

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES
Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei
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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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Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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1. Torah, the Purifying Factor for the Jew

The Torah states, “**Bezalel made the Ark of acacia wood (atzei sheetim)...**” The Midrash explains, “The reason the wood used for the Ark was ‘atzei sheetim (acacia wood) is because it was revealed before G’d that the Jewish people would sin in the location of Sheetim...” In Sheetim, the Jewish males sinned with the Baal Peor and had forbidden sexual relations with the Midianite women.

The Midrash continues, “Therefore G’d gave the commandment that the Ark should be made of sheetim wood so that they could be atoned for that sin that will occur in Sheetim. The verse states, ‘**He cast it (the Ark) with pure gold...**’ This is symbolic of students of Torah who are pure. Just as the casting of gold onto wood enhances the wood, so too the more the students study the Torah they become enhanced and glorified. If they engage sufficiently in Torah study, it will enter into their hearts causing purity of the heart and kidneys. They will be referred to as ‘pure gold.’”

The Ark was the repository for the Tablets and the Torah. The Torah by specifying that the Ark must be made of “sheetim wood” is alluding to the fact that through the Ark, one can be atoned from the most severe level of sin (idolatriy and promiscuity – as mentioned regarding the incident of Baal Peor). Secondly, the reason the wood of the Ark was cast in pure gold, is to teach us that the study of Torah purifies the hearts (and kidneys which symbolize wisdom) of those who study it. Just as the gold enhanced the wood, so too does the study of Torah enhance and purify the person who studies it.

One can only appreciate and value something that he possesses if he truly understands its intrinsic value. The more a Torah scholar engages in Torah study he gains a greater capacity to appreciate its value. The purification process of Torah study causes one to gain a keener grasp and appreciation for the Torah itself.

Before World War II, an assembly of great rabbis and Torah sages convened in Warsaw. At this assembly, Reb Shimon Shkop z’tl, the Rosh HaYeshivah of Grodna

Lithuania, had made a suggestion regarding certain issue which was summarily dismissed by many of the rabbis. Reb Baruch Ber Leibowitz z’tl, the Kaminetzer Rosh HaYeshivah (main disciple of Reb Chaim Brisker z’tl), had said, “Reb Shimon Shkop values Torah to such a degree that if he encounters a difficulty in one of the commentaries he becomes physically ill until he is able to understand it. How could a person of this level of dedication to Torah be dismissed so quickly?” Meaning because Reb Shimon Shkop’s dedication and immersion was at such a level, he merited a unique clarity that should be considered.

Chazal are telling us that those who dedicate themselves to Torah study are purified and enhanced through it, because it offers them clarity and wisdom. As they advance in Torah knowledge, they gain a new understanding of how precious it is – consequently it motivates them to dedicate themselves, even to a greater degree, to Torah study. This is why King David writes in Psalms based on his own perspective of Torah, “The words of Torah have greater value than thousands of pieces of gold and silver.”

On the Shabbos and the Yom Tov we pray to G’d in the Amidah (silent prayer) that He should purify our hearts to serve Him with Truth. The only path to truth is through the purity of heart. Purity of heart can only be achieved through intensive Torah study because its essence is Truth. As King Solomon writes in Proverbs, “Acquire Truth, do not sell it.” We pray that the Torah we study should purify our hearts and minds to be able to appreciate the truthfulness of G’d.

2. Moshe’s Association with the Golden Calf

The Midrash tell us that it was the rabble (eirev rav) who had initiated the sin of the Golden Calf. Although they had gone out of Egypt along with the Jewish people and had witnessed many miracles, they hastened the casting of the Golden Calf through sorcery. The Midrash tell us that when Moshe located the remains of Yosef in the Nile, he had raised them from the water by writing on a piece of pottery “*aalei shore* – the ox should

rise” and throwing it into the Nile (the Torah compares Yosef to the ox). Ultimately, Micha (who was an evil person) located this special piece of pottery and had inserted it into the mouth of the Golden Calf. As a result, the Calf assumed a lifelike function, giving it greater credence as a deity.

When the Jewish people were engaged with the Golden Calf, Moshe was in heaven receiving the Torah. G'd had said to him, “Go down because your people have become corrupted.” Moshe responded, “Are they my people and not Your people?” G'd said to him, “When the rabble left Egypt, they only were able to do so because you allowed it. You never consulted with Me regarding the rabble leaving Egypt. They left only with your permission. Therefore they are your people and not Mine.” Moshe was indirectly responsible for the sin of the Golden Calf. It was as a result of his decision that the rabble left Egypt and subsequently initiated the idolatry. Moshe allowing the rabble to leave Egypt was for the sole purpose to convert pagans into monotheists – to bring them under the wings of the Divine Presence.

The Golden Calf was able to impact upon the Jewish people because of the special piece of pottery on which Moshe had inscribed the name of G'd. We see once again that Moshe's action was indirectly the cause of the Golden Calf. How could Moshe, the dedicated servant of G'd who was the most special Jew to ever live be indirectly linked to such a grave sin?

The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah tells us that after the Sinai experience and prophesizing at a level of “face to face” with G'd, the Jewish people should have not been influenced and drawn to idolatry. Their level of clarity was of such a dimension that its falseness was blatant and obvious. G'd created an interest in idolatry among the Jewish people so that they should be put into a position of temptation to make a choice to serve the Golden Calf or not. The value of this choice was that even if they should fail, it would establish a model for all generations until the end of time from which to learn. The lesson that would be learned from the failing of this generation would be that despite the extreme level of desecration of G'd's Name, a community is not beyond atonement and reinstatement. This was demonstrated by the fact that after the Sin of the Golden Calf, the Jewish people were reinstated.

The Gemara continues that King David, at his advanced spiritual level, should not have been drawn into the incident with Basheva; however, he was given a situation of temptation so that he should be a model for all generations to come that if an individual should fail,

although he does not have the merit of a community, if he repents he will be forgiven.

If the rabble would have not been intermingled with the Jewish people, they would not have not considered sinning with the Calf. Consequently the model of a community being atoned for the most extreme level of sin would not exist. The rabble were needed in order for the events to unfold as they did – resulting in the ability for a community to repent and be atoned. The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin tells us that just as the individual is judged, so too are communities and the world as a whole is judged. If the world is judged as being evil, it will be destroyed. The only way to sway the balance so that it is judged as righteous is to have the ability for the world as a whole to do teshuvah. This is possible only because of the actions of Moshe.

Although G'd had told Moshe that he should have consulted with Him regarding the rabble, he is not faulted for allowing them to leave Egypt. When Moshe pleaded on behalf of the Jewish people, he understood that G'd would not destroy them because of the ultimate purpose of serving as a role model for teshuvah on a community level.

There is a principle, “G'd brings merit to the meritorious and tragedy to the hands of the guilty.” If Moshe was meritorious, then how did G'd allow him to take actions that ultimately resulted in tragedy? In actuality, the ultimate results of his actions were positive. The Jewish people were forgiven for sinning and they established a model for repentance.

Thus, the rabble inciting the Jewish people and the piece of pottery being used to animate the Calf could have only come about through an individual such as Moshe who was meritorious and whose intent was pure. Had these events unfolded through another, it would have been a detriment to the Jewish people. Because Moshe was the worthy and dedicated servant of G'd these events, although were detrimental in the narrow sense to the Jewish people, were ultimately the only reason for their survival until the end of time.

3. The Manner in which One Creates Advocates

The Midrash states, “G'd said to the Jewish people, ‘Observe My mitzvos and My statutes...’ Why is this so? It is because the reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah and the result of a sin is a sin. Ben Azai says, ‘Performance of a mitzvah brings about another mitzvah and sinning brings about another sin.’ Reb Meir says, ‘For

every mitzvah that one performs G'd sends an angel to protect him. If one performs one mitzvah, he receives one angel. If he performs many mitzvos, he receives many angels to protect him. As it states, 'The angels were commanded to protect you...'"

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that since man is not perfect, he is continuously subject to prosecution from the Attribute of Justice. The Attribute of Justice dictates that if one sins he must be punished. In order for one to be protected from this prosecution, one needs to have G'd's Mercy, which results from his own spiritual endeavors. If one is engaged in mitzvos, he will merit angels who will be his advocates against prosecution. This is the reason G'd commanded the Jewish people to "**Observe My mitzvos and My statutes observe the mitzvos...**"

The Midrash continues, "In addition to meriting angels for protection, if one is engaged in many mitzvos he creates for himself a 'good name.' We find that an individual is identified by three names – the name that his parents gave him, one that others call him, and one that he acquires for himself. The ultimate title that one carries, is the one that he creates for himself. Where do we find this? Betzalel, because he acquired for himself a 'good name,' merited to be the one to oversee the building of the Mishkan. As it is written in Proverbs, 'A good name is better than silver and gold...'" What is the meaning of the Midrash? Betzalel was given the name 'Betzalel' by his parents, yet he is used as the example of one who acquired for himself a 'good name.'

A "good name" that one acquires for himself is referring to how one quantifies himself. One could choose to identify with the physicality of his existence or his spiritual essence. Betzalel identified himself with spirituality and thus acquired the ultimate "good name."

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) tells us that for every mitzvah one performs one acquires a defending angel (advocate) and for every sin he creates a prosecuting angel. Typically these advocate and prosecuting angels are thought of as playing a role at the end of time, when one is judged before G'd. However we see that these angels have relevance to one's daily existence. There is continuous prosecution and advocacy which result from one's actions. Betzalel, because he had devoted himself entirely to spirituality, had merited countless angels who were advocating on his behalf. As a result of the overwhelming advocacy, he acquired for himself a "good name." One is quantified by the angels that surround him from his actions. The quality of these angels is determined by the quality of one's mitzvah

performance. If one engages in mitzvos for their own sake (l'shma) then he merits the highest quality of advocating angels. However, if he performs a mitzvah in deficient manner, such as with an ulterior motive (shelo l'shma) then the angel that results will also be deficient.

Everyone needs protection from prosecution/physical and spiritual harm. In order to merit the Mercy of G'd, one must engage in doing His Will. The verse states, "G'd protects the feet of His devoutly righteous." Rabbeinu Bachya explains if one were a runner, it is inevitable that over time he will sustain injuries. However, one who is continuously engaged in doing the Will of G'd will merit Divine Protection in all aspects of his life. G'd will not allow anything negative to present itself to His devoutly righteous.

The Gemara tells us that until Avraham, our Patriarch, was circumcised he did not have full control over five parts of his body- eyes, ears, and the male organ. After he was circumcised, G'd added the letter 'hey' to his name (which has the numerical equivalent of five) indicating that he was in control of his totality. Avraham was devoutly righteous even before his circumcision. Does the Gemara imply that he had difficulty controlling his eyes from gazing upon something inappropriate? Surely not, he was a prophet of G'd. After his circumcision, Avraham assumed a unique level of purity and holiness that G'd protected him from being exposed to anything negative where he could fail inadvertently. The Gemara tells us that Rebbe Akiva had gazed upon the beauty of the daughter of Tanus Tropus. How is this possible? He was one of the greatest Torah Sages of all time. The Gemara explains that he had come upon her inadvertently as they crossed paths in the street. It was beyond his control. Although Rebbe Akiva was a great Torah sage, he did not merit the same level of protection of our Patriarch Avraham.

One is prone to mishaps both in the physical and spiritual sense. Therefore, one must engage in mitzvos and Torah study to merit angels to be his advocates.

4. The Basis for the Sin is the Basis for the Correction

The Torah describes at length the materials that the Jewish people had brought for the building of the Mishkan and in the manner in which it was brought. The Jewish people not only provided the raw materials for the Mishkan, they also gave their jewelry, which is a personal item. They parted with these items for the sake of the Mishkan without issue.

The Torah refers to the Mishkan as “*Mishkan ha'aidus* – the Sanctuary of testament.” Chazal explain that the Mishkan was a “testament” that G'd had forgiven the Jewish people for the sin of the Golden Calf. Despite the gravity of their sin, G'd fully reinstated the Jewish people and dwelled in their midst. After transgressing so severely with the Golden Calf, how were the Jewish people able to repent and be full reinstated?

There is principle of “*Meda kineged meda* – measure for measure.” This is the manner in which G'd punishes or rewards an individual based on his actions. For example, since the Egyptians had thrown the Jewish newborn males into the Nile to drown them, they in turn were drowned in the Sea when they were pursuing the Jewish people- measure for measure. Just as this principle is applied within the context of punishment it also has relevance to the positive- similarly regarding atonement.

The Torah tells us that when the Jewish people had fashioned the Golden Calf, they removed their earrings and nose rings (personal jewelry) and contributed them with alacrity for the making of the Calf. Identically, when the Jewish people gave towards the building of the Mishkan, which was the ultimate edifice in which G'd's Presence was to dwell, they contributed their jewelry with the same level of zeal. Thus, in the same manner in which the Jewish people had failed they were able to make the correction.

The Torah tells us that when the Moshe was about to pass away, he rebuked the Jewish people for the sins they had committed in various locations. One of the locations mentioned by Moshe was Di Zahav. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that there is no such location as Di Zahav. Evidently, the name is an allusion to a specific failing of the Jewish people. Di Zahav is a reference to “dai zahav – enough gold.” Because G'd had given the Jewish such an abundance of gold, it contributed to their failing with the Golden Calf. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that when G'd wanted to destroy the Jewish people for the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe pleaded on their behalf claiming that G'd was partially at fault for their failing since He had provided them with such an abundance of gold. It is similar to one who adorns his son with the finest clothes and perfume, provides him with a purse of gold coins, and places him in the entrance of a brothel. Is it not certain that he will come to sin?

Conversely, if it were not for the fact that the Jewish people were given so much gold, they would not have been able to build the Mishkan. G'd gave them an unlimited amount of wealth in order to make it relatively easy for them to build the Mishkan. But as with anything

in life, it can be used for the negative or the positive. One has the ability to choose to dedicate his resources to advance his spirituality or diminish it. As the Rambam writes in Hilchos Teshuvah, one's status as righteous or evil is not predetermined by G'd. Just as the Jewish people had abundant wealth that they used for the Golden Calf, they had it to build the Mishkan with a similar level of ease. It is true that the Jewish people had failed with the Golden Calf; however, G'd provided them the means to make the correction – in a similar vein as measure for measure.

5. *The All-Encompassing Characteristic of the Jew*

The Torah states, “**The men came with the women; everyone whose heart motivated (*nadiv leiv*) him brought bracelets...**” Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that there is a difference between “*nadiv leiv*-motivated heart” which is a noun and “*asher yidvenu leibo*- to give from the generosity of heart,” which is a verb. “*Nadiv leiv*” is the essence of the person. One who is classified as “*nadiv leiv*” is innately one with a generous heart. On the other hand, the one who is classified as “*yidvenu leibo*” it is the one who performs an act of generosity only because it presented itself. It does not necessarily reflect on the person. He simply was motivated at that moment to act generously.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues that the one who is “*nadiv leiv*” gives without consideration for his own needs or taking into account his own limitations. It is the equivalent of one who is classified by the Torah as “*nisaoh leibo* – inspired heart.” The inspiration of this individual is so consuming that his focus is solely on the cause – ignoring his own needs.

The Gemara in Tractate Chagigah tells us that G'd values the ascent of all the Jews when they visit the Temple Mount during the three festivals of the year. The Gemara cites a verse which states, “How beautiful are your steps, the daughter of the benefactor (*bas nadiv*).” The Jews are referred to as the “*bas nadiv*” because they are the descendents of Avraham who selflessly gave his heart to G'd (*nadiv leiv*). Avraham gave of himself without limitation. There was nothing that was too difficult for Avraham to do in the service of G'd. In fact when he was thrown into the fiery kiln at Kasdim, he had intended to give his life.

Chazal present the principle of, “Love disrupts/supersedes protocol.” When one truly loves something, all that exists at that moment is the object of

his love. Nothing else exists at that moment to interfere with his objective. Although Avraham was world renowned and one of the most wealthy individuals of his time, he hitched his own donkey to go to the Akeidah (binding of Yitzchak). All that mattered to Avraham at that moment was to fulfill the Will of G'd. His own existence was totally negated. As a result of his selfless behavior, Avraham ascended to the level of being referred to by G'd as "My beloved." His essence was "nativ leiv."

The Gemara tells us that mercy, shame/conscience, and acts of kindness are characteristics that are inherent in the Jewish people. This is because they descend from Avraham who possessed these characteristics. The Jewish people are referred to as the "daughter of the benefactor - bas nativ" (Avraham our Patriarch) because every Jew inherently has the ability to give of himself selflessly as Avraham had done.

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)