

ACCEDING TO ONES DEMISE WITH ELATION

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Matos-Massei

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The Ultimate Cell of MultiCultural Organisms

1. The objective of creation is the study of *Torah* and the fulfillment of its *mitzvos*.
2. *Zohar*: Should there be any moment the *Torah* is not studied, the world would revert to preexistence.
3. *Pirkei Avos*: The world stands on 3 principles: *Torah*, *Avodah*, and acts of loving-kindness.
4. The *Mishnah* seems to contradict the *Zohar*.
5. *Chazal*: The study of *Torah* is the equivalent of all 613 *mitzvos*.
6. *Vilnah Gaon*: Each word of *Torah* is the equivalent of all 613 *mitzvos*.
7. *Rambam*: Great is the study of *Torah* that it brings to actualization; the performance of a *mitzvah* alone does not.
8. *Midrash*: I would have preferred they abandon me and keep my *Torah* because the (innate) illumination contained within it would have brought them back to good.
9. All *mitzvos* are connected to the study of *Torah*.
10. When one studies *Torah*, he has touched upon *Avodah* and acts of loving-kindness.
11. If one does not study *Torah* regardless of his level of engagement it will not touch upon *Torah*.

Emphasizing the Innate Value of the Speaking Species

1. When taking an oath and violating it, one violates the negative commandment "Do not desecrate your word."
2. *Gemara*: Due to the sin of vows, one loses his wife and (minor) children.
3. The commandment of violating vows connotes there is sanctity to speech.
4. Vernacular: "One's speech is sacred."
5. *Job*: Man (*Adam*) was made to toil.
6. *Gemara*: "Toil" refers to the toil of the mouth, the articulation of *Torah*.
7. G-d blew a soul of life into his nostrils & he became a living species.
8. *Targum*: "Living" is interpreted as a speaking species.
9. Speech emanates from the spiritual components of the person, the soul.
10. G-d created the world for *Torah* & the Jewish People.
11. When one studies *Torah* it must be articulated.
12. *Adam* was endowed with the power of speech, which is essential for the study of *Torah*.
13. Violating one's word, which emanates from a spiritual source, has severe repercussions.

Myopic Effect Of Prioritizing The Material

Weekly Video

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Matos-Massei



Rising Above Conflict

“G-d spoke to Moshe saying, Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites...”

Moshe sent *Pinchas* to avenge the vengeance of the Jewish people against the Midianites. Why did *Moshe* not do it himself?

Midrash: “The one who begins a *mitzvah* should be the one who completes it.” Since *Pinchas* was the one who initially killed *Zimri* together with *Cozbi* the Midianite princess and halted the plague, he should be the one to wage war against *Midian* whose intent was destroy the Jewish people.

“G-d had commanded *Moshe* himself to take vengeance against the Midianites on behalf of the Jewish people; however, we find that he sent others (*Pinchas*) to wage war against them. *Moshe* sent *Pinchas* to engage in war against *Midian*, because he was raised in *Midian*

and benefited from them. He thus said, ‘It is unjust to do them harm because they had done good to me. (I was a beneficiary of their hospitality).’

After killing the Egyptian, *Moshe* had fled Egypt and sought refuge in *Midian* where he had married the daughter of *Yisro*, the Sheik of *Midian*. He had spent many years in *Midian* before returning to Egypt. As the proverb states, ‘The well from which you had drunk, do not throw into it a stone.’ Therefore *Moshe* delegated the responsibility to destroy *Midian* to others.”

Although *Moshe* was commanded to destroy the Midianites, he understood, based on the principle that one should not be an ingrate, that G-d had intended that he should delegate it through another.

There is a negative commandment that prohibits one from afflicting an Egyptian, because “you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Rashi: Since Egypt was the host country for the Jewish people, the Jew is indebted to the Egyptians. If the Egyptians had inflicted untold suffering upon the Jewish people, why should we have a debt of gratitude towards them? It is because they were the beneficiaries of Egypt, being the location of their domicile for 210 years.

Regarding *Moshe* and the Midianites, the debt of gratitude is even more compelling. They had done only good to him by hosting him and offering him protection from Pharaoh. In addition, he became the son-in-law of the Sheik of *Midian*.

In contrast, although Egypt was the host country for the Jewish people, they had enslaved them unjustly in the harshest manner.

Netziv: The first book of the *Torah* is referred to in the Book of Joshua as “*Sefer Ha’Yashar* (The Book of the Straight Ones).

Gemara: This is because the Patriarchs, *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov* were “*yesharim* (straight).” Since the Book of *Bereishis* is primarily devoted to their lives, it therefore assumes this appellation.

Netziv: There are three classifications of righteous people – devoutly righteous (*tzaddik*), devoutly pious (*chasid*), and straight (*yashar*). A *tzaddik* is one who meticulously observes all of the *mitzvos* without deviation. A *chasid* is one who not only meticulously adheres to the dictates of the *Torah* but also goes beyond his basic obligation. One who is considered to be “straight (*yashar*)” is an individual who maintains his objectivity in all situations and does not allow his personal conflict of interest to interfere with his service of G-d.

Avraham, our Patriarch demonstrated his characteristic of “*yashar*” when he pleaded and supplicated G-d on behalf of *Sdom*. He had devoted his entire life to the espousal of monotheism and to dispel pagan beliefs from society through the attribute of loving kindness.

One would think that when G-d had informed him that *Sdom* was going to be destroyed, he would have rejoiced because G-d was openly vanquishing evil from existence. However, this was not *Avraham*’s response.

Despite the good tidings that evil was to be expunged, he suppressed his own conflicts of interest and supplicated G-d on their behalf in the most intense manner. *Avraham* understood that if G-d would not

spare *Sdom*, it would have been perceived by the world as G-d destroying the innocent along with the evil, causing a desecration of His Name.

Yitzchak, our Patriarch was driven out of the Philistine community by *Avimelech* its king; however at later date, when *Avimelech* wanted to make a covenant with him, he agreed.

Yaakov, our Patriarch was victimized for many years by his father in law *Lavan*; however, he never shared this with his wives until G-d told him to leave and return to his father’s home.

The Patriarchs, because they were “*yashar*,” rose above their personal conflicts in order to do the will of G-d.

Because the Jewish people were victimized by the Egyptian people and enslaved by them, one would think that the Jewish people should abominate them and not allow them to be in their midst. Nevertheless, the *Torah* commands the Jew to rise above his personal conflict and not afflict the Egyptians to appreciate that they were the host country for them.

The characteristic of “*yashar*” was a characteristic of the holy Patriarchs. They naturally did not allow their conflicts of interest to interfere with their service of G-d.

The Jewish people needed to be commanded to do so in order to emulate the characteristic of the holy Patriarchs. *Moshe*, being the ultimate person who is not conflicted because of his unique level of negation, did not wage war against the Midianites despite the wrong that they had done to the Jewish people.

G-d Provides Opportunity

“G-d spoke to *Moshe* saying, Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered unto your people.”

Midrash: “*Rebbe Yehudah* says, ‘If *Moshe* wanted to extend his life by many years he could have done so. G-d told him that after he would avenge the vengeance of the Jewish people against the Midianites, he would pass on. Despite the fact that *Moshe* could have extended his life by delaying the vengeance upon the Midianites, he did not delay. We see from this the praiseworthiness of *Moshe*. He did not say, ‘I will delay the vengeance against *Midian* so that I should extend my life.’”

Moshe negated himself totally to the will of G-d. G-d refers to *Moshe* as, "My servant *Moshe*; in My house he is the trusted one..."

If *Moshe's* negation to the will of G-d was so unique that G-d esteems him to be considered to be "the trusted one," why is it considered to be "praiseworthy" for *Moshe* not to delay the destruction of the Midianites? What would have been *Moshe's* consideration to delay the destruction of the Midianites?

In the Portion of *Shelach* it states, "G-d said to *Moshe*, 'Send for yourself men.'"

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: It was in *Moshe's* best interest to send the spies to scout out the Land of Israel. By doing so, if the Jewish people would fail, they would be punished and delayed in the desert for an additional thirty nine years before entering into the Land.

Since it was decreed by G-d before the Jewish people left Egypt that *Moshe* was not to enter into the Land, if the sin of the spies would have not occurred, *Moshe* would have passed away in the second year in the desert. However, because of the sin of the spies, *Moshe's* life was extended for thirty-nine years.

The level of influence that *Moshe* had brought upon the Jewish people as their leader for an additional thirty nine years is incalculable. *Moshe* understood from G-d the importance of extending his life for another thirty-nine years. *Moshe* could have justified delaying going to war against *Midian* in order to extend his leadership and his association with the Jewish people for an additional amount of time. Its value would have been exceptional.

However, *Moshe* chose not to do so by delaying, but rather chose to immediately follow the dictate of G-d. In addition, it is stated in the Book of *Devarim* that *Moshe* had said to the Jewish people that after he will pass away, they would become idolaters. Therefore *Moshe's* level of association with the Jewish people would further secure their spirituality to delay the ominous future. Therefore, the *Midrash* speaks of the "praiseworthiness" of *Moshe*. Although he was "the trusted one" in the house of G-d he could have justified the delay, but did not.

Midrash: "It is written in the Book of *Yehoshuah*, 'G-d said, 'As I was with *Moshe*, I will be with you.' Just as *Moshe* lived for 120 years so too would *Yehoshuah Bin Nun*, his successor, live for 120 years.

However, *Yehoshuah* lived 110 years. Why were ten years taken from his life?

When *Moshe* was commanded by G-d to take vengeance against the Midianites, although he understood that he would pass away after their destruction, he did not delay. He did not ponder, 'What is the value of my death? Perhaps I should extend my life by delaying the war.'

Yehoshuah, on the other hand, did not follow the way of his teacher. When he was commanded to conquer the thirty-one kings of *Canaan*, he said, 'If I defeat them I will die immediately as my rebbe *Moshe*.'

What did he do? After defeating one king, he delayed and prolonged the process of conquering *Canaan*, because he wanted to extend his life. G-d said to him, 'Is this the way you should behave? I will thus remove ten years from your life because you did not act as your rebbe *Moshe*.'

Regarding this, King David writes in Psalms, 'Many ideas pass through a man's heart (calculations), but G-d's plan will endure.'"

Gemara: The face of *Moshe* is the equivalent of the sun and the face of *Yehoshuah* is the equivalent of the moon. Because *Yehoshuah* was a close disciple of his teacher *Moshe* he reflected every aspect of his teacher's behavior. If this is so, why did he not follow the example of his teacher *Moshe* and go to war without delay?

Midrash: Although *Moshe* had said to the Jewish people in the Book of *Devarim* that they would become idolaters after he would pass away, it is indicated in the Book of *Yehoshuah* that the Jewish people did not engage in idolatry until after the passing of *Yehoshuah Bin Nun*, the student of *Moshe*.

Chazal: We are able to learn from this that as long as one's disciple is alive, the teacher values it as if he himself is still living.

Yehoshuah was able to differentiate between his own situation and the decision that was made by his rebbe *Moshe*. *Moshe* had no reason to delay because his successor *Yehoshuah* would be able to maintain the Jewish people at a level that they would not become pagans. However, *Yehoshuah* understood that if he would not delay and thus pass away, the Jewish people would fall to the level of idolatry. This was the basis

for *Yehoshuah's* justification to delay the conquest of *Canaan* and not draw a lesson from *Moshe*, his teacher.

If in fact the *Midrash* refers to *Moshe's* decision of not delaying the destruction of *Midian* as "praiseworthy" even for one as great as *Moshe*, the decision not to delay evidently is not a simple matter. If so, why is *Yehoshuah* punished for his failure?

It is true that the decision to go to war was a monumental one, that even for *Moshe* it was considered to be "praiseworthy." However, once *Moshe* had set the standard of how one must deal in such a context, it no longer requires any decision process. *Yehoshuah* needed to only follow the instruction of his *rebbe*, which he did not.

Wealth can be a Curse

"The children of *Reuvain* and the children of *Gad* had abundant livestock – very great." Because the tribes of *Reuvain* and *Gad* had a great amount of livestock they chose to remain on the transJordan side (portion of *Og* and *Sichon* that was conquered). It was because of their need for vast grazing lands that were located there.

Midrash: "The heart of the wise man is to the right and the heart of the fool is to the left." (Ecclisiastes) The wise man whose heart is to the right is referring to *Moshe*. The fool whose heart is to the left, is referring to the children of *Reuvain* and *Gad* who made what is primary secondary and what is secondary primary. Why is this so?

They valued their possessions more than themselves. They said, "We will build corrals for our livestock and then we will build cities for our children."

Moshe said to them, "You shall not do this (your priorities are not correct). You will first address what is most important by building cities for your families, and then you will build corrals for your livestock." This is because *Moshe* was the wise man whose heart is to the right.

G-d said, "Because you endeared your assets more than your lives, I swear on your lives there will be no blessing in your midst as it states, 'A portion that is initially overwhelming will not bring blessing.' Do not become weary in order to become wealthy based on your own understanding...The one who is wealthy is the one who is joyous with his portion."

Another *Midrash* states, "G-d created three gifts for the world – wisdom, power, and wealth. When is the gift considered the ultimate good fortune? It is when it is a gift from G-d and it emanates from His Power directly."

Wisdom, power and wealth that are created by man have no value. If these gifts are seized by the individual and are not granted to him by G-d Himself, they will ultimately come to an end.

The tribes of *Reuvain* and *Gad* had abundant livestock. They greatly valued their wealth. It is because of their attachment to their wealth that they were willing to settle outside of the Land of Israel and separate themselves from their Jewish brethren.

Because they chose to live outside of the Land and were willing to remove themselves from the Jewish people, they were the first of the tribes to be exiled before the destruction of the First Temple. "They separated themselves from their brothers for the sake of their livestock."

How does one discern if the gift comes from G-d or not?

Midrash: When *Rivka* our Matriarch was pregnant with *Yaakov* and *Esav*, she experienced "rumblings in her womb." She sought out the counsel of *Shem* the prophet, the son of *Noach*, in order to understand the cause of the "rumblings" within her.

Shem explained that there were two nations within her that were battling with one another regarding the dominance of the physical and spiritual worlds (good and evil). This conflict would continue after their birth. They would emerge from the womb as two nations.

After *Yaakov* had taken the blessings from his father *Yitzchak*, he fled to the home of *Lavan* to be protected from *Esav* who had vowed to kill him. Thirty-six years later, *Yaakov* and *Esav* had an encounter. *Esav* saw that his brother *Yaakov* had accumulated an enormous amount of wealth. He had flocks, servants, and great material abundance.

Midrash: "*Esav* said to *Yaakov*, 'I understood that we had agreed that the spiritual world would be your domain and the material world would be mine; however, I see that you have partaken of my realm, since you have an abundance of wealth. You have violated our agreement.'"

Yaakov replied, "When one is fully dedicated to the spiritual, the material is provided naturally because it

is not possible to exist in the physical world without material. "If there is no flour there is no *Torah*." The value of the material is only to accommodate and facilitate the spiritual.

In contrast, you only have relevance to the material. Your existence is unrelated to the spiritual realm.

After hearing *Yaakov*'s words, *Esav* said, 'If this is so, let us re-divide the material and the spiritual.' *Yaakov* would not agree."

The *Torah* tells us that after *Esav* had received the exceptional gift from *Yaakov* to defuse his anger toward him, *Esav* wanted to reject it. He said to *Yaakov*, "I have much, therefore you should have it in return." *Yaakov* responded, "I have everything, therefore you must take it."

Yaakov, being of spiritual dimension, as he is quantified by the *Torah* "He is the perfect man who dwells in the tent (of *Torah*)," understood that the value of the material was only to accommodate the spiritual. Whatever G-d bestows upon him regarding the material is the equivalent of having everything because its only value is to facilitate the *Torah* and its *mitzvos*.

However, *Esav*, who was the physical and material person, believed that the material has value unto itself. Therefore, as much as he had, it was never enough because it is impossible to have it all.

When the tribes of *Reuvain* and *Gad* decided to first build corrals for their livestock and then provide protection for their families, it was a clear indication that their priorities were not in correct order. It revealed their blinding desire for material wealth.

Therefore, the wealth that they came upon was considered that they had "seized it" rather than a gift of G-d to facilitate the spiritual. Because they chose to see what is secondary as primary, they ultimately succumbed to the temptations of the world and were the first tribes to be exiled.

The Debasement of One's Word

"If a man takes a vow to *Hashem* or swears an oath to establish a prohibition upon himself, he shall not desecrate (*chillul*) his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do."

Rashi: After one takes a vow, "he may not make his words ordinary (*chullin*)/desecrate one's word (*chillul*)."
This negative commandment relates to vows.

The positive commandment stated by the *Torah* regarding the one who adheres to his vow is, "whatever comes from his mouth shall he do."

Since the *Torah* uses the word "*chillul* (desecration)" regarding the breaking of one's vow, it is inferred that one's speech is sacred. Desecration only has relevance to the defilement of something that is sacred. The *Torah* is alluding to the fact that since one's word is holy, if one transgresses his vow or oath, the consequences are very severe. It is the equivalent of desecrating something holy.

A vow must be verbalized in order to be effective. The power of speech is the expression of one's spirituality. The *Torah* states regarding the creation of *Adam*, "And *Hashem* G-d formed the man... and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being (*nefesh chaya*)."

Targum Unkolus: "*nefesh chaya*" – "he (man) became a speaking spirit (species). It is because of this unique soul that man has the ability to comprehend and speak."

The power of speech emanates from the soul. It is a spiritual power and not a physical sense. Because a vow emanates from one's spirituality, if one were to violate it, it is considered to be a desecration of something that holy.

Gemara: "Man was born to toil..." (*Iyov*) This refers to the "toiling with the mouth" and not physical toil. "The toiling of the mouth" is not referring to ordinary speech but rather the verbalization of *Torah*.

Man was endowed with the power of speech, which emanates from his soul, so that he should toil in the study of *Torah*, which is the most advanced context of spirituality. If one were to debase his power of speech by transgressing in the area of vows or engages in negative speech (*lashon harah*), he then contaminates a holy faculty.

When this individual engages in *Torah* study or prayer, because his speech has been contaminated, his *Torah* study and prayer will be less effective because he defiled and undermined his holy faculty of speech.

One says in the blessing that is recited after the reading of the *Torah*, “Blessed are You...Who gave us the *Torah* of truth and implanted eternal life within us.”

Chofetz Chaim: In order to sustain the body, one must eat sufficiently to be nourished. Once the nourishment is depleted one must eat again to nourish the body.

What nourishes the eternal soul that G-d implanted within us? When one engages in *Torah* study, it provides a spiritual energy to the soul that will sustain it forever.

“The study of *Torah* is equivalent to all the *mitzvos* (*Talmud Torah Keneged Kulam*).” The spirituality that is innate within the *Torah* is what is needed for the Jewish soul to be nourished and sustained forever.

Gemara: The only one who will be resurrected at the end of time will be the one who engaged in *Torah* study. Even the ignorant person (*aam haaretz*), although he did not study *Torah* himself, if he had assisted or supported *Torah*, he will also merit resurrection.

Since the *Torah* is eternal, one’s reward for engaging in it, even as much as assisting a *Torah* scholar in his life, will also qualify him to become eternal. He will thus merit resurrection.

If one debases his holy power of speech, he will diminish the power of his *Torah* study and consequently he will have limited relevance to eternity.

Midrash: “G-d said to the Jewish people, ‘You should be careful with your vows and do not breach them. Whoever breaches them will ultimately violate the area of oaths. For the one who violates an oath, G-d will not forgive him forever.’”

Gemara: At *Sinai* when G-d communicated the Ten Commandments and said, “Do not pronounce My Name in vain”, the entire world quaked.

Even if one would intercede and rebuke the one who violated his oath, the entire world is liable. G-d does not want one to take his vows lightly because if one violates at a lesser level, he will come to violate at a more serious level in an area where there is no forgiveness.

Rambam: One should not become angry because it is one of the most negative characteristics of man.

Gemara: One who becomes angry is considered to be the equivalent of an idolater. Although anger is so negative, there are times of “great importance” that one

may become angry. However, one should take heed and be careful not to become angry too often because he will then become angry for things of lesser importance.

Man is a creature of habit. By repeating something many times, one will create a mode of behavior that he will do automatically, thereby establishing it as a standard of behavior. Therefore, if one becomes angry often, even from things of “great importance,” he will become inclined to become angry in circumstances in which he should not.

Similarly, regarding the desecration of one’s speech. G-d does not want one to desecrate his power of speech even in the most minute areas because he will ultimately come to violate his oath, which has tragic consequences and is unforgivable.

If one has control over his mouth, he will be able to utilize his power of speech for the holy tasks for which it was created. However, if one is not careful with his speech, it will lead to catastrophe.

Environment and Role Models, the Determining Factors

“The children of *Reuvain* and the children of *Gad* had abundant livestock – very great.” Because the tribes of *Reuvain* and *Gad* had a great amount of livestock they requested to remain on the transJordan side (portion of *Og* and *Sichon* that was conquered). It was because of their need for the vast grazing lands that were located there.

Midrash: We see that the tribe of *Reuvain* and *Gad* had abundant livestock. They greatly valued their wealth. It is because of their attachment to their wealth that they were willing to settle outside of the Land of Israel and separate themselves from their Jewish brethren.

Because they chose to live outside of the Land and were willing to remove themselves from the Jewish people, they were the first of the tribes to be exiled before the destruction of the First Temple. “They separated themselves from their brothers for the sake of their livestock.”

Although the children of *Reuvain* and *Gad* were well intended and G-d allowed them to settle where they had requested, they were the first tribes to be exiled. It was because they were willing to forgo the spiritual

and holy environment of being together with their brethren in Israel proper. They valued their material assets more than the spirituality of their families.

The effect of the failing of the tribes of *Reuvain* and *Gad* did not immediately manifest itself. It was something that became evident over time.

Reuvain and *Gad* were only allowed by G-d to receive the trans-Jordan side as their portion if they agreed to assist the Jewish people in conquering the Land of *Canaan*. If they would not agree to do so, they would cross the Jordan with their brothers and their portion would be among the other tribes in Israel.

They agreed to participate in the conquest of the Land, which was a seven-year period. In addition, they agreed to remain for another seven years after the conquest in order to divide the Land. They were separated from their families for fourteen years. The women and children were left behind by their husbands and fathers who entered into the Land to participate its conquest.

Although the families of the tribes of *Reuvain* and *Gad* were left in a secure environment, they did not have any fathers as role models to mentor the children as Jews.

Gemara: Because there were many orphans among the Jewish people (during the Second Temple Period) and they had no fathers to teach them *Torah*, a special individual who was the High Priest, established a Jewish educational system to be implemented in every community throughout Israel.

Gemara: “*Yehoshuah Ben Gamla* should be remembered for good because if it were not for him, *Torah* would have been forgotten from the Jewish people.”

Although the Jewish children who were orphans could have been provided with some level of Jewish education by others, if a formal education system was not created, it would not have been sufficient for the generation to esteem and revere the *Torah* as it should have in order to ensure its eternity.

The children of the tribes of *Reuvain* and *Gad* were raised for fourteen years without fathers. They did not have the necessary role models to educate them and give them an appreciation for the traditions that were transmitted since *Sinai*.

Sforno: The tribe of *Levy* is the most spiritual tribe amongst the Jewish people. The tribe of *Levy* was only able to maintain its spiritual persona because *Levy*, the son of *Yaakov*, was the last of the sons of *Yaakov* to pass away. He was able to influence and affect his family's spirituality in a profound manner, ensuring the internalization of the *Torah* in their lives.

Since *Levy* was the role model to guide his family, they were the most spiritual of all the tribes. Because of the level of spirituality that they had been imbued with from their forefather, the tribe of *Levy* did not agree to be conscripted into the bondage in Egypt. They chose to be fully committed to *Torah* study and not to be drawn into the allure of Egyptian society.

Because the others did not have the spiritual sensitivity of *Levy*, they succumbed and subsequently became slaves and ultimately became idolaters. Because of the far-reaching effect of *Levy*, the tribe of *Levy* did not participate to any degree in the sin of the golden calf.

The men of the tribes of *Reuvain* and *Gad*, because they valued their possessions more than anything else, were willing to forgo what was necessary for the spirituality of their families. Although their families were provided for in the material sense, they were denied the influence of their fathers and were denied the attachment to the remainder of the Jewish people. They were denied a strong connection to *Torah* and *mitzvos*.



Yad Avraham Institute