

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Rosh Hashanah

September 17, 2009

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
1. <i>One's Ascent Through Torah</i>	2
2. <i>The Path to Repentance</i>	3
3. <i>The Innate Power of Torah</i>	3
4. <i>Something that is Simple But Yet Very Difficult</i>	4
5. <i>G'd Demonstrates His Dominion Through Judgment</i>	5

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
New York
September 17, 2009

B"H

Rosh Hashanah

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita
Dean

1. One's Ascent Through Torah

The Torah states, **“Moshe went (*vayeilech*) and spoke these words to all of Israel.”** The Midrash explains, “The term ‘vayeilech (went)’ is an expression of rebuke. As it states, ‘Go and see the wonders of G’d.’” What relevance does seeing the wonders of G’d have with to rebuke? How will gazing upon the majesty and awesomeness of existence, which is G’d’s handiwork, cause rebuke? It is only after one witnesses and internalizes G’d’s Omnipotence through creation, is one negated. This will cause one to recognize and appreciate his failings.

The Midrash states, “King Solomon writes, ‘The words of the sages are similar to a cattle prodder.’” The one who ploughs with the ox must insure that the ox does not veer to the right or to the left. If the ox should not walk the straight path it will break the blade of the plough in the ground. The Midrash continues, “Identically, the words of the sages and the Torah direct the hearts of those who study it. By engaging in Torah, one will be led along the proper path of goodness.” Ramchal writes in Path of the Just that the desires and lusts of one’s heart are the cause of the conflicts of interest that direct one away from the proper path. However based on this Midrash, if one studies Torah sufficiently, it will allow one to gain clarity and a perspective that will cause the heart to have an interest and appreciation for spirituality.

The Midrash continues, “Just as a nail is secure in the location in which it was implanted, so too do the words of Torah cause one to become secure and set in his position. The words of the sages are like plantings. Just as when one plants it blossoms and produces fruits, so too when one engages in the words of Torah do they blossom within the individual and cause him to come upon new understandings...King Solomon writes, ‘The nails (*masmeros*) are planted...’ (the word *masmeros* (nails) is usually written with the letter ‘*samoach*’ however King Solomon writes it with the letter ‘*sin*’). This is to teach us that there are twenty-four books in the Torah that

correspond to the twenty-four watches of the Priests (Kohanim) established by King David (and Shmuel the prophet). (Regarding officiating in the Temple, the Gemara tells us that there were twenty-four families of Kohanim that would officiate for one week on a rotation basis). Thus, the word “*masmeros* (nails)” can be read as “*mishmaros* (watches).” We find that there is a commonality between the Torah and the twenty-four week rotation service of the Kohanim.

It was only the Kohen who was qualified to officiate in the Temple. The Tribe of Levy was the only tribe that did not participate in the sin of the Golden Calf and were thus not tainted with the impurity of idolatry. Because they were the most spiritually advanced of all the tribes, they were qualified to have a closer relationship with G’d. The Torah tells us that the tribe of Levy did not receive a portion in the Land of Israel as the other tribes of Israel did, because **“Hashem is their portion.”** Although the Levite was not as qualified as the Kohen to serve in the Temple, they nevertheless qualified for certain duties. Both the Kohen and the Levy were fully responsible to officiate in each of their own capacities.

Rambam states at the end of the Laws of Shmitta and Yovel that every person has the ability to ascend to the level of the tribe of Levy (although he will not be qualified to officiate in any capacity in the Temple). Rambam explains, “If one is motivated to pursue the understanding of G’d and be dedicated to officiate on His behalf and serve Him and to adhere to His Will and not to allow material concerns to distract him, as all mankind seeks out, this individual is sanctified to the ultimate level and G’d will be his portion forever. He will merit all that he needs in this world to maintain him as the Kohen and the Levy.”

We see from Rambam, that one whose dedication to G’d is without compromise is valued by Him no less than the tribe of Levy. The Midrash, which refers to the Torah as “*masmeros* (nails)” that secure, and can be read as “*mishmaros* (watches) implies that if one dedicates himself to study all of the (twenty-four) books of Torah, he will ascend to a level of spirituality that he will be valued

by G'd as the Kohen, the one who is most qualified to officiate and serve, Him. The commonality that exists between the spiritual profile of the Torah and the profile of the twenty-four families who had officiated in the Temple gives us an insight and understanding that through one's own initiative, despite one's natural limitation, one can achieve a level of relationship with G'd that is no less than a Kohen.

2. *The Path to Repentance*

The Torah states in the Portion of Nitzavim regarding repentance, **"...and you will return unto Hashem, your G'd, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and all your soul...Hashem will circumcise your heart..."** Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains, "When one repents he must make corrections in three areas. The first area that must be addressed is regarding one's study of Torah. How does one return to G'd and heed His voice? One must engage in Torah study. It is only through one's study of Torah that one can appreciate and internalize His Word. Thus, the first initiative that one must take in order to return to G'd is commit oneself to the study of Torah (to begin the spiritualization process). What will be the result of being committed to Torah study? The Zohar states, 'In the merit of Torah study, the Jewish people will be redeemed.' We find that the destruction of the First Temple was directly caused by the absence of Torah study. As it states in the verse, 'They abandoned My Torah...' Therefore when the Jewish people commit to Torah study, they will be returned to the Land that was promised to them as their inheritance by G'd."

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues, "How does one repent for the transgression of a negative commandment? The verse states, **'Hashem will circumcise your heart....'** It is known that one only violates a negative commandment because of the covering on one's heart (*orlas halev*) is the source of desire and lust and thus the cause of all evil. Therefore, G'd will circumcise one's heart and remove its covering. This will occur when one has sufficient love for G'd...How does one repent for transgressing a positive commandment? If one will perform all of the commandments...."

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in Gates of Repentance that the initial step in repentance is the recognition of the wrong that one had done. It is only after one senses his deficiency can one repent. This sensitivity to be able to introspect and reflect upon one's failings comes only

through the study of Torah, without distraction. This does not mean that one must study continuously throughout the day in order to gain spiritual sensitivity. But rather, one must dedicate time to study without interruption.

We recite in the blessing of repentance in the Amidah (silent prayer), "Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah, and bring us near, our King to Your service, and influence us to return in perfect repentance..." We see that the process of repentance first begins with the return to Torah study. This will allow the next stage of ascent to come about which is to be drawn near to the King in service.

We supplicate G'd every day in our prayers (u'vah l'tzion), "Open our hearts with Your Torah..." The key to open the Jewish heart to spirituality is only through Torah study. If the heart is sealed there is no receptivity or sensitivity for spirituality. The heart needs to be penetrated. As the verse states, **"Hashem will circumcise your heart..."** Meaning, G'd will remove the blockage, which causes the heart to pursue lust and desire and prevents it from sensing the value of spirituality and absorbing it. Intellectual understanding of Torah concepts is not sufficient, but rather one's objective in its study must be to give one a greater understanding of G'd's Will. Only then will he merit Divine Assistance which will allow the Torah to penetrate his heart and make him receptive to His Word.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states, "One who attempts to purify himself will be assisted." If one beseeches G'd to allow his heart to be penetrated by Torah and is committed to its study, then he will become the greatest beneficiary of that pursuit. Thus he will become sensitive to his spiritual deficiencies to be able to make corrections and advancements.

3. *The Innate Power of Torah*

The Torah in the Portion of Haazinu states, **"May my teaching (Torah) pierce you like the rain, may my utterance flow like the dew..."** The Midrash explains, "Why is Torah compared to rain? Just as the rain has the ability to penetrate and dissolve stone so too can the Torah penetrate the heart that is made of stone. (The Gemara tells us that Rebbe Akiva was inspired to pursue a lifetime of Torah study because he noticed that over time a small stream of water had dissolved a stone. He drew from this and concluded, 'If water has the ability to penetrate stone, then the Torah can penetrate my heart that is no harder

than stone.') Our Rabbis of blessed memory teach us that if the evil inclination is like stone the Torah will melt it, if it is like iron it will cause it to burst. Therefore, it is in the best interest of the individual to dedicate himself to Torah study day and night. As it is stated in the Book of Joshua, 'You should mediate (in Torah) day and night.'

G'd created the evil inclination in order to create a context for man to be able to have free choice. One is continuously challenged by his evil inclination. The only way one can contend with and destroy this inclination is through the study of Torah. As the Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin states, "I have created the evil inclination, I have created the Torah as its antidote." If one engages in Torah study it will dissolve the evil inclination as water dissolves stone.

The Midrash continues, "This is the reason that if one says, 'I have toiled (in Torah) and did not find it- he should not be believed.'" What is the relevance of coming upon the truth of Torah to the destruction of the evil inclination through its study?

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that G'd is not receptive to one's prayers because one's sins act as an iron partition that prevent them from ascending. The study of Torah allows one to perceive and understand truth. Without the study of Torah, one's perception of truth is occluded by the conflicts of interest of one's desires. However, by engaging in Torah study, that conflict (evil inclination) will be removed because one had come upon the truth of Torah. Therefore, if one claims to have toiled in Torah sufficiently he should have come upon its truth. If he did not come upon its truth, it is an indication that he did not toil in it sufficiently. There is something innate in the intense Torah study process that dissolves and obliterates the evil inclination that exists within man. Therefore, if one engages in it sufficiently, he will definitely find it.

Rav Baruch Baer Leibowitz z'tl was one of the primary disciples of Reb Chaim of Brisk z'tl and was the Rosh HaYeshivah of Kaminitz. During one of his Talmudic discourses one of his students had asked him a difficult question on the subject matter at hand. Rav Baruch Baer answered the student without any hesitation. All of the students who were present at the discourse were astounded at the Rosh Yeshiva's immediate response, which revealed his extraordinary intellect and genius. The following day, the Rosh Yeshiva approached the student who had asked the question, and answered him again as he had done on the previous day. The student could not understand the intent of his Rosh Yeshiva sharing with

him the same identical answer as the previous day. Rav Baruch Baer had already shared with the identical answer verbatim the day before. The student had asked him, "Why are you repeating to me today what you had said yesterday?" He answered, "Yesterday my answer was rooted and emanated from my intellect without any degree of effort or toil. However, what I am telling you today, although it is the same answer, it came about through a process of self-application and toil. This is because the knowledge and truth of Torah that comes as a result of toiling has a more profound effect than one that only stems from one's intellect." It is the toiling process in Torah that removes the barriers and occlusions, thus allowing one to see truth in a compelling context. The process of toiling in itself affects the individual. Two people may arrive at the same answer to a Torah query, one through his superior intellect and the other through toiling endless hours. It is the one who had toiled in Torah who will be come upon truth that is irrefutable because of the process in which he had engaged. The other individual, although he had come upon the same truth, because it did not come through toiling, it will not be established as irrefutable truth.

The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin tells us that if one is overcome by "the despicable character (evil inclination), one should immediately go to the study hall and engaged in Torah study. It is because through the study of Torah it will be obliterated and dissolved.

4. Something that is Simple But Yet Very Difficult

The Torah states, "**For this commandment that I command you today- it is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in heaven, (for you) to say, 'Who can ascend to heaven for us...it is in your mouth and your heart to perform it.'**" There is an argument among the commentators as to which mitzvah this verse is referring. Rashi explains that "**this commandment that I command you today**" is referring to the mitzvah of Torah study. One need not traverse the sea or ascend to heaven to attain its wisdom, but rather, one only needs to engage in its study. This mitzvah can be readily fulfilled because it is available and close to every Jew. Sforno explains that the mitzvah to which the verse is referring is the mitzvah of repentance (teshuvah). Every Jew has relevance to repentance and it is not beyond his capacity. One must first sense and recognize that he has failed. It is only after this recognition of the wrong can one repent. However, it is not simple matter to be able to introspect and assess one's own failings. One needs to have the clarity to be able

to go beyond his own conflicts of interest and justifications.

There are issues that one needs to have the benefit of prophets and advanced Torah sages in order to come upon them. However, the process of repentance is not something that requires these special individuals. The solution to one's spiritual issues lies within the individual. All one needs to do is to go beyond his ego and reflect upon his actions in order to address his failings. One does not need the assistance of a prophet or Torah sage to do this. Rambam explains that repentance is first to have remorse for the wrong that one has done followed by a commitment to not to transgress again in the future. Sforno explains that the recognition of the wrong is not limited to only understand that one has done wrong, but rather one should appreciate that he has transgressed against G'd, the King of the Universe Who is the One who provides him with everything. This is a more profound appreciation of one's failing.

Rambam writes that part of the repentance process is to confess one's sins "Before G'd." If one already is aware of his transgressions and G's is aware of everything, what is the value of expressing one's sins aloud? By enunciating one's transgressions, with the understanding that he is doing so before the Master of the Universe, one will appreciate the profundity of his sin. He will come to realize that he not only did not fulfill his own potential, but rather, he diminished all existence by violating the Word of G'd. In addition, if one reflects upon all of the good that G'd has given him he will realize that he has transgressed against the One who provides him with every aspect of his existence. However, this degree of understanding is not readily available to everyone. One must supplicate G'd to allow him to be able to see the truth. As we say in the blessing that precedes the blessing of repentance, "You graciously endow man with wisdom and teach insight to a frail mortal..." Without G'd's endowment of understanding and discretion to see something in its proper light one cannot advance to the level of recognizing one's failing to begin the repentance process.

5. G'd Demonstrates His Dominion Through Judgment

The Torah states, "**You shall be holy...**" The Midrash cites a verse from the Prophet Yishaya, " 'G'd was exalted through judgment...' How was G'd exalted through judgment? G'd becomes exalted in existence when He judges the nations of the world. As the verse

states, 'G'd establishes Himself for battle and He stands to judge the nations....' The verse continues, '...The Holy G'd will be sanctified through His righteousness/charity...' What is the charity that G'd will do? At the end of time when G'd will judge the Jewish people, He will do so favorably despite their shortcomings. This is the meaning of 'G'd will be sanctified through His charity.' G'd will be the advocate of the Jewish people and He will speak abundantly on their behalf to bring about their salvation. G'd said to the Jewish people, 'At the end of time I will be sanctified through you.' By demonstrating His Attribute of Kindness, as being the advocate of the Jewish people, G'd will be sanctified...G'd said to them, 'And therefore you must be sanctified through Me.'"

It is interesting to note that on Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgment, when we conclude the blessing of the holiness of G'd's Name we insert the verse from Yishaya "G'd, Master of Legions will be exalted in judgment, and the holy G'd will be sanctified in righteousness/charity." The blessing concludes, "G'd, the holy King." The Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashanah tells us that on Rosh Hashanah, the entire world stands in judgment before G'd. Not only are the Jewish people judged on that day, but also the nations of the world. When G'd institutes judgment on the world, He is exalted. In addition, G'd is sanctified through His righteousness because He acts as the advocate of the Jewish people. Despite the intensity of the prosecution, G'd demonstrates His Mastership by deflecting the prosecution, as the advocate of the Jewish people. Thus, G'd is sanctified through bringing about a favorable judgment on behalf of the Jewish people.

Chofetz Chaim in his work, *Loving Kindness (Ahavas Chesed)*, cites sources that state that most times, judgment is adjudicated through the Heavenly Court, with G'd presiding over it. However, there are times when G'd Himself adjudicates the case of an individual without the participation of the Heavenly Court. On Rosh Hashanah the day of judgment, regarding the predicament of the Jewish people, G'd Himself intervenes on their behalf as the Holy King. Despite the level of prosecution against the Jewish people, He acts as their advocate. At the end of time, G'd will be acknowledged by all humanity as the Supreme King. It is at that time that He will judge all the nations of the world and they will be condemned. However, He will demonstrate His righteousness/charity to the Jewish people by judging them favorably. By acting as their advocate at the end of time, despite their failings, G'd will be sanctified and recognized as the Master of all existence.