

TO RECONSTRUCT FOR ETERNITY
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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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Conscience as Barometer to the Acuity of Debt

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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.

How To Increment the Unquantifiable

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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."

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Devarim



Torah, Dispelling Impurity

Torah: “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 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*.

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*.’ 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.

Midrash: “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.

Gemara in Tractate *Niddah*: While *Aba Shaul* was digging graves he came across the thigh bone of Og. *Aba Shaul* entered into it and walked for miles.

Maharsha in his commentary: 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.

Torah: *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.

Internalizing the Impediments to Spirituality

Torah: *Moshe* mentioned many locations to which the Jewish people had traveled since they had left Egypt.

Rashi citing *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.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: One of the locations mentioned by *Moshe* is 'Chatzeros (literally means: courtyards)'. "Chatzeros 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: “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.

Gemara in Tractate *Shabbos*: “One’s yearly allocation is designated from *Rosh Hashanah* to *Rosh Hashanah* (by G-d).”

Gemara in Tractate *Niddah*: 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. “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 *Niddah* 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 not 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.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: “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: 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.”

The Prerequisite for Spiritual Ascent

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: 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: ‘*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: 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: “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.

Gemara: “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 in the Laws of Repentance: 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*.”

Gemara in Tractate Taanis: 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.

The Jewish People, G-d’s Chosen

Torah: “*Moshe* said to the Jewish people, ‘You have much as a result of dwelling by this mountain (Mt. *Sinai*).’”

Rashi citing *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?

Chazal: As a result of the sin of the Golden Calf, *Moshe* shattered the tablets that he had received from G-d. 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: 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.

Chazal: When the *Torah* refers to the *Mishkan* as the ‘*Mishkan* of the Testament’, 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.

The City of Refuge an Expression of G-d’s Mercy

Torah: 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?

Midrash citing 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.

Midrash: "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. "

Midrash: 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.

Gemara: 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?

Torah: 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 intact 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.

