

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES

The Portion of

Shemini

March 27, 2008

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
1. Moshe's Understanding of Himself	2
2. Dietary Laws, a Confirmation of the Eternity of the Jewish People	3
3. The Invaluable Gift of Mitzvos	4
4. Setbacks Could be the Basis for Understanding	5
5. Sacrifice, the Vehicle for Atonement	6

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.

If you would like to receive this Weekly Torah Commentary Series by email

Please call 212-371-9555 or email:

info@yadavraham.org

TUNE IN TO OUR LIVE VIDEO BROADCAST OF CLASSES

And over

50,000 online classes 24 hours a day

Yad Avraham Institute
New York
March 27, 2008

B"H

Shemini

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. Moshe's Understanding of Himself

The Torah states, **"It was on the eighth day, Moshe summoned Aaron and his sons..."** It was on the eighth day that Aaron and his sons began to officiate in the Mishkan. The Midrash states, "During the seven day period that Moshe was at the burning bush G'd had said to him, 'I want you to go (to Egypt) to redeem My children.' Moshe responded, 'You should send the one who is qualified. You should send Aaron my brother who is more qualified than I am.' This dialogue repeated itself on the first day, the second day, etc. G'd said to Moshe, 'Every day I tell you to go and every day you answer Me that I should send your brother, who is more qualified. I swear on your life that tomorrow you will be repaid for your obstinacy. When the Mishkan will be completed, initially you will believe that you will be the High Priest. However, I will surprise you by informing you that Aaron is the one who will officiate as the High Priest. You will then summon Aaron and his sons.' Thus, the verse states, **'...Moshe summoned Aaron and his sons...'**"

On the seventh day of Moshe's dialogue at the burning bush, when Moshe had said, "Send the one who You would normally send as Your Agent." G'd responded, "Aaron, your brother, the Levy." Rashi cites Chazal who explain the verse to mean that Aaron is only a Levy until now; however, because of Moshe's obstinacy, Aaron will be the High Priest. From the Chazal cited that is cited by Rashi, it would seem that Moshe understood immediately that he had forfeited his priesthood because of his obstinacy. However, according to the Midrash cited above, it is evident that Moshe was not aware that he had lost the priesthood because of what had transpired at the burning bush. Until the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan, he had believed that he would be the High Priest. If Moshe had believed that his brother Aaron was

qualified to be the Redeemer of Israel, why would he not also be the one qualified to be the High Priest? Why was he surprised when G'd informed him that Aaron and his children would be the Kohanim?

There was no human being in the history of existence that had a closer relationship with G'd than Moshe. His dimension of spirituality was unique. He understood all the inner workings of existence. After the sin of the Golden Calf, G'd wanted to destroy the Jewish people. It was only because of Moshe's supplications that they were spared. When the Jewish people had sinned with the spies, Moshe again evoked G'd's Mercy, thus preventing their destruction. It was only Moshe who had the ability to evoke the most intense level of G'd's Mercy. The concept of atonement is based on the principle of Mercy. As the Midrash tells us that the appellation of G'd that is associated with sacrifices is the appellation of "YKVK," which connotes the Attribute of Mercy. The appellation of G'd that connotes the Attribute of Justice is never mentioned in the Torah regarding atonement. The Kohen, was the individual who was qualified to bring about forgiveness and atonement for the Jewish people. It would therefore be logical to assume that Moshe would be the most qualified to be the High Priest. He would be able to evoke the most advanced level of Mercy on behalf of the Jewish people. Despite this fact, because of his obstinacy at the burning bush (which was considered a disrespect), G'd surprised him on the eighth day by informing him that Aaron, his brother was the only one qualified to be the High Priest. Where else to do we find that Moshe believed himself to be qualified and was subsequently informed that he was not?

When Moshe was in heaven and was being instructed regarding the building of the Mishkan, he had believed that he would be the one to oversee its building. However, G'd revealed to him at the last moment that

Bezalel was the only one that was qualified to oversee the building of the Mishkan. Although Moshe had reason to believe that he was the one to build the Mishkan, G'd had informed him otherwise.

Every aspect of the Mishkan needed to be infused with a specific intent. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that Bezalel understood how to conjugate the letters of the Hebrew alphabet that brought about Creation. The Mishkan had to be infused with the same forces that were used to create existence. The Mishkan was a microcosm of Creation. This ability was not unique to Bezalel. Moshe, as the conduit of Torah to the Jewish people, had acquired all 49 levels of understanding (Binah) except for the 50th which is the understanding of G'd Himself. If this is so, then Moshe should have been the one to oversee the building of the Mishkan, being the most qualified. Nevertheless, Bezalel was chosen by G'd to oversee its building. Bezalel possessed something that Moshe did not. Bezalel, was a grandson of Chur who had given his life at the time of the Golden Calf to sanctify G'd's Name. When the Jewish people came to Aaron to provide a deity for them, Chur, the son of Miriam vehemently protested and opposed their demand. Because of his objections he was killed. Although Moshe understood from G'd's choice that Bezalel was more qualified than he was, he had no reason to believe that he was not the most qualified to officiate as the High Priest.

Moshe, although he was the most humble person who ever lived, understood his own capabilities. He had believed, because of his special relationship with G'd, that he was the most qualified to act as the representative of the Jewish people to evoke His Mercy through the bringing of offerings. It was only after he was informed that Aaron, his brother would be the High Priest that he realized and appreciated his failing at the burning bush.

2. Dietary Laws, a Confirmation of the Eternity of the Jewish People

The Torah states, "**Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aaron, saying to them: Speak to the Children of Israel saying: These are the creatures that you may eat from among the animals that are upon the earth.**" The Midrash cites a verse from Chavakuk, " 'G'd had stood and measured/evaluated the Earth. He saw and released the nations.' What is the meaning of 'G'd measured the Earth?' When G'd wanted to give the Torah to the Jewish people, He evaluated the Earth (existence) and decided to give it in the desert in a public setting. Initially, when the nations of the world rejected the Torah, G'd was going to

cause the world to revert back to a state of water (pre-existence). However, when the Jewish people accepted the Torah unequivocally with their declaration of 'Naaseh V'nishma – we will do and we will listen' existence continued. It was only when the Jewish people accepted the Torah that the world became tranquil. As it states in Psalms, 'The Earth was fearful and tranquil.' When the Jewish people accepted the Torah, the nations of the world received their release. They were permitted to eat the forbidden contaminated species such as rodents. To what is this analogous? To a doctor who evaluated two patients. One was deathly ill with no chance of recovery. The doctor told his relatives that he should not be denied anything that he wants to eat. Afterwards, the doctor evaluated the second patient and understood that he would recover. He then instructed his family that he could only eat certain foods; however, others must be withheld from him if he was to recover. After hearing the doctor's prescription to each of the patients, the doctor was asked, 'Why do you differentiate between the two patients regarding what they are permitted to eat?' The doctor responded, 'Regarding the patient who is deathly ill, since he will die in any case, there is no reason to deny him anything that he desires. However, the other patient, who has relevance to life, must adhere to a strict dietary regiment if he is to live.' Similarly, G'd permitted to the nations of the world anything they desired to eat (even rodents and foods that would abominate their souls). However, since the Jewish people have relevance to eternal life, they need to maintain their spiritual purity and sanctity. Therefore, G'd forbade them from eating the species that would contaminate them. As it states, 'You who cling to Hashem, your G'd, you are all alive today.'"

Initially G'd was going to cause the world to revert to a state of non-existence since the nations of the world had rejected the Torah. However, when the Jewish people chose to accept the Torah the world assumed permanency. G'd chose to give the Torah to them in a public setting, which was the desert of Sinai. Why did G'd choose to give the Torah in a location which is the ultimate setting of desolation?

The Gemara in Tractate Nedarim explains that the reason G'd chose to give the Torah to the Jewish people in the desert is because a desert is a location that is ownerless and barren. Just as the desert has no innate value, so too must the one who wants to acquire Torah render himself ownerless like the desert (humble). However, based on the Midrash, it seems that G'd gave the Torah in the desert because He wanted to give it to the Jewish people in a public setting with no distractions. Because if there were any distractions at the moment of the giving of the Torah,

one would not be able to appreciate the profundity of the event.

G'd wanted the Torah to be given in the most public setting because He wanted the nations of the world to understand that the world only exists in the merit of the Jewish people. It was only because the Jewish people embraced the Torah, unequivocally, that existence has any value. The nations of the world needed to appreciate and understand that they owe their very existence to the Jewish people, who dedicated themselves to G'd.

Chazal tell us that there was a negative aspect to receiving the Torah in a public setting. The Midrash tells us that the reason the Jewish people were vulnerable to the Sin of the Golden Calf was because the nations of the world had given them an "evil eye," which was rooted in envy. Had they received the Torah in a more private setting, they would not have been minimized by the envy of the nations. Although the Jewish people were put in a compromised position, as a result of the public setting, G'd chose to give the Torah before the eyes of the world, so that they could understand that their existence is only due to the Jewish people receiving the Torah at Sinai.

3. *The Invaluable Gift of Mitzvos*

The Torah states, "...**These are the creatures that you may eat from among the animals that are upon the earth.**" The Midrash cites a verse in Psalms, "To fulfill Your Will My G'd I do desire and Your Torah is in my innards..." What is the meaning of this? The Torah permeates every aspect of our existence. How fortunate are the Jewish people because each one of their limbs has relevance to a mitzvah. There are 248 limbs in the human body and G'd has given the Jewish people 248 Positive Commandments (to correspond to them). And therefore we say every day (*asher yatzar*) 'Blessed are You, Hashem, our G'd King of the Universe, Who fashioned man with wisdom and created within him many openings and cavities (*chalulim chalulim*) ...' The numerical equivalent of '*chalulim chalulim*' is 248, which corresponds to the number of limbs in the human body. This is the meaning of the words of King David in Psalms, 'Your Torah is in my innards...'"

Reb Chaim Vital explains that just as the human body is comprised of 248 limbs, the Jewish soul is comprised of 248 parts. There is a correlation between the soul and the body. When one fulfills any of the 248 Positive Commandments it perfects the corresponding aspect of the soul. In addition, the physical limb that

corresponds to that mitzvah is also spiritualized and elevated. Just as the mitzvos nurture the soul, so too is the body spiritualized. As the Gemara in Tractate Berachos states, "Just as G'd permeates all existence, so too does the soul permeate every aspect of the body." The soul was created to give life and meaning to every aspect of the human being.

Chazal tell us that contained within the three paragraphs of the Shema, which is the acceptance of the yoke of heaven/dominion of G'd, are 245 words. If one prays within the context of a quorum, the one leading the service concludes the Shema with three words which complete the number 248 (*Hashem Elokechem Emes*). If one prays privately, one introduces the Shema with three words (Kail Melech Neeman) in order to bring the number of words in the Shema to 248. When one declares his belief in G'd, he is accepting the yoke of heaven upon every aspect of his physical being.

The human being, regarding his make up and inclination, is the equivalent of an animal, apart from his intellect. All of Man's tendencies and drives are rooted within the animal. Man was endowed with intellect in order for him to take control of the animal/physicality and spiritualize it through the performance of the mitzvos. It is only through the study of Torah and performance of mitzvos that man can subordinate his physical inclinations and invest them in spiritual endeavors. The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states, "If the earlier ones are classified as angels, then we can be classified as human beings. However, if the earlier ones are classified as 'human beings' then our classification will be donkeys – and not even the equivalent of the donkey of Reb Pinchas Ben Yair." The Gemara tells us that the donkey of Reb Pinchas had been stolen and the thieves attempted to feed it untithed grain. The donkey refused to eat it because it was a forbidden entity. Although the donkey is an unintelligible creature, because it was the possession of Reb Pinchas Ben Yair, who was a uniquely devout person, the donkey assumed a spiritualized state. Thus, instinctively it would not partake of anything that was contrary to the Torah.

Man, in terms of his physical make up, is no different from the donkey. Maharal explains that the Hebrew word "*chamor* – donkey" is derived from the word "*chomer* – material." Just as the essence of the donkey is material, and thus epitomizes the animal, man in his physical make up is no different. The only way one can dominate and dictate the physical is to assume a spiritual persona. In order to facilitate this, G'd endowed the Jewish people with Torah and mitzvos that correspond to every

aspect of their physicality to bring about this spiritual metamorphosis. When one transgresses with a certain part of the body, it becomes compromised. Conversely, when one performs a mitzvah with that part of the body, it becomes spiritualized and thus elevated. Therefore, if one were to steal with his hand, besides the need to correct the sin that had been perpetrated, one should perform acts of kindness in order to spiritualize the limb that had been diminished. If one were to gaze upon something that is inappropriate, he should gaze upon the words of the Torah in order to spiritualize his eyes. This concept is mentioned in *The Gates of Repentance*, authored by Rebbeinu Yonah.

The Gemara in Tractate Sukkah states, “I (G’d) created the evil inclination. I created Torah as its antidote.” When one engages in Torah study and actualizes it through the performance of mitzvos, one incapacitates and subordinates the evil inclination and brings about a spiritualization of himself.

4. Setbacks Could be the Basis for Understanding

The Torah tells us that after Aaron had brought his personal offering and that of the Jewish people, he entered into the Tent of Meeting with Moshe. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that after Aaron had officiated and brought all of the required offerings, the fire did not descend from heaven to consume them. The fire was a representation of the Shechina (Divine Presence) entering into the Mishkan. When Aaron had done all that he was commanded to do and saw that the Shechina did not enter, he was pained. Aaron said to Moshe, “I understand that the reason the Shechina has not entered is because G’d is angry with me (because of his involvement with the Golden Calf).” Aaron said to Moshe, “Moshe my brother by putting me in this position you have embarrassed me!” Moshe and Aaron immediately entered the Tent to pray for Mercy so that the Shechina should descend.

Initially Moshe told Aaron that he was chosen to be the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest). Meaning that G’d selected him for that position. Seemingly, Aaron understood that his appointment came about through G’d’s dictate – unrelated to Moshe’s choice. If this is so, why then, when the Shechina did not descend, did he say to Moshe, “You have embarrassed me by placing me in this position”? The claim should not have been directed against Moshe, but rather the question should have been, “why did G’d put me in an embarrassing position?”

The Torah tells us that Korach attempted to usurp Moshe’s authority by questioning the authenticity of the Divinity of the Torah. Korach’s claim against Moshe was that Aaron’s appointment was Moshe’s choice. Korach accused him of nepotism. It is interesting to note that although Korach experienced the Sinai event and openly witnessed G’d speaking to Moshe face to face, he nevertheless questioned his credibility. The Torah tells us that G’d spoke to Moshe after the Sinai event saying, “**In you, they (the Jewish people) will believe forever**” – meaning that Moshe’s word is synonymous with that of G’d. If G’d had said that Moshe’s word is His word, how could Korach have questioned his authority?

Korach believed that because of Moshe’s special level of spirituality he had a unique and intimate relationship with G’d. Therefore, when Moshe would make a request of G’d, He would acquiesce and grant him his wishes. Korach felt that the choice of Aaron to be the High Priest was not the choice of G’d, but rather it was Moshe’s. G’d acquiesced to his request and was agreeable that Aaron was to be installed as High Priest. This was the basis for Korach’s mutiny against Moshe. He had also believed that many of the other laws of the Torah evolved in this manner.

Aaron’s understanding and initial reaction was similar to that of Korach. He believed that G’d had only appointed him as *Kohen Gadol* due to the request of Moshe. Since Moshe wanted him to be the High Priest, G’d merely acquiesced. Therefore, when the Shechina did not descend, he said, “Moshe my brother by placing me in this position *you* have embarrassed me!”

Upon hearing this, Moshe took his brother Aaron into the Tent of Meeting and they prayed for G’d’s Mercy. It was only after they prayed that G’d responded. At this moment, Aaron understood that his predicament was not due to Moshe initiating his appointment but rather, even if one is chosen by G’d, one needs to call upon His Mercy to assist him in his mission.

The Jewish people witnessed this incident; it sowed the seeds of descent, which allowed Korach to initiate his mutiny. One could have interpreted the situation, as Aaron had initially understood it to be. Aaron’s misperception was corrected; however, Korach was not able to see it in this manner because of his desire for acknowledgement and glory.

One could ask -if we are the Chosen People, then why do we experience such difficulties and hardships? G’d forbid, these questions could undermine our belief in

who we really are. The Jewish people were chosen by G'd to be His priestly, kingly nation. He identified us as His holy people. The basis for all the travails and difficulties of the Jewish people are rooted in our spiritual setbacks. We learn from Moshe and Aaron that with the power of prayer one is able to call upon the Attribute of Mercy (*Midas Ha'Rachamim*) to intervene and bring about *bracha* (blessing).

5. Sacrifice, the Vehicle for Atonement

The Torah tells us that after Aaron was installed as the High Priest, he needed to bring a calf as a sin offering to atone for his participation in the sin of the Golden Calf. In addition, Aaron brought a goat as a sin offering on behalf of the Jewish people to atone for their participation in idolatry. Ohr HaChaim writes, "G'd had taken an oath that the world should function within the context of Justice. The Gemara in Tractate Bava Kama tells us that if one were to say that G'd overlooks and does not evaluate and judge every detail of one's behavior, his life should be compromised. If this is so, then if one were to sin he should be judged for death and not be allowed to bring a sacrifice for atonement. The Jerusalem Talmud states that they had consulted with Prophecy (Nevua), 'What should be the fate of the sinner? Prophecy responded, 'The life of the sinner should be taken.' They then asked G'd, 'If one were to sin, what should be done with him?' G'd responded, 'He should bring a sacrifice and be atoned.' How can we reconcile the fact that one can bring a sacrifice for atonement with the principle that G'd established existence to function within the context of Justice?"

Ohr HaChaim explains, "It seems that if one's life were to be taken for sinning, it would actually be a miscarriage of justice. Because when one sins, it is not within the context of a rational human being. As the Zohar states, 'A person does not sin unless he is overtaken by a spirit of irrationality (*ruach shtus*).' Therefore, when one sins, he is not sinning as a person with an intellect, but rather as an unintelligible creature – similar to the animal. However, when one introspects and appreciates that he had transgressed, and begins the process of repentance, he assumes the status of a human being/person (who has an intellect). Therefore, it is logical to say that when one sins, it is actually the animal aspect of the human being that had sinned and not the person. Thus, it would be unjust to kill a person, for the sin that was committed by an animal. Therefore, after one repents he must bring an animal as a sacrifice in order to atone for the sin that was committed

by the animal. Although G's is willing to accept the sacrifice in his stead, the sinner must appreciate that it is he who should have been slaughtered and burnt for the transgression. It is only because he had risen from the status of the animal to the status of the human being, due to his repentance, that he is able to bring the sacrifice in his place. This is the understanding of the verse in Psalms, 'Man together with the animal, G'd will assist...' Meaning, if one employs his intellect to understand the wrong that was committed as a result of his animalistic drives /physicality, then G'd will assist him."

Yom Kippur is the day of atonement. During the final service of the day, Neilah, we ask G'd to seal us in the Book of Life. Meaning, He should forgive our sins and allow us to be beneficiaries of His blessing. Rabbeinu Yonah explains that true repentance is a lengthy process that requires multiple levels of introspection and remorse. If this is so, then how can one expect G'd to seal him for life based on his repentance that takes place on Yom Kippur? Based on the understanding of Ohr HaChaim we are able to say that when one introspects and appreciates the wrong that he had perpetrated, his classification is no longer that of the animal that had sinned. Although the process of repentance has not been completed, he assumes the classification of a human being, who is endowed with intellect. Therefore, he deserves to be sealed for life on Yom Kippur because he is no longer subject to punishment that is meant for the animal.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that if one experiences suffering in his life (financial, physical, etc.), he should introspect and reflect on his past behavior and try to understand where he had failed and make the necessary corrections. Suffering and difficulties in life only come about because of one's transgressions. The Gemara continues to say that if one had introspected and did not find any reason for deserving this level of punishment, he should attribute his difficulties to not having studied Torah sufficiently (*bitul Torah*). After he has understood that the source of his issues is rooted in his insufficient Torah study, he ascends to the level of a human being. Consequently, his suffering will cease.

King Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes, "All your days your clothing should be white." Rambam explains in the Laws of Repentance that this is referring to the fact that one should always be in a state of repentance, which is equated with purity. Although achieving complete repentance requires an entire lifetime, when one has begun the process of repentance, he is no longer subject to the suffering that is meant to come upon the animal that had transgressed.