

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES
Parshas Shemos

January 11, 2007

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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 The Special Linkage Between Every Jew and the Patriarchs
 The Qualification that is Necessary for Kingship

About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Parshas Shemos

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1. Reflecting on One's Own Motivation

The Torah tells us that Shifrah (Yocheved) and Puah (Miriam) were the midwives who oversaw the delivery of all the Jewish children who were born in Egypt. Chazal explain that Yocheved was called Shifrah because her role was to cleanse and beautify the newborn children (*l'shapeir* – to beautify), while Miriam was called Puah because she was the one who calmed and quieted the newborns (Puah is the calming sound made to quiet a crying child). By identifying Yocheved as Shifrah and Miriam as Puah, the Torah is revealing to us that each of their strengths as midwives were the areas in which they excelled. Yocheved was uniquely qualified, because of her predisposition and capacity to cleanse and beautify the newborn children and Miriam had the unique ability to calm the newborns despite the trauma of childbirth. Why is it necessary for the Torah to share with us the special abilities of Yocheved and Miriam as midwives?

The Torah states, **“The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives (Yocheved and Miriam)...’When you deliver the Hebrew women, and you see them on the birthstool; if it is a son, you are to kill him and if it is a daughter, she shall live.’ But the midwives feared G’d and they did not do as the king of Egypt spoke to them, and they caused the boys to live.”** Yocheved and Miriam did not obey the dictate of the king of Egypt. They did not succumb to his wishes to kill the Jewish newborns. Chazal explain that when the Torah states, “...they caused the boys to live...” it means that they did not only defy his command, but they also fed and sustained the children.

Very often one behaves in a manner that is based on his own predisposition. For example, one may give charity because he is inclined to provide for another who is in need. By providing for the person in need, he is satisfying his own need to give. This individual's motivating factor in giving charity is not rooted in G'd's command, but rather, it is based on his own inclination and interest. If the reason one performs a mitzvah is because it is his natural inclination to do so, regardless of it being the Word of G'd, that mitzvah is deficient on a qualitative level. A qualitative mitzvah is only when one performs the mitzvah solely because it is the Will of G'd. Therefore,

one should take pause before performing a mitzvah in order to ascertain within himself his own motive for performing the mitzvah.

Since the Torah had quantified Yocheved and Miriam's essence regarding their level of caring for the newborns as midwives, one would think that the reason they had defied the order of Pharaoh, not to kill the male newborns, was because it was contrary to their essence. It was something that they could not do. However, the Torah reveals that their defiance to Pharaoh was rooted in their fear of G'd. It was unrelated to their compassion or their natural disposition. Thus, the Torah establishes Yocheved and Miriam her daughter, as people who had negated their own essence only to do the Will of G'd.

2. The Unlimited and Far-Reaching Effect of Discipline

The Midrash cites a verse from Proverbs, “ ‘One who withholds the rod hates his child, but he who loves him reprimands/disciplines (mussar) him early on.’ Who is the one who loved his son and disciplined him (gave him mussar)? It is Avraham our Patriarch. Avraham had disciplined his son Yitzchak and taught him. He conditioned his son to follow in his ways...The Torah tells us that Yitzchak was a reflection of his father Avraham in every way – in wisdom, beauty, strength, wealth, and in good deeds. What is the proof that Yitzchak was the equivalent of his father? At the time of the Akeidah (binding of Yitzchak) Yitzchak was 37 years old and Avraham was 137 years old. He bound his son like a sheep and Yitzchak did not resist. He allowed himself to be taken because of the conditioning and discipline that he had received from his father.”

It is interesting to note that because of the merit of the Akeidah, the Jewish people are protected from the prosecution of satan until the end of time. As the Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashanah tells us, it is the sounding of the ram's horn (Shofar) that silences satan. It was only because of Yitzchak's willingness to allow himself to be bound as a sacrifice that the Jewish people are able to be protected from the Attribute of Justice. Had it not been for Avraham's disciplining and conditioning of Yitzchak in

his ways, the Akeidah would have not taken place – thus not allowing the Jewish people to survive.

The Midrash continues, “Yaakov, our Patriarch was also disciplined by his father Yitzchak. Yitzchak dictated to his son that he should engage in Torah study. As it states, ‘Yaakov...dwelt in the tent (of Torah).’ Because of Yitzchak’s disciplining, Yaakov learned all the Torah that was known to his father. Subsequently, he had left his father to study in the yeshivah of Aver. It was because of his Torah study there, that he merited receiving/inheriting the Land of Israel. As it states, ‘Yaakov dwelt in the sojourning of his father...’” Why did Yaakov merit inheriting the Land of Israel because of his studying in the yeshivah of Aver?

When Yaakov had fled the home of his parents, because of his brother Esav, he first went to the yeshivah of Shem and Aver for 14 years. Only after being totally immersed uninterruptedly in Torah, did he continue on to the home of his future father in law Lavan. Yaakov understood that the community and home of Lavan was a representation of evil and depravity. He understood that unless he prepared himself for that encounter and exposure, he would not be protected from the impurity of that environment. He had to study an aspect of Torah that he had never engaged in before that moment. Yaakov had believed that he would remain for the rest of his life in the confines of Canaan. Now, he was suddenly thrust into a situation that would have been untenable without sufficient spiritual preparation. It was because of the Torah that he had studied in the yeshivah of Shem and Aver that Yaakov was able to maintain his purity, despite his surroundings. It was in the merit of that Torah initiative that he inherited the Land.

Rabbeinu Yonah in his work Shaarei Teshuvah (Gates of Repentance) cites the words of Chazal, “The words of the Sofrim (rabbis/rabbinic fences) are more beloved (by G’d) than the wine of the Torah (Biblical Dictates).” He explains that the objective of all mitzvos in the Torah is to demonstrate one’s fear of heaven (yiras shamayim). All rabbinic laws are fences to protect the Torah law that it should not be violated. When one adheres to the rabbinic fence, it is a greater demonstration of one’s fear of heaven then conforming to the Torah law itself. This is because when one observes the Torah law, which is the Word of G’d, one understands that if he should violate it, he is transgressing the Word of G’d. Therefore it is more difficult to violate the Torah law itself. However, if one violates a rabbinic fence he is not violating the Word of G’d itself, but only the safeguard which is only of rabbinic nature. Thus, when one adheres to the rabbinic

fence, he is showing an even greater concern for the Torah law – valuing the necessity to have a fence, not to violate the Torah law under any circumstance, is a demonstration of a greater level of fear of heaven.

Yaakov, our Patriarch, understanding the potential spiritual danger that he would be confronted with in the community of Lavan, took upon himself to study the Torah that was necessary to safeguard and insulate him from the influences of evil. He spent 14 years preparing for that event. By choosing this initiative for the sake of spiritual protection and survival, he was in effect creating the equivalent of a fence. Thus, he demonstrated the ultimate level of fear of heaven. Because of this initiative, he merited to inherit the Land of Israel. Again we see the fruits that are produced as a result of disciplining a child from early on. Because of the disciplining of Yitzchak, Yaakov chose to go to the yeshivah of Shem and Aver – thus allowing him to inherit the Land.

The Midrash continues, “The Jewish people are referred to by the Torah as the “children of Israel (Yaakov)” because they were also disciplined by their father. Thus, they assumed a similar spiritual capacity and potential as their father.

Just as one must discipline and condition his child, he must do the same to himself regarding the evil inclination. As the Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that one must “always be intolerable of his evil inclination.” One must continuously engage in self-discipline by controlling and subduing his evil inclination through the study of Torah.

3. Payment of the Spiritual Debt

The Midrash cites a verse from the prophet Hosheiah, “The prophet states, ‘They (the Jewish people) betrayed G’d...’ How did the Jewish people betray G’d? They fathered children and would not have them circumcised. When Yosef had passed away in Egypt the Jewish people no longer circumcised themselves. They had said, ‘We want to be similar to the Egyptians...’ When G’d had seen what they had done, He had nullified the love that He had for them. As King David writes in Psalms, ‘G’d changed His heart to despise His people.’ It was because they ceased to circumcise themselves, G’d allowed a new king to rise upon Egypt with a mandate to enslave the Jewish people.”

The Torah tells us that the Egyptian exile came about as a result of G’d’s decree which was communicated

to Avraham, our Patriarch at the time of the Covenant Between the Parts. The verse states, “...**Your children will be strangers in a land that is not their own for four hundred years...**” The Midrash tells us that the 400-year period of exile began with the birth of Yitzchak. This is because G'd had said to Avraham, “**Your children will be strangers...**” If one were to calculate the time from the birth of Yitzchak until the redemption from Egypt it would be 400 years.

Maharal of Prague in his work *Gevuras Hashem* (the Power of G'd) asks that if the exile of the Jewish people was to be one consisting of 400 years of bondage in a land that was not their own, how could this period commence with the birth of Yitzchak? At that time, Avraham and his family dwelled in the land of Canaan. Avraham, our Patriarch had achieved at that time great wealth and world renown. He was acknowledged by the nations of the world as the “father of all nations.” After the birth of Yitzchak, Avraham continuously ascended through the many trials and tribulations that were presented to him. His greatest accomplishment was the Akeidah (binding of Yitzchak), which was the most difficult. In the merit of the Akeidah the Jewish people are protected from the Attribute of Justice until the end of time. Chazal tell us that Avraham and his wife Sarah succeeded greatly in espousing monotheism. Avraham converted the men and Sarah converted the women. Avraham had made G'd's existence known to all mankind. How could this time period of monumental spiritual accomplishment be considered the equivalent to the years of bondage in Egypt?

Maharal explains that the Attribute of Justice is exacting in every respect. The application of Attribute of Justice in the context of punishment is exacting to the point that the person receives exactly what he deserves. Identically, regarding accomplishment, one is deserving of reward to the smallest detail based on what he accomplished. Avraham, our Patriarch was selflessly dedicated to the service of G'd – only to utilize existence as a means to glorify His Name. He was pained by the spiritual void that existed in the world – and thus was motivated to engage in theological dialogue in order to dispel the falsehood of paganism from existence. He detested idolatry to such a degree that when the three wayfarers (who were in fact angels) were approached by him to offer his hospitality, he provided the water to wash their feet through a third party. Although every aspect of their hospitality was attended by him personally and his wife, however regarding the water, he chose not to be involved. Since Avraham had suspected that the three wayfarers were pagans who worshiped the dust, he did not

want have any degree of association with the idolatrous object.

Avraham himself, having a profound sensitivity and understanding of G'd was continuously pained by the spiritual void in which he lived. Avraham and subsequently Yitzchak, the spiritual heir of his father, suffered tremendously by being surrounded with impurity. G'd evaluated and valued Avraham's suffering to be the equivalent of exile and bondage. Although he had wealth and renown, Avraham suffered from the spiritual affliction of his environment no less than the Jewish people suffered under their Egyptian taskmasters in the physical sense. As a result of this, we begin calculating the 400 years of exile from the birth of Yitzchak.

The remaining 210 years of exile in Egypt began when Yaakov had descended to Egypt. Although Yaakov was alive and provided protection for family not to be subject to spiritual diminishment, nevertheless those years are considered as part of the exile/bondage that was decreed upon Avraham's progeny. As long as Yaakov was alive, Chazal tell us that the eyes and hearts of the Jewish people were not closed to spirituality. Until the generation of those who had descended with Yaakov to Egypt had passed away, the Jewish people were not subjected to physical bondage. Because Yaakov and his family had great spiritual sensitivity, entering into an environment that was depraved and spiritual impure, caused them great pain which was the equivalent of bondage. However, when the Jewish people chose not to circumcise themselves after the passing of Yosef, it was an indication that they no longer valued their spirituality. At this point, being denied a spiritual environment was no longer considered by them to be a state of bondage. Therefore, the bondage needed to manifest itself through the physical, which is what they truly valued. This is the reason the physical bondage began immediately after the passing of that generation.

One of the tenets of Jewish belief is that one's behavior has consequences. It is the principle of reward and punishment. This principle manifests itself in a manner that has relevance to each individual. If one dedicates his life to spirituality, being deprived or failing spiritually would be considered a punishment because it is something over which the individual will agonize. However, if one does not value his spirituality to such a degree, a spiritual setback/deprivation would not be considered by that individual to be a loss. Therefore, this person must experience punishment through something in the physical/material realm.

4. Amram's and Yocheved's Contribution to the Jewish People

The Torah states, **"A man went from the house of Levi and he took a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and gave birth to a son..."** The Torah does not reveal the identity of the "man" or the "daughter of Levi." Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the "man" was Amram and the "daughter of Levi" was Yocheved. Amram and Yocheved were Moshe's parents. Amram was the leading sage of his generation and Yocheved was the leading midwife (Shifra), who defied the edict of the Pharaoh regarding the killing of the Jewish newborn males. Why does the Torah conceal the identity of Amram and Yocheved?

Maharal of Prague in his work *Gevuras Hashem* explains that most often a child's ability and potential is determined by the characteristics and genealogy of the parents. By concealing the parentage of Moshe, the Torah is telling us that his dimension of being was unrelated to the innate characteristics and genealogy of his parents. However because Amram and Yocheved were very special in their own right because of their own accomplishments, they merited having Moshe. Moshe, even at the time of his birth was obviously unique with special abilities. Chazal tell us that on the day that Moshe was born, he was able to speak and walk. The Gemara tells us that on that day the house was illuminated with light because the Divine Presence was upon him. These endowments were in no way a reflection of the capabilities or potential of Moshe's parents. Thus, the Torah only identifies his parents as: **"A man from the house of Levi who took a daughter of Levi."**

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that because Yocheved had defied the dictate of Pharaoh to kill the Jewish newborn males, she merited having Moshe – the most exceptional Jew as her son. Because of Yocheved's defiance and not heeding the decree of Pharaoh, there is a Jewish people. Had she succumbed to his will, the Jewish people would have become gone into oblivion in Egypt. Chazal tell us that Moshe's dimension of spirituality was the equivalent of the entire Jewish people. Therefore, based on the principle of measure for measure – just as her sacrifice was the cause of having a Jewish people, she merited having a son that was the equivalent of the entire Jewish people - measure for measure. What was Amram's merit for having a son such as Moshe?

Chazal tell us that the tribe of Levi merited having the Priesthood (Kehuna) because they were the only ones who did not participate in the sin of the Golden Calf. It

seems however, that they had rejected idolatry not because of their special ability, but rather because they were not spiritually handicapped as the rest of the Jewish people. All of the tribes of Israel, with the exception of Levi, were subject to bondage in Egypt. It is because of this bondage that they had declined spiritually and ultimately had become idolaters. In contrast, the tribe of Levi, because they had freedom of movement, would go out into the field with scrolls to teach the Jewish people about their spiritual antecedents – Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. The Jewish people, when they had stood at Sinai to receive the Torah, were already weaned and purged of the idolatrous beliefs of Egypt because of all of the revealed miracles that they had seen and experienced. However, because of their past, there was a trace of that impurity that still existed within them. When they found themselves in a precarious position, believing that Moshe had died and they were stranded alone in the desert, they gravitated back to their idolatrous past. This was not the case regarding the tribe of Levi. They were never victimized in Egypt nor did they ever possess the impurity of idolatry because they were never enslaved. If this is so, then why do we see the tribe of Levi as extraordinary for not succumbing to the temptation of the Golden Calf?

The Gemara in Tractate Sotah tells us that initially Pharaoh approached the Jewish people and asked them to participate and join with him in building the Egyptian civilization. He removed his regal garments and began to work with mortar and brick to show that he was willing to compromise on his position as king for the sake of building Egypt. His request of the Jewish people was very alluring and convincing. Amram told the Jewish people that under no circumstance were they to reveal to Pharaoh their capability in this area. He should never know the potential and dimension of the capabilities of the Jewish people. He explained to them that the moment the Egyptians would understand their capability, they would be enslaved. Every tribe rejected and defied Amram's warning, except for the tribe of Levi. The tribes had believed that it would be inappropriate and disrespectful to not heed the call of the monarch of Egypt- especially because Egypt was their host country. However, the tribe of Levi, although they understood the rationale of other tribes and their convincing argument, they nevertheless negated their feelings and understanding to accept the ruling of Amram – the leading Torah sage of the generation. The tribe of Levi subordinated themselves to the Will of G'd which was communicated by Amram the leading Torah sage.

Levi did not succumb to the temptation of the Golden Calf because initially when they were in Egypt,

they had chosen to subordinate themselves to the ruling of Amram not to participate in the building of Egypt. It was their subordination to G'd's Will which allowed them to retain and maintain the purity of Yaakov, their forefather. The tribe of Levi was essential to the spirituality of the Jewish people. They were the officiants of G'd – the representatives of the Jewish people within the context of spiritual atonement. Their negation was only set in motion because of the ruling of Amram, the father of Moshe. Thus, he merited to have a child who was the equivalent of the entire Jewish people.

5. *Yaakov's Insightful Perception of Zevulon*

(from Vayechi)

The Torah tells us that before Yaakov passed away he blessed his children, in a manner that secured the potential of each tribe. Yaakov had established a partnership between his two children Yissachar and Zevulon, in which Zevulon would provide for all the material needs of Yissachar who was totally dedicated to the study of Torah. Because of Zevulon's support, Yissachar was able to engage in Torah study without any degree of distraction. In fact, the Midrash tells us that the level of commitment that Zevulon had to Yissachar was even to the point that they, "placed sustenance in the mouth of Yissachar." Meaning, Yissachar did not need to engage in the material to any degree.

The tribe of Yissachar is referred to by the Prophet as "*Yodei eetim* - those who know times." Their profundity of thought was so exceptional that they were able to perform all the mathematical calculations that were needed to determine the length of the year (whether an additional month should be added). The basis for this clarity was that they were not distracted to any degree from their Torah study because of Zevulon's financial commitment to them. This partnership between Yissachar and Zevulon was only able to come about through Yaakov, their father, because he understood the essence and potential of each of his children.

Yaakov understood that Zevulon would provide for Yissachar in this exceptional manner because Zevulon himself had a profound appreciation for the Torah to be studied in an uninterrupted context. Although Zevulon was not able to be immersed in Torah study to the same degree as Yissachar; however, he understood that Yissachar's uninterrupted study took priority over his own Torah involvement. It was Yaakov himself who established this priority on behalf of Zevulon.

One would think that it was because Yaakov was the Patriarch who is quantified as, "The perfect man, who

dwelt in the tent (of Torah)" that he would be the one qualified to make the proper evaluation to establish this unique partnership between Yissachar and Zevulon. However, we find that this concept of the partnership between Yissachar and Zevulon actually preceded Yaakov.

Sforno explains that Yitzchak, our Patriarch was the first to envision such a partnership. Yitzchak had believed that Esav was in fact a devoutly righteous person dedicated to G'd and spirituality. However, his capacity within the realm of spirituality was not comparable to Yaakov, his brother. Esav is identified by the Torah as, "the man of the field." Yaakov was a person who was totally divorced from the material. The only value of the material to him was to be a medium and means to a spiritual result. Yitzchak understood that in order to establish Torah at its most advanced level it needed to be studied without any degree of distraction. Thus he wanted to create this special partnership between Yaakov and Esav. Esav, being the equivalent of Zevulon and Yaakov being the equivalent of Yissachar. However this was not meant to be as the events evolved – Yaakov had taken the blessings that were rightfully his. In concept, this special partnership had unlimited value. It was only a question when it would be implemented.

The Torah tells us that when Moshe blessed the Tribes of Israel before his passing, he had said regarding Zevulon, "**Rejoice, Zevulon, in your excursions, and Yissachar in your tents.**" Meaning, Zevulon should rejoice when going out to engage in commerce because it is only due to his initiative in the material that Yissachar is able to engage in Torah at such an advanced level. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh states, "It seems from the verse that Zevulon will rejoice even prior to his success in his commercial dealings. When one goes out to engage in commerce does one know that he will definitely succeed? The Torah is telling us regarding, Zevulon, that when he will go out specifically to engage in commerce with the intent of supporting Yissachar he definitely will succeed. Since Yissachar's Torah study was totally dependent on Zevulon's degree of success, Zevulon can be classified as a 'shaliach mitzvah (a designated agent to perform a mitzvah).' Since Zevulon is the agent to perform a mitzvah, he definitely will succeed in his financial pursuits."

It states in the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers), "*im ein kemach, ein Torah* – if there is not flour there is no Torah." Meaning, one cannot engage in Torah study if he does not have material sustenance. If in fact G'd wants one to dedicate his life to Torah study without distraction, evidently, He will provide. If so, why

do we find situations where one must interrupt his Torah studies for the sake of a livelihood? Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains the statement in the Mishna to mean, "If there is not flour/sustenance that is an indication that there is no Torah"- that there is something lacking in the Torah study itself. If one engages in Torah in a selfless and dedicated manner, G'd will provide for his material needs. If one's Torah study is not at that exceptional level, then he will not be provided for. Since Yissachar's dedication to Torah study was unique, Zevulon's success in material success as an agent of mitzvah was guaranteed. Zevulon, having the capacity to appreciate the true value of Torah, he was able to rejoice in his excursions for that purpose.

The Chofetz Chaim writes in his work, Loving Kindness, that although the Gemara in Tractate Kesubos states that one should not give more than 20% of his earnings to charity, this law does not apply to the support of Torah. He explains that when one supports Torah, it is the equivalent of an investment. A partnership is established between the one who studies and the one who facilitates the Torah that he supports.

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 – Nefesh HaChaim
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah
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

11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Taanis**
 Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
 Enter on 54th Street

12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Pesachim**
 Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue
 Between E.51st and E.52st

Tuesday

12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
 Location: Yad Avraham

Wednesday

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

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

Thursday

10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**
 Location: Yad Avraham

12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Taanis** Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL)