

***Yad Avraham Institute***  
**Weekly Torah Commentaries Series**  
**Portion of Devarim**

**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita***

<b><i>Inside This Week's Edition</i></b>	<b><u>Page</u></b>
<b><i>1. Torah, Dispelling Impurity</i></b>	<b>2</b>
<b><i>2. Internalizing the Impediments to Spirituality</i></b>	<b>3</b>
<b><i>3. The Prerequisite for Spiritual Ascent</i></b>	<b>4</b>
<b><i>4. The Jewish People, G'd's Chosen</i></b>	<b>5</b>
<b><i>5. The City of Refuge an Expression of G'd's Mercy</i></b>	<b>5</b>

**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](mailto:info@yadavraham.org)

**TUNE IN TO OUR LIVE VIDEO BROADCAST OF CLASSES**

**And over**

**60,000 audio classes at**

**[www.yadavraham.org](http://www.yadavraham.org)**

## Devarim

*Presented by*

**Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

**Dean**

### **1. Torah, Dispelling Impurity**

The Torah states, "**Moshe spoke to the Children of Israel...after he had smitten Sichon, king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Cheshbon, and Og, king of Bashan, who dwelt in Ashtaroth...**" The Torah tells us that before Moshe passed away he admonished the Jewish people for their failings over the forty-year period in the desert. It was only after the giants Og and Sichon were destroyed and their countries conquered did he rebuke the Jewish people in the plains of Moav.

The Midrash states, "G'd said, 'I have destroyed before you Sichon, king of the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan. Their height is that of the largest cedars. In what merit were you able to defeat these giants? It was in the merit of Torah.' Our Rabbis of Blessed Memory explain that Sichon was the equivalent of a tower. He was more powerful than any creature in existence. There was no human being that could defeat him. How then was Moshe able to defeat him? The Prophet Amos states, 'I (G'd) will destroy his fruits from above and his roots from below...'" G'd had toppled the archangels who were the spiritual counterparts of Og, Sichon, and their people and gave them over to the Jewish people. It was only because G'd had removed the spiritual force that stood behind these giants was Moshe able to conquer and destroy their physical manifestation.

The Midrash continues, "Our Rabbis of Blessed Memory tell us that it was more difficult to destroy Sichon and Og than Pharaoh and his entire army. As the Jewish people had given song of praise after the destruction of Pharaoh and his army (Song of the Sea), so too should have they done after the defeat of Sichon and Og. Yet they did not. It was not until King David, who authored the songs of praise for the destruction of these giants. As King David writes, 'To him Who smote great kings, for His kindness endures forever...Sichon king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, for His kindness endures forever...'" We see from the words of Chazal that the strength of any creature or nation is determined not by its

own physical make up and prowess but rather by the dimension of its spiritual counterpart that it represents.

One would think that it would have been more difficult to destroy Pharaoh and his armies, who were perceived as the mightiest power on earth, than Og and Sichon who were only two giants. However, Chazal reveal to us that Og and Sichon were more difficult to destroy because the level of spiritual impurity that they had represented was far greater than that of Pharaoh and his armies. The Gemara in Tractate Niddah tells us that while Aba Shaul was digging graves he came across the thigh bone of Og. The Gemara tells us that Aba Shaul entered into it and walked for miles. Marsha explains in his commentary that the inordinate length of Og's thigh bone depicted in the Gemara is symbolic of the unlimited extent of impurity that the giant represented in existence.

There is a continuous struggle between the representation of good and evil. For example, Moshe was the counterforce to contend with the evil of Bilaam, who was the personification of evil. The Torah tells us that Moshe was buried opposite Baal Peor, which was the idolatry that was suggested by Bilaam to destroy the Jewish people. This deity was the cause of the death of 24,000 Jews. We see that in order to counter and nullify the impure affect of Baal Peor, the holiness of Moshe was needed. He was therefore buried opposite to its location. It was only Moshe's intense level of spirituality and purity that was able to neutralize the impurity represented by Baal Peor.

Despite the fact that the destruction of Sichon and Og was a greater miracle than the destruction of Pharaoh and his army, the Jewish people did not sing the praises of G'd after their defeat as they had done at the time of the closing of the Sea. It was only because the Jewish people were able to fully appreciate what had taken place at the Sea that they sang G'd's praises. However, regarding the destruction of Sichon and Og, it was only Moshe who appreciated and understood the dimension of miracle that was needed to topple these giants. He appreciated the spiritual dimension of the archangels that were their spiritual counterparts. King David, appreciating the

miracle that was needed to destroy Sichon and Og expressed His praises for the kindness that had taken place.

It is interesting to note that had the Jewish people not sinned with the spies, they would have immediately entered into the Land of Israel and not needed to wander for forty years along an extended path to the Promised Land. Had they entered immediately into the Land, they would not have needed to engage with Sichon and Og in battle. If this is so, how would the profound evil and impurity that Sichon and Og represented be vanquished from existence? If the Jewish people had entered immediately into the Land of Israel and not sinned with the spies, they would have been at a spiritual level that their very existence would have countered Sichon and Og, thus causing them to be destroyed. Their performance of mitzvos and Torah study would have generated an intense level of holiness and purity that would have subdued and subordinated all the evil in existence. However, because the Jewish people sinned with the spies, they were diminished spiritually and thus needed to confront and defeat the representation of Sichon and Og in a physical context.

We pray that G'd should destroy our enemies. We recite in our daily prayers the verse from Psalms, "Some with chariots, and some with horses, but we- in the Name of Hashem, our G'd we call out." While others rely on their own strengths and abilities, the Jew relies on G'd to destroy the enemy. However, the accomplishment and representation of the Jew must be sufficiently pure to merit that G'd should act on his behalf.

## 2. *Internalizing the Impediments to Spirituality*

The Torah tells us that Moshe mentioned many locations to which the Jewish people had traveled since they had left Egypt. Rashi cites Chazal, "Reb Yochanon says, 'If one were to search all of the verses of the Torah, Prophets, and Scripture one would not be able to find these locations. It is evident that these locations are only alluding to particular events of the past and not actual locations. They are alluding to the failings of the Jewish people that had transpired over the forty-year period since they had left Egypt.'" Thus, with the mention of each location Moshe is rebuking to the Jewish people in order to give them an appreciation as to where they had failed.

One of the locations mentioned by Moshe is "*Chatzeros* (literally means: courtyards)." Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains, "Chazteros is alluding to the fact that

when one studies Torah one must do so in a set manner. Torah cannot be studied on a haphazard basis and without focus." The Torah must be seen as something that is primary in one's life as the Mishna in Ethic of our Fathers states, "Let your Torah study be primary and your livelihood secondary." Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues, "The Torah states regarding Yaakov, our Patriarch, '**He was the perfect man who dwelt in the tent (of Torah).**' Meaning, one must study Torah in a location dedicated to Torah study. The name '*Chatzeros* (courtyards)' also is alluding to the fact that one must frequent the courtyards of G'd, which are the study halls of Torah. A person should not be distracted with the illusions and fantasies of existence by pursuing the material. The one who follows the desires of his heart will nullify his service of G'd. One should only partake of the material to the degree that is necessary and without excess. One of the locations mentioned by Moshe is '*Di Zahav* (literally meaning: enough gold)' One must know when to say enough to the material and partake of it only as it is needed. An additional understanding of 'enough gold' is whatever G'd provides the individual regarding the material, he should be satisfied as it states in Ethics of our Fathers, 'Who is the wealthy one? The one who is satisfied/joyful with his portion.' If one feels that his portion is sufficient, then he will not be distracted by the pursuit of the material."

It is interesting to note that the statement from Ethics of our Fathers states, "Who is the wealthy one? The one who is satisfied/joyful with his *portion*." It does not state, "The one who is satisfied with *what he has*." Meaning, the truly happy individual is the one who understands that the portion that he receives was allocated by G'd. As the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states, "One's yearly allocation is designated from Rosh Hashanah to Rosh Hashanah (by G'd)." The Gemara in Tractate Nidah tells us that before the conception of a child an angel brings the droplet of semen before G'd and He pronounces upon it - poor or rich, strong or weak, wise or foolish. He does not pronounce upon it - righteous or evil. The Gemara states, "From here we see that everything (in one's life) is predestined by heaven, except one's fear of heaven." One's choice to be righteous or evil is determined solely by one's own choice and initiative.

We see from the Gemara in Tractate Nidah that one's material predicament is predetermined by G'd Himself. Therefore, it is with that specific portion that one is intended to meet his spiritual objective in creation. If one is not satisfied with his G'd given portion, then he will pursue the material to the detriment of his spirituality. This

is because G'd intended that he should succeed only within the context of the portion that was allocated. One must therefore be content and rejoice with his particular portion because it is through that portion, that he will be able to fulfill his objective in creation.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos states, "Greater is the one who benefits (has pleasure) from the toil of his own hands than the one who fears heaven." How is it possible that one who is engaged in menial and mundane physical activity be greater than one who fears heaven? Maharal of Prague explains that the Gemara means to say that the one who can benefit from what he had received from G'd, regardless of how minimal it may be, is the one who recognizes and loves G'd for the portion that he had been given, although it may not meet his material requirements. He understands, because of G'd's love for him, He did not give him more than what was received because it would have been detrimental regarding his ability to fulfill his spiritual objective in existence. Since loving G'd is a more advanced level than the fearing/revering G'd, the one who demonstrates his love for G'd by rejoicing over the minimal portion that he had received "is even greater than the one who fears heaven."

### ***3. The Prerequisite for Spiritual Ascent***

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the locations that are mentioned at the beginning of the Portion of Devarim are not meant to identify actual locations but rather are allusions to characteristics that one must assume to have relevance to spiritual growth. He writes, "In these few verses Moshe is teaching the Jewish people what is needed to fear/revere G'd and having the proper characteristics and behavior to live a life in conformance with the Torah. In order to do so, one must address nine aspects of one's self. Firstly, one must assume the posture of Avraham, our Patriarch. The Torah refers to him as, '**Avraham Ha'Ivri.**' Chazal explain that 'Ha'Ivri' means 'from the other side.' The Torah identifies him as such because he was on one side and the rest of the world was on the other." Avraham, our Patriarch singularly opposed the world through his belief of monotheism. It was because of his conviction to monotheism that he was able to introduce G'd to the world. Prior to Avraham's introduction of G'd to humanity, G'd was only known as 'G'd of the Heavens.' However, as a result of Avraham's single-handed initiative He became known as 'G'd of the heavens and earth.' It was only because Avraham possessed the unique characteristic of being opposed to the world that he was able to succeed.

In order for one to develop and advance spiritually one must regard himself as not being part of the world at large. One must not believe that he has no relevance to the culture or values or world society. Only by not seeing oneself as having no commonality with humanity that he is able to define his position and affect others.

When Moshe fled to Midian he married and fathered two sons. Moshe chose to name his first son "Gershom" to connote, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land." Moshe named his second son "Eliezer" to connote "The G'd of my father Who came to my assistance." One would think that Moshe should have named his first-born son "Eliezer" because sequentially being able to flee and being saved from the Egyptian sword had taken place first. Why did Moshe choose to name his first-born son "Gershom" which connote that he was a stranger in a foreign land? Moshe understood that when one enters into an alien environment that have beliefs and values that are not similar to his, over time, one could be influenced subliminally and thus be spiritually eroded. Moshe chose to name his first-born "Gershom" to connote that Midian is not his place, regardless of his success. He wanted to always feel that he does not belong in Midian. He did not want to be influenced by Midian in any way.

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that regardless of how successful and renowned the holy Patriarchs referred to themselves as "strangers (*geirim*)." This is because they truly saw themselves as not having any relevance to their countrymen or the societies in which they lived. In order for a Jew to be the proper receptacle for holiness he must assume the posture of Avraham, which is to see oneself as not having relevance to the surroundings that do not represent holiness and spirituality. In order for one to be able to impact upon the world within a spiritual context, one must perceive himself as not being part of what is being changed.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues, "The third characteristic that one must possess is that of humility." In addition to Moshe, Avraham our Patriarch was one of the most humble people who ever lived. He regarded himself as, "**dust and ash.**" In order for one to be able to extricate himself from society, one must possess the characteristic of humility. It is one's need for acknowledgement that draws him to create a commonality with those who surround him- thus, being influenced by society. It is only the humble person who does not seek that acknowledgement is the one who can separate himself and appreciate the unique spiritual opportunity that is at hand.

The words in the verse “**In the desert**” is alluding to the characteristic of humility. The Gemara asks, “Why was the Torah given in the setting of the desert of Sinai? It is to teach us that one must negate as the desert is negated to the rest of the world.. The desert is a desolate location that has no value or identity of its own, so too must the individual be humble in order to be the receptacle of Torah.” Only when one assumes a humble posture will he be able to make the spiritual ascent.

Rambam writes in the Laws of Repentance that in order to repent one must first separate himself from the sin. Even before feeling remorse and regret, one must distance himself from the sin. Only then will the repentance process be affective. This concept of separation is similar to that of “Ivri.” The Gemara in Tractate Taanis explains that if one does not separate himself from the sin although he may have made a commitment to repent, it is the equivalent of immersing oneself in a mikvah while still holding on to the rodent, which is the source of spiritual contamination. Although the mikvah has the ability to purify, if one does not separate himself from the source of contamination, he cannot achieve purity. One must therefore assume the posture of Avraham by not seeing himself as part of the world order.

#### ***4. The Jewish People, G'd's Chosen***

The Torah states, “**Moshe said to the Jewish people, ‘You have much as a result of dwelling by this mountain (Mt. Sinai).’**” Rashi cites Chazal, “**‘You have much’** means Moshe said to the Jewish people, ‘You have received much greatness and prestige as a result of dwelling by this mountain (Mt. Sinai). What happened to you at the mountain? You built the Mishkan, the Menorah and all of its vessels. You received the Torah. You appointed a Sanhedrin (High Court)...’” Moshe does not enumerate the accomplishments of the Jewish people in their chronological order. One would think that Moshe would have first mentioned the receiving of the Torah, which is synonymous with the Sinai event, and then the building of the Mishkan. Factually, the essence of the Jewish people is the Torah and everything else is only an outgrowth of what was received. Why is the giving of the Torah not mentioned first?

As a result of the sin of the Golden Calf Moshe shattered the tablets that he had received from G'd. Chazal tell us that the breaking of the tablets was the equivalent of an annulment of a marriage. Although the Jewish people had received the Torah at Sinai where they were taken as G'd's Holy people, they had terminated their relationship

with G'd as a result of the idolatry in which they had engaged. They were only reinstated as His people with the giving of the second set of tablets. The Mishkan was the medium that was needed for G'd to solidify their relationship and dwell in their midst. The Sinai event was no longer relevant until their relationship with G'd was restored. Chazal explain that the Mishkan was referred to as “the Mishkan of the Testament because it was a testament to the Jewish people that they had been forgiven by G'd for the sin of the Golden Calf.” Without the Mishkan the Jewish people had no relationship with G'd, despite having the Torah. Chazal mention the building of the Mishkan before the receiving of the Torah to indicate that without that special relationship with G'd restored, the Torah was no longer relevant to the Jewish people.

When the Torah refers to the Mishkan as the “Mishkan of the Testament” Chazal tell us that it is a testament to the world that the Jewish people were forgiven for the sin of the Golden Calf. Why is it necessary or important for the nations of the world to know that the Jewish people were forgiven? The Jewish people, when they were taken as G'd's Holy People, and designated as His Kingly Priestly nation, were meant to be His representation in existence for the nations of the world to be impacted by their spirituality. If the Jew were to be seen as being forsaken by G'd and no longer having a unique value, G'd's Presence no longer has a representation in the world. In essence, the public reinstatement of the Jewish people through the Mishkan allows G'd's Name to be sanctified through His people. Every day that the Temple does not stand (it has been over 2,000 years) it is a desecration of His Name. It is perceived by the world that G'd has abandoned His Children and that they are no longer His Chosen. The observance of the Shabbos is a testament to the world that G'd is the Creator. This effect is no longer at its original level because of the diminished status of the Jewish people in the world. It was therefore crucial that the Mishkan should be built. Although it is true the through the Torah the Jewish people are linked with G'd and can glorify His Name; however, “For My Glory it has been created” is not able to be addressed properly.

#### ***5. The City of Refuge an Expression of G'd's Mercy***

The Torah tells us that if one kills inadvertently he must flee to one of the cities of refuge, where he must remain until the passing of the High Priest. If the inadvertent murderer should leave the city of refuge, the avenger of the blood (closest relative of the victim) is

permitted to kill him. Where is there a precedent for the concept of a “city of refuge” to be considered an atonement for the one who flees there?

The Midrash cite a verse from Psalms, “ ‘The ways of G’d are good and straight, He directs sinners along the way...’ To what is this referring? G’d remember Your Mercy and Kindness for You demonstrated them at the beginning of Creation. If it were not for Your Mercy that You demonstrated to Adam, the world would not have continued to exist. For You had told him **‘from the day you shall eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil you will surely die.’** Meaning, if he were to violate G’d’s dictate by eating from the Tree he would die immediately; however, we see that Adam did not die immediately. He was driven out of the Garden and lived for 930 years.” If G’d had said that Adam would die upon eating from the fruit of the Tree, why did he not die?

One could say that prior to eating from the Tree, Adam was an eternal and unlimited being that had no relevance to death. His level of clarity was such that he could see from one end of the world to the other. However, after he ate from the Tree of Knowledge and introduced evil into himself and existence, he became finite and spiritually diminished. He became subject to death. This is the meaning of, “from the day you shall eat from the Tree you will surely die.” However, we see from the Midrash that this is not the way to understand Adam’s punishment.

The Midrash continues, “Why did Adam deserve to be driven out? It is because he brought death upon the future generations. Rather than killing him instantly after the sin, G’d drove him out of the Garden. This is similar to the one who kills inadvertently and must flee to the city of refuge. Just as G’d’s Mercy and Kindness regarding Adam had altered the Attribute of Justice, so too does G’d provide an equivalent solution for the inadvertent murderer. He is able to flee to the city of refuge.”

The Midrash tells us that the severity of Adam’s sin was not only that he had transgressed the Word of G’d by eating from the Tree, but rather, the consequence of his sin was that he brought death upon the future generations. Adam was thus responsible for bringing death upon all creation. Rather than killing him immediately, Adam was displaced when he was forced to leave the Garden. This was a display of G’d’s Mercy to Adam similar to the inadvertent murderer being forced to be displaced from his own location to flee to the city of refuge. Just as Adam left the Garden which had no limitations to enter into a

limited world, so too does the inadvertent murderer enter the city of refuge which is confining and limited. The Gemara tells us that remaining in the city of refuge is an atonement for the taking of another’s life. Why did G’d spare Adam by displacing him from the Garden, rather than bringing death upon him immediately? Why did he deserve such Mercy?

The Torah tells us that on the third day of Creation that G’d declared, “**Let the earth give forth fruit trees producing fruit.**” Meaning, that not only should the fruit of the tree be edible, but even the tree itself should be edible. However, the earth produced a tree that gave forth fruit that was edible but it itself was not. The earth did not follow the dictate of G’d. This caused deficiency in the earth. G’d did not choose to destroy the earth for its failing, but rather, He left it in tact in its deficient state. Why did G’d not destroy the earth to create a more perfect existence with no deficiency?

G’d created Adam’s physicality from earth that was spiritually deficient. Consequently, Adam was created from deficient material that possessed within it a vulnerability and inclination to be defiant. Because Adam had been created with this particular handicap, G’d allowed His Mercy to be evoked, thus allowing him to be expelled from the Garden, which was an unlimited setting, to go to a setting of limitation. G’d wanted Adam to have a defense for his defiant behavior, which was that his physicality was made from spiritually defective material that caused him to be inclined to defiance.

Adam being driven out of the Garden was the equivalent of the man who kills inadvertently being driven from his location and placed into a city of refuge. As Adam brought death upon all generations and was atoned by the expulsion from his domicile, so too is the inadvertent murderer who took a life expelled to a city of refuge until the passing of the High Priest.