

TO RECONSTRUCT FOR ETERNITY  
**THE FOUNDATION**  
 MUST BE RESET

## YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Devarim/Tisha B'Av

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

### Parshas Devarim: Conscience as Barometer to the Acuity of Debt

1. *Moshe* at the end of his life rebukes the Jewish People for their failings over 40 years.
2. He refers to *Yisro* who suggested establishing a judicial system.
3. The Judges who were qualified to adjudicate were "*Chachamim*" (knowledgeable, wise).
4. *Rashi*: They must have shame, conscience.
5. Jews, descendants of *Avraham*, possess three characteristics: Compassion, Shame (conscience) and Acts of Loving Kindness.
6. Though brilliant, if one does not have conscience the intellectual is misappropriated.
7. This individual cannot be classified as wise.
8. Fear of G-d is referred to as fear of heaven.
9. *Nefesh Hachaim*: If one is aware of accountability to G-d, one behaves appropriately.
10. Psalms: The prerequisite to wisdom is fear of G-d.
11. *Avraham*, our Patriarch, came upon G-d due to his sense of conscience.
12. He needed to identify his benefactor to pay his debt of gratitude.
13. The weight of one's debt is determined by conscience.

### Parshas Devarim: How To Increment the Unquantifiable

1. *Moshe* blesses the Jewish People to increase a thousand fold.
2. *Sifri*: The Jewish People responded: "Your blessing is finite; the blessing G-d gave to *Avraham* is unlimited."
3. G-d said to *Avraham*, "Your progeny will be like the sand on the seashore that can not be counted."
4. *Moshe* responds "My blessing is in addition to the blessing given to *Avraham*."
5. *Gemara*: "Blessing" does not come upon something counted, measured or weighed.
6. Blessing only comes upon that which is concealed from the eye.
7. *Maharal of Prague*: Blessing is something that is spiritual in nature which is unlimited.
8. The physical realm is finite, limited.
9. Once quantified by number or weight it no longer has relevance to Blessing which is unlimited.
10. The Jewish people said to *Moshe*: Your quantification denies us unlimited blessing because we assume a physical persona.
11. *Moshe* responds: "My blessing is in addition to G-d's not compromising the spiritual."

### Tisha B'Av: Once Putrefied the Potency of the Antidote is Minimized

## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Devarim



### **Kindness, the Precipitator of All of G-d's Attributes**

*Ramban:* Before the *Torah* begins to discuss the mitzvos, *Moshe* rebuked the Jewish people for the sins that they had committed over the forty-year period in the desert. How many times did they defy G-d in the desert! Despite their defiance and failings, to what degree did G-d deal with His people within the context of the Attribute of Mercy (*rachamim*)! This is to make known G-d's Kindness (*chesed*) to the Jewish people."

Although the Jewish people had spiritually failed many times in the desert and were deserving of punishment and destruction, G-d treated them with Mercy. By reflecting upon these instances in which they had failed, the Jewish people could appreciate His Kindness towards them.

The Attribute of Mercy and the Attribute of Kindness are two distinct Attributes of G-d. The Attribute of Kindness is indiscriminate and is employed by G-d regardless of one's worthiness. However, the Attribute of Mercy is only employed when the context of the situation is hopeful. If there is a chance that the sinner will repent and make the necessary changes if given the opportunity, despite the fact that presently he is undeserving, G-d will allow him the time to repent. However, if the individual has no hope of repenting, the Attribute of Mercy will concur with the Attribute of Justice to prosecute.

We see this regarding the destruction of *Sodom*. The *Torah* uses the appellation of *Hashem* (YKVK) which connotes the Attribute of Mercy regarding the destruction of *Sodom*, to indicate that even the Attribute of Mercy was in agreement that *Sodom* needed to be destroyed because there was no hope of repentance.

Throughout the six days of Creation, the *Torah* utilizes the appellation of “*Elokim*” to refer to G-d.

*Chazal*: The appellation of “*Elokim*” connotes the Attribute of Justice while the appellation of “*Hashem* (YKVK)” connotes the Attribute of Mercy.

*Rashi*: G-d initially intended to bring about existence through the Attribute of Justice, which is exacting. However, at the time of the creation of Man, the *Torah* associates the appellation of “*Hashem*” with “*Elokim*,” – “*Hashem Elokim*.”

*Chazal*: “The world could not exist if the Attribute of Justice is in effect (because man is prone to fail), G-d therefore coalesced the Attribute of Mercy with the Attribute of Justice.”

*Ramban*: When *Moshe* rebuked the Jewish people, its value and purpose was “...to make known G-d’s Kindness (*chesed*) to the Jewish people.” If G-d did not punish the Jewish people because of His Attribute of Mercy, what relevance does this have to His Attribute of Kindness?

King David writes in Psalms, “*Olam chesed yibaneh* – the world was created out of (His) Kindness.” G-d is perfect and complete, Who is in need of nothing. He created existence solely out of His Kindness, to give man the opportunity to perfect himself in a setting that will qualify him to be deserving of the ultimate reward, which is a relationship with G-d.

This opportunity for spiritual advancement is only due to the Attribute of Kindness. Because of G-d’s Kindness, G-d established the Attribute of Mercy, through which He will evaluate the spiritual record of the Jewish people and all mankind.

The basis for the Attribute of Mercy is G-d’s Kindness. Had G-d not created existence through His Kindness, there would not have been a context for His Attribute of Mercy. Thus, the Attribute of Mercy is only relevant if there is context of Kindness.

The fact that G-d did not destroy the Jewish people in the desert, despite their defiance, is due to His Attribute of Mercy. He only employed the Attribute of Mercy because of His Kindness.

When a Jew is merciful, it is not because he is kind, but rather because he has an innate characteristic of mercy, which expresses itself through acts of mercy.

*Gemara*: There are three distinct characteristics that are innate in every Jew: mercy, shame, and the propensity to perform acts of kindness (*rachmanim, baishanim, gomlei chassadim*). These characteristics are transmitted to the Jewish people by the holy Patriarchs because they are their spiritual heirs.

Each characteristic is distinct in its own right. Mercy is not kindness. In contrast, G-d is merciful because of His Attribute of Kindness. His Attribute of Kindness is the basis for His Attribute of Mercy, which is not so for the individual who possesses both of these characteristics. When one understands and appreciates that G-d’s Attribute of Mercy is only an outgrowth of His Attribute of Kindness, one will be grateful and beholding for His Mercy, understanding its cause.

## **The Timing of the Rebuke of the Jewish People**

“*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*.”

Before *Moshe* passed away, he rebuked the Jewish people for their failings over the forty-year period in the desert. It was only after *Og* and *Sichon* were smitten and their communities conquered, did he rebuke the Jewish people.

*Rashi*: *Moshe* said, “If I should rebuke them even to the slightest degree before they enter into the Land, the Jewish people will say, ‘What does *Moshe* expect of us? What good did he do for us? He is only coming to criticize and find fault with us (that we are unworthy to enter into the Land). It is because he truly does not have the ability to bring us into the Land.’” Therefore, *Moshe* waited until the destruction of *Og* and *Sichon* and the conquest of their communities before he rebuked them. This was to demonstrate to them that he did have the ability to bring them into the Land of Israel, and his rebuke was for their own good and to allow them to understand that they are truly worthy.

*Midrash*: 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*.’

*Chazal:* *Sichon* was the equivalent of a great tower and a high wall. He was the most powerful creature in existence. There was no human being that could defeat him. How then was *Moshe* able to defeat him?

“I (G-d) will destroy his fruits from above and his roots from below.” (*Amos*) G-d toppled the archangels who were the spiritual counterparts of *Og*, *Sichon*, and their people and gave them over to the Jewish people. “I will destroy his fruits from above” refers to the subordination of the archangels of *Og* and *Sichon* and then the Jewish people would be able to conquer them from below as it states, “and his roots from below.”

*Midrash:* It was more difficult to destroy *Sichon* and *Og* than Pharaoh and his armies. Just as the Jewish people sang songs of praise after the destruction of Pharaoh and his army, so too they should have done so after the defeat of *Sichon* and *Og*. Yet, they did not. It was not until King David authored the songs of praise for the destruction of these giants as it says in Psalms, “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.”

Although G-d brought the ten plagues upon Egypt and destroyed Pharaoh and his armies on behalf of the Jewish people with the closing of the Sea, they understood that *Og* and *Sichon* were an invincible enemy. In order to defeat them they would need a special degree of merit. If *Moshe* were to rebuke the Jewish people before defeating *Og* and *Sichon*, they would have thought that perhaps he did not have sufficient merit to defeat these formidable foes who stood in the way of the Jewish people entering into the Land.

The *Torah* states regarding the spies who returned with slanderous reports about the Land, “(the spies) said, ‘We cannot ascend to that people for it is too strong for us!’”

*Rashi:* The spies did not mean to say that the nations of *Canaan* were more powerful than themselves, but rather they were more powerful than G-d Himself. It is the equivalent of a master who is unable to remove his vessels from their location (G-d is not able to vanquish the seven nations of *Canaan*).

The Jewish people understood that although they were victorious over Pharaoh, in order to defeat the seven nations of *Canaan*, they needed special merit. *Og* and *Sichon* were more powerful than the seven nations of *Canaan* and therefore they needed even greater merit to defeat them.

The spies did not witness the destruction of *Og* and *Sichon*. They had perished thirty-eight years before the destruction of these communities.

If *Sichon* and *Og*, the two most powerful nations in the world, were conquered and destroyed, the Land of *Canaan* would definitely be conquered. The power of the nations does not lie in their numbers or physical might, but rather it is determined by their spiritual representation. When G-d deems that their archangel should be incapacitated and destroyed, the nations will fall.

## Turning the Infinite into the Finite

“May *Hashem*, the G-d of your forefathers, add to you a thousand times yourselves, and bless you as He has spoken to you.”

*Midrash:* If *Moshe* said to the Jewish people that they will be blessed by increasing in number a thousand fold, why does he conclude by saying “bless you as He (G-d) has spoken to you”?

After receiving *Moshe*’s blessing, the Jewish people said to him, “G-d blessed our forefather *Avraham* that we should be an entity that cannot be counted (as the sands on the seashore and the stars in the heavens); however, your blessing is within the context of limitation. *Moshe* responded, ‘My blessing is in addition to the one you have already received from G-d. He blessed you to be an unquantifiable entity and I am adding to His blessing that you should be a thousand fold of that.’

*Gemara:* Anything that is counted, measured, or weighed is not subject to blessing. It is only something that is concealed from the eye that has relevance to blessing.

If a farmer brings in his harvest and has not yet quantified it, if he prays that blessing should come upon it, it is considered a valid prayer. However, if he first quantifies his harvest by evaluating it and then supplicates G-d for blessing, it is a prayer in vain.

*Maharal of Prague zt"l*: The concept of a blessing is something of spiritual nature, which is something that is unlimited and infinite. Anything that exists within the physical realm is finite. Therefore, blessing, being of a spiritual nature, cannot come upon something that has been quantified because it has assumed a physical profile. If one were to say to his fellow, "You should be blessed," the extent of that blessing is unlimited.

When *Moshe* blessed the Jewish people by saying "add to you a thousand times (of your present being)," they understood it to be a limitation upon them. They understood that they were a spiritual people, who are beyond quantification and number. By associating with them the blessing "a thousand times," it was contrary to their spiritual essence, which is unlimited.

The Jewish people, being His people, have a commonality with G-d in that they are unlimited as He is unlimited. If the Jewish people were to be limited in any way, they cannot cleave to G-d and truly be His people. Therefore, *Moshe* clarified himself by saying, "and bless you as He has spoken." This means that they should be a thousand fold of the unquantifiable.

*"V'haya eikev tishmeun eis ha'mishpatim...* This shall be the reward when you hearken to these ordinances, and you observe and perform them; *Hashem*, your G-d, will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers...And you will merit all the bounty and reward."

*Rashi*: The *Torah* uses the term "*eikev*" here, which in this context means "when," rather than the word "im", which means "if." The word "*eikev*" literally means "heel of one's foot" and it alludes to the *mitzvos* that are not valued sufficiently and are thus trampled under one's heel. If one keeps these *mitzvos*, that are perceived as being not important and vital, one will merit unlimited blessing and reward.

Why is the one who values the *mitzvos* that are trampled upon and glossed over worthy of exceptional blessing and reward?

If one evaluates *mitzvos* to determine which is more important or less important, then the seemingly less important *mitzvah* will not be addressed and it will be trampled upon. When one evaluates *mitzvos* as being either "less stringent" or "more stringent," one is quantifying them. Then, even the *mitzvos* that he

meticulously observes assume a finite profile, which causes it to forfeit its innate spiritual quality.

However, if one regards every *mitzvah* as being equally important because it is the Will of G-d and does not distinguish between the "more stringent" and the "less stringent" *mitzvos* based on his quantification of their value, then the *mitzvos* retain their spiritual character and have relevance to the infinite.

*Pirkei Avos*: "One should be careful in the performance of even a (seemingly) ordinary *mitzvah* as with a major *mitzvah* because one does not know the extent of the reward of a *mitzvah*."

If one treats the seemingly less stringent *mitzvah* as the more stringent one, his *mitzvah* performance will be classified as spiritual and not physical because it is beyond quantification.

## **A Model of Misplaced Values**

The tribe of *Gad* and *Reuvain* had enormous wealth due to their large flocks and herds. They therefore requested of *Moshe* to remain on the trans-Jordan side, which had vast expanses of grazing lands. Due to their desire to provide for their flocks and herds, they chose to be separated from their brethren, the Jewish people, who crossed the Jordan to settle in the Land of Israel. Because of their wealth they chose to separate from their brothers. Consequently, they were the first tribes to be exiled.

*Midrash*: "It is not found in the East and it is not found in the West." (Psalms) What is the meaning of this?

One should not mistakenly believe that one becomes wealthy by traveling the globe. Even if one were to travel the high seas by boat or traverse the desert from the East to West from the desert to the mountains (*harim*), he will not come upon wealth.

What is the meaning of 'mountains (*harim*)?'

Whenever the *Torah* mentions the word '*harim*,' it refers to mountains except in this particular context (regarding one becoming wealthy). In this instance, the word '*harim*' means to become exalted. One ascends to become wealthy and is exalted not due to his own initiative or toil. If this is so, then how does one become wealthy?

G-d takes the wealth from one individual and bestows it upon another. "G-d judges – He lowers one and He elevates the other." (Psalms) Although it is within G-d's ability to provide each individual with the amount of wealth with which he should be endowed without taking it from another, G-d chooses to keep the wealth in existence finite. He transfers the wealth from one individual to another.

*Midrash:* This is the reason possessions are referred to in Hebrew as '*nichasim*.' They are concealed from some (*nichsim*) and appear to others.

Why are coins called '*zuzim*'? It is because they move (*zaz*) from one person to another. G-d brings His wrath upon one and elevates the other (by bestowing upon him wealth.)

A matronly gentile woman asked *Reb Shmuel ben Chalafta*, 'How long did it take G-d to create the world?' He responded, 'It took Him six days.' She asked him, 'Since the completion of Creation, how does He occupy His time?' He answered, 'He makes ladders.' There is a continuous ascent and descent of people. This is the meaning of the verse in Psalms 'G-d Judges – one He lowers and the other He elevates.'

What is the proof of this? When G-d wanted the Tribe of *Gad* and the Tribe of *Reuvain* to become wealthy, He toppled the Midianites on behalf of the Jewish people so that the Tribe of *Gad* and the Tribe of *Reuvain* should acquire their wealth.

The Jewish people needed to topple the Midianites to avenge the tragedy that they brought upon the Jewish people through *Baal Peor*. However, there was another objective in destroying the Midianites – to provide the transfer of the wealth of the Midianites to the tribes of *Gad* and *Reuvain*. G-d lowered the Midianites in order to elevate the tribes of *Gad* and *Reuvain*.

Although the wealth that the tribe of *Gad* and *Reuvain* had come upon seems to have been a blessing of G-d, we see that it ultimately lead to a negative outcome. It was due to this wealth that these tribes separated themselves from their Jewish brothers, which caused them to be the first tribes to be exiled.

We see that because of the wealth they received they had misplaced values. When they had requested to remain on the trans-Jordan side, they said to *Moshe*, "We will first build enclosures for our flocks and then

build houses for our families." In response, *Moshe* said that they should first provide for their families and then secure their flocks.

G-d toppled *Midian* in order for the tribes of *Gad* and *Reuvain* to be faced with the challenge of wealth. They needed to choose, to either to go into the Land of Israel with their brethren, or remain on the trans-Jordan side and not have the spiritual support of the Jewish people.

They chose to forfeit the spiritual, for the sake of the material. They failed in their challenge because they made what is primary secondary and what is secondary primary.

*Pirkei Avos:* "Shammai says, 'Make your *Torah* primary and your work secondary.'" One must understand that the material is only meant to facilitate the spiritual. One must prioritize the spiritual.

The tribes of *Gad* and *Reuvain* chose to prioritize the material at the expense of the spiritual. Similarly, G-d presents every individual with his own tailor-made challenges. It is therefore the choice of the individual to address his own personal challenge whether to succumb to the physical or use it to facilitate and advance the spiritual.

## Assuring Victory

The tribes of *Gad* and *Reuvain* requested that they be allowed to remain on the trans-Jordan side and not receive a portion in the Land of Israel because they needed vast grazing lands for their herds and flocks. In order to receive their portion on the trans-Jordan side, they needed to agree to assist their brothers in the conquest of the Land.

"*Moshe* said to them (the tribes of *Gad* and *Reuvain*), 'If you do this thing, if you arm yourselves before *Hashem* for the battle, and every armed man among you shall cross the Jordan before *Hashem*, until He drives out His enemies before Him."

*Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh:* *Moshe* could have merely stated 'If you do this thing' (*Gad* and *Reuvain* agreed to assist in the conquest). Why did *Moshe* need to repeat himself by saying, 'If you arm yourselves before *Hashem*....'?

The children of *Gad* and *Reuvain* were agreeable to enter into the Land to assist in the conquest because it was a precondition to allow them to settle the trans-Jordan side. However, this is not the correct intent in order to succeed in battle.

In order to succeed in battle, one should not enter into it for self-interest, but rather, it should be to avenge the vengeance of G-d. It would then be considered a mitzvah that he is engaged in battle, and it would be called "a battle for the sake of G-d."

*Rambam*: If one engages in battle with all of his heart and his intent is only to sanctify G-d's Name, it is guaranteed that no harm will come to him, and he will merit a share in the world to come. One's intent should be purely to sanctify G-d's Name.

*Moshe* was concerned that if the reason the tribes of *Gad* and *Reuvain* would enter into battle was due to their self-interest, they would not succeed and they would cause harm to others. Therefore, *Moshe*, with his wisdom, instructed them that they should enter into the battle for the sake of G-d. They should 'arm themselves before Hashem for battle... until He drives out His enemies before Him' (For the sake of sanctifying G-d's Name).

When the Jewish people battle against their enemies, their victory is dependent on Divine Assistance. Therefore, the intent of the Jewish people in battle must be for the sake of sanctifying G-d's Name and not for self-interest.



**Yad Avraham Institute**