

Yad Avraham Institute
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The Portion of
Beshalach
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Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

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Yad Avraham Institute
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B"H

Beshalach

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. *The Perspective that is Needed for Survival*

The Torah tells us that after the Jewish people had seen the remains of the Egyptians on the seashore, **“They believed in Hashem and Moshe His servant.”** After the Sea had closed upon the Egyptian army, the Jewish people were not convinced that their enemies had perished in the Sea. They were concerned that they would circumvent the Sea in order to continue pursuing them. When their remains were cast on the seashore, they had seen Divine retribution and they believed in G'd and Moshe His servant. They were inspired to sing G'd's praises along with Moshe, articulating every aspect of the destruction of their enemies.

The Midrash states, “It was because ‘they believed in Hashem...’ that the Jewish people merited to inherit the Land. In the merit that Avraham believed in G'd, he inherited this world and the world to come. As it states, **‘He believed in Hashem, and it was considered a righteousness.’** Similarly, when Moshe presented himself to the Jewish people as the Redeemer, ‘they believed.’ ...As it states, ‘The tzaddik will live through his belief (in G'd).’ It is understood that if one believes in the in G'd after he is the beneficiary of His Beneficence, his belief is not considered notable. However, if one has reason to question and despite his difficult predicament, he believes, it is considered something admirable. For example, the Torah states that Avraham ‘believed in G'd’ after he was promised that he would have a son. Although he had not yet fathered a child from Sarah, our Matriarch, at his advanced age, Avraham believed in G'd's promise that he would. Therefore, his belief was considered a “righteousness.” It is when one believes in G'd, despite the one's circumstance, that belief is considered to be exemplary.

Although the Jewish people were pagans in Egypt, when Moshe presented himself as the Redeemer of Israel,

the Torah states **“and the people believed.”** Despite the fact that they had abandoned their Jewish beliefs, when Moshe presented his credentials as G'd's agent, they believed.

Chazal compare the physical world to the night time period. It is because when there is an absence of light, things are obscured and distorted. One's perception of truth is very often based upon one's own conflicts of interest. Throughout history, we as a Jewish people have witnessed and experienced many tragedies and upheavals such as the destruction of two Temples, expulsions, and continuous discrimination and victimization. Without belief and trust in G'd, that all that He does is for the Good, one would have difficulty doing His Will. A Jew can only thrive within the spiritual realm, if he is secure in his belief.

When the Jewish people declared their belief in G'd and Moshe His servant it was after witnessing the splitting of the Sea and the many revealed miracles that had previously occurred. They had also witnessed Divine retribution when the remains of the Egyptian army were cast on to the seashore. If their declaration of belief occurred immediately after benefiting from G'd in a context of miracles, why was their declaration of belief at that moment esteemed by G'd that they should merit to inherit the Land and that the Divine Presence should rest upon them? If anyone would witness what the Jewish people had, it is understood that they would declare their belief in G'd. Why is it necessary for the Torah to state, **“They believed in Hashem and Moshe His servant?”** Seemingly, this is a natural consequence. Evidently, since the Torah does share with us their declaration of belief, it must be because their experience was not as convincing as one may think. If it were, the Torah would not need to state it.

The Jewish people at this point had left Egypt to go into the desert without any provisions or any sense of security for the future. They had left the security of their

homes based on Moshe's directive in the Name of G'd. Despite all of the uncertainties of their predicament, their faith and belief in G'd and Moshe was unswerving. This was considered an accomplishment that was valued by G'd. As the Prophet states, "I (G'd) will always remember the kindness of your youth...your following Me into an unplanted land..." It was because of their belief in G'd that the uncertainty of the future did not distract or hinder them from heeding the word of G'd. The righteous live by their belief. Despite all of the unanswered questions and difficulties of life, every Jew must believe with absolute faith that G'd is continuously watching over us and will speedily bring Moshiach to bring about the ultimate redemption.

2. *Miriam, the Sister of Moshe*

The Midrash cites a verse from Psalms, "The song for the inauguration of the Temple of David..." Why is the Temple identified with David, when in fact King Solomon was the one who had built it? It is because of King David's sacrifice for it, that the Temple identifies with his name...The Torah states, **'His sister stood at a distance....'** Why is Miriam identified only as the sister of Moshe when she was also the sister of Aaron? It is because she sacrificed for Moshe, that she is identified with his name..."

The Torah tells us that Pharaoh had decreed that all Jewish newborn males should be thrown into the Nile. Moshe's mother, Yocheved, took her newborn son and placed him in the reeds at the bank of the Nile. The Torah states, **"His sister (Miriam) stood at a distance to know what would be done with him (Moshe)."** It is evident from the Midrash that by standing at the bank of the Nile, Miriam was exposing herself to danger. Nevertheless, she was willing to put herself in jeopardy in order to see what would happen to her brother Moshe. What was compelling Miriam to do so?

The Torah tells us in the of Portion of Beha'aloscha, that when Miriam had become a leper, she had to be sent out of all the camps of Israel for a period of seven days until she recovered from her leprous state. The Midrash tells us that during this period of time, the Jewish people did not travel, but rather, they waited until she recovered. In the merit of her waiting to see what would happen to her brother Moshe (although it was for only a moment) the Divine Presence, 600,000 males above the age of 20, and the Clouds of Glory, waited for Miriam for a period of seven days. This was her reward – measure for measure. As she had waited to see the outcome of Moshe's

fate, the Divine Presence waited for her recovery. What was so significant about Miriam's waiting?

The Gemara tells us that Miriam began to prophesize before the birth of Moshe. She had prophesized, "My mother will give birth to the Redeemer of Israel." The Midrash states, "When Moshe was born, the house was illuminated with light, confirming that he was indeed destined to be the Redeemer. Amram (Miriam's father) kissed her on her forehead and said, 'My daughter your prophecy has come to fruition.' When Moshe was placed into the Nile to escape the decree of Pharaoh, Amram tapped Miriam on the head and said, 'What will become of your prophecy?' Thus, Miriam stood and waited by the river to see what was going to happen to her brother Moshe."

Miriam's concern for her brother Moshe was not merely a sister's concern for her sibling's survival. She knew, as a prophetess, that Moshe was the only one qualified to be the Redeemer of Israel. If Moshe would not survive the Nile, the Jewish people would not be redeemed from Egypt. Consequently, they would not merit to stand at Sinai to receive the Torah. The objective of creation was for the fulfillment of the Torah by the Jewish people. Miriam internalized the reality that if Moshe would not survive his ordeal, G'd's Glory would not come about. Miriam's anticipation and putting her life in jeopardy was only for the sake of G'd. She understood at that moment that all existence was at stake. It is because of her all-consuming concern for G'd, that she merited that the Divine Presence, the Jewish people, and the Clouds of Glory, should wait for her recovery.

The Torah states after the splitting of the Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army, **"Miriam the sister of Aaron led the women in song."** Since Miriam was the sister of both Aaron and Moshe why is she only referred to as "the sister of Aaron" at this moment? Rashi cites Chazal who tell us that when she had originally prophesized regarding the birth of Moshe, she was only the sister of Aaron. When Miriam led the women in song at the Sea, it was an outgrowth of her original prophecy coming to fruition – that her parents would bring forth the Redeemer of Israel, Moshe. At this moment she is identified as "the sister of Aaron" in order to emphasize that this expression of praise at the splitting of the Sea was the consummation of her lifelong anticipation that G'd's Glory would be realized. The revelation of G'd at the Sea was greater than the revelation that Yechezkel the Prophet had experienced. This was for Miriam, the ultimate.

3. *The Spiritualization of the Mind*

After the Jewish people had witnessed the revelation of G'd at the Sea, the Torah states, **“Moshe caused Israel to journey from the Sea of Reeds and they went out to the Wilderness of Shur; they went for a three-day period in the Wilderness, but they did not find water. They came to Marah, but they could not drink the waters of Marah because they were bitter...The people complained against Moshe saying, ‘What shall we drink?...’”**

After seeing the Hand of G'd in Egypt through the plagues and the splitting of the Sea, it was inappropriate for the Jewish people to complain to Moshe that they did not have anything to drink. They should have requested of him to pray to G'd to provide them with water. Moshe cried out to G'd and He showed him a tree, which he threw into the water – and the water became sweet. The Torah then states, **“There Hashem established for (the nation) a Decree and an Ordinance, and there He tested them.”** Rashi cites Chazal, “Marah was the first location in which the Jewish people were given portions of the Torah for them to engage in (their study). What were the portions that were given? The laws of the Shabbos, the laws pertaining to the Red Heifer (*Parah Adumah*), and laws pertaining to monetary issues/damages (*Dinim*).” Before the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the classification of the Jewish people was “Noahides.” They were not yet bound by the laws of the Torah. They were not subject to spiritual contamination, because only a Jew (post-Sinai) is susceptible to spiritual impurity. The laws of the Red Heifer had no relevance to their present status. The value of the Red Heifer that was communicated to them was purely for the sake of engaging in its study. Why was it important at this time to engage in Torah study?

The Jewish people had witnessed at the Sea the Hand of G'd on the most vivid level. Chazal tell us that what the maidservant had seen at the splitting of the Sea even Yechezkel the Prophet had not seen. Although they had declared after the Sea closed upon the Egyptians their belief in G'd and Moshe, three days later they quarreled with Moshe rather than speaking to him in a more respectful manner. One would think that after experiencing this level of revelation and understanding of Moshe's status as G'd's Prophet, they would have behaved differently. It is evident from their behavior that even when one is exposed to G'd's Presence, one's human frailties and conflicts do not allow the person to process and internalize the event sufficiently. Without, the spiritualization of one's mind and emotion, the events have

relatively little impact on his being. The only thing that gives one the capacity to fully appreciate a spiritual encounter is the study of the Torah itself. The Jewish people at this time did not have that available to them.

Therefore, G'd gave the Jewish people the portions of the Shabbos, the Red Heifer, and laws, in order to engage in their study. Through this process of studying, the Jewish people would be spiritualized in mind and emotion to have the capacity to fully appreciate spirituality. Thus, they would overcome their human impediments.

The blessing that is recited before one engages in the study of Torah is, “Blessed are You Hashem...and has commanded us to engross/engage ourselves in the words of Torah...” One would think that the blessing should be, “...and has commanded us to learn Torah ...” Maharal of Prague explains that the mitzvah of Torah study is to engage in its study. The process of engagement, attempting to understand the words and concepts of the Torah, is the mitzvah itself. Therefore, the text of the blessing which precedes the study of Torah is to engage in its Words. It is this process that impacts upon the person and spiritualizes him. It is not limited to the accumulation of its knowledge.

Chazal tell us, “*Talmud Torah keneged kulam* - the study of Torah is equivalent of fulfilling all the mitzvos of the Torah combined.” Thus, engaging in Torah study touches upon the total spiritual development of the individual. Although the Torah in its entirety was not yet given to the Jewish people at Marah, nevertheless, studying the portions of Torah that were given to them would impact upon them as if they had studied all aspects of the Torah. Consequently, through engaging in these portions, they would become spiritualized in preparation for the Sinai event.

The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah tells us that the one who engages in Torah study and performs acts of kindness will dominate his evil inclination. Chofetz Chaim explains in his work *Toras Chesed* that the evil inclination affects a person in two areas of his existence – through his mind and through his physicality. When one engages in Torah study, the mind is spiritualized. Thus, his thoughts become impervious to the evil inclination. When one engages in acts of kindness (*chesed*), he is spiritualizing his physicality. Thus, body is not inclined towards evil.

The only reason one does not have clarity is because one is distracted by his emotions and desires. The only way one can contend with this issue is to engage in Torah, which spiritualizes all aspects of one's being.

4. The Uniqueness of The Laws That Were Given at Marah

The Torah states, **“There (in Marah) Hashem established for (the nation) a Decree and an Ordinance, and there He tested them.”** Rashi cites Chazal, “Marah was the first location in which the Jewish people were given portions of the Torah for them to engage in. What were the portions that were they given? The laws of the Shabbos, the laws pertaining to the Red Heifer (*Parah Adumah*), and laws pertaining monetary issues (*Dinim*).” Before the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the classification of the Jewish people was “Noahides.” They were not yet bound by the laws of the Torah. G’d gave them these three areas of law in Marah not so that they should be obligated to observe them, but rather, only for them to engage in their study. Since they had not revere Moshe sufficiently, despite all of the miracles that he had brought about, it was evident that the Jewish people needed to be spiritualized. This spiritualization could only come about through the study of Torah. Although the Jewish people could have been given any portion of the Torah to study, G’d specifically gave them the laws pertaining to the Shabbos, the Red Heifer, and monetary laws. Why was this so?

Baal Haturim explains, “The tree that Moshe was told to throw into the bitter spring in order to sweeten it was in fact bitter itself. However, it was able to make the bitter water sweet. Similarly, the ritual of the Red Heifer has the ability to purify the one who is contaminated and it contaminates the one who is pure.” The mitzvah of Parah Adumah was given to the Jewish people in Marah because it reflected the miracle that had transpired regarding the water. This however does not give us any understanding why the laws of Shabbos and monetary issues were given in Marah?

The Torah states in the Portion of Chukas, regarding the mitzvah of the Red Heifer, **“Zos ha'Torah adam ki yamus b'ohel... This is the Torah, (when) a man dies in the tent...”** Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks, “Why does the verse state, **‘This is the Torah...’**? If the Torah is presenting the laws pertaining to spiritual impurity and purity, it should have stated ‘These are the laws of contamination and purity...’?” He explains that when the Jewish people left Egypt, G’d commanded them to engage in the Pascal Sacrifice (Korban Pesach). Although one is not permitted to engage in something that is consecrated in a state of contamination, nevertheless, the Jewish people did partake of the Pascal Sacrifice, despite their status. At

this point, spiritual impurity was not a problem because their classification before Sinai was “Noahide.” The laws of spiritual impurity only apply to the Jewish people, which is related to the status that they had attained when they received Torah at Sinai. Through the Torah, they had ascended a spiritual level that caused them to be susceptible spiritual contamination. The intense contamination that is brought about by exposure to the dead only has relevance to someone of an intense spiritual make up because the nether forces in existence, which are the basis for all impurity, seek out to attach themselves only to a source of immense spirituality. Therefore, the Torah is the prerequisite for giving the Jew relevance to the laws of spiritual contamination and purity- thus requiring them to engage in the Parah Adumah.

King Solomon, who was the wisest person to ever live was able to comprehend all of the laws and statues of the Torah, except for those of the Red Heifer. He had said, “It is beyond me...” Why was King Solomon not able to grasp this particular statute? The status and dimension of spiritual impurity is only a consequence of receiving the Torah at Sinai. As we see, one who is not bound by the Torah has no relevance to spiritual impurity. The Torah itself, which an expression of the infinite wisdom of G’d, cannot be understood in its entirety by any finite being. Since, the basis for the contamination of the Jew is rooted in something that is beyond comprehension, King Solomon was not able to understand the laws of the Red Heifer.

When G’d wanted to spiritualize the Jewish people, He chose to give them the portion of the Parah Adumah because it encompasses the entire Torah. It touches upon the every aspect of the Torah in its fullest. In order for them to ascend to the level of Sinai, they needed to be impacted by the study of something that was a microcosm of the entire Torah. The laws of the Parah Adumah reflect the infinite aspect of Torah.

The Gemara states, “If one violates the Shabbos it is as if he rejected the entire Torah. If one observes the Shabbos it is as if he fulfilled the entire Torah.” Thus, the portion of the Shabbos is also an all-encompassing mitzvah and a reflection of the entire Torah. Thus, it was one of the portions that was given to the Jewish people in Marah, to impact upon them through its study.

The laws pertaining to monetary issues and damages has relevance to the relationship between man and his fellow. One must be sensitive to the needs of his fellow and treat him with the same level of respect and concern that one expects himself to be treated. This

touches upon the concept of unity. By behaving as one entity, the Jewish people reflect the Oneness of G'd which is a necessary prerequisite to have a special relationship with Him. As the verse states before the giving of the Torah at Sinai, **"Israel camped (vayichan) there..."** The word "vayichan" (camped) is written in the singular to indicate that the Jewish people were unified as one individual with "one heart." Since the unity of the Jewish people is integral to the entire Torah, the laws pertaining to "Dinim" were given in Marah.

5. 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.