

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES

Parshas Beshalach

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Sponsored By:

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For the Yahrzeit of his beloved and revered father
Berich Bernard Briefel,
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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, Hashkafa, 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 Beshalach

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. Relativity Determines the Degree of Sanctification of G'd

The Midrash states, "Why does the Portion begin, **'It happened when Pharaoh sent out the people...'** It is because the same mouth that had said, 'I will not send them out' now had said 'I will send them out.' What was the reward for this? The Jewish people were given the mitzvah of not being permitted to harass the Egyptian. The mouth that initially rejected G'd by saying, **'Who is Hashem... I do not know Hashem'** retracted and said during the plague of hail, **'This time I have sinned; Hashem is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones...'** What was his reward? G'd gave his people in ground internment. As the Torah tells us that after the Sea had closed upon the Egyptian army, they were buried (and not left to be devoured by the fish of the sea). "

Pharaoh was no ordinary man. He was the monarch of the most advanced and powerful civilization in the world. In addition, he was a pagan who had proclaimed himself as a deity. For Pharaoh to agree to send out the Jewish people because G'd had commanded him to do so through Moshe His agent, it was a sanctification of G'd's Name (kiddush Hashem). The world had seen the obstinate and seemingly invincible Pharaoh submit and adhere to the dictate of G'd, which itself was the ultimate sanctification of G'd's Name. Through this his people had merited the negative commandment that a Jew is not permitted to harass an Egyptian. The self-deified pagan monarch who initially denied G'd's existence on the most insolent level – "Who is Hashem – I do not know Him?" – now acknowledged His all-encompassing dominion by declaring "Hashem is righteous." He thus merited on behalf of his people that they should receive proper burial after the closing of the Sea. For someone who was known to be the most powerful monarch and self-proclaimed deity to acknowledge the Omnipotent Being, is truly a sanctification of G'd's Name.

The Torah states, **"You shall not taunt or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land**

of Egypt." Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the term "stranger" is referring to a convert. A Jew is not permitted to cause pain or aggrieve a convert by reminding him of his past. The Gemara tells us that this prohibition extends for ten generations. However, we find that very often Yisro, Moshe's father in law, is referred to in the Torah as **"Kohen Midian** – high priest of Midian." Although this was after his conversion to monotheism, he is continuously referred to in this seemingly pejorative manner. If one is not permitted to remind another of his past, then why does the Torah repeatedly emphasize and reiterate that Yisro was the pagan priest of Midian?

If the Torah had not referred to Yisro as the high priest of Midian, then we would not appreciate the ramifications of his ultimate accomplishment of converting to monotheism. By rejecting idolatry and abandoning his position as the pagan leader of Midian, he became a pariah in his own community. The Torah tells us that when his daughters would go to water their flocks they were driven away by the other shepherds because of the status of their father. The reason the Torah continuously identifies Yisro as the high priest of Midian is to communicate to us that although he had originally represented the most advanced position as a pagan priest, he rejected it all for the truth of monotheism. It would be the equivalent of the head of the Catholic Church rejecting all his previous beliefs and acknowledging Judaism as the true religion. An ordinary pagan converting to monotheism would have not brought about such a level of kiddush Hashem.

The Midrash tells us that when Yaakov's children together with the Egyptians had taken him to be buried in the cave of Machpelah in Canaan, the Canaanites initially wanted to wage war against Yaakov's family. However, when they saw the crown of Yosef, the Viceroy of Egypt, they encircled it with their own crowns – thus renaming the location to memorialize the event. The Canaanites exclaimed, "It is a time of profound grieving for the Egyptians. Yaakov is being buried." When they had made this declaration, they had either first walked four cubits, according to one interpretation in the Midrash, or raised their fingers to acknowledge the event. According to the

first opinion, for each pace they had taken to acknowledge the passing of Yaakov, they merited that the Jewish people should be kept out of the Land of Israel for one generation. Thus, since they had walked four cubits, the Jewish people were not able to enter into the Land until four generations had passed. Because they were pagans, their acknowledgement of the tragic passing of Yaakov, a man who personified and embodied holiness, was considered a sanctification of G'd's Name.

The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah tells us that Reb Chananyia Ben Tradion, his wife, and daughter experienced tragedies at various levels. Reb Chananyia Ben Tradion was wrapped in a Torah scroll and was burnt to death. His wife was taken out to be killed, and his daughter was sent to a brothel in Rome. When each of them experienced their own personal tragedy, they acknowledged and proclaimed that G'd was just in the punishment that was being meted out to them. Without their declaration, one could think that their tragic fate would be considered a travesty of justice (G'd forbid). However, because they had declared that G'd is righteous and Just in His Judgment, they dispelled any question and embraced G'd's decision. This was a kiddush Hashem.

The Gemara in Tractate Yoma tells us that when one repents out of fear of G'd, his deliberate sins take on an inadvertent status. However, if one repents out of love, then his deliberate sins are converted to merits. When one assumes the status of a sinner and despite that status, he acknowledges G'd by repenting out of fear, it is a degree of kiddush Hashem (albeit limited). However, when one assumes the status of a sinner and truly recognizes the wrong and repents out of love for G'd it is a more advanced level of sanctification of G'd's Name – thus he is able to convert the deliberate sins into merits.

When one is able to acknowledge G'd in His true context, despite all the distortion of truth, one is bringing about a sanctification of His Name whose merit is profound and unlimited.

2. The Internalization of Torah

The Torah states regarding the manna, **“G'd said to Moshe, ‘Behold! I shall rain down for you food from heaven; let the people go out and pick each day’s portion on its day, so that I can test them, whether they will follow My Torah or not...’”** Sforno explains **“so that I can test them”** to mean, “The Jewish people should be sustained without pain/effort. As it says in the Mechilta, ‘The Torah was only given to those who ate of the

manna.’” Chazal are telling us that the way one can acquire Torah properly and internalize it, is only within a setting in which one is not distracted by his material needs. The ideal context of this setting was the partnership between Yissachar and Zevulun. The tribe of Yissachar, was able to be fully dedicated and immersed in Torah study without any concern for their material needs because they were entirely provided for by the tribe of Zevulun. In the words of Chazal, “They (Zevulun) put the food into the mouths of Yissachar.” Meaning, Yissachar was not involved to any degree in acquiring or preparing their sustenance. It was the equivalent of Zevulun literally putting the food into their mouths. There was not even an iota of distraction from their Torah study. They therefore were able to acquire a unique level of clarity in Torah. Because of this clarity, they were able to determine any fallacy in calculation or cogency of logic.

The Gemara in Tractate Yomah tells us that the manna was the “bread of the angels.” Ramban explains that just as the angels are sustained by the radiance of G'd, so too were the Jewish people sustained by the radiance of G'd in a physical form called “manna.” One could understand this to mean that the Jews had to be spiritualized through the manna before having the capacity to process G'd's Torah, which is the ultimate of spirituality. However, this is not the understanding. Rather it was purely to provide a means of sustenance in a manner that there would be no distraction from Torah study, whatsoever. This forty-year setting in the desert was the equivalent of the predicament of the tribe of Yissachar. G'd Himself was the equivalent of their Zevulun.

The Midrash states, “The fourth generation will return to Canaan. When the Jewish people left Egypt they had to be delayed in the desert for forty years because they were not permitted to enter into the Land until after the fourth generation. G'd had said, ‘If I take the Jewish people on the direct route into the Land of Israel, each person will enter the Land and immediately engage with his fields and vineyards. They will be distracted from their Torah study (albeit justified). Therefore I will take them through the desert and they will eat of the manna and drink of the wellspring so that the Torah will become settled in their innards.’” Thus, G'd chose to take the Jewish people on the circuitous route through the desert so that they should remain there for forty years to become spiritualized through the Torah. This seems to be difficult because the Torah states explicitly that it was decreed that the Jewish people should wander in the desert for forty years because of the sin of the spies. The generation between the ages of 20 and 60 were meant to perish over this forty-year period and not enter into the Land.

Eitz Yosef, the commentator on the Midrash, explains that if G'd had told them that they must remain in the desert for this extended period of time in order to be in an environment in which they would not be distracted from their Torah studies, they would not have been pleased. Because they would have had a sense of urgency to enter into the Promised Land after leaving Egypt, they would not have wished to remain in the desert. G'd therefore presented them with the difficult test of the spies, knowing that they would fail, so that they would be forced to remain in an undistracted environment for forty years. It is not to say that the Jewish people did not have free choice to reject the false reports of the spies, it is only that G'd knew their choice.

It was worthwhile for G'd to present the Jewish people with the test of the spies knowing they would fail. Although their failing was a desecration of His Name and caused the generation that had stood at Sinai to perish, G'd needed to create a setting in the desert, for the sake of the eternity of Torah, in which the Jewish people would be insulated from all distraction for forty years. It is only because of this that the Torah was "able to be settled in their innards."

3. The Power of the Quorum

The Torah tells us that when the Jewish people found themselves confronted with the Egyptian army coming down upon them, realizing that they were caught between the Sea and their previous masters, they raised their eyes and prayed to G'd. The Midrash states, "The Jewish people took hold of the craft of their Forefathers. As the verse in Yishaya states, 'Fear not you, worm Yaakov...' Why are the Jewish people compared to the worm? Although the cedar tree is mighty, when it is attacked by the worm it will be toppled by the penetration of its mouth. Although the mouth of the worm is soft, it is able to penetrate something that is hard (the cedar). Similarly, the only power that the Jew has is through his mouth – the power of prayer (tefillah). The nations of the world are compared to the cedars. As it states, 'The Assyrians stood like the cedars of Lebanon. G'd smashed the cedars of Lebanon.' When the Jewish people are overwhelmed by the nations of the world, they repent and then cry out to G'd in prayer." As the Torah states regarding the blessing given by Yitzchak, our Patriarch, "**The voice is the voice of Yaakov....**" This is referring to the power of prayer (and Torah study).

The Midrash does not state, "When the Jewish people are overwhelmed by the nations of the world they

pray to G'd" but rather it states, "they repent and then cry out to G'd." The Jew must first repent by reflecting and introspecting upon his past and then he prays. It is only when the voice is the voice of Yaakov, when one has repented and has been reinstated as "Yaakov", then G'd will be attentive to his plea. However if an evil person were to pray to G'd, his supplication would not be effective because it is not the voice of Yaakov. The mouth of the Jew/power of expression only assumes the characteristic of the worm, to be able penetrate the mighty cedar, is when it is pure (through repentance)- then G'd will respond to his request.

The Midrash concludes, "The Jewish people took hold of the craft of their Forefathers and cried out to G'd. Then He availed Himself to them. As it states, 'You will seek out Hashem from there and you will Find Him.'" The Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashanah cites a verse, "**Moshe said to the Jewish people – who is as great as our G'd? Whenever we call out to Him, (He responds).**" However, the Prophet Yeshaya said to the Jewish people, "You should seek out G'd when He is found. Call to Him when He is close." Seemingly, the words of the Prophet Yeshaya contradict the words of Moshe. Moshe said that it is whenever the Jew calls out to G'd, He will respond. However, Yeshaya indicates differently – that it is only when G'd is close will He respond. How do we reconcile the words of Yeshaya and the words of Moshe?

The Gemara answers that when a tzibur/quorum (a minimum of ten men) supplicates G'd, He responds to them whenever they call out to Him. However, regarding the individual, G'd responds during the time when He is found and is close, which is during the Ten Days of Repentance between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. Thus, the Prophet Yeshaya is referring to the supplication of the individual, while the Moshe is referring to supplication of the community.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that if one prays outside of the context of a quorum/minyan, it is difficult for his prayers to be answered. However if one prays within the context of a quorum, then regardless of level of his fervency or attentiveness, G'd will listen because he is part of the quorum. It is only within the context of communal prayer does G'd avail Himself. Thus, He responds to the supplications of the community. In essence, the context of a quorum is identical to that of G'd's availability to the individual during the Ten Days of Repentance.

Because G'd avails Himself to the quorum, He is attentive to each individual's prayers. However, the

individual who supplicates G'd does not have the merit of the quorum, consequently G'd does not avail Himself to that individual. However, if the quorum is comprised of evil individuals, G'd will not avail Himself to them because their voice is not the voice of Yaakov.

4. The Far Reaching Effects of Belief

The Torah states after the splitting of the Sea, **"...and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant."** Ramban explains that other than the Sinai event, there was no other time in Jewish history in which the people had reached such an advanced level of faith in G'd. This is understandable because the dimension of revelation at the splitting of the Sea was of such a degree that even the prophet Yechezkel did not merit to witness what the lowly maidservant had experienced. They had declared, **"Behold, this is my G'd I will glorify Him!"** G'd's Presence was so palpable that one could point his finger at Him. Seemingly, having such a great degree of faith in G'd at that moment should not be considered a significant accomplishment. However, we see from the Midrash differently.

The Midrash states, "Because the Jewish people had faith in G'd at the time of the splitting of the Sea, they merited to inherit the Land of Israel. We find that the reward that Avraham, our Patriarch, had merited for having faith in G'd was exceptional. After G'd had informed him that he would have a son, the Torah states, **'And Avraham believed in G'd and He considered it to be righteous.'** Because of this level of faith he merited inheriting this world and the world to come." At this time, Avraham was 99 years old. He had already dedicated his life to the selfless espousal of monotheism. He had withstood the test of being thrown into the fiery kiln of Kasdim, rather than bowing to the idol. He had also withstood the test of needing to leave his homeland, his birthplace, and his family. He did not question G'd when he was confronted with the famine in Canaan, causing him to go to Egypt. Despite all these accomplishments, Chazal tell us that it was only because he had "believed in G'd" when he was told that he would have a child that he merited this world and the world to come. Firstly, based on all of Avraham's spiritual accomplishments, why was that not sufficient to merit a share in this world and the world to come? In addition, why was Avraham's belief in G'd, regarding having a child, so unique?

Chazal tell us that G'd does not associate His Name with a person during his lifetime. As we see, He did not associate His Name with the Holy Patriarchs, with the

exception of Yitzchak, while they were alive despite their level of faith and unique levels of accomplishment. It was only after they had passed away that G'd identified Himself as "the G'd of Avraham" and "the G'd of Yaakov." This is based upon the principle, "One should not believe in himself until the moment of his death." Meaning, regardless of one's level of devoutness and dedication to G'd, as long as one is alive he is subject to free choice. He has the ability to chose until the very last moment of his life to become a heretic. It is because of this, that G'd does not associate His Name with someone during his lifetime.

If one lives a life of selfless dedication to G'd and adheres to His Torah, how is it possible for one deny His existence? One is continuously confronted with issues and tests (trials and tribulations) that may destabilize his belief and faith. As long as one experiences blessing, it is not a challenge to have faith in G'd. However, if one should experience tragedy or other difficulties, it may cause him to reconsider his understanding of G'd. It was only after Avraham believed G'd, when he was told that he would have a son, that it became less likely for him to falter in his faith and belief because he merited special Divine Protection. At that moment he had internalized G'd's promise to a point that it was not an abstract concept, but rather a reality. It is true that before that moment, his spiritual accomplishments were outstanding and one of a kind; however, achieving this special level of faith caused him to ascend to another level.

We see from Chazal that regardless of one's exposure to G'd's Presence, believing in Him is considered something special. Every human being has sufficient conflicts within himself that could cause him to process the moment in a way which does not confirm G'd's reality. When one accepts G'd's Dominion and Omnipotence one becomes bound to His Will. It is the unwillingness of man to submit to His Will that causes a resistance to acknowledge truth. Thus, the Jewish people at the splitting of the Sea could have denied G'd, despite His obviousness. Therefore when the Jewish people chose to accept G'd through the revelation at the Sea, which they could have denied, they merited the Land.

5. Expectation Leads to Disappointment (From Bo)

The Torah states, **"The Children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth...They baked the dough that they took out from Egypt into unleavened cakes, for they could not be leavened, for they were driven from Egypt for they could not delay, nor had they made provisions for themselves."**

The Prophet Yechezkel states, "And you are naked and devoid." Chazal explain that Yechezkel the prophet is referring to the spiritual state of the Jewish people that they were devoid of mitzvos. Since they were pagans until this moment, they needed sufficient merit to be taken out of Egypt. Thus, G'd presented them with the opportunity to perform the mitzvos of circumcision and the Pascal lamb. These two mitzvos were the prerequisites for their redemption as the Prophet Yechezkel concludes, "It is through the bloods that you shall live..." Chazal explain that the term "bloods" is referring to the blood of circumcision and the blood of the Pascal lamb.

By circumcising themselves, the Jewish people demonstrated self-negation to G'd's Will. On a rational level, circumcision should be viewed as self-mutilation. Seemingly, if a male is born uncircumcised evidently this is the proper state of being that G'd had intended for him. In addition, they demonstrated a unique level of subordination to G'd by slaughtering the Pascal lamb. Despite the fact that they were still under the dominion of their Egyptian masters, they slaughtered the lamb, which was a deity of Egypt – regardless of the consequences that they may experience. The Midrash tells us that on the Shabbos preceding the 14th of Nissan (the day that the Pascal lamb was slaughtered), the Egyptian masters entered into the homes of the Jews and noticed that each family had a sheep tied to their bedposts. They had asked them, "What are you doing with the sheep?" The Jews answered, "We are going to slaughter it as an offering to our G'd." The Egyptian masters gritted their teeth and walked out. This is the basis for the Shabbos preceding Passover to be called, the "Great Shabbos (Shabbos HaGadol)." It is the Shabbos that the Jewish people experienced a miracle that they were not killed by their masters. Because of their submission to the Will of G'd, they merited redemption.

If the Jewish people had clearly demonstrated their faith in G'd by performing the mitzvos of circumcision and the Pascal lamb, without consideration for their own welfare, why then did they not prepare sufficient provisions for their imminent exodus from Egypt? G'd had told them at the beginning of the month of Nissan that they would be taken out of Egypt on the 15th of the month. Despite their selfless acts, they did not have sufficient faith that G'd would take them out of Egypt on the 15th of Nissan.

Reb Moshe Feinstein z'tl explains that the Jewish people did not prepare themselves for their imminent departure from Egypt because they had been previously

disappointed many times by Pharaoh. He had agreed to release them and then reneged on his promise.

Every time they had witnessed a plague coming upon Egypt, they had believed that the time of their redemption was at hand. However, Pharaoh did not allow them to leave. The Jewish people, because of their disappointment had difficulty believing until they actually experienced redemption. The basis for their dough to be unleavened was an outgrowth of their lack of faith.

G'd had not told the Jewish people that they would be leaving after any of the previous plagues. Their belief was only based on their own self-delusion, which was an outgrowth of their predicament. Redemption was not meant to occur until G'd deemed it to be. If the Jewish people truly had sufficient faith in G'd they would have not succumbed to their own desperation. Consequently, they would have prepared themselves adequately for their departure from Egypt.

One of the tenets of Jewish belief is, "I believe with complete faith in the coming of Moshiach, although he may be delayed, nevertheless I anticipate every day that he will come." It has been over 2,000 years since the destruction of the Temple and the beginning of the last Jewish exile (Edomite/Roman exile). We declare that his delay will not deter us from our belief. Meaning, that we believe with absolute certainty that when he is meant to come, he will. In essence, we are saying that despite the daily events surrounding us, our faith is firm and we will not allow our own predicament to bear down upon us. Unlike in Egypt, we will not be disappointed to the degree of losing faith in G'd's Word, because our faith is based only on His Promise and not on our own interpretation of events. This declaration of belief and faith is a correction for the failing of Jewish people in Egypt who allowed themselves to succumb to their own desperation.