we mourn and grieve the destruction of the Temple, we must appreciate G’d’s Kindness for taking it from us rather than His expending his Wrath upon His beloved people. In actuality, we are not mourning the destruction of the edifice, but rather the distance between G’d and ourselves that is caused by our sins.

5. *Egypt, the Iron Crucible*

The Torah states, **“(Moshe recounted to the Jewish people) Hashem has taken you and had withdrawn you from the iron crucible, from Egypt, to be a nation of heritage for Him, as this very day.”** The Torah refers to Egypt as “the iron crucible” in order to convey that just as a smelter extracts the impurities from iron, so too did the bondage of Egypt remove the spiritual impurities from the Jewish people. Although the bondage in Egypt was severe, it had a purging effect on the Jewish people.

The Torah states regarding the splitting of the Sea, **“Moshe stretched out his hand over the Sea... The Children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the Sea; the water was a wall (*choma*) for them, on their right and on their left.”** Chazal tell us that the word “*choma*-(wall)” which refers to the wall of water surrounding the Jewish people in the Sea, is written with the letter “*vav*” deleted. Thus, the word can be read as “*cheima*,” which means “wrath.” The Midrash explains that as the Jewish people walked between the walls of water through the Sea, the angels began prosecuting them before G’d. They had said, “Why are you sparing the Jewish people and destroying the Egyptians? These are idolaters and these are idolaters.” Since the Jewish people had fallen to the level of paganism to no less a degree than the Egyptians, why are the Egyptians more culpable than

the Jewish people? The Jewish people should have perished as the Egyptians had in the Sea. Despite the fact that the original seventy members of Yaakov’s family who had come to Egypt were the equivalent of living angels, their descendants had become completely acculturated into the pagan society of Egypt. The Jewish people only retained three aspect of their identity: their names, attire, and the Hebrew language (The holy tongue). In all other respects, the Egyptian experience had transformed a nation of devout people into idolaters.

Chazal tell us that although the Jewish people had witnessed the Ten Plagues and the Splitting of the Sea, which were revealed miracles, and G’d had spoken to them “face to face” at Sinai when they received the Torah at Sinai, they failed with the sin of the Golden Calf because there was a trace of impurity from their idolatrous past in Egypt. When they found themselves in a precarious state, believing that Moshe had passed away and were left stranded alone in the desert, they gravitated to their past, which was idolatry. If this is so, it would seem that Egypt was the antithesis of the “iron crucible” that had removed impurities of the Jewish people. To the contrary, Egypt was the setting that caused them to absorb the most extreme level of spiritual impurity that could not be extracted. In what context was Egypt the equivalent of the “iron crucible?”

The Torah tells us that at the Covenant Between the Parts, after G’d had promised Avraham, our Patriarch, that the Jewish people would inherit the Land of Canaan, Avraham asked G’d, **“How will I know that my children will inherit it?”** This was considered an inappropriate question for Avraham, since G’d’s Promise was not contingent on any issue. Rather, it was an unconditional gift. Therefore, there was no basis for Avraham’s question. He should have had trust in G’d. Because he had asked this inappropriate question a spiritual impurity had entered into his own spiritual make up and thus needed to be purged. The Jewish people, being his descendants, possessed this impurity. They needed to be purged through the difficult bondage in Egypt. As the verse states, **“You shall know that your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not their own. There, they will be enslaved and afflicted for 400 years.”**

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that although the Jewish people did succumb to idolatry in Egypt, they experienced overwhelming suffering through back-breaking enslavement. The suffering that they had experienced through the bondage was part of an atonement process which resulted in a spiritual purification. The setting and situation of the Jewish people in Egypt caused

them to become vulnerable to their masters' pagan beliefs. Although they had become idolaters, their essence remained unaffected. Assuming a pagan belief was based on each individual's own choice. Factually, the spiritual impediment that was caused because of Avraham's sin was removed. They thus had the capacity and potential to rise to unlimited spiritual heights.

The Torah states, **“Moshe and Aaron went and gathered all the elders of the Children of Israel. Aaron spoke all the words that Hashem had spoken to Moshe...and the people believed.”** After Moshe had presented his credentials as G'd's agent to be the Redeemer of Israel, which was through the performance of specific miracles, the Jewish people believed in G'd. Despite the fact that until that moment, they were fully immersed in their idolatrous beliefs, when they witnessed the Hand of G'd through Moshe performing the various miracles, they had the ability to recognize the truth. Consequently, they chose to bring about a work stoppage, believing that their redemption was imminent. The spiritual obstruction that they had inherited as a result of Avraham's failing, had been purged. If in fact the bondage and suffering did not impact upon them by removing the spiritual obstruction, they would have been as impervious to the miracles as the Egyptians were. They would have thus remained unaffected.

Every morning we recite among the many blessings, “Blessed are You, Hashem our G'd...Who releases the imprisoned (bound).” Although one may not be confined to an actual prison, each individual has his own spiritual impediments and blockages, which are the equivalent of a prison. One is not able to advance and succeed because of this level of interference. We therefore acknowledge G'd as the One who provides the Divine Assistance to extricate one from this spiritual confinement and allow us to see and internalize His truth that exists. It was the “iron crucible” that removed the impediments that were created by the failing of Avraham, from the Jewish people to allow them to be redeemed from Egypt and ascend to Sinai to receive G'd's 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 – Path of the Just
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Makkos
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi- Bava Basra
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

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

Tuesday

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

11:30 – 12:30 pm	Talmud: Chagigah Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
1:00—2:00 pm	Rambam Hilchos Talmud Torah Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

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