



ACCEDING TO ONE'S **DEMISE** WITH ELATION

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Maatos-Maasei

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Neder Versus Shavua

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Muttar Versus Assur

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Moshe Did Not Delay the Inevitable

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Avenging the Vengeance of Hashem

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Weighted Down by the Impurity of Sin

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The Ultimate Cell of MultiCultural Organisms

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

Emphasizing the Innate Value of the Speaking Species

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

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Maatos-Maasei



Debt of Gratitude, To What Degree?

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

Midrash: “Moshe had sent a thousand men from each tribe (totaling 12,000) to go to war against the Midianites. G-d had commanded Moshe to take vengeance against the Midianites, himself, on behalf of the Jewish people; however, we find that he had sent others to wage war against them. As it states, ‘Arm men from among yourselves...’ Moshe sent others to engage in war against Midian because he was raised and established himself in Midian. He thus said, ‘It is inappropriate to do them harm because they had done good to me. I was a beneficiary of their hospitality.’

“After Moshe had fled Egypt, he sought refuge in Midian where he had married the daughter of Yisro, the Midianite. He had spent many years there before returning to Egypt. As the proverb states, ‘The well from which you had drunk water, do not throw into it a stone.’

Therefore Moshe delegated the responsibility to destroy Midian to others.” Although Moshe was commanded to destroy the Midianites, he understood, based on the principle of not being an ingrate, that G-d had intended that he should delegate it through others.

Torah: After Pharaoh decreed that all Jewish male newborns should be killed, Yocheved, the mother of Moshe, placed him in a box and set it upon the Nile. “It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man, of his brethren... So he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.”

As a result of Moshe benefiting from the Nile (he miraculously did not drown despite being placed in a box) and the sand, in which he had hidden the remains of the Egyptian so that his actions should be concealed, we find regarding the plagues of blood, frogs, and lice, that G-d commanded Moshe to tell his brother Aaron

to bring about those plagues. This was so that *Moshe* should not be an ingrate because he had benefited from them. As it states regarding the plague of blood, “*Hashem* said to *Moshe*, ‘Say to *Aaron*, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt...”

Torah: Regarding the plague of frogs, “*Hashem* said to *Moshe*, ‘Say to *Aaron*, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers...” Regarding the plague of lice, “*Hashem* said to *Moshe*, ‘Say to *Aaron*, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the land...” Since *Moshe* benefited from the Nile and the earth, it would have been inappropriate for him to strike them and disrupt their function.

When G-d told *Moshe* to take vengeance against the Midianites on behalf of the Jewish people, despite the fact that they were deserving of punishment for what they had perpetrated, *Moshe* understood from his experience regarding the plagues, that he had an obligation to demonstrate his gratitude, even to the inanimate. If it was required of him to demonstrate his gratitude to the inanimate, although his benefit was unrelated to its choice, how much more so should he refrain from destroying the Midianites himself, from whom he had so greatly benefited, from their land and community.

Torah in *Lech Lecha*: “*Hashem* said to *Avraham*, ‘Go for yourself from you land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house...” One of the tests that G-d had presented to *Avraham*, our Patriarch was to leave his land, his birthplace, and his father’s household.

Midrash: Because *Avraham* espoused monotheism he became a fugitive and needed to go into hiding for many years. He had become a pariah in his community and was despised by all. *Avraham*’s father, *Terach*, had taken him to *Nimrod* the king, in order to put him to death for destroying his idols. He was given an ultimatum by the king to either bow to the idol or be thrown into the fiery kiln. *Avraham* chose to give his life for G-d. If *Avraham* had become an individual who was despised and hated by his countrymen and family, how is G-d’s directive to leave them considered to be a test?

Avraham believed that he owed a great debt of gratitude to his father, *Terach* because he was the one who brought him into existence. Without *Terach*, there would not have been an *Avraham* to bring G-d to all mankind. Although *Avraham*’s community were pagans who despised him, he believed that he owed them a debt of gratitude because his entire development

was shaped by his interaction with them. One must be thankful for all of the experiences that G-d brings upon one, because even if the experience is negative, if one learns from his mistake (especially one never to be repeated) it is considered something of great value.

Chavos HaLevavos: If one were to understand and appreciate the extent of G-d’s Kindness in every aspect of one’s life, one would have no difficulty in addressing his obligation to serve Him. One would always be beholden to his Benefactor. Although we recite the morning prayer, “modeh ani” upon rising, “I gratefully thank You, O living and eternal King...” and recite blessings throughout the day demonstrating our acknowledgement of G-d’s providing for our needs, in order for one to be truly impacted by this reality, one must reflect upon and internalize these fact to sense a debt of gratitude to G-d.

The Power of Speech vs. The Power of the Sword

Torah regarding the war against the Midianites and the demise of *Bilaam*, “They killed the kings of *Midian*...and *Bilaam* son of *Beor* they slew with the sword.”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: “Why does the *Torah* chose to elucidate the point that *Bilaam* was killed with the sword? When *Bilaam* came against the Jewish people, he exchanged his craft with their craft. The Jew only advances through the articulation of his mouth through prayer and supplication. *Bilaam* came upon the Jewish people to curse them with his mouth. Therefore, when it was time to kill *Bilaam*, the sword was chosen to bring about his death to indicate that the Jewish people had exchanged their craft with the craft of the nations of the world, which is the sword. Where do we see that the craft of the nations of the world is the sword? As it states regarding the blessing that *Yitzchak* had given to his son *Esav*, ‘By your sword you shall live.”

The verse that is cited by the *Midrash* to establish that the sword is the craft of the nations of the world is drawn from the blessing that *Yitzchak* had given his son *Esav*. Seemingly, this blessing is particular to *Esav* and the Edomites, his descendants, and not the nations of the world at large. The conflict between *Yaakov* and *Esav*, regarding the birthright, was rooted in the issue of who would be the spiritual heir of their father *Yitzchak*. *Esav*, being evil, had no relevance to

spirituality. However, being the firstborn of his father he initially had the right to be the future patriarch. He had chosen to forfeit his birthright by selling it to his brother *Yaakov*.

In order for *Yaakov* to receive what was rightfully his, he needed to deceive his father by coming to him in the guise of his brother *Esav*. When *Yitzchak* had given his blessing to *Esav*, "By your sword you shall live" he was quantifying him as a physical being, who was no different than the nations of the world. He had no relevance or qualification to be the spiritual heir of his father.

Yitzchak's words were only a revelation of *Esav's* essence, thus confirming that he was no different from every gentile. It is only because of the *Midrash* that is cited by *Rashi* that we are able to conclude that the words of *Yitzchak* "By the sword you shall live" is not particular to *Esav*, but rather a common characteristic that he shared with the nations of the world, who are devoid of spirituality.

Torah: Regarding the creation of man, "And G-d formed the man, dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being (*nefesh chaya*)."

Targum Unkolus: The words "*nefesh chaya*" can mean "he (man) became a speaking species." It is because of his unique soul, that man has the ability to comprehend and have verbal expression. Although other creatures, such as a parrot, may be able to mimic speech, it is only man who has the Divine Soul which gives him the "power of speech".

Maharal: The word "*Adam* (man)" is derived from the word "*adamah* (earth)." Just as the earth has unlimited potential to yield its bounty if it is properly cultivated, so too does man have the innate ability to develop and advance his spirituality to an unlimited degree. However, because *Adam* had failed by eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he forfeited his classification as "*Adam*." He putrefied himself and all of existence when he introduced evil into himself by eating of the Tree. Thus, he was no longer qualified to actualize the potential of the "speaking species."

It was not until *Avraham*, our Patriarch reintroduced G-d into existence that he assumed the posture of "*Adam*." As a result of his own spiritual metamorphosis, which was due to his own choices, *Avraham* and his descendants, the Jewish people, were endowed with

the unlimited potential that was initially given to *Adam* the first human being. In contrast, the nations of the world do not have that potential because they do not descend from the holy Patriarchs. Therefore, their ability to speak is not an expression of that unique spirituality, which has the spiritual ramifications of the power of speech of the Jew.

Following G-d's Will Without Calculations

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

Rashi citing *Chazal*: Despite the fact that *Moshe* understood that his demise was contingent on the destruction of the Midianites, he did not hesitate to perform the will of G-d. Rather, "He performed the mitzvah with joy and did not delay." If *Moshe* had chosen not to act immediately upon the dictate of G-d, he would have extended his life.

Midrash: Regarding *Moshe's* decision to go to war, "We see the praiseworthiness of *Moshe* that despite the fact that he understood that he would pass away, his response was without delay." The inference of the *Midrash* is that even for someone of *Moshe's* caliber and dimension of spirituality it was considered praiseworthy for him to act with immediacy, despite its consequence.

Midrash: "It is written in the Book of *Yehoshua*, 'G-d said, 'As I was with *Moshe*, I will be with you...' Meaning, just as *Moshe* lived for 120 years so too would *Yehoshua Bin Nun*, his successor. If this is so, why were ten years removed from his life? When *Moshe* was commanded by G-d to take vengeance against the Midianites, although he understood that he would pass away after their destruction, he did not delay. He did not ponder, 'What is the value of my death? Perhaps I should extend my life by delaying the war.'

"*Yehoshua*, on the other hand, did not do follow the way of his *rebbe*. When he was commanded to conquer the thirty-one kings of Canaan, he said, 'If I defeat them I will die immediately as my *rebbe Moshe*.' What did he do? After defeating one king, he delayed and prolonged the process of conquering Canaan, because he wanted to extend his life. G-d said to him, 'Is this the way you should behave? I will thus remove ten years from your life because you did not act

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

Midrash: It is interesting to note that regarding *Moshe*, his not delaying reveals to us his "praiseworthiness." Meaning, even for someone of his dimension of person and selfless dedication to G-d, his attending to his obligation was considered praiseworthy. However, regarding *Yehoshua*, who was only the disciple of *Moshe*, his delay for the sake of prolonging his life is considered a failing and thus he became culpable. It is true that for one to establish a correct mode of behavior in this particular context, one needs to have the level of clarity of *Moshe*.

Although it was considered to be praiseworthy even for one of *Moshe*'s caliber; nevertheless, after he had set the precedent for one's behavior, one is bound to that standard. *Yehoshua* is not culpable for not coming upon this truth based on his own understanding. He needed only to learn from the precedent that was set by his *rebbe*. Why did *Yehoshua* fail?

Gemara in Tractate *Bava Basra*: The face of *Moshe* is compared to the sun and the face of *Yehoshua* is compared to the moon. Meaning that although *Yehoshua* was qualified to be *Moshe*'s successor to lead the Jewish people into the Promised Land, nevertheless, he was only a reflection of his teacher (as the moon reflects the light of the sun). Therefore, since the caliber of leadership of *Yehoshua* was not comparable to that of his teacher, *Moshe* could have justified delaying his death for the sake of the spiritual development of the Jewish people. Being under his tutelage and supervision would have advanced them to a greater degree than *Yehoshua*. If this is so, then what was the basis for *Yehoshua* to justify his delay?

Devarim: *Moshe* had said to the Jewish people that after he will pass away, they would become idolaters.

Rashi citing *Chazal*: "This is not so. It is indicated in the Book of *Yehoshua* that the Jewish people did not engage in idolatry until after the passing of *Yehoshua Bin Nun*, the student of *Moshe*. We are able to learn from this that as long as one's disciple is alive, the teacher values it as if he himself is still living." *Yehoshua* was therefore able to differentiate between his own situation and the decision that was made by his *rebbe Moshe*. *Moshe* had no reason to delay because his successor *Yehoshua* would be able to maintain the Jewish people

at a level that they would not become pagans. However, *Yehoshua* understood that if he would not delay and thus pass away, the Jewish people would fall to the level of idolatry. This was the basis for *Yehoshua* to justify his decision and not draw from the precedent set by *Moshe*, his teacher.

Although there is a difference between *Yehoshua*'s issues and *Moshe*'s, regarding the future of the Jewish people; nevertheless, *Yehoshua* should have followed the dictate of G-d without delay. He should have learned from *Moshe* that when one is commanded by G-d to perform, one does not hesitate as a result of calculations of his own.

Gemara in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: *Aaron*, the High Priest, the brother of *Moshe* had made a similar error by justifying a manner of behavior. When the Jewish people were rallying to establish a god to lead them, which ultimately was the Golden Calf, *Chur* the son of *Miriam* initially opposed them. Subsequently, he was killed for interfering. *Aaron* understood that if he attempted to stop them, he would meet a similar fate and he therefore chose another approach. He told them to gather gold to make the Calf. By doing so, he would delay the process and thus allow *Moshe* to return. He had justified his action by saying, "If I were to go against them and they were to kill me, since I am a Priest and a prophet of G-d, there is no atonement for their actions. Therefore, it is better that I should be involved in idolatry than the Jewish people to never be atoned."

Although *Aaron*'s decision seems to be cogent, he was punished. Factually, the *Torah* vehemently prohibits any degree of involvement in idolatry. Regardless of his concern for the outcome of the Jewish people's behavior, *Aaron* had no right to participate in their abominable objective, idolatry. He should have not made any calculation but rather be put to death for the sake of sanctifying G-d's Name.

G-d's Glory, the Aspiration of the Jew

Torah: "G-d spoke to *Moshe* saying, 'Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered unto your people (*Moshe* will pass away).'"

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk: "Why could *Moshe* not have passed away before the destruction of the Midianites?

If the war against *Midian* would have taken place after *Moshe* had passed away, people would have said that the reason *Moshe* did not destroy them in his lifetime was because he was flattering them. It was because he was the son-in-law of *Yisro* who was a Midianite and had spent many years in *Midian*. Therefore, the war against *Midian* needed to take place in *Moshe's* lifetime."

If the world had believed that *Moshe* did not go to war against *Midian*, despite their wickedness, because he was flattering them it would have been a desecration of G-d's Name. It would have been perceived that *Moshe* was compromising his characteristic of truth for the sake of flattery. Thus, G-d commanded *Moshe* to take vengeance against them before he passed away.

Midrash: "Why did G-d want *Moshe* to destroy the Midianites? It is because of what is stated in the verse, 'G-d does not want to deny the *tzaddik*, what he desires to see with his own eyes.' From here we learn that *Moshe* desired to see the destruction of *Midian* before he passed away. He thus requested from G-d that He should allow him to see their destruction. As it states in the verse in *Psalms*, 'The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance (of G-d), he will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.' 'The righteous will rejoice...' is referring to *Moshe*. He rejoiced in the destruction of the Midianites. '...wash his feet in the blood of the wicked' is referring to *Bilaam*, the evil one."

Why did *Moshe* desire to see the destruction of the Midianites with his own eyes? When one witnesses a sanctification of G-d's Name one should be elated with joy. If one is not, it is an indication that bringing glory to G-d is not a focal point in his life. *Moshe* lived every moment of his life for the sake of G-d's Glory. He was the ultimate faithful servant of G-d. Thus, when he witnessed the destruction of evil, whose mere existence is a desecration of G-d's Name and the antithesis of His Will, *Moshe* rejoiced. He desired to see the destruction of the Midianites because they were truly evil.

Under *Bilaam's* direction, the Midianite women sexually engaged with the Jewish men and caused them to worship *Baal Paor*. As a result of this ploy, 24,000 Jewish men died in a plague. The continuation of the Midianite nation, who perpetrated such evil was a desecration of G-d's Name. Therefore, *Moshe* desired to witness their destruction, which is a sanctification of His Name.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: If there would be ten Jewish men in a synagogue in any community in the world who

truly desired the coming of *Moshiach*, G-d would bring him instantly. Although there are many Jews who desire the coming of *Moshiach* and yearn for the ultimate glorification of G-d, the fact that he has not yet come, is an indication that their quality of intent is not sufficient. Why does the Jew want the coming of *Moshiach*? Is it to put an end to the persecution of the Jewish people? Is it so that the world should recognize the special value and significance of the Jewish people?

As long as *Moshiach* is not here, evil and falsehood continue to exist and thrive, which is a ongoing desecration of G-d's Name. The coming of *Moshiach* will be the ultimate glorification of G-d because it will be a time when evil will be vanquished from existence. One should desire the coming of *Moshiach* for the sake of His Glory, when truth will become evident and obvious.

In the *Amidah* (silent prayer) of *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, we ask G-d to instill fear and awe in all mankind. Additionally, we ask Him to give honor and glory to the Jewish people and reveal Himself and bring *Moshiach*. As a result, the devoutly righteous (*tzaddikim*), the straight (*yesharim*), and the scrupulously pious (*chasidim*), will rejoice. It would seem that if all mankind is brought to the realization of G-d and is in awe by His Presence, one would think that all mankind would become ecstatic as a result of this realization and revelation.

Why do we single-out only these three levels of spiritually advanced individuals who will rejoice? It is because these exceptionally spiritual people have dedicated their lives to the sanctification of G-d and await His revelation and glory. However, the ordinary person who has devoted his life to the pursuit of his own success and interest does not have the capacity to internalize the value of that event, despite its awesomeness.

We say in *Avinu Malkeinu*: "Our Father, our King, avenge before our eyes the spilled blood of Your servants." Is this because the Jewish people are vengeful? Since the Jewish people have been victimized and downtrodden throughout the ages, it is a desecration of G-d's Name because they are His chosen people. The Jewish people should rejoice with the destruction of those who spilled the blood of G-d's servants because their annihilation is a sanctification of G-d. Therefore, the Jewish people need to ask their Father and King to allow them to witness His vengeance upon their enemies. This is the reason *Moshe* desired to see with his own eyes the destruction of the Midianites.

Perceiving Truth, Despite Distraction (from Pinchas)

After the Jewish people had heard and accepted the slanderous reports of the spies about the Promised Land, G-d decreed that the members of the generation that were between the ages of twenty and sixty should perish in the desert over a forty-year period. After that generation had passed, a new census of the Jewish people was taken.

Torah: “These are the ones counted by Moshe...For Hashem had said of them, ‘They will surely die in the Wilderness,’ and not a man was left of them...”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The reason the verse specifically states “not a man was left” is to indicate that none of those who had died as a result of the decree were women. Why were the women spared? The reason the women were not subject to the decree was because they rejected the report of the spies who had slandered the Land.

Chazal: The women did not believe the spies because they had “a special love for the Land (*chibas ha’aretz*).” Without the explanation of *Chazal*, one could have thought that the basis for the women’s rejection of the slanderous report of the spies was because they had an innate intuition for truth. Thus, they sensed that the reports of the spies were false. We find a demonstration of this innate characteristic of the Jewish women in a statement of *Chazal* regarding the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt.

Chazal: “It was in the merit of the righteous women that our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt.” The Jewish women in Egypt believed intuitively that the Jewish people would eventually be redeemed as G-d had promised, regardless of the bleakness of the situation. In fact, they had encouraged their husbands to procreate in order to guarantee the future of the Jewish people.

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: “The daughters of Israel had in their possession copper mirrors, which they would look into when they would beautify themselves... When their husbands would be fatigued from the backbreaking work that was imposed upon them by the Egyptians,

the women would go and bring their husbands food and drink, and feed them. Then they would take the copper mirrors and view themselves together with their husbands in the mirror, enticing him by saying, ‘I am more attractive than you.’ By this means, they would bring their husbands to desire, and consequently they would cohabit with them and conceive.” Because the women intuitively had faith in G-d’s promise, they not only did not despair. What is the basis for this special intuition that is possessed by the woman?

Gemara in Tractate *Nidah*: The reason a woman enters into adulthood a year before the male is because she has “an additional level of perception that was given to her at the time of creation.” It is because of this special perception that the woman has greater sense of right and wrong than the male. Thus, the Jewish women in Egypt did not despair because they had internalized their faith in G-d’s promise that they would be redeemed. One would think that it is because of this innate sense of faith in G-d that they rejected the slanderous reports of the spies.

Chazal: It was only because of the women’s “special love for the Land” that they did not accept the slanderous reports. Because of the special love of the Land that the women had, they were not distracted by the reports of the spies. If one loves and esteems another and is told slanderous information about him, one’s love and relationship for that individual will not allow him to accept or consider the validity of the information.

Similarly, the women, because of their special love for the Land would not give any credence to the reports of the spies. Had the men loved and yearned for the Land as the women had, they would also rejected the reports of the spies and thus would not have needed to die in the desert. There is a positive commandment to “Love Hashem, your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your resources.” Despite all of the difficult and unanswerable questions that one may face in life, if one has sufficient love for G-d, then his faith will remain unswerving. Despite the fact that the Jewish people throughout history have endured holocausts and exiles, their faith in G-d and the promise of His ultimate redemption has not been weakened because of their love for Him.



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