
Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES
Portion of Terumah

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.

Terumah

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

Dean

1. Torah, the Ultimate Commodity

The Torah states, **“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, ‘Speak to the Children of Israel and let them take for me a portion....’”** The Midrash states, “King Solomon writes in Proverbs, ‘(G’d says) I have given you a good commodity, do not abandon it.’ Reb Shimon Ben Lakish says, ‘There were two merchants who were standing together. One sold silk and the other sold spices. They said to one another, ‘let us exchange the commodities that we are selling.’ Thus, the merchant who was originally selling silk gave his silk in exchange for the spices and the spice merchant received the silk in exchange for the spices. After exchanging commodities each one no longer possessed what he originally had. However, the Torah is not similar to this. If one had studied the section of plantings (zrayim) and the other studied the laws relating to times (moed). If each were to teach his fellow the area of Torah that he had studied, one would not lose what he originally possessed but rather each one would gain from the other. Both will possess two areas of Torah rather than only one as they originally possessed. As was the case regarding the commodities. Is there a better commodity than this?” These are the words of King Solomon.

It is true that when one is dealing with the material, if one were to exchange with his fellow his commodity, he would no longer possess what he originally had. However, regarding any branch of knowledge such as medicine and physics, if the one who has a proficiency in medicine teaches the one who has a proficiency in physics and vice versa, each will ultimately possess expertise in both areas. Neither one needs to compromise on what he originally possessed. If so, why is Torah considered to be such a special commodity?

Rambam in the Laws of the Study of Torah writes, “Until when does one need to study Torah? It is until the moment until he dies.” One would think that the reason for this is no different than any other mitzvah obligation. One must continue to perform the mitzvah as long as he is able to do so. Rambam, however, explains the reason by

citing a verse, “It may be removed from your heart all the days of your life.” As long as one is not engaged in the study of Torah, he begins to forget. Thus, the reason one must study Torah until the last moment of his life is so that he should not forget his Torah knowledge.

When the physicist takes the time to teach his fellow physics and the one who is proficient in medicine takes the time to teach his fellow his area of expertise, they both begin to forget their original area of expertise because of the hiatus. Whenever one detaches from any branch of knowledge, immediately the process of forgetting begins and the knowledge base begins to fade. There is a cost factor to acquiring new areas of knowledge- the original knowledge is compromised. However, in Torah study there is no such compromise. When one who is proficient in one area of Torah teaches his fellow and vice versa, neither of their original proficiency in Torah will be compromised. Ultimately, both of them will be in full possession in both areas of Torah. There is no cost factor at all. There is something unique and special about the innateness of Torah that as long as one is engaged in any form of Torah study, he merits a special Divine Assistance to fully retain what he originally possessed. One is not compromised to any degree when he studies other areas of Torah. This is because Torah, regardless of the variations of subject matter, is one entity. This is the understanding of the words of King Solomon that the Torah is considered to be a “good commodity.” There is no other commodity, regardless of its value, that can be compared to Torah.

2. The Mishkan, a Replication of Existence

The Torah at the beginning of the Portion of Terumah enumerates the various materials that were needed for the building of the Mishkan, **“Gold, silver, copper...and ram skins that are dyed red...and oil for illumination”**. The Midrash explains, ‘Gold corresponds to the Babylonian civilization (the prophet Daniel had seen in a prophetic vision the Babylonian emperor

Nebuchadnezzar as a head of gold) ...Silver corresponds to the Persian/Medes (Haman had given 10,000 talents of silver to Achashverosh the King of Persia, to seal the fate of the Jewish people.) Copper represents the Greek civilization. The ram skins that were dyed red correspond to the Roman Empire (Edom) (who destroyed the Second Temple). The oil that was used for the kindling of the Menorah represents the light of Moshiach. G'd said, 'Although you will see four kingdoms behaving arrogantly and they will come upon you, from the midst of the bondage I will bring you salvation.'" Thus, the materials that were used in the building of the Mishkan represent and allude to the four civilizations who dominated the Jewish people.

G'd commanded the Jewish people saying, **"Make for Me a Sanctuary (Mishkan) so that I may dwell in your midst."** The Mishkan was the holiest location in existence, because it was the domicile for G'd's Presence on Earth. The Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans were all evil empires who attempted to destroy the Jewish people and remove G'd's Presence from existence. They were the antithesis of holiness. Although they were evil, they are nevertheless alluded to through the materials of the Mishkan in the location of G'd's Presence. Why must this be so?

Chazal ask, "Why is the portion of Shabbos juxtaposed to the portion of the Mishkan? To teach us that all the thirty-nine classifications of creating activity that were needed for the building of the Mishkan are forbidden on Shabbos." The Torah tells us that G'd Created existence in six days and He refrained from creative activity on the seventh day. Thus, the Jewish people were commanded to keep the Shabbos holy and observe it by refraining from creative activity. If the basis for the Jewish people observing the Shabbos is correlated to the process of Creation, why is the building of the Mishkan relevant to the observance of the Shabbos? Why are the classifications of creative activity that are forbidden on Shabbos defined by the building of the Mishkan?

The Midrash tells us that the Mishkan was a microcosm of existence. Every aspect of Creation is alluded to and represented in the Mishkan. For example, just as there were curtains in the Mishkan, the Midrash cites a verse from Psalms that tells us that G'd spread the heavens like a curtain. Just as G'd said that the waters that were upon the earth should gather, so too do we find that the water gathered in the laver in the Mishkan (that was used to ritualize the hands and feet of those officiating).

Thus, every aspect of Creation is represented in the Mishkan

The Torah states in the beginning of Book of Bereishis, **"In the beginning G'd created heaven and the earth – when the earth was empty, with darkness upon the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of G'd hovered over the face of the waters. (Bereishis bara Elokeem es ha'shamayim v'es ha'aretz: v'ha'aretz hoysa tohu v'vohu v'choshech al panei tahom v'ruach Elokeem merachefes al panei ha'mayim)."** The Midrash explains that each of the words in this opening verse of the Torah alludes to civilizations that will come into existence in the future. Meaning, when G'd created existence, He preordained that certain dynamics will unfold in their proper times.

The Midrash explains that **"v'ha'aretz hoysa tohu – the earth was unformed,"** refers to the Babylonian exile. **"v'vohu- desolate"** refers to the Persian/Medes exile. **"Choshech - darkness,"** refers to the Greek exile; as the Chazal tell us, "they blackened the eyes of the Jewish people with their decrees." **"Al panei sahoh- surface of the deep"** alludes to the Roman exile, which is seemingly unlimited/ends as the depth of the waters that covered the earth. (We are still experiencing the Roman exile after more than 2,000 years.) **"V'ruach Elokeem merachefes al panei ha'mayim - the Spirit of G'd hovered over the face of the waters"** is ascribed to the spirit of Moshiach.

The initial intent of Creation was that physical existence should accommodate the Divine Presence. The world was meant to be the dwelling place for G'd. However, because of the sin of Adam the world was putrefied and no longer was qualified to accommodate His Presence. The Mishkan was therefore needed to be the equivalent of Creation to accommodate G'd's Presence. Thus, just as the creation of the world contained a representation of the four civilizations that will ultimately come about and dominate the Jewish people, the Mishkan which is its equivalent, needed to allude to the same elements in Creation. The ultimate redemption will come about through Moshiach which is alluded to by the oil that was used for illumination. Thus, the basis for creative activity which is not permitted on Shabbos, is derived from the building of the Mishkan, which was the equivalent of the world.

3. What is Necessary to Maintain the Balance Between Good and Evil

The Torah states regarding the materials that were used to build the Mishkan, **“Gold, silver, copper...and ram skins that are dyed red”**. Chazal tell us that these materials that were used in the building of the Mishkan represent the four exiles that will be experienced by the Jewish people until the coming of Moshiach. The Mishkan was the dwelling location of the Divine Presence in the world. Thus it was the most holy location in existence. If this is so, why should the four most evil and oppressive civilizations who wanted to remove G’d’s Presence from existence be represented in the Mishkan?

G’d Created existence to give man the opportunity to be worthy of reward – to choose between good and evil. If he chooses to do good, he is worthy of reward. In contrast, if he chooses to fail, he will be liable. The only creation within existence that has the ability to dictate his own actions is the human being. It is through the application of one’s free choice that man can be meritorious and thus cleave to the Creator, which is the source of all Good, or to the contrary, if he were to make the wrong choice, he will be culpable for punishment. Thus, in order to facilitate the objective of Creation, a context of choice must be continuously maintained. This is the reason G’d does not present Himself in the most obvious manner. This is because if He were to do so, man would no longer have the ability to choose. He would be forced through his own clarity to accept G’d. If this is so, why did G’d perform revealed miracles in Egypt through the ten plagues, splitting of the Sea, and the miracles in the desert? The revelation of G’d’s Presence at the splitting of the Sea was so obvious and palpable that even the lowly maidservant was able to point to G’d’s Presence and declare, “This is my G’d!” Ramban explains in his commentary that because the Jewish people had been enslaved in Egypt for many years, where they were exposed to the most intense level of spiritual impurity that they had become pagans. The world was so steeped in paganism that the context of choice no longer existed. G’d was no longer a consideration because He had become an unknown entity. The world therefore needed to experience G’d in the most obvious and undeniable way to establish an alternative to paganism – to choose between good and evil. Through the revealed miracles, free choice was restored.

In order to maintain the context of choice, there must always be a balance between good and evil. The

Gemara in Tractate Yomah tells us that the Temple is referred to as “sustenance (*shesiya*)” because there was a stone in the location of the Holy of Holies that is referred to as “the stone of sustenance.” All the material and spiritual sustenance that is bestowed upon existence emanates from that location. To maintain the balance of good and evil, G’d wanted in that special location to also be a representation of evil to maintain the balance.

The Gemara in Tractate Yomah tells us that the evil inclination for idolatry was an all-consuming force which was responsible for the spiritual decline of the Jewish people through the period of the destruction of the First Temple. It was more overwhelming than the sexual drive. The Men of the High Assembly had fasted and prayed to G’d to allow them to destroy this inclination. The Gemara tells us that G’d responded to their supplications and consequently a fiery lion came forth from the Holy of Holies. They took this fiery lion, which represented the evil inclination for idolatry and trapped it inside a lead cylinder and disposed of it. Because of the action of the Men of the High Assembly, the Jewish people are no longer overwhelmed by the inclination for idolatry. How is it possible that the very essence of impurity should have relevance to the Holy of Holies, which is the location of the Divine Presence? It is because the context of free choice cannot be maintained unless there is a balance of representation of good and evil. Through the exercise of free choice, man is able to influence the balance between good and evil in the world. If mankind were to do good in abundance, then the representation of good would dominate over evil. However, if man chooses to fail, the world would be overwhelmed with sin.

The verse states, “We give power to G’d....” There is another verse that states, “The rock has become weakened by the sins of the Jewish people...” How is it possible that the Jewish people could strengthen or weaken G’d through their behavior? It is not that G’d is affected in any way by anything, but rather, G’d established an infrastructure in existence that will advance or regress based on the level of good and evil that is generated by the behavior of the Jewish people. If the Jewish people do the Will of G’d then blessing and bounty comes upon existence and sustains the world. It is an empowerment of the good. However, if the Jewish people should fail through sin, then G’d withholds His blessing from existence. It is through the behavior of the Jewish people that the system of good and evil in the world is strengthened or weakened.

Throughout the Torah we see that G'd maintains the balance of good and evil in the world. Because there was an Avraham in existence who espoused monotheism to mankind and was an overwhelming positive influence, there needed to be a Nimrod, who was the counterbalance. When Avraham, our Patriarch passed away, on that same day Nimrod was killed. This is because both were needed to maintain the balance between good and evil. Chazal tell us that whenever Rivka, our Matriarch would pass before the study hall, Yaakov would bolt within her womb towards it. Whenever she would pass a location of idol worship, Esav would bolt within her womb towards that direction. They were the representation of good and evil in existence. Because of this, they were born into the world at the same time.

Despite the holiness of the Mishkan, it needed to have a representation of evil within it in order to maintain the context of free choice in existence.

4. 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.

5. The Responsibility to One's Fellow *(from Mishpatim)*

The Torah states, **“And these are the ordinances (Mishpatim) that you shall place before them...”** The Midrash explains, “King Solomon writes in Proverbs, ‘A King through justice establishes the land. But one who is as terumah (tithes) destroys the land.’ The Torah sage who is proficient in every aspect of the Torah is the equivalent of a king. The justice that he brings about by engaging in Torah and adjudicating disputes establishes existence. However, if this individual chooses to act in a manner that is similar to terumah (tithes), which is stored in the corner of the house, he is the one who destroys existence. This is the individual who despite his qualifications as a judge, chooses to remain uninvolved in the needs of his fellow and community. He is the one who says, ‘Why should I be bothered or burdened by my community? Why should I be involved in resolving their legal disputes? Why should I heed their outcries? It is better for me to withdraw from my community and only immerse myself in Torah study.’ This person is the one who destroys the world by not serving his community as a Torah Sage. Just as terumah remains in the corner of the house undisturbed until it is given and consumed by the Kohen, so too does this individual recluse himself from the community.”

The Midrash cites an incident involving Rav Assi. When Rav Assi was on his deathbed, his nephew entered and found him crying. Rav Assi's nephew asked him, "Why are you crying? Is there any area of Torah that you have not learned or have not taught? You have many disciples who sit before you. Why are you afraid? Is there any area of acts of kindness that you had not performed?

And your greatest praise is that you distanced yourself from rendering judgments — you did not involve yourself in litigation and judgments of Torah. You did not sully yourself with messy communal matters. What could be wrong?" Rav Assi responded, "It is because of this failing (of not occupying myself with litigation and communal matters) that I am crying. Maybe I will face Heavenly Punishment over the fact that I could have rendered judgments for Israel and abstained from doing so. As it states, ‘A King through justice establishes the land. But one who is as terumah (tithes) destroys the land.’ I am concerned that perhaps because I abstained from rendering judgment I have brought destruction upon the world!" Why is rendering judgment considered to be so vital to existence?

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that when a gentile came to Hillel the elder to convert, he had said that he would only convert to Judaism if he would be taught a single principle that encompassed the entire Torah. Hillel responded with the principle, “What you despise, to your fellow you shall not do.” Hillel explained to him that this single principle encompasses the entire Torah and the rest is commentary. The Torah is comprised of mitzvos that are between man and man as well as between man and G'd. The mitzvah of loving one's fellow is between man and man. If this is so, then how can this principle encompass the entire Torah – including the mitzvos between man and G'd?

The Midrash tells us a story of two people who were traveling together in a boat. One of them began to bore a hole under his seat. His fellow said to him, “You should stop what you are doing!” He responded, “Why does this matter concern you? I am boring a hole under my seat not yours.” His fellow replied, “Do you not understand, it does not matter under whose seat you bore the hole, it will cause the entire boat to sink thus drowning all of us!” The Torah in the Portion of Nitzavim states, **“You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your G'd...”** Moshe presented the Jewish people with the covenant of communal responsibility- the covenant of “areivus”- “kol Yisroel areivum ze la ze – every Jew is responsible for his fellow.” This is a fundamental principle of Judaism. Every Jew is spiritually interconnected/intertwined with every other Jew. Therefore, when one performs a mitzvah obligation properly, he not only elevates and advances himself but also the entire Jewish people as a whole. Conversely, when one individual sins, the consequence of his action is not limited to himself but it pervades the entire Jewish people and diminishes them.

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero writes in his work *Tomer Dvora* that the Jewish people as a whole is analogous to a human body. Just as if one limb of the body malfunctions it will cause pain and diminishment to the entire body, so too if one Jew does not follow the dictate of G'd he will cause the entire Jewish people to suffer. Every Jewish soul is a component of the entire system referred to as "the Jewish people."

The principle of "love your fellow as you love yourself" thus not only addresses the mitzvos that are between man and his fellow, but also the mitzvos between man and G'd. If one is concerned about fulfilling the mitzvah of tefilin properly or keeping dietary laws, then he should be equally concerned that his fellow Jew should also be able to fulfill these mitzvos. This is because if his fellow does not do so, he will be negatively impacted as if he himself did not fulfill the mitzvah.

The Midrash cites the verse from Proverbs, "A King through justice establishes the land. But one who is as *terumah* (tithes) destroys the land." A Torah sage who does not engage in judgment and the resolution of disputes is acting in a manner contrary to the principle of "love you fellow as you love yourself." By distancing himself from judgment, the Torah sage is demonstrating an indifference to his fellow by allowing the deterioration of justice between his fellow Jews. This will lead to the destruction of the world. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that King David did "Judgment and kindness." Although one may have been found guilty by the court of King David, he would leave the court singing with joy because it was revealed to him the wrong that he had done, thus allowing him to correct it.