

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Shemos

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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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Shemos

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*
Dean

1. Yocheved and Miriam's Negation to G'd

The Torah tells us that the Jewish people proliferated in Egypt to the degree that Pharaoh became concerned that they would ultimately join with their enemies to wage war against them. Pharaoh thus decreed that the Jewish people should be enslaved with hard bondage. Despite the severity of their bondage the Jewish people continued to proliferate and multiply at an unnatural rate. In order to minimize their numbers, Pharaoh decreed that the Jewish newborn males should be killed. The Torah states, **"The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives of whom the name of the first was Shifrah and the name of the second was Puah, 'When you deliver the Hebrew women, and you see them on the birthstool; if it is a son, you are to kill him and if it is a daughter, she shall live.'"**

Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "Shifrah is Yocheved (the mother of Moshe). She was called Shifrah because her role was to cleanse and beautify the newborn children (*l'shapeir* – to beautify), while Puah is Miriam (the sister of Moshe) because she was the one who calmed and quieted the newborns (Puah is the calming sound made to quiet a crying child)." Why does the Torah choose to identify Yocheved and Miriam as Shifrah and Puah and not by their names? By identifying Yocheved as Shifrah and Miriam as Puah, the Torah is revealing to us each of their strengths as midwives. Yocheved was uniquely qualified, because of her predisposition and capacity to cleanse and beautify the newborn children and Miriam had the unique ability to calm the newborns despite the trauma of childbirth. Both Yocheved and Miriam at the core of their being, were unique in their level of love and devotion to the Jewish children. Why is it necessary for the Torah to share with us the special abilities of Yocheved and Miriam as midwives?

The Torah continues, **"...But the midwives feared G'd and they did not do as the king of Egypt spoke to them, and they caused the boys to live."** Yocheved and Miriam did not obey the dictate of the king

of Egypt. They did not succumb to his wishes to kill the Jewish newborns. Chazal explain that when the Torah states, **"...they caused the boys to live..."** it means, that they did not only defy his command, but they also fed and sustained the children.

It is natural that if a mother is commanded to kill her own child, she will prefer to be killed herself rather than bring harm upon her child. Chazal tell us that at this time in Egypt, Jewish women were giving birth to six children in one pregnancy. This would mean that Yocheved and Miriam were overseeing the births of hundreds of thousands of children. Regardless of this staggering number, the Torah identifies them as Shifrah and Puah to affirm that their love for every child was unwavering. Seemingly, since the Torah had quantified Yocheved and Miriam's essence regarding their level of caring for the newborns as midwives, one would think that the reason they had defied the order of Pharaoh not to kill the Jewish newborns, was because it was contrary to their being. It was something that they could not do, because their feelings and love was not less than a parent towards his own child. However, the Torah reveals that their defiance to Pharaoh was rooted in their fear of G'd, and unrelated to their compassion or their natural disposition to love the children. Thus, the Torah establishes Yocheved and Miriam her daughter, as people whose fear of G'd subsumed and negated their feelings towards the children.

Had the Torah identified the midwives as Yocheved and Miriam, it would not have revealed this aspect of their dimension of fear of G'd. It is because of this special negation to G'd that they merited to have special gifts bestowed upon them. As it states, **"He (Hashem) made for them houses."** Chazal explain that these houses were the Priesthood and Kingship.

2. The Eternity of the Jewish People

The Torah tells us that before Yaakov our Patriarch passed away he blessed all of his children in a manner that identified and secured their spiritual potential

until the end of time. The Torah states in the Portion of Vayechi regarding the blessing that Yaakov had given to Ephraim and Menasha, **“May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads, and may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak...”**

Sforno explains, “Yaakov said, **‘the names of my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak’** in order to emphasize that his forefathers were not Terach and Nachor. This is because tzaddikim (devoutly righteous) have no relevance to ancestors of theirs who were evil. As the Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that if one is evil (rasha) he is referred to as a rasha who is the son of a rasha, even if his father was a tzaddik. The rasha only has relevance to his forefathers who were evil. Therefore, Yaakov prayed on behalf of Ephraim and Menasha that G’d should give them the potential and capacity to identify with Avraham and Yitzchak. As King David in Psalms states, ‘Unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name.’” The heart of a Jew has the unique ability to be filled and dedicated to love and fear G’d. This capacity and ability is what King David beseeched G’d to grant him and what Yaakov had blessed his grandchildren Ephraim and Menasha. Just as Avraham and Yitzchak had developed and actualized their unique spiritual capacity so too did Yaakov want his children to do. Every Jew regardless of how far he has strayed from the path of G’d has the innate ability within him to return to G’d. It is only because his heart relevance to the spiritual accomplishments of the holy Patriarchs.

Tana d’vei Eliyahu (teachings of Eliyahu the Prophet) states that every Jew must say, “When will my accomplishments be comparable to the accomplishments of my forbearers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov?” Why must the Jew set his goals to be able to achieve the level of the holy Patriarchs? Chazal tell us that the Patriarchs had a dimension of holiness that was identical to the Holy of Holies. They were the location of the Divine Presence in existence. Why would it not be sufficient for a Jew to aspire, “When will my accomplishments be comparable to the accomplishments of Rambam (or other great Torah personalities of the past)?” Every Jew does not have relevance to Rambam or to other great Torah sages such as Shamei and Hillel. However every Jew does have relevance to the Holy Patriarchs who established the spiritual DNA of the entire Jewish people.

The Gemara in Tractate *Yevamos* tells us that Jewish people possess three innate qualities: they are

merciful, have shame and perform acts of loving-kindness. These qualities exist within the Jew because they are inherited from our Patriarchs. The Jewish people are the spiritual heirs of their forefathers and thus possess the innate characteristics and qualities exemplified by Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. The spiritual potential of the Jew surpasses the limitation of an ordinary human being because of his relevance to his forbearers. Therefore, one must aspire to the accomplishments of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov because his potential is defined by their accomplishments. This is the reason Yaakov blessed Ephraim and Menasha that the names of their forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak should be upon them.

We say in our prayers, “Unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name” so that G’d should grant us the exclusivity of heart to be able to actualize our unlimited spiritual potential. It is only because one’s heart naturally desires things that are not spiritual in nature, that it is not exclusively dedicated to G’d. It is because every Jew has relevance to the blessing that Yaakov had given to Ephraim and Menasha and to the Holy Patriarchs that he may return to G’d despite his level of sin. As the Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin tells us that although a Jew may sin or even become an apostate he is still a Jew. The Jew never loses his spiritual potential because it is innately part of his essence that he had inherited from his holy forbearers.

3. The Unquantifiable People

The Torah states, **“It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out (of the palace)...and saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man, of his brethren. He turned this way and that and saw that there was no man, so he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.”** Moshe believed that no one had witnessed his killing the Egyptian and burying him in the sand. If Pharaoh were to be informed about what he had done, he would be put to death. The Torah continues, **“He went out the next day and behold two Hebrew men (Dasan and Aviram) were fighting. He said to the wicked one, ‘Why would you strike your fellow?’ He replied, ‘Who appointed you as a dignitary, a ruler, and a judge over us? Do you propose to murder me as you murdered the Egyptian?’ Moshe was frightened.”** Moshe understood at that moment, that it had become known what he had done.

Rashi cites Chazal, “Moshe said to himself, ‘Now it has become clear to me, (*achain nodah hadavar*) regarding what had been difficult for me to understand—Why are the entire Jewish people deserving of overwhelming bondage more than any of the nations of the world? Now it has become known to me. Meaning, from the statement of these (Jewish men who were fighting) that since they had revealed a secret, something of confidential nature (that Moshe had killed the Egyptian) they are deserving of punishment. Because they had spoken *lashon harah* (evil speech), they are deserving of bondage.”

Maharal of Prague z’tl in *Gevuras Hashem* explains the consequence of revealing something that should remain concealed (choosing to reveal information that should remain confidential, such as Moshe killing the Egyptian). Although the Jewish people in a physical sense are no different from the seventy nations of the world, their dimension of being is something that is unfathomable because of its spiritual nature. Although they may be the smallest in number (relative to other nations), they are the ones who maintain existence. According to the Torah, Jews are not permitted to be counted because it is a distortion of their true value. The strength and value of the Jew does not lie in the quantitative but rather in the qualitative. The Mishna in Sanhedrin states, “One who saves the life of one Jew, is the equivalent of saving the entire world.” How is it possible that one Jewish life should be the equivalent of billions of people? It is because that one Jewish life has immeasurable value and significance that is unknown and hidden because it is an unquantifiable entity.

Maharal explains that if one reveals something that should remain a secret, he is assuming the profile of the nations of the world whose value and significance is based upon a physical quantification which is something revealed. Their representation is thus a revealed entity. The Jew whose essence is spiritual is thus hidden and not subject to the norms of physical existence. If one reveals something that should remain hidden, that individual is assuming the profile and characteristic of the physical world and is thus subject to physical phenomena such as bondage (to be bound and dominated). Maharal writes that when Moshe realized that the two men had openly stated that he had killed the Egyptian, he said, “*achein* (it has become known).” The numerical value of the word “achein” is “71” (the value of aleph is 1 and the value of chof is 20 and the value of nun is 50). He explains that if the Jew assumes the behavior of the “70,” meaning the “one” attaches itself to the “seventy” he becomes part of it.

The Jewish people are signified by the letter “aleph” that connotes something that is exceptional and unique (one of a kind). There is no nation that can be compared to the Jewish people. The word “aleph” is spelled “aleph, lamed, pei.” If the word is read backwards, it would be “*pei lamed aleph*” which spells “*peleh*” something that is a “wonder” and “unfathomable.” The characteristic of the Jew is that he is unfathomable. Thus, their state of being is concealed and hidden. Therefore, when the Jew reveals a secret, he identifies with the “70” and is thus subject to bondage because he assumed a physical profile.

Chazal tell us that the Jewish people merited redemption because they did not change their Hebrew names, their language (Hebrew), and their attire (Jewish dress). The Midrash adds an additional reason, that they did not reveal a secret. Ten months before they needed to leave Egypt, they were told to borrow the precious possessions of their masters (gold and silver vessels and garments) before they were to go out of Egypt. For ten months no one divulged this secret, although it was known to millions of Jews. Keeping this information concealed was a correction for the original failing of the Jewish people that they revealed something that should have remained concealed. They therefore merited redemption.

4. *The Fruits of One’s Labor*

The Torah tells us that Pharaoh had decreed that all Jewish newborn males should be thrown into the Nile. Yocheved, Moshe’s mother, was able to conceal him for a number of months since he had been born prematurely. However, the time had come when she needed to take further measures to protect her son. She constructed a box and placed Moshe into the Nile. The Torah states, “**His sister (Miriam) stood at a distance to know what would be done with him (Moshe).**”

The Torah tells us in the of Portion of Beha’aloscha, that when Miriam became a leper, she was sent out of all the camps of Israel for a period of seven days. (The minimum recovery period of a leper before he can be reinstated). The Midrash tells us that during the time Miriam was sequestered outside of the camp, the Jewish people did not travel, but rather, they waited until she recovered and was able to reenter into the camp. In the merit of her waiting to see what would happen to her brother Moshe, the Divine Presence, 600,000 males above the age of 20, and the Clouds of Glory, waited for Miriam for a period of seven days to recover. This was her

reward—measure for measure. As she had waited to see the outcome of Moshe's fate, the Jewish people, Divine Presence, and the Clouds of Glory waited for her recovery. When Miriam waited, did she do so as a sister concerned for the fate of her brother to see if he would drown in the Nile? Or was Miriam's waiting for a more profound reason? It is evident that if G'd had decreed that all must remain in place until Miriam recovered from her leprous state, it is for a reason that goes beyond a concern for one's sibling.

The Gemara in Tractate Sotah tells us that Miriam began to prophesize before the birth of Moshe. She had prophesized, "My mother will give birth to the Redeemer of Israel." The Midrash states, "When Moshe was born, the house was illuminated with light, confirming that he was indeed destined to be the Redeemer. They had seen the Divine Presence upon him. Amram (Miriam's father) kissed her on her head and said, 'My daughter your prophecy has come about.' When Yocheved was forced to place Moshe into the Nile, Amram tapped Miriam on the head and said, 'What will become of your prophecy?' (Meaning that it is not certain that Moshe will survive the ordeal). Thus, Miriam stood and waited by the bank of the Nile to see what was going to happen regarding her prophecy pertaining brother Moshe."

Miriam's concern for Moshe was not merely a sister's concern for a sibling's survival. She understood, as a prophetess, that Moshe was the only one who was truly qualified to be the Redeemer of Israel. If Moshe would not survive the Nile, the Jewish people would never be redeemed from Egypt. Consequently, the exodus from Egypt to receive the Torah at Sinai would never take place. The objective of creation, which is the fulfillment of the Torah by the Jewish people would not be achieved. Miriam's concern was regarding G'd's glory. Would it be actualized through Moshe as the Redeemer or not? At that moment, she understood that all existence was at stake.

Chofetz Chaim writes in several of his works that during his time, because of the inroads of the enlightenment movement, tragedy had come upon the Jewish people. The study of Torah was being stripped away. A new perspective had established itself among the Jewish people that had placed the Torah and its observance into jeopardy to the point of nullification. Chofetz Chaim was uniquely pained and anguished regarding this problem. He had said that it was similar to witnessing a conflagration in a city. Unless one takes immediate action in order to save everything that could be saved, all will be

consumed by the raging fire. At that moment, one must expend every available resource in order to rescue as many people as possible from total destruction. However, one will only be motivated to act with immediacy if one understands and internalizes the gravity of the destruction that is at hand. Miriam internalized the reality of Moshe perishing in the Nile. She was able to foresee the consequence of that event. Her worry and fear was that the objective of Creation would not take place. It was because of this that she stood and waited to see what would happen. Because Miriam was pained for G'd's honor, G'd honored Miriam, decreeing that the Jewish people must wait on her behalf until she could be reinstated into the camp.

5. *Innate Value is Determined by One's Mindset*

The Torah states at the beginning of the Portion of Shemos, "**A new king (*melech chadash*) arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef.**" After Yosef and his generation had passed away, Pharaoh established a new laws that were against the Jewish people. He acted as if he did not know Yosef. Yosef had been the Viceroy of Egypt who was responsible for Egypt's survival during the years of famine. In addition, it was only due to Yosef's ingenuity and integrity that Egypt became the most advanced and wealthy civilization in existence. Yosef's family was initially revered by the Egyptian people during his lifetime. They were treated as royalty. However, after that generation had passed away, the bondage was instituted and they were reduced to slaves.

The Midrash states, "The Prophet says, 'They (the Jewish People) betrayed G'd and they fathered children who were alien to their heritage. Because of this, they will be consumed by '*chodesh*.' They bore children and did not circumcise them. We learn from this that when Yosef passed away, the Jewish people nullified the mitzvah of circumcision. They said, 'We shall be like the Egyptians.' When G'd saw that they no longer wanted to identify themselves with Him, by nullifying the sign of the covenant, He nullified the love of the Egyptians for the Jewish people. As it states, 'He changed their heart to despise His people...' Now they will be consumed by '*chodesh*.' As it states, '**A new king (*melech chadash*) arose over Egypt.**' (Without vowels the word *chodesh* is read *chadash* 'new') This king enacted new decrees to embitter their lives with bondage." How is the decree of severe bondage a consequence of the Jewish people nullifying the mitzvah of circumcision?

The Torah tells us that the Egyptian exile came about as a result of G'd's decree which was communicated to Avraham our Patriarch at the time of the Covenant Between the Parts. The verse states, **"...Your children will be strangers in a land that is not their own for four hundred years..."** The Midrash tells us that the 400-year period of exile began with the birth of Yitzchak. This is because G'd had said to Avraham, **"Your children will be strangers..."** If one were to calculate the time from the birth of Yitzchak until the redemption from Egypt it would be 400 years.

Maharal of Prague in his work *Gevuras Hashem* asks that if the exile of the Jewish people was to be one consisting of 400 years of bondage in a land that was not their own, how could this period commence with the birth of Yitzchak? At that time, Avraham and his family dwelled in the land of Canaan. Avraham, our Patriarch had amassed great wealth and gained world renown. He was acknowledged by the nations of the world as the "father of all nations." After the birth of Yitzchak, Avraham continuously ascended through the many trials and tribulations that were presented to him. His greatest accomplishment was the Akeidah (binding of Yitzchak), which was the most difficult. How could this time period of monumental spiritual accomplishment be considered the equivalent to the years of bondage and affliction? This is also true regarding the lives of Yitzchak and Yaakov. In what context could their lives be seen as suffering and affliction?

Maharal explains that Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, having profound spiritual sensitivity and understanding of G'd were continuously afflicted and pained by the spiritual void in the environment in which they had lived. Although they had wealth and fame, they suffered tremendously by being surrounded with impurity, such as paganism and depravity. G'd evaluated and valued their suffering to be the equivalent of exile and bondage. Because of their suffering, the Torah begins counting the 400 years of exile from the birth of Yitzchak.

The remaining 210 years of exile in Egypt began with the descent of Yaakov and his family. Although the actual physical bondage did not begin when Yaakov and his family entered Egypt, those years are also considered to be part of the bondage in Egypt. Until that generation, who had descended with Yaakov passed away, the Jewish people were not subjected to physical bondage. Because Yaakov and his family had an acute spiritual sensitivity,

entering into an environment such as Egypt was the equivalent of bondage. However, when the Jewish people began to admire the Egyptians and wanted to emulate them by choosing not to circumcise their children it was an indication that they were no longer pained by being in an environment that was devoid of spirituality. At that point the bondage needed to manifest itself through physical bondage and affliction in order to fulfill the decree of the Covenant Between the Parts. This is the reason the physical bondage began with the nullification of the mitzvah of circumcision.

Initially when G'd created the world, everything was provided to Adam without any need for him to take the initiative. However after Adam had sinned by eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, G'd cursed man by saying, **"By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread..."** From this moment forward, man needed to take the initiative to provide for himself. Ramchal asks in his work *Mesilas Yesharim*, if the Gemara tells us that one's yearly allocation for livelihood is determined from Rosh Hashanah to Rosh Hashanah, why does one need to take initiative in order to receive his allocation? In order for one to receive his allocation one must fulfill the prerequisite of the decree **"By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread..."** Thus, one must take the physical initiative to receive the allocation that G'd decides for him on Rosh Hashanah.

If one lives his life with a material perspective and is motivated by the acquisition of glory and honor, then working one or two hours a day would not be sufficient to achieve and attain one's allocation because it would not be considered **"By the sweat of his brow..."** This individual must therefore invest many hours of work in a day to receive his allocation. In contrast, if one is a spiritually attuned person whose perspective and ideal is to dedicate his life to G'd's Will, and thus utilizes every moment for spiritual pursuits, then it would only be necessary for him to invest a minimal amount of effort in order to fulfill the prerequisite of **"By the sweat of your brow..."** It is because the spiritual person will be pained when he must interrupt his Torah study for the sake of the physical. G'd will provide him with everything that was intended for him with a minimal effort. One's mindset will determine to what extent he must invest in the material.

Rambam writes in the Laws of Repentance that in order for one to atone for certain sins, one must experience suffering in addition to repentance, and the atonement of Yom Kippur. If one is a spiritual person then that

suffering will come in the form of spiritual setbacks and disappointments. However, if one's objective is to pursue the material, where a spiritual failing is less than insignificant, he will need to suffer within the context of the physical in order for it to be considered as suffering.

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 – Duties of the Heart
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Kiddushin
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

11:30 – 12:30pm **Talmud: Beiah**
 Location: Sunrise Capital 600 Lexington (23rd FL.)
 Enter on 54th Street
 1:00-2:00 pm **Ramchal: Derech Hashem**
 Location: Cedarview Capital 1Penn Plaza (45th FL.)

Tuesday

12:10 - 1:10pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
 Location: Yad Avraham

Wednesday

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Beiah**
 Location: Sunrise Capital 600 Lexington (23rd FL.)
 Enter on 54th Street
 1:00—2:00 pm **Maharal Gevuras Hashem**
 Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

11:00 –12:00pm **Duties of The Heart**
 Location: Yad Avraham
 12:30 – 1:30 pm **Talmud: Beiah** Sunrise Capital 600 Lexington
 (23rd FL)