
Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Tetzaveh

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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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, Hashkafa, 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.

Tetzaveh

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

Dean

1. The Value of Spiritual Disappointment

The Torah states regarding the kindling of the Menorah, **“Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination...”** The Midrash states, “Reb Meir says, ‘G’d said, ‘The lights that Aaron kindled are more beloved to Me than the luminaries that I have set in the heavens.’ Why is this so? When all of the Tribes were asked to bring gifts and offerings to participate in the inauguration of the Mishkan, the Tribe of Levy was excluded. As a result, Aaron was pained and entered into a state of melancholy. He said, ‘All of the Princes were asked to participate in the inauguration of the Mishkan, but I have no share in the offerings.’ G’d responded to him, ‘I swear on your life! Their participation was only one time; however, you will have your own special inauguration by kindling the lights of the Menorah.’ As the verse in Psalms states, ‘G’d had heard the desire of the humble...’” Because Aaron was pained that he was denied the opportunity to participate in the inauguration of the Mishkan, G’d considered his kindling of the Menorah to be more special than their inauguration of the Mishkan.

The Torah states at the end of the Portion of Ki Savo, **“Moshe summoned all of Israel and said to them, ‘You have seen everything that Hashem did before your eyes in the land of Egypt...But Hashem did not give you a heart to know, or eyes to see, or ears to hear until this day.’”** It was not until the Jewish people had wandered in the desert for forty years that they had the capacity to fully understand and internalize the value of their relationship with G’d. Rashi cites Chazal, “G’d did not give the Jewish people the heart to recognize His Kindness to cleave to Him until this day. What happened on this day? Moshe had finished writing a Torah scroll that he had given to the tribe of Levy. All of the Jewish people came before him and said, ‘Moshe, why are you giving the Torah scroll only to the Tribe of Levy? We too stood at Sinai where G’d gave us the Torah just as He had done to the Tribe of Levy. Why are you giving them the right to dominate the Torah? We have the same rights to the Torah

as they do. One day the Tribe of Levy may say to us, ‘The Torah was only given to us and not to you.’ When Moshe heard their claim, he had great joy. Moshe said, ‘On this day I understand that you truly feel the desire to cleave to G’d. Now you are His people.’” Just as Aaron’s kindling was considered something special because he was pained for being denied the participation in the inauguration of the Mishkan, so too the Jewish people became more worthy to be G’d’s people when they expressed their pain.

We say in the blessing of the Torah, “Blessed are You...Who has selected us from all the nations and gave us His Torah...” If one truly understands and appreciates the privilege of being chosen by G’d to be given His Torah, one would be overwhelmed with joy.

This is similar to the incident of Avraham’s hosting of the angels on the third day after his circumcision. The Torah tells us that G’d caused it to be the hottest day (since the beginning of existence) so that Avraham should be able to have a respite from engaging in hospitality. Rather than taking this reprieve as an opportunity to recuperate, Avraham was pained because he was denied the opportunity to host guests. He thus sat at the entrance of his tent awaiting wayfarers. Avraham’s hospitality was a means to espouse monotheism. He was thus pained because he was denied the opportunity to bring mankind to recognize G’d as the Omnipotent One. Because of his feeling of being denied, G’d sent him three angels to host, who were the most special guests. The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metizia tells us that every aspect of Avraham’s hospitality that he provided to the angels was evaluated and produced unlimited benefits for the future of the Jewish people. As a result of this evaluation, the Jewish people merited special gifts in the desert that allowed them to survive. These gifts sustained and protected them throughout their forty-year trek in the desert. In the merit of the water that was offered to the angels the Jewish people received the wellspring of Miriam, which traveled with them. In the merit of offering the shade of his tree, they received the protection and benefits of the Clouds of Glory. In the merit of the bread that he offered, the Jewish people were given the Manna.

In the merit of the meat that Avraham offered, the Jewish people were given the slav (quail). Even beyond the forty-year period, Chazal tell us that the mitzvah of Sukkah was given to the Jewish people in the merit of the shade of Avraham's tree. Because Avraham experienced pain from being denied the opportunity to do G'd's Will, his hospitality to the angels impacted upon the future of the Jewish people until the end of time.

2. The Unforgivable Behavior of Amalek

King Solomon writes in Proverbs, “**A deprecator (*letz*) you should smite, but a fool (*pessi*) could be made wise.**” The Midrash explains that “A deprecator you should smite” refers to Amalek and “a fool you could make wise” refers to Yisro. The Torah states, “**Yisro heard...**” Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Yisro heard about the splitting of the Sea and the battle against Amalek. It was because of (either) these events that Yisro chose to forgo all of his glory as sheik of Midian to become part of the Jewish people in the desert. Yisro initially was classified as the fool, because he had chosen a path of idolatry. He later became wise because of the events of which he had become aware. In contrast, the deprecator is a person who has no capacity to appreciate the value of what he mocks or belittles. Thus, King Solomon tells us that the only way to respond to a deprecator is to smite him. Yisro was only lacking in spirituality because he was not aware of truth. However, once he came upon truth, he fully embraced it. Amalek, on the other hand, regardless of the blatant reality of truth, he remained oblivious to it because he did not have the capacity to appreciate it.

Chazal tell us that at the time of the splitting of the Sea, the presence of G'd was palpable. As a result of the splitting of the Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian armies, the Jewish people had assumed a special aura in the eyes of the nations of the world. They trembled in awe before them. What G'd had done on behalf of the Jewish people, revealed to the world His special relationship with them. Despite the awesomeness of their presence, Amalek attacked the Jewish people soon after the splitting of the Sea. How could Amalek not be overwhelmed with fear from the Jewish people, as the rest of the world was? They chose to attack the Jewish people without any concern for the consequences.

Chazal tell us that Amalek's attack on the Jewish people is analogous to a fool who jumps into a scalding

bath that others are too afraid to approach out of fear of being scalded. The fool jumps into the bath and is severely scalded; nevertheless, the bath is cooled down for others to enter. As a result of the attack of Amalek, the aura of G'd and the Jewish people was diminished in the eyes of the world. Why did Amalek remain unaffected after the splitting of the Sea, while the rest of the world stood in reverence and fear from the Jewish people? It was because Amalek possesses the characteristic of the “deprecator” (*letz*). They do not have the capacity to appreciate or esteem anything that has relevance to G'd. To the contrary, they are opposed to the existence of G'd. Thus, there is no basis for entering into a dialogue with Amalek. The only way to deal with them is to destroy them.

Rav Hutner zt'l writes in his work, *Pachad Yitzchak* that if one truly esteems and appreciates the value of something, he will belittle or deprecate it. However, if one does not have the capacity to recognize or sense its value, then he will deprecate it.

The Torah states in the Portion of Balak, “**(Bilaam said through his prophetic vision), ‘Amalek, the first of nations, in the end will enter into eternal destruction.’**” Chazal tell us that at the end of time all the nations will come to recognize G'd's dominion over all existence. Despite the spiritual shortcomings of these nations, they have some degree of capacity to appreciate His Presence. Amalek, in contrast, because he does not have the capacity to sense G'd, will not merit the ultimate revelation. Since they were the first nation to attack the Jewish people after the splitting of the Sea, they openly demonstrated that they have no relevance or capacity to appreciate spirituality. Thus, at the end of time when G'd will reveal Himself to the world, Amalek will go into the oblivion.

The Gemara in Tractate Megilah tells us that Haman (the viceroy of the Persian Empire) was unequalled in his ability to speak evil (*lashon hara*). No one was able to communicate negativity as effectively as Haman, the evil one. When he approached Achashverosh, the king of the Persian Empire, to annihilate the Jewish people, he demonstrated his expertise in negative expression (*lashon hara*). Why was Haman able to communicate negative speech in the most lethal manner?

Haman personified every aspect of Amalek. He was a direct descent of the Amalekite King Agag, who was killed by Samuel the Prophet (at the time of King Saul).

He personified the characteristic of deprecation and was thus able to speak lashon hara in the most lethal manner. He was unable to see any aspect of the Jewish people in a positive light. Therefore, when he spoke negatively about the Jewish people he was able to bring about the decree to annihilate them.

It is interesting to note that The Gemara in Tractate Taanis tells us that when the Torah is studied for its own sake it is the equivalent of a life potion; however, when it is studied with a sinister intent to undermine or disgrace another person, the same Torah study is transformed into a death potion. Regarding the one who studies Torah with a sinister intent, Chazal tell us that G'd says, "It would have been better that he should not have come into existence." Why is G'd so severe with the one who studies Torah with a sinister intent? Torah is the ultimate illuminator as it is stated by King Solomon. The Torah reveals G'dliness in existence by revealing holiness where it has been hidden. When one studies Torah with the proper intent, he is able to see truth. However, when one utilizes the Torah to undermine another, he is expressing the characteristic of Amalek with something that is the most holy thing in existence, which is the Torah itself. Rather than brining about life through the Torah, he chooses to utilize it for negativity and destruction. Thus, it would have been better that this individual not have come into the world.

G'd says, "My throne is not complete until Amalek has been obliterated from under the heavens." It is because Amalek is the ultimate deprecator who denies G'd's existence and thus undermines His Presence. He must be removed from existence.

3. The Inaugural Feast Of Achashverosh, a Cause for Annihilation

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that there was a discussion between Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai and his students regarding why the Jewish people were deserving of annihilation during the period of Purim. Reb Shimon Bar Yochai asked them, "What is your opinion why the Jewish people were deserving of destruction?" They responded, "Jewish people deserved annihilation because they benefited from the inaugural feast of Achashverosh (the Emperor of Persia)." Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai rejected their reason, because if it were as they had said, then only the Jews in Shushan who participated in the feast should have been liable for punishment and not

the entire Jewish people. He said that the reason the Jewish people deserving annihilation was that they had bowed to the image of Nebuchadnezzar (Babylonian Emperor, who had destroyed the First Temple). Nebuchadnezzar had ordered all of his subjects to bow to his image or be subject to death. The only ones who did not bow were Chananyia, Meshael, and Azarya.

The students of Reb Shimon Bar Yochai asked him, "If in fact the Jewish people deserved to be destroyed why were they not?" He answered them, "Because when they bowed, it was only an external action that was devoid of any belief that Nebuchadnezzar was a deity. Thus, the decree against the Jewish people also manifested itself as something that was external but not substantive."

Chazal tell us that the feast in which the Jewish people had participated was in conformance to dietary laws. If so, why was benefiting from the banquet a reason for the Jewish people to be deserving of annihilation?

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah explains why Achashverosh delayed his inaugural feast until the third year of his reign. Under normal circumstances, a king would celebrate his coronation at the beginning of his reign. Why did Achashverosh delay it until the third year? The Gemara explains that the Prophet had said in the Name of G'd that after 70 years of exile in Babylon, the Jewish people would return to the Land of Israel. According to Achashverosh's calculation, the 70-year period was not complete until the third year of his reign. His position as emperor was secure only after he was assured that the Jews were not returning to the Land of Israel. When the anniversary of the 70th year had passed, and the Jews remained in exile, Achashverosh believed that G'd had abandoned and forsaken His people. G'd reneged on His promise that He will bring them back.

In essence, the feast of Achashverosh was the celebration of the abandonment of the Jewish people by G'd. Thus, the banquet was the celebration of the desecration of G'd (Chilul Hashem). This is the reason Mordechai was vehemently opposed to the Jewish people participating in the banquet. Thus, because the Jewish people benefited from the banquet, they deserved to be annihilated. However, Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai disagreed with his students.

4. Reciprocation- a Prerequisite to Reinstatement

The Midrash explains the basis for every aspect of the Mishkan, “Rav Bisna says, ‘G’d said to the Jewish people: My Children, I want you to do for Me as I have done for you. Just as I sustained you in the desert with the Manna, I want you to sacrifice before Me a lamb every morning (daily communal sacrifice). Just as I cleansed you with water, you should make for Me a Laver (*kiyor*). Just as I anointed you with oil, you should bring the anointing oil (*shemen ha’mishchah*). Just as I have cloaked you in elaborate embroidered vestments, you should make for Me an embroidered curtain (*Paroches*)...Just as I adorned you with ornaments, you should make the Holy Ark and its crown. Just as I adorned you with earrings/nose rings/jewelry, so too should you cover the Ark with a gold covering...Just as I provided you with the pillar of fire that accompanied you at night in the desert, so too should you kindle the Menorah...” What is the significance of the Jewish people reciprocating for what G’d had done for them as a people? G’d, being Complete in an absolute sense, does not need anything.

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 correlations, (based on verses) that indicate that the Mishkan was the equivalent of Sinai.

The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah explains that when the Jewish people had unequivocally accepted the Torah at Sinai with the declaration “*Naaseh v’nishma* – we will do and we will listen” they were reinstated to the level of spirituality of Adam, before the sin of the Tree of Knowledge. A consequence of their new spiritual status was that they had overcome all of their physical handicaps (if one were blind he was able to see etc.) The Jewish people were no longer subject to death. They had reverted to the state of Adam before the sin, which was eternal. It was only after the Sin of the Golden Calf that they regressed to the post-sin status of Adam.

The Mishkan was a symbol of the reinstatement of the Jewish people after they had sinned with the Golden Calf. The Mishkan was the medium through which G’d dwelt in their midst. As it states, “**Make for Me a Sanctuary so that I shall dwell in your midst.**” In order to replicate the setting for the Divine Presence to dwell, the Jewish people needed to meet certain criteria.

The Torah tells us that the materials that were given by the Jewish people for the building of the Mishkan needed to be given “through the generosity of their hearts” (not as an obligation). If one felt obliged to contribute the materials to the Mishkan, it did not qualify. The materials for the Mishkan needed to be given with the same selfless dedication as the Jewish people had embraced the Torah at Sinai with their declaration of “*Naaseh v’nishma*.”

The Torah tells us that when G’d confronted Adam regarding his eating the fruit of the Tree, He asked him “**...Have you eaten of the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?**” Adam replied, “**The woman whom You gave to be with me – she gave me of the tree...**” Chazal tell us that Adam’s response to G’d’s question was an expression of an ingrate. Rather than being thankful and appreciative for the wife that G’d had created for him, who was essential to actualize his potential, Adam chose to blame G’d for his failing. He had said that as a result of this woman that G’d had given him, he ate of the tree. When the Jewish people complained about the Manna in the desert, which was essential for their survival and spiritual development, G’d quantified them as “ingrates.” He said, “You are ingrates who descend from an ingrate (Adam).” The innate negative characteristic of lack of appreciation emanates from Adam, the father of mankind.

In order for the Mishkan to be able to facilitate the Divine Presence in its midst, the Jewish people had to address the innate failing of Adam. After eating of the Tree of Knowledge, Adam had demonstrated the negative characteristic of being an ingrate. The materials, which G’d had instructed the Jewish people to donate, acted as a medium through which they would express their gratitude for everything that G’d had provided for them from the time they had left Egypt until the present. Through this reciprocation they addressed and corrected the failing of Adam, thus allowing themselves to be worthy of a relationship with G’d that was similar to what had existed before the sin.

In order for a Jew to have greater relevance to the Divine Presence, he must continuously be appreciative for all that G'd provides. One must recognize that even his own initiative is a gift from G'd.

5. The Challenges of Life

The Torah tells us in the Portion of Terumah that one of the materials that was needed to build the Mishkan was Acacia wood (*atzei sheetim*). Rashi cites Chazal who ask, "From where did the Acacia wood come in the desert? (Acacia trees do not grow in the desert nor are they an indigenous species in Egypt.) Yaakov, our Patriarch had seen in his Divine vision that the Jewish people would one day be redeemed from Egypt and would need to build the Mishkan in the desert. He therefore brought with him Acacia trees from the Land of Canaan to Egypt. He instructed his children that when they would leave Egypt was is important to take with them the Acacia wood."

The Gemara in Avodah Zorah tells us that after the receiving the Torah at Sinai, the Jewish people had ascended to the level of Adam before the sin and they were no longer subject to death. However, after the sin of the golden calf, they had reverted back to the level of Adam after the sin and they were subject to death. Had they not sinned with the golden calf they would have been qualified to be the location of the Divine Presence. However, because they were tainted as a result of their sin, a Mishkan was needed to be built to be the medium through which G'd could dwell among them. As it states, **"Build for Me a Sanctuary so that I may dwell in your midst."** This is similar to the firstborn (*bechorim*) who were initially qualified to be G'd's officiants. However, because of the golden calf, they became tainted and were no longer qualified. They were replaced by the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron who were not involved with the golden calf. Why did the Jewish people fail with the sin of the golden calf?

Rashi in the portion of Ki Sisa cites the Midrash that tells us that towards the end of the forty-day period when Moshe was in heaven receiving the Torah the skies blackened and the Jewish people saw the bier of Moshe being carried across the heavens. This vision of Moshe's remains indicated to them that Moshe had died in heaven and was not going to return. As a result of this belief, the rabble initiated the idea that they needed a deity to assume the position of leadership because Moshe who had taken them out of Egypt was no longer there. In actuality, what they had seen was a distortion of truth. The Jewish people

were deceived by satan, which caused them to fail with the golden calf. Had they known that Moshe was alive, they would have not considered sinning and the world would have been brought to spiritual perfection.

The Torah states in the Portion of Vayechi, **"Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; and the days of Yaakov..."** Rashi cites the Midrash, which addresses the opening paragraph structure of the Portion of Vayechi. It is referred to as a "*parsha setumah* (a sealed portion)". One of the interpretations regarding the significance of the portion being "sealed" is that Yaakov wished to reveal the end of time (*ha'keitz*) to his sons but it was concealed from him. The *keitz* is the end of time when Moshiach will come and the world will brought to a state of spiritual perfection. Yaakov did not reveal the end of time to his sons.

There is a question in the Midrash if it was Yaakov's choice not to reveal it or G'd had caused Yaakov to forget when the moment of the end was going to be. The end of time that Yaakov would have revealed was the moment that the Jewish people had achieved their level of perfection at Sinai. The world had been reinstated to a level of purity before the sin of Adam. If Yaakov would have revealed to his children that the end of time was going to be the Sinai event, the Jewish people would have not been deceived by satan because they would have received a tradition from Yaakov that their moment at Sinai was the end of time. However, because it was not shared with them, they did not realize the significance of that moment and thus visualizing Moshe's remains in a darkened heaven was truly a test for them, which they had failed. G'd wanted the Jewish people to be subjected to the test of the golden calf to see if they would have sufficient faith in Him or fail as they did.