

TO RECONSTRUCT FOR ETERNITY  
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## YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Devarim

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

**Devarim**

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**Hashem's Rachamim is Always There**

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**Mussar Before Moshe's Death: Communicating the Words of Hashem**

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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

A photograph of the Western Wall in Jerusalem, showing its massive stone blocks and people walking along its base. A semi-transparent white box with text is overlaid on the wall.

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### Relating to Our Loss

The three-week period, which begins on the seventeenth of *Tammuz* and concludes on the ninth of *Av* is identified as a time of mourning. One is rabbinically obligated to fast at the beginning of this period on the seventeenth of *Tammuz* because it was the day that the walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Roman legions, with the intention of destroying the Holy Temple and Jerusalem, which took place on the ninth of *Av*. The Romans set fire to the Second Temple before sundown on the ninth of *Av* and it continued to burn through the tenth of *Av*.

Every year for more than two thousand years the Jewish people have mourned the destruction of the Temple. As one approaches the week of the ninth of *Av*, the laws pertaining to mourning intensify in order to be able to sense the dimension of tragedy that we are commemorating. It is not a simple task to properly mourn the destruction of the Temple on the ninth of *Av*.

Although one observes the five areas of deprivation on the day the Temple was destroyed; such as not eating or drinking, refraining from washing oneself, refraining from cohabitation, not anointing oneself, and not wearing leather shoes, in order for one to truly appreciate what is being mourned, one must reflect and focus. In fact, we are mourning the loss of our special relationship with G-d, Who had dwelt in our midst. As a result of our sins, the Temple was destroyed and the Jewish people were exiled. To be able to appreciate that loss, one needs to be on a special spiritual level.

On *Yom Kippur*, one must also observe the five areas of deprivation (although they are not for the sake of mourning). However, one can have a sense of the importance of *Yom Kippur*, without being at such an advanced spiritual level because one can easily understand the gravity of one's situation when his life stands in the balance on *Yom Kippur*. One beseeches G-d to be inscribed and sealed in the book of life to be allowed to live and succeed in his life.

At one time, when the predicament of the Jewish community throughout the world was fraught with anti-Semitism and discrimination, the Jew being under constant threat of pogroms, it was easier for a Jew to yearn for the redemption and the rebuilding of the Temple on a daily basis. However, in a society in which the Jew lives in safety and comfort, it is not a simple task to appreciate what one is missing, regarding the restoration of the Temple. One must reflect upon the value of the Jewish people needing a Temple. What is its profound significance?

One must focus and try to understand the meaning of being deprived of a special relationship with G-d that had at one time existed at the time of the Temple. Unfortunately, it is only the one who lives a life that is dedicated to G-d who can have any sense of loss and pain for not having the Temple. However, in contrast, if one lives a self-absorbed life that is focused on material gain, he will have difficulty sensing this loss.

The one who mourns the destruction of the Temple is in essence mourning the level of desecration of G-d's Name that exists in the world. It is a desecration of G-d's name when G-d's chosen and princely people live in exile among the nations of the world, being displaced without the holy Temple. It is a profound desecration that the nation that is most beloved to G-d is assimilating because they have rejected His *Torah*. If one takes pause to reflect upon these tragic facts, one can be moved to sense the value of the loss.

Although it is true that the destruction of the Temple was the greatest tragedy that ever befell the Jewish people, it was also a day that G-d demonstrated His infinite Mercy upon them. Rather than destroying the Jewish people because of their spiritual failings, G-d brought His Wrath upon the "wood and stones" of the Temple. Thus, destroying it rather than His beloved people. Although when G-d will bring the Redeemer, the Moshiach, the Jewish people will celebrate the rebuilding of the Temple, their primary celebration will be the reinstatement of the special relationship with G-d.

## **The Innate Spiritual Value of the Jewish People**

*Torah*: "Moshe said to the Jewish people...I cannot carry you alone."

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: "Is it possible that Moshe did not have the capacity to judge the Jewish people himself? Moshe was the one who had taken them out of Egypt, split the Sea, brought the Manna and the *slav* (quail), is he not capable of judging the people? Moshe had said to the Jewish people, 'G-d has made you numerous. He has elevated you above your judges. He has taken the punishment that you are deserving of and has placed it upon the judges.'

"As King Solomon states, 'Who has the capacity to judge this difficult people?' King Solomon was the wisest man who every lived. Is it possible that he did not have the capacity to render judgment? Rather, our judges are different from their judges (nations of the world). If a non-Jewish judge renders a judgment that causes innocent people to die, steals, and corrupts justice; despite this, G-d does not punish him in any way. However, if a Jewish judge were not to render a proper judgment, his life will be taken. As it states, 'G-d will take their life...'"

Therefore, *Moshe* felt that he did not have the capacity to judge the entire Jewish people alone because the ramifications of his decisions were too great for any one person to assume, even for one of the dimension of *Moshe*. We find that the basis for the difference in the standard to which a Jewish judge is held, as compared to a gentile judge, is rooted in the spiritual dimension of the Jew. When a non-Jew sins, his failing only touches upon himself and does not have a global effect. In contrast, when the Jew fails, the repercussions of his sin touches upon every aspect of existence. Therefore, the Jewish judge who renders an improper judgment has greater accountability because of the ramification of his ruling.

*Torah*: There are particular laws regarding the contamination to the dead that pertain to the High Priest (*Kohen Gadol*) that do not pertain to an ordinary Priest (*Kohen*). A *Kohen* is not permitted to contaminate himself to the dead; however, an ordinary *Kohen* is permitted to contaminate himself to his seven closest relatives (wife, children, parents, etc.). However, the High Priest, is not permitted to contaminate himself even to his closest relatives. This is because his function and value as it relates to the entire Jewish people and the world is of such importance that he is not permitted to compromise his spiritual viability for any reason. For example, if the court finds an individual

guilty of an inadvertent murder, he must flee to a city of refuge and remain there until the passing of the High Priest.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Makkos*: “Why is the freedom of the inadvertent murderer contingent upon the passing of the High Priest? Why should he have any degree of culpability? It is because it is the responsibility of the High Priest to supplicate G-d on behalf of the Jewish people so that they should be protected from such tragedy. Since an innocent Jew was killed, although it was inadvertent, during his reign as High Priest, it is an indication that he has failed in his capacity.”

Because the High Priest is the intermediary between the Jewish people and G-d, he is not permitted to compromise his function through contaminating himself, even to his closest relatives. If he were to be disqualified through contamination, the entire world would be in jeopardy. The gravity of the responsibility of a Jewish judge is commensurate with the innate dimension of the Jew.

*Mishna* in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: “One who maintains (rescues) the life of one Jew it is as if he maintained the entire world.” We see that the value of a single Jew is the equivalent of all existence. The *Mishna* does not state that if one saves humanity, he is saving the world, rather it is the life of only a single Jew that has the same value as the entire world. The function of the world rests upon the choices that are made by the Jew. Because of the innate spiritual value of the Jew, the effect of his failing diminishes all existence. For the same reason, when the Jew succeeds by addressing his spiritual responsibility, he elevates all creation. By taking the responsibility away from the defendant and placing it upon the judges, G-d has actually put a burden upon the Jewish judge that cannot be fathomed.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: When a judge renders a “truthful” judgment he is considered a “partner with G-d in the act of Creation.” However, if the judge renders a corrupt judgment, although the monetary issue may be negligible, he deserves to be put to death for the wrong that he perpetrated. Why is the punishment for a corrupt judge more severe than the thief who steals? The reason for this is that the ordained judge is referred to as “*elokim*.”

G-d allows the judge, because of the dimension and capacity of his position, to be identified with His holy appellation of “*Elokim* (G-d)”. Therefore, when he fails

in this exalted capacity, his liability is more severe. As a judge he has the ability to be G-d’s partner in Creation, but he chose to act inappropriately for his own reason. It was because of his understanding of this degree of culpability that *Moshe* felt that he could not carry the Jewish people alone.

The Jew is obligated to recite the *Shema* in the morning and in the evening, which is the declaration of His Unity and the acceptance of the yoke of heaven.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Sotah* citing a verse from Prophets: Goliath, the Philistine would come out every morning and evening and blaspheme G-d. “Why did he choose these particular times?” It was because the morning and evening period is the time during which the Jewish people fulfill the positive commandment of accepting the yoke of heaven through the recitation of the *Shema*.

Goliath understood the value of the recitation of the *Shema* by the Jewish people. If it is recited with the proper intent it would afford them Divine Protection and they would become invincible. Goliath wanted to disrupt the ability of the Jew to recite the *Shema* during these times. Although Goliath was a giant who possessed superhuman strength he understood that he could not approach or harm the Jew because of his merit. From this we see once again, the profound value and effect of the action of the Jew. Although the *Shema* is a positive commandment that can be fulfilled in a few moments, its effect is infinite. If the Jew understands and appreciates his own spiritual capacity and value, he would be motivated to address his service of G-d in the most perfect and sincere manner.

## **To Acquire the Unlimited within a Limited Capacity**

*Torah*: Before *Moshe* passed away he rebuked the Jewish people for many of their failings that had taken place over the past forty years. He recounted, that at the time that *Yisro* had suggested that *Moshe* establish a hierarchical system of judges on behalf of the Jewish people they responded, “The thing that you propose to do is good.” Before *Yisro* had suggested a multi-tiered judicial system, he had witnessed how *Moshe* had adjudicated all of the legal issues of the Jewish people himself. *Moshe* had engaged in this process from morning until evening. *Yisro* had said to

him, "What you are doing is not good because you will wither under the strain. In addition, it is not respectful for the Jewish people to wait their turn in order to be accommodated."

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: "The response of the Jewish people was for their own self-interest. They should have responded by saying, 'Our teacher *Moshe*, from whom is it better to learn, from the teacher or from the student? Is it not better to learn from you, who suffered and sacrificed for the sake of acquiring the *Torah*?' Since you did not respond in this manner I understand that you were acting out of self-interest..." Since *Moshe* was taught the *Torah* by G-d Himself, Who is the source and basis for all spirituality, one would think that the reason it would be better to study from the teacher was because *Moshe* had studied from G-d, rather than studying from the student who had learned from a mere mortal.

*Chazal*: The reason it was better to learn the *Torah* from *Moshe* was because he had suffered and was pained for its acquisition. Where do we see that *Moshe* had suffered for the sake of acquiring the *Torah*?

*Torah*: After *Moshe* had returned from being taught the *Torah* by G-d he had said to the Jewish people, "For forty days and forty nights bread I did not eat and water I did not drink."

*Midrash*: "Why was it necessary for *Moshe* to tell the Jewish people that he was denied food and drink? What is its relevance to them? *Moshe* was teaching the Jewish people that the manner which one must acquire *Torah* must be similar to his own. He had said, 'Just as I sacrificed my blood and fat for the sake of the acquisition of *Torah*, so too must you be willing to sacrifice your physicality and material comforts in order to acquire *Torah*.' Only then will you merit to come upon its truths." Since no one sacrificed for the sake of *Torah* as *Moshe* had, he was the most qualified to be the conduit for its teachings.

*Mishna* in *Ethics of our Fathers*: The *Torah* is acquired through forty-eight ways. There are forty eight criteria that one must meet before one can come upon *Torah*, in its most advanced form. These criteria which are mentioned are specific and unique to *Torah*. Regarding any other branch of knowledge, regardless of its profundity, one's ability to succeed is solely based on one's intellect. Because *Torah* is a spiritual entity, which is infinite and outside of the realm of physical existence, one needs special Divine Assistance to come upon it and acquire its truth.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Bava Metzia*: "One must conduct himself in a manner that is similar to those in that location (*minhag hamakom*). From where do we learn this? When *Moshe* ascended to heaven to receive the *Torah*, he did not eat or drink because he was in a location of angels who do not eat or drink. We find that when the three angels had come to *Avraham*, our Patriarch, in human form, although they were spiritual beings who had no physical needs, they did partake of the feast that was prepared on their behalf. This is because they were in a location of humanity, who have a need to eat and drink."

*Chazal* citing *Rashi*: The reason *Moshe* did not eat or drink when he ascended to heaven was not because he was in a spiritual location in which one does not eat or drink, but rather because he needed to acquire the *Torah* within a context of suffering and sacrifice. If this is so, how do we reconcile the statement of *Chazal* with the *Gemara*? Why did G-d choose to transmit the *Torah* to *Moshe* in heaven? He could have communicated it to him on the top of Mt. Sinai, as He had done so with the Ten commandments, which was communicated on the terrestrial level, rather than heaven.

G-d chose the location in which the *Torah* should be taught to *Moshe* to be one in which the angels do not eat or drink so that the process of transmission should take place within a context of sacrifice and suffering. Whenever one chooses to take a course of action, which is prescribed by the *Torah*, that is contrary to one's natural inclination, which is in a context of difficulty, it is considered to be an action of sacrifice and suffering. Therefore, one will be accorded special Divine assistance in order to come upon the truths of *Torah*. Although *Moshe* had the greatest teach, G-d Himself, nevertheless had he not sacrificed and suffered for its acquisition, he would not have had the capacity to receive it from G-d.

## **Appreciating the Failing that Caused the Destruction of the Temple**

*Gemara* in Tractate *Taanis*: "When the month of *Av* begins one should decrease his joy." The month of *Av* is the most tragic month in the Jewish Calendar.

*Mishna*: "Five tragedies occurred on the Ninth of *Av* (*Tisha b'Av*): the sin of the Spies, the destruction of the First and Second Temples, the massacre at Batar, and the city of Jerusalem was plowed under (by the Romans)."

*Gemara* in Tractate *Nidarim*: After the First Temple was destroyed the Sages and Prophets were asked, “Why was the land destroyed?” They were not able to respond. G-d was then asked the same question. He responded, “Because they (the Jewish people) had abandoned My *Torah*.” The meaning of “abandoning the *Torah*” does not mean that they did not study the *Torah*; but rather, their study was not predicated on the blessing which precedes the study of *Torah*. One is rabbinically obligated to recite a blessing before engaging in a *mitzvah*.

*Ran* (earlier commentator) on Tractate *Nidarim* citing *Rabbeinu Yonah*: Before the destruction of the First Temple, when the Jewish people engaged in *Torah* study, they did so for the sake of intellectual pursuit as one does with other branches of knowledge. When a Jew studies *Torah* he must engage in it for the sake of adhering to its principles and laws – not for intellectual advancement. Because the *Torah* was studied on a deficient level it did not afford the generation the necessary protection to ward off the enemy. This deficient level of *Torah* engagement was considered an abandonment of G-d’s *Torah*.

*Midrash*: The *Torah* was the blueprint of Creation – as it states, “G-d gazed into the *Torah* and created the world.” The purpose, value, and function of the world is to facilitate the fulfillment of the *Torah* in its entirety. Every aspect of the *Torah* is addressed in creation.

*Maharal* of Prague in *Nesivos Olam*: The *Torah* itself represents “order.” It is the *Torah* that brings “order to existence; however, when the *Torah* is breached there is a consequent disruption in the “order” of existence.

*Mishna* in *Pirkei Avos*: The world was created through the Ten Utterances of G-d. “Why were there Ten Utterances? He could have created the world with One Utterance. There were Ten Utterances so as to punish the evil who destroy the world that was created through Ten Utterances and to give good and proper reward to the *tzaddikim* who maintain the world that was created through Ten Utterances.”

*Mahral*: The *Mishna* cannot be simply telling us that the world was created with Ten Utterances (and not One) to give greater reward to the *tzaddik* and greater punishment to the *rasha*. It is communicating to us a profound understanding of Creation. The number ten, although it is composed of ten parts, it is an entity unto itself. The number ten is a complete unit. If one

part of the whole was to be removed from the ten it would cease to be the entity that it had been. It would be a totally different entity that has no relevance to the original entity.

The essence of the world is one entity reflecting the unity of G-d. Ten, being a unified entity is the basic number that best encapsulates the essence of creation as being unified and whole. The order of existence only comes about through *Torah* – which is reflected by the Ten Utterances. G-d created existence through the Ten Utterances to indicate that its essence is one and its purpose is only to fulfill the *Torah*. It cannot exist as a fractionalized entity. The *Mishna* is explaining why the *tzaddik* is so deserving of reward and the *rasha* so deserving of punishment.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: The Temple is referred to as the “*even hashseeya* – the rock of sustenance.” All blessing emanated from the Temple. It was destroyed because the Jewish people did not engage in *Torah* properly (as it is stated in the *Gemara* in Tractate *Niddarim*). The appellation of “*Torah*,” which means “to guide” indicates that it is intended to shape, guide, and govern one’s life. The value of the *Torah* is its intellectualism. When it was not studied as “*Torah*” but rather as a branch of wisdom, it was considered an abandonment of *Torah* – thus disrupting the order of existence. This caused a breach in the Ten Utterances which resulted in tragedy.

## **Appreciation a Motivating Factor (From Masei)**

*Masei*: The *Torah* identifies the 42 locations in which Jewish people had camped during their 40-year trek in the desert. What is the value of identifying these locations?

*Midrash*: “G-d said to the Jewish people, ‘My children, be careful regarding the observance of My *mitzvos* and keep the *Torah*. You should understand how many miracles and wonders I have performed for you from the time that I had taken you out from Egypt. I have toppled your enemies. I took you across the Sea and brought fear and dread upon your enemies... I have destroyed the Amorites and the giants.

“During the 40-year period that you were in the desert, I did not for a moment leave you unattended. Many enemies came upon you and you did not need to flee from them. How many snakes and scorpions did I kill

in your presence in the desert? I did not allow them to harm your. It is because of all these miracles that had taken place that I want you (*Moshe*) to record all of their travels in the desert so that they should know the many miracles that I performed on their behalf within every travel. How will the Jewish people come to know about the miracles? – when they will read about their travels.” If *Moshe* had not recorded all the locations in which the Jewish people had camped, they would have never been able to fully appreciate the miracles that had been performed by G-d on their behalf.

*Chazal*: “The beneficiary of a miracle is not able to recognize and appreciate it, when he is experiencing the miracle.” During their forty-year journey in the desert, the Jewish people lived a supernatural existence. G-d provided them with all of their needs on a miraculous level; however, they could not fully appreciate this fact until the miracles ceased. When *Miriam* passed away, the wellspring that had provided water for the Jewish people had ceased; rather than expressing their appreciation to G-d for providing for them with a wellspring in the desert, they began to complain. Had they fully recognized that they were the beneficiaries of G-d’s Kindness, they would not have behaved as they had.

The basis for the immutability of *Torah* is tradition that is passed on from generation to generation. Thus, the strength and enthusiasm of the initial generation will determine the strength of the transmission of *Torah* that will be passed on. Thus the integrity of *Torah* will be guaranteed until the end of time. G-d commanded *Moshe* to record all of the locations in which the

Jewish people had camped so that they could fully appreciate the fact that they were the beneficiaries of exceptional miracles.

By experiencing a deep sense of appreciation, their debt of gratitude would cause them to communicate what they had experienced with enthusiasm and strength. If *Moshe* were not to recount those locations of encampment, this aspect of transmission would be lost. It is important to understand and appreciate that the Jewish people only merited these miracles because they had “observed the *Torah* and kept its *mitzvos*.” Had they not been fully committed to G-d’s Will, they would not have been worthy of the miracles that had been performed on their behalf because the worthiness of the Jew is determined by his adherence to G-d’s Word.

*Torah*: There is a Positive Commandment to teach one’s children about the bondage and redemption from Egypt. As it states, “You must declare to your children... the events of the exodus.” The *Torah* reveals that the purpose of certain miracles of Egypt were to allow the Jewish people to appreciate G-d’s dominion so that they should communicate their understanding of events to their decedents. The more profoundly one experiences a miracle the greater will be its transmission.



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