

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
The Portion of
Terumah
 February 7, 2008

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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Yad Avraham Institute
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B"H

Terumah

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. The Altar- Reflecting The Jewish Experience

The Torah states regarding the building of the Altar (*Mizbeiach*), **“You shall make the Altar of acacia wood, five cubits in length and five cubits in width...three cubits its height.”** The Midrash states, “G'd said to Moshe, ‘Instruct the Jewish people to build an altar for burnt offerings so that it should atone for the sins of My children. I had made a precondition with Avraham, our Patriarch, that if his children should sin, they will have atonement through the offerings...What is the significance of the word ‘*Mizbeiach* (Altar)’? The word ‘*Mizbeiach*’ is an acronym. The first letter of the word is the letter ‘*mem*’ which represents ‘*mechila* (forgiveness).’ The second letter is ‘*zien*’ which represents ‘*zechus* (merit).’ The next letter is ‘*beis*,’ which represents ‘*beracha* (blessing). The last letter is ‘*ches*’ which represents ‘*chaim* (life).’ In the merit of the burnt offering ‘*olah*’ you would be ‘*misaaleh* (elevated.)’”

The Midrash continues, “The Altar was made of acacia wood (*atzei shitim*) in the merit of Avraham, our Patriarch. He had hosted the angels and told them to rest under the shade of his tree (*eitz*). What is the significance of ‘*shitim*’? When the Jewish people had engaged in ‘*shtus* (foolishness)’ through the Golden Calf, G'd had said, ‘Let the merit of Avraham (who had hosted the angels under his tree) atone for their foolishness.’ Another interpretation of ‘*shitim*’ is that it is an acronym: ‘*shin*’, which represents ‘*shalom* (peace)’; ‘*tes*’ which represents ‘*tova* (goodness)’; ‘*yud*’ which represents ‘*yeshua* (redemption)’; ‘*mem*’ which represents ‘*mechila* (forgiveness). The Torah states that the Altar was **‘five cubits in length and five cubits in width.’** What is the significance of this specification? When the Jewish people were given the Ten Commandments, five Commandments were written on one Tablet and the other five were written on the second Tablet. (Thus, there is a correlation between the height and width of the Altar and the Ten

Commandments). The Torah states, **‘three cubits its height’** which corresponds to the three Redeemers of Israel. As it states, **‘I will send before you Moshe, Aaron and Miriam...’** Every aspect of the Altar is rooted in and connotes the merit of our Patriarchs and the three Redeemers. It is in their merit that the Altar facilitates atonement and blessing on behalf of the Jewish people.

The Torah tells us that there are three species that qualify for a sacrifice: the ox (*shor*), sheep (*kesev*), and goat (*eiz*). The Midrash tells us that each of these species correspond to one of the Patriarchs. The ox (*shor*) was chosen in the merit of Avraham. As it states regarding Avraham’s hosting of the angels, **“Avraham ran to the cattle, took a calf tender and good, and gave it to the youth who hurried to do it..”** The sheep (*kesev*) was chosen to be an offering in the merit of Yitzchak. As the verse states regarding the Akeidah (binding of Yitzchak), **“And Avraham looked up and saw- behold a ram – after it had been caught in the thicket...”** The species of the ram reminds G'd of the special act of the Akeidah, which was the ultimate sacrifice. The goat (*eiz*) was chosen to be an offering in the merit of Yaakov. As the Torah states regarding Rivka, our Matriarch, telling her son Yaakov to take the blessing from his father Yitzchak, **“So now, my son, heed my voice to that which I command you. Go now to the flock and fetch from there two good goats...”** These goats were meant to be prepared by Rivka as delicacies through which Yaakov would receive the blessings from his father.

Each species as an offering can only facilitate atonement and mercy because it corresponds to the merits of the Patriarchs. Every day we recite in the first blessing of the Amidah (Silent Prayer), “Blessed are you Hashem, our G'd,...Who recalls the kindness of the Patriarchs and brings the Redeemer...” The basis for the survival and development of the Jewish people throughout the millennia is in the merit of the Patriarchs. They have drawn upon their spiritual account continuously throughout the ages. However, when the merits of the

Patriarchs will be depleted, G'd will bring the Redeemer for their children. G'd will be forced to bring the Redeemer of the Jewish people even if they are not worthy because there is no longer a basis to maintain them as before.

The Patriarchs, through their spiritual initiatives and service of G'd, inculcated into their souls unique characteristics, which are inherited by every Jew until the end of time. Every aspect of the Jew, from his innate characteristics to his potential of accomplishment was established by the Patriarchs. The specifications and composition of the Altar reflects the fact that the Jew's existence is enmeshed on every level with our holy antecedents.

2. The Relevance of Torah to Atonement

The Torah states regarding the building of the Altar (*Mizbeiach*), **“You shall make the Altar of acacia wood.... You shall make its horns on its four corners...”** The Midrash explains that every aspect of the Altar alludes to something that is a basis for the Jewish people to be worthy of atonement. The Midrash states, **“‘You shall make its horns (*karnos*) on its four corners...’** The Altar needed to have four *'karnos'* to atone for the Jewish people who were exalted through four levels of special distinction (*karnos*) that were bestowed upon them at Sinai. The first *'keren'* (level of distinction) that was given to the Jewish people was that G'd had elevated them at Sinai to give them special status...The second *'keren'* was the Crown of Torah that was given to them ...The third level of distinction, *'keren'* was the Crown of Priesthood...The fourth *'keren'* that was given to the Jewish people was the Crown of Kingship...”

Every component of the Altar is a prerequisite for it to facilitate atonement. If any part of the Altar is nicked or damaged, even to the slightest degree, it is invalidated. Thus, if one would bring a sacrifice when the Altar is damaged, it would have no value. This is because the totality of the Altar, representing all aspects of merit that is necessary to evoke the Attribute of Mercy, is hindered. As the Midrash explains, the Altar needed to be made of acacia wood (*atzei shitim*) to allude to Avraham's hospitality of the angels. He had hosted them under the shade of his tree. It needed to be five cubits in length and five cubits in width to allude to the Ten Commandments that were embraced by the Jewish people and were given five on each Tablet at Sinai. The Altar needed to be three cubits in height in order to allude to the merits of the three Redeemers – Moshe, Aaron, and Miriam. The four corners

needed to exist in a perfect form because they symbolized the four levels of distinction that were bestowed upon the Jewish people at Sinai.

It is interesting to note that within the symbolism of the Altar is the Crown of Torah, which was one of the levels of distinction that were given to the Jewish people at Sinai. Every morning we conclude the Amidah (Silent Prayer) with a request, “May it be Your Will, Hashem our G'd...that the Holy Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days. Grant us our share in Your Torah...” What is the correlation between having the Temple rebuilt and meriting our portion in Torah? Evidently, they are related. When the Temple existed it was the location of the Divine Presence. As it states in the verse, “Make for Me Sanctuary so that I may dwell in your midst.” The only reason a Jew has difficulty coming upon his pre-designated share of Torah is because there is a distance between himself and G'd. However, when the Divine Presence will exist in our midst in the Temple, we will have the clarity to process and internalize our portion of Torah. All clarity emanates from the location of the Divine Presence— as it states, *“Ki me Tzion teitzei Torah - Torah goes forth from Zion.”*

It is evident that one of the components that is crucial to the atonement of the Jewish people is the Crown of Torah, which is represented through one of the corners of the Altar. For a Jew to be more qualified for spiritual reinstatement, he must have relevance to the Torah. We recite in the Ashrei (Psalm), [which is written as an acrostic that represents each of the letters of the Hebrew Alphabet] “G'd is close to all those who call upon Him in truth (*b'emmes*).” Simply, one would understand this verse to mean that G'd responds to the one who calls upon Him with sincerity. However, one could understand it in another context. G'd responds to the one who possesses “*emmes* (truth),” which is the Torah Itself. As King Solomon states in Proverbs (Mishlei) regarding the Torah - “Acquire *emmes* (truth/Torah) and do not sell it.” Torah is unadulterated Truth. Meaning, G'd responds to the one who possesses truth/Torah when he calls out to Him.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that since the time of the destruction of the Temple, G'd's only location in the world is “within the four cubits of Halacha (normative Jewish law).” Meaning, the study hall in which people are engaged in studying Torah in a manner that leads to the elucidation of Torah Law, is the location of the Divine Presence. Since this location represents truth in its absolute form, G'd's Wisdom, G'd has relevance to that location. We pray from the speedy rebuilding of the Temple in order to give us relevance to the source of

Truth, which is G'd Himself – to thus enable us to process the absolute Truth, which is G'd's Torah.

3. *The Mishkan – A Replication of Sinai*

The Torah states regarding the building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle), **“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel and let them take for Me a portion (terumah), from every man whose heart motivates him you shall take My portion.’”** The only materials that were qualified to be given for the building of the Mishkan were those that were given selflessly and out of the generosity of one's heart. If one felt compelled to give, it would not be considered valid for the Mishkan. The verse states, **“..take for Me a portion..”** and concludes with **“you shall take My portion.”** Seemingly, the second reference to taking G'd's portion from the Jewish people is superfluous. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the Torah is revealing to us that it was only the portion that was given selflessly/wholeheartedly that was classified as **“My portion.”**

Ramban explains that the Mishkan was a replication of Sinai. The intensity of G'd's Presence in the Holy of Holies in the Mishkan was the equivalent to that of the Sinai event. Just as G'd communicated to Moshe and the Jewish people at Sinai, He spoke to Moshe from between the Cherubs on the Holy Ark that was located in the Holy of Holies. Ramban presents many colorations, based on verses of how the Divine Presence in the Mishkan was the equivalent of Sinai.

The purpose of the Mishkan was to create a setting for G'd's Presence to dwell in the midst of the Jewish people. As the verse states, **“Make for Me a Sanctuary so that I can dwell in your midst.”** One would think that such an important and crucial task of building the Mishkan would be incumbent upon every Jew. As we find regarding the giving of the *Machtzis Ha'Shekel* (the half silver coin that was compulsory for every Jewish male above the age of twenty to give for the sake of purchasing communal offerings). However, the Torah tells us that the materials that were presented for the building of the Mishkan were not given as a tax or obligation but only out of the generosity of the heart. In fact, this was the only circumstance under which they were acceptable. Why was this so?

When the Jewish people accepted the Torah at Sinai they unequivocally declared **“Naaseh V'nishma – we will do and we will listen.”** The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that when G'd heard this declaration He

exclaimed, **“Who revealed this secret to My children?”** They had spoken in the same manner as angels conduct themselves. The angels do the Will of G'd without first hearing His Command. Thus, the Jewish people at Sinai were the equivalent of angels because they accepted the Torah without knowing the extent of its obligation. They selflessly dedicated themselves to doing G'd's Will. However, as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf, the Jewish people forfeited their special relationship with G'd that they had established at Sinai. In order to reinstate that relationship, G'd instructed them to build the Mishkan. Just as the Jewish people at Sinai dedicated themselves to G'd selflessly, as angels do, so too did their giving of the materials towards the building of the Mishkan needed to have a semblance of that selflessness.

The only way the Jewish people could be reinstated to the level of **“Naaseh v'nishma”**, is to once again assume the posture of the angel by giving to the Mishkan in a selfless manner. Because the Mishkan was built with materials that were given out of the generosity of the heart, it was able to function at the same level as Sinai. The Divine Presence dwelt in it to no less of a degree than It did at the time of the giving of the Torah.

Rambam, based on the Gemara in Tractate Moed Katan, writes, **“When one chooses a rebbe (mentor/teacher) he should have a semblance of an angels.”** What characteristic of the angel should the rebbe reflect? An angel is epitomized through **“Naaseh v'nishma.”** The angel selflessly executes the will of G'd without any hesitation or conflict. It is only through the individual who possesses this level of dedication that G'd's Torah is communicated. Therefore, one should choose a rebbe who is selflessly dedicated to G'd because it is only through a teacher with this degree of dedication that the Torah is properly transmitted.

4. *The Mishkan – A Representation of Our Eternity*

The Torah at the beginning of the Portion of Terumah enumerates the materials that were needed for the building of the Mishkan, **“Gold, silver, copper...and ram skins that are dyed red”**. The Midrash explains that each one of these materials corresponds to one of the exiles of the Jewish people. The Babylonian exile is represented by the gold in the Mishkan. Silver represents the Persian exile. Copper represents the Greek exile. The Roman exile (Edom), which is currently being experienced by the Jewish people is represented by the ram skins that were colored red. Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian Emperor,

who destroyed the First Temple, was shown in a dream all of the future exiles to which the Jewish people were going to be subject. Each of the exiles were represented through gold, silver, copper, and iron. Iron represents bloodshed, which is red.

Kli Yakar asks, “Why was it necessary for Nebuchadnezzar to be shown the future exiles of the Jewish people through the various materials that comprised the Mishkan?” Kli Yakar explains that it was necessary for him to understand that despite the fact that the Jewish people’s presence in existence throughout history has been miniscule; nevertheless, they will triumph over their enemies. Each one of the exiles to which the Jewish people were subjected was caused by a world power. Nebuchadnezzar had to understand that although he had destroyed the Temple and had conquered the Jewish people, ultimately he and the future enemies of Israel were going to be vanquished because there is a representation of each of them in the Mishkan, where G’d’s Presences dwells.

The Gemara in Tractate Yomah tells us that the inclination for idolatry was such an all-consuming force that it ravaged the spirituality of the Jewish people during the First Temple Period. It was more alluring than the sexual drive. The Men of the High Assembly, fasted and prayed to G’d to allow them to destroy this inclination. The Gemara tells us that G’d responded to their prayers and consequently a fiery lion came forth from the Holy of Holies. They took this fiery lion, which represented the inclination for idolatry and destroyed it. Because the Men of the High Assembly had destroyed the inclination for idolatry, the Jewish people are no longer attracted by it. How is it possible that the very essence of impurity should be associated with the Holy of Holies, which is the location of the Divine Presence?

Rambam writes in the Laws of Repentance that one’s status of “devoutly righteous (tzaddik)” or “evil (rasha)” is not predestined but rather it is determined through one’s choice. Man is therefore confronted continuously by situations in which he must chose between good and evil. If he makes the right choice, he will advance himself spiritually- thus being deserving of reward. However, if he should fail by succumbing to his evil inclination, his spirituality will be diminished and he will be deserving of punishment. In order to maintain the proper balance between good and evil, at whatever level “good” is represented, there must be a counterforce of “evil” that equally represented. The Holy of Holies was the location of the Divine Presence and was the source of all “good” needed to have within it a representation of

“evil” to maintain the counterbalance. This balance between good and evil is the basis of existence and the setting in which G’d created man to perfect himself. This is the objective of Creation.

The Mishkan was comprised of representations of the four exiles experienced by the Jewish people. Their presence must be represented in the location of G’d’s Presence to indicate that they are the counterbalance for the Jewish people in existence. The Jewish people represent “good” and the nations who dominated civilization represent “evil.”

One’s context of choice is only valid if one has the ability to ultimately succeed by making the proper choice. Even if one has advanced himself spiritually through multiple proper choices, he cannot become complacent because of his successes. As he advances himself spiritually, simultaneously there is an intensified counterbalance that accompanies that advancement to guarantee that there is always a context of choice. The struggle against evil is never-ending; regardless of one’s spiritual dimension.

5. *The Essence of the Jewish Court (from Mishpatim)*

The Torah states at the beginning of the Portion of Mishpatim, “**And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them...**” The Midrash explains that the expression “place before them” means that one must present judicial matters before a qualified Jewish court (*beis din*) and not a secular court. Although the adjudication and verdict of the secular court is identical to that of the Jewish court, it is a Torah violation to go before the secular court. The Midrash concludes, “If one were to present a judicial matter before a secular court it is as if he denies G’d and the Torah itself.” If the verdict of the secular court is identical to that of the Jewish court, and is not in contradiction to Torah law, why then is it considered a denial of G’d and the authenticity of Torah?

It states in Psalms, ‘*Elokim netzav ba’adas keil* – G’d stands (associates Himself) with the congregation of G’d (proper Jewish court).’ Meaning, G’d associates Himself with the Jewish court when it convenes. One of the responsibilities of the Jewish High Court (Sanhedrin) is to adjudicate capital crimes that will determine if a defendant is liable for the death penalty. If man is subject to err because of his limitations, then how could the Torah allow the court to pass judgment? Perhaps the court would be taking an innocent life. Because G’d associates Himself

and convenes with a proper Jewish court, that meets all of the prescribed criteria, one does not need to be concerned because He elucidates the subject matter pertaining to the verdict so that the judges should render a proper judgment. Regardless of the facts and evidence pertaining to the case, whether the defendant is innocent or guilty, the verdict is determined by G'd. Meaning, if it were discovered after the defendant was put to death that the witnesses who had testified were found to be conspiring, although the basis for the verdict was faulty; nevertheless, the decision of the court is correct. This is because G'd convenes with the congregation of G'd. G'd Himself wanted this individual to be put to death through the process of the court. The court only facilitated G'd's Will. Thus, human fallibility has no bearing on the ultimate outcome.

Rambam rules in the Laws of Idolatry that if one's belief in G'd is based on his own intellect, although his position is in total conformance with the Torah, he is in violation of the negative commandment, **“Do not turn to idols.”** Rambam explains, “The intelligence of man is limited.” Meaning, that although one may be correct in his belief of G'd presently through his compelling intellectual evidence, because it is not rooted in fact, he may change his position of belief. Therefore it is similar to turning to idols which is based on one's own perception of truth. In contrast, if one's belief is based on the tradition that was transmitted from generation to generation, dating back to the Sinai event, where every Jew witnessed G'd's Presence and communicating His Will to Moshe as His Prophet, then one's belief is no longer based on one's perception of truth, but rather on fact.

When a Jewish court adjudicates a matter between two individuals, regardless of the evidence, the verdict is correct because G'd determines the outcome. Thus, it is the equivalent of embracing G'd and His Torah. However, if one goes before a secular court, whose process and verdict/decision may be identical to the Jewish court, if the evidence for the verdict is faulty then the decision of the court is a corruption of justice. This is because G'd had no relevance to that particular court. Therefore going the secular court in this context is the equivalent of rejecting G'd and His Torah.