

TO SEE OR NOT TO SEE - THAT IS THE QUESTION

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

1. Understanding the Mechanics of Culpability

The Torah tells us that if a person kills inadvertently through his own negligence, he must flee to the City of Refuge. The Gemara says that being incarcerated in the City of Refuge is considered atonement for the inadvertent murderer. The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states that "There is no death without sin." Meaning death exists in the world only because of sin and the only reason why a person passes away is because of his transgressions. The question to ask is - if the person who was killed deserved to die because of his own sins then why is the inadvertent murderer (who had no intention to kill) held culpable for his death? If the victim was meant to die then his death at the hands of the inadvertent murderer should have been no different than an act of G-d; thus making the murderer not culpable.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh says that the only human to ever live who was able to deal with based on the Attribute of Justice was Moshe Rabbeinu. He was at such a perfect state of spiritual existence that he was able to withstand the Attribute of Justice. Moshe is the only figure in the Torah referred to as "Ishe Elokeem (Man of G-d) [Elokeem is an appellation of Hashem that refers to the Attribute of Justice]". Even the Patriarchs (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov) were not at level to be called "Ishe Elokeem". As Chazal explain, G-d wanted to create the world with the Attribute of Justice; however, when He saw that mankind would not be able to withstand it, He associated with the Attribute of Mercy (Midas HaRachamim). The Attribute of Justice (Midas HaDin) would destroy anything that is not absolutely perfect; however, the Attribute of Mercy protects the imperfect being from Midas HaDin and is crucial to existence.

There is a Commandment, "Do not kill", indicating that the act of killing is based on free-choice. If however, a person is meant to die because of his sins then how is it the murderer's free choice to kill his victim? In addition, if the person was meant to die then why should the murderer be held culpable to any degree?

The answer is that in fact everyone deserves to die based on the Attribute of Justice, since we are all imperfect beings. The only reason we survive is because of the Attribute of Mercy. Therefore when a person decides to kill another, he in essence suspends the Attribute of Mercy protecting that individual. The suspension of the Attribute of Mercy causes the person to die from the Attribute of Justice (Divine Justice). The person who is killed dies because of his own spiritual shortcomings;

however, the murderer is culpable because it was his choice that suspended the Attribute of Mercy for his victim. The inadvertent murderer had the choice to be more careful; however, because of his own negligence he murdered another human being.

It is possible that a person, because of their special mission, will be immune from having the Attribute of Mercy suspended by anyone. For example, Hashem intends an individual to live many years to accomplish a special mission, then regardless of other people's choices that individual will remain alive independent from the Attribute of Mercy. Dassam and Aviram survived the desert despite the fact that they had informed the Egyptians on Moshe. Why did they survive? One would think that evil people such as this deserve to die. The answer is that Hashem needed these people to exist in order to fulfill a certain purpose, independent of their own merits. If Hashem needs an individual to exist then his life does not depend on the Attribute of Mercy to survive.

The Gemara speaks about "Tzadik v'tovelo (a righteous person who has a good life" and Tzadik v'rahlo (a righteous person who has a difficult life." The Gemara explains that the Tzadik v'rahlo is not difficult to understand because no one is perfect and in order to atone for one's sins in this world, one must have difficulties. The righteous person with a good life is actually more complicated to understand. If we are all imperfect beings and the difficulties we experience are meant to bring us atonement for the World to Come, then how could a righteous person not have difficulties. How can he have atonement? The answer is - in fact everyone deserves difficulties because of our shortcomings; however, because Hashem has a special mission of the tzaddik that requires him to have a good life, then the principle of needing difficulties for atonement is suspended.

2. The Importance of maintaining a connection with Hashem

The Torah tells us that after the Jews destroyed Midian they brought back to their camp all of the spoils of war. In addition to the livestock and valuables of the Midianites, the Jews brought back the Midianite women who they did not kill as they were commanded to do. The Torah states, "Moses was angry with the commanders of the army...Moses said to them, 'Did you let every female live? Behold! - they caused the Children of Israel, by the word of Bilaam, to commit a betrayal against Hashem regarding the matter of the Baal Peor..."

After the Torah tells us that Moshe became angry the it describes the process of Koshering utensils saying, "Elazar the Kohen said to the men...This is the Decree of the Torah, which Hashem Commanded Moshe..." Rashi cites the Chazal which asks- why did Elazar communicate the Laws of Koshering utensils? Moshe should have been the one to teach the Jews the Laws. Chazal answer that since "Moshe was angered he made a mistake which was a momentary lapse which caused him to forget the Laws of Koshering utensils that were in possession of non-Jews. Chazal also state that previously Moshe made a mistake when had become angered by the complaints of the Jewish people and he struck the rock rather than speaking to it as he was commanded by Hashem to do.

The question is when Chazal say that Moshe made a mistake and forgot the Laws - what was

Moshe's mistake? Moshe forgot the Halacha but he did not make a "mistake". Usually a "mistake" means someone did something wrong. Here Moshe simply forgot the Halacha. Evidently, Chazal are saying that the basis for Moshe's making a mistake was his momentary lapse that caused him to forget the Halacha.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states the concept that there are no Rabbinic fences in the Bais HaMikdash (Temple). Outside of the Bais HaMikdash there are many Rabbinic laws which act as fences to prevent the violation of a Torah Law. For example, if Rosh Hashanah came on Shabbos, Rabbinically one is not permitted to blow the Shofar because of the concern that he may carry the Shofar from one domain to another which is a Torah violation of Shabbos. However this Rabbinic fence does not apply to the Bais HaMikdash itself. One is permitted to blow the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah even if it is Shabbos because the Rabbis were not concerned that someone would come to carry it from domain to domain. The question is - why did the Rabbis not have the same concern with transporting the Shofar in the Bais HaMikdash as they did outside of the Bais HaMikdash. The answer is that since one was in such close proximity to Hashem's Presence in the Bais HaMikdash he would be so cognizant ! that he would not violate the Shabbos. However, outside of the Bais HaMikdash where one is not feel Hashem's Presence so clearly, one may have a lapse of vigilance and transport the Shofar, thus violating the Shabbos. One only needs a fence when it is a situation when one is not continuously aware of Hashem's Presence.

We say in the Shema that when we look at the tzitzis (fringes) we are reminded of all of the Mitzvos. The Chofetz Chaim says that this is understandable if one forgot a Mitzvah which he had previously learned; however, how can one be reminded of Mitzvas that were never learned? One can only remember something that was forgotten and one can only forget something that he already knows.

One can only make a "mistake" if one knows the correct way to do something and he does it incorrectly. A mistake is a misapplication of something that one knows. So why does a person misapply something that he already knows? The answer is that at the time of the mistake there is a certain degree of being "out of touch" with the knowledge. If a person was fully cognizant of what he knew and it remained in the forefront of his mind, he would not make a mistake. Moshe knew the Halacha of Koshering the utensils; however, because he became angry he had a lapse which caused him to become "out of touch" with his knowledge. This is lack of cognizance is the basis of any mistake.

Why does anger cause a lapse of cognizance? One may say from a psychological viewpoint that when a person is angry he becomes focused on his anger and that causes him to be distracted. However in our discussion we are referring specifically to anger causing a lapse of cognizance as it relates to Kiddusha (Holiness). Somehow being angry leads to being disconnected from Torah. The verse says, "When one serves Hashem he must do it with joy." Anger is the antithesis of Joy. Anger is limiting and causes one to become self absorbed, whereas joy gives a person energy and perspective to be able to accomplish almost anything. Joy is a spiritual characteristic which, like

other spiritual matters, is un-quantifiable and unlimited. When one enters into an unlimited states he has relevance to the Wisdom of Hashem. Conversely, when one is angry he enters into a limited state which does not have the capacity to contain Torah.

Torah cannot be contained within a person who is arrogant and self-centered. A person who is trapped within himself has no relevance to an Infinite Being. If on the other hand a person is humble then he has relevance to Torah and Kiddusha because he is cognizant of Hashem and has the capacity to connect with the infinite. Regardless of how great Moshe was, when he became angry he no longer connected to the Infinite Wisdom of Hashem. This was Moshe's mistake - he had a momentary lapse due to his anger which caused him to forget the Halacha. For that moment, Moshe was not connected at the same level to Hashem and therefore could not transmit Torah.

The Gemara in Tractate Nidarim tells us that the Divine Presence was not in touch with Moshe Rabbeinu during the thirty-nine years in which the generation of the spies passed away. The reason for this was because the Klal Yisroel was in a depressed state of mind. Since prophecy only comes to someone who is in a state of Joy, Hashem did not communicate with Moshe at the same level during this time period. Depression just like anger is a limiting characteristic which takes away one's capacity to have relevance to the infinite.

It is only because we become self absorbed that we are not cognizant of Hashem. This lack of cognizance is the lapse which causes us to make mistakes.

3. Utilizing our gifts properly

At the beginning of the Portion of Devarim, Moshe Rabbeinu recounts several locations where the Jewish people had traveled - "Arabah, opposite the Sea of Reeds between Paran and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Di-zahav..... Rashi cites the Chazal which states that Reb. Yochanan researched all of the verses in the Torah and was unable to find the locations mentioned. But rather the references that are delineated by Moshe are allusions to various failings from the time of the Exodus until the present. One of the references mentioned by Moshe is "Di-zahav (enough gold)", which Rashi explains was in fact a rebuke to the Jews for failing with the Golden Calf. Rashi cites the Midrash that explains that what Moshe actually said to the Jews was that because of the Gold the Jews failed with the Golden Calf. As it is stated in the verse "I (Hashem) gave them (the Jews) an abundance of Gold and Silver and they went and worshipped the Baal."

The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zarah tells us that there were two spiritual failings, one on a communal level and one on an individual level that logically should not have taken place given the level the spirituality of the parties at that moment. The example of the individual failing was David HaMelech (King David) who asked G-d to test him. Although Dovid had totally negated his Evil Inclination he wanted to have a degree of temptation to be able to overcome it. He was presented with the temptation of Batsheva (as it is stated in Prophets) and he failed. The example of the communal failing was that the Jewish people, although they were at the pinnacle of their spirituality,

they nevertheless failed with the Golden Calf.

How was it possible that after hearing and experiencing G-d as such a reality, that the Jewish people could succumb to the Sin of the Golden Calf. The answer is that despite their most advanced level of clarity, Hashem allowed a degree of uncertainty regarding their belief in His Omnipotent Power. The Gemara (Avodah Zarah) explains that creating the setting for Dovid and the Jewish people's failing at Sinai was necessary to set an example for future generations to understand that regardless of the degree of spiritual failing (whether on a communal level or individual level) if one is sincere and does teshuvah (repents) they will be fully reinstated.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that after the Golden Calf, when G-d wanted to destroy the Jewish people, Moshe Rabbeinu came to their defense by saying "Di-Zahav". Meaning that the Jews cannot be fully faulted for the Sin of the Golden Calf. Hashem is partially at responsible. The Gemara compares Hashem's giving of the over abundance of wealth which the Jews possessed at that particular time to a father who dresses his son in the finest clothing, provides him with perfume which omits the most beautiful fragrance and places a purse of gold around his neck and tells him to pass by the entrance of the brothel and not to enter. Is it possible in that context for the son not to succumb to temptation and enter into the brothel? Identically, Hashem who had given the Jews so much wealth facilitated the state of mind for the Jews to be enticed by the Golden Calf. As a result of Moshe's defense, Hashem agreed not to eliminate the Jewish people.

It is interesting to note that the same words that Moshe used as a point of rebuke "Di-Zahav" (when he redressed the Jewish people) were the same words that he used forty years earlier to defend the Jewish people. How do we understand this?

The answer is that both interpretations of "Di-zahav" are valid. Being given this level of overwhelming wealth is like walking a tightrope. On one hand this gift of G-d was meant to be used for the building of the Mishkan where an enormous amount of gold was needed. Being given so much gold enabled the Jews to be able to contribute to the building of the Mishkan without great difficulty. However, simultaneously there is a possibility that by receiving such an abundance of wealth, the Jews could lose focus by becoming intoxicated with all of this material. According to this the rebuke to the Jewish people was valid- if one is given so much blessing to facilitate his service of Hashem without great difficulty, how does he use that blessing to bring about such failure? On the other hand the truth is- that particular setting which Hashem created for the Jews is the equivalent of putting one's son before a brothel.

The Talmud tells us in Tractate Magillah that Hashem always provides the remedy before ailment (takes place). As a result of providing this over abundance of wealth for the Jews, Moshe had a basis of defense to avert the destruction of the Jewish people.

Every person has his own test. The wealthy person's trials and tribulations are different than the less fortunate person. The Klal Yisroel had the choice to utilize the blessing in the service of Hashem, the

building of the Mishkan, or invest it in an enterprise that was the antithesis of the Will of Hashem. The gift of genius can be used to justify anything that person chooses to justify. Or it can be used to advance himself and the world around him.

4. What Causes One to be Appreciative and Introspective?

The Portion begins, "Ayleh HaDevarim...(These are the words of Moshe...)". The Commentators explain that the word "Ayleh" has the numerical value of thirty-six, indicating that these were the last thirty-six days of Moshe's life. During his last days, Moshe admonished the Jewish people. Rashi cites the Chazal who explain that there are four reasons why one should only give mussar (admonishment) close to the time of one's passing. One of the reasons given is that one should not have to repeat his rebuke more than once.

If a person had been previously admonished for a particular issue and did not take it to heart, if he would be subsequently admonished (even at the time of the passing of the admonisher) it would no longer be as effective because he would say, "That is something that I have heard before." People value and process new information with more attentiveness than information, which they believe they already know. It is because of this that Moshe only gave mussar to the Klal Yisroel at the very end of his life.

The Torah tells us that when Moshe told the Jewish people that they needed to go to war with Midian, they resisted his request because it was known to them that after the destruction of the Midianite people, Moshe was meant to pass away. Rashi cites the Midrash, which states that we see from this how beloved are the leaders of the Jewish people. When it became evident to them that the passing of Moshe was imminent, they gained a new found appreciation for him. A person only realizes how special something is when he is about to lose it. Although the Jews over the forty-year period were contentious with Moshe and behaved many times in a disrespectful manner, now that they understood that his days were numbered- they saw him in a different light. Because of the special appreciation which the Jews had for Moshe at this moment they were more attentive to his words of mussar. Thus they were affected to a greater degree.

The Talmud tells us in Tractate Taanis that the three special gifts (continuous flow of water from the wellspring, the Clouds of Glory, and the Mann), which the Jews were beneficiaries of in their fortieth year in the desert, were in the merit of Moshe. Because of their reality, the Jews understood that when Moshe passed away their existence would be in question. Therefore at that moment they were more attentive and receptive to the words of Moshe.

Chazal explain that the Matriarchs (Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah) were barren because Hashem desires the fervent prayers of the devoutly pious (tzadikim). Even the greatest tzadikim, who are devout and righteous, pray to G-d differently when they have that sense of need. If one realizes that one's present situation is not guaranteed and at any moment it could change because whatever we have is continuously Willed by Hashem, then even in a state of bounty a person would maintain a

beholdeness and indebtedness to Hashem. The question is - how can we put ourselves in a mindset that will allow us not to take things that we do have for granted? Unfortunately, it is only when we are in need that we become appreciative and understand the value of what we had as the Klal Yisroel became attentive and appreciative of Moshe Rabbeinu at the point they were going to lose him.

We must ask ourselves - "Do we have more abundance in our lives than previous generations because of our worthiness? Are we more worthy than they were?" Clearly, this is not the case. Hashem has His reasons for providing us with such bounty, which is not based on our merit. The moment we realize that the blessing we receive from Hashem is not due to us but rather because of his Beneficence, then we would realize that the affluence that our society experiences is not forever. Only then would we become appreciative and beholden to Hashem for his Kindness.

As it is stated in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers) that a person should do teshuvah on the last day of his life. Meaning, a person should live every day of his life as if it were his last, because then we realize how precious and ephemeral life truly is.

5. The Importance of Proper Judgment

In the Portion of Devarim, Moshe announces to the Jewish people that he will be appointing judges to assist him in adjudicating their issues saying, "I cannot carry you alone. Hashem, your G-d, has multiplied you and behold!...Provide for yourselves distinguished men, who are wise, understanding, and well known to your tribes, and I shall appoint them as your heads." Rashi cites the Chazal which asks, "Is it possible that Moshe was unable to adjudicate the issues of the Jewish people alone? He was the one who took the Jews out of Egypt, Split the Sea on their behalf, and provided them with the Mann and the sluv (quail) in the dessert." Meaning that Moshe had demonstrated that he was a person of unlimited abilities and was able to function in a capacity that was beyond the norm.

Chazal tell us say that the reason why Moshe appointed judges to assist him in the adjudication of the Jewish people was because he wished to share the awesome responsibility with other qualified individuals. It was not because it was beyond his ability, but rather because, "Hashem holds the judge responsible to give the proper judgment." Sholomo HaMelech (King Solomon) the wisest man to ever live says, "Hashem, who could judge you people who are so difficult." Chazal explain that a Jewish judge is different from a non-Jewish judge because if a non-Jewish judge is corrupt, the ramification of his corrupt judgment does not have serious ramifications. However, if a Jewish judge renders a corrupt decision, Hashem says he will take the life of that judge. The standard to which the Jewish judge is held is far beyond that of the non-Jewish judge. The question is why is the corrupt behavior of the Jewish judge so much graver than that of the non-Jew?

Chazal state, "If there is justice below, there is no need for justice from above. However if there is no justice below then there will be justice from above." Meaning, that if there is human justice issued by the Court, then there is no need for Divine Justice. However, if the human court does not render

proper decisions, then there will be Divine Justice. Rashi in his commentary at the beginning of Sefer Bereishis cites the Midrash, which says that Hashem wanted to create the world with the Attribute of Justice. As it is stated in the Torah, "Bereishis bara Elokeem (In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth)". However because G-d recognized that the world could not survive the scrutiny of the Attribute of Justice, which is an exacting level of continuous judgment, Hashem synthesized Rachamim (Mercy) with the Attribute of Justice, and thus established the Attribute of Mercy.

Although the world cannot survive the exactness of Divine Justice, justice is a necessity for existence because there must be accountability to maintain order. Therefore Hashem communicated to Man that every society must have a judicial system. If human justice is meted out by the earthly court, there is no need for G-d to introduce His Divine Justice. However, if humankind fails and becomes corrupt, then G-d is forced to institute His Justice to maintain existence

With this principle we are able to understand the Gemara in Tractate Sanherdrin, which states, "A person who renders a truthful judgment is a partner with Hashem in the act of Creation. However if one renders a corrupt decision G-d says - I will take your life." The question is- why is the judge who renders a truthful decision considered G-d's "partner" in creation? The answer is - if the court metes out proper Justice, then G-d says, "Since Justice is being implemented on the human level, there is no need for Divine Justice to be instituted." If G-d's Justice is activated, then it is the Attribute of Justice is in force. Thus bringing about holocaust and destruction. Therefore, the judge who renders the proper and truthful judgment is in fact maintaining the existence of the universe. Therefore G-d considers the judge His partner in creation. Conversely, if the judge is corrupt and deviates from Justice as much as an iota, he deserves to have his life taken because (as slight as the deviation may be) he has disrupted and undermined human justice- thus causing great hardship and suffering for mankind through Divine Justice.

The Jewish people at the time of Sinai, when they were taken as G-d's people, became responsible for the existence of the universe. The world's ongoing function is determined by the spirituality of the Jewish people. This is why the Jewish people are held to a higher standard. For the same reason, the Jewish judge who is responsible to maintain the standard of judgment and accountability of the world. If he compromises on the standard of justice he is culpable. This is what Moshe meant when he said, "It is too difficult for me to carry this burden." He referred to the difficulty of having the sole responsibility of maintaining justice. Therefore he wanted other qualified judges to be appointed to share in this responsibility.

There is a Positive Commandment that is incumbent on every Jew to judge his fellow properly by giving him the benefit of the doubt. If a Jew does not judge his fellow properly by giving him the benefit of the doubt in cases where his fellow's actions are questionable, he is in violation of this Positive Commandment. We see that the obligation of rendering proper judgment has relevance even outside of the judicial system. If Jews judge one another positively, then this is considered

proper Justice on a human level. In this case there is no need for Divine Justice. Consequently all mankind are beneficiaries of the Mercy of Hashem. If on the other hand we do not judge our fellow properly, this is considered a breach of Justice and then G-d forbid it can bring about Divine Justice.

6. To see or not to see- that is the question

The Torah tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu said to the Jewish people, "Re'eh nasati lifnaychem ha'aretz (You should see, I have given before you the land." It is important to note that the word "Re'eh (see)" is written in the singular whereas the word "lifnaychem (before you)" is in the plural. The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks - why is the word "Re'eh (see)" singular while "lifnaychem (before you)" is plural? The Ohr HaChaim answers that if multiple people are able to accurately "see" the same thing they will all see it as the same object or event. However, understanding the significance of what is being seen is based on each individual. We all see the sun rising and we see its light; however, do we truly understand and appreciate what is its significance? Each person understands this at his own level. This is why "Re'eh" is singular and "lifnaychem" is plural.

It says in the Gemara Tractate Taanis states, "When the month of Av enters one should diminish his engagement in joy", because it is a month tragedy for the Jewish people. The greatest tragedies that ever befell the Jewish people occurred during the month of Av. The Mishnah tells us that five of the greatest tragedies in the history of the Jewish people occurred on the ninth day of Av (Tisha B'Av). The First and Second Temple were destroyed on the ninth day of Av.

The day of Tisha B'Av is devoted to grieving over the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash and reflecting on the cause of its destruction. Through one's introspection one hopefully will come to a level of realization that will cause him to correct the spiritual deficiency that brought about its destruction. The Jerusalem Talmud tells us that any generation in which the Temple was not rebuilt it is considered as if it was destroyed in that generation. Meaning, that each generation has the ability to correct the wrong which brought about its destruction and therefore can make the correction. If they do not make the correction it is considered that the Temple was destroyed in that generation.

Although many people acknowledge the ninth of Av as a day of tragedy, each person has his own level of understanding of the true nature of the day. Some may even say, "True it is unfortunate that we do not have the Temple, but thank G-d my family is doing quite well." If one would truly appreciate and internalize the tragedy of Tisha B'Av, one could not feel complete without having the Bais HaMikdash restored - regardless of one's success and tranquility in life.

We may all be aware of not having the Bais HaMikdash and living in exile; however, the actual comprehension of this tragedy is very individualized -depending on one's perspective. The Mishna Brurah states that if a child is too young to appreciate or understand what it means to mourn over the loss of Jerusalem, then the parent has no obligation to condition the child in the observance of Tisha B'Av (chinuch). If we today would have Jerusalem under our own control and the Jews in Israel living in relative peace with their Arab neighbors - how would one understand and relate to the

meaning of the mourning of the Bais HaMikdash and Jerusalem?

We find in the introduction to Midrash Eichah that when Titus (the Roman Emperor) destroyed the Bais HaMikdash he prided himself that he destroyed G-d's Temple. The Midrash tells us that when Titus was gloating over his victory, Hashem said to him, " You fool! The only reason you were able to destroy Temple was because My Presence left the Temple Mount. You were only destroying stones and wood. It is the equivalent of grinding flour that has already been ground." Meaning, that when the Divine Presence had departed from the Temple Mount, the Temple itself was the equivalent of a pile of stones and dirt. It is only the person who values his relationship with Hashem could truly appreciate and understand the meaning of not having the Bais HaMikdash.

Dovid HaMelech (King David) in Psalms says, "Who could utter the strength of Hashem to be able to enunciate all of His praise?" The Maharal of Prague explains in the introduction to his work Gevuras Hashem what Dovid is saying is- firstly it is impossible to fully appreciate or understand (in the quantitative sense) the strength of Hashem because there is so much of existence that we are not even aware of. Even that which we are aware of, we truly do not fully comprehend to be able to enunciate the praise of Hashem. Our perspective and understanding is so limited that we are out of touch with most of existence. We see the ocean, but do we know what is contained in its depth? We look up to the heavens and we see stars but do we even begin to fathom the universe? The Mahral explains that there are many things that we do not see and even the things we do see we do not understand. If we "see" an apple, do we appreciate the genius in its creation or the Godliness that is its ! essence?

This is why Moshe said to the Jewish people "Re'eh (see)" in the singular and "lifnaychem (before you)" in the plural. We all "see" the same world but we all understand it based on our individual capacity. The question is how do we increase our capacity and develop a way to understand the world in a more profound and meaningful manner. King Solomon says in Mishlei, "Neir mitzvah v'Torah ohr (the mitzvah is the material which provides the fuel and the Torah is the light)" meaning the study of Torah gives one the depth and breadth of understanding to be able to appreciate existence. The Torah itself illuminates and elucidates. If a person's life is devoid of Torah study, then although he may be performing the mitzvos, he is lacking in understanding of many things because he does not have the Torah to shed light on his existence.

7. The Incalculable Value of a Mitzvah

The Torah states that Moshe addressed the Klal Yisroel by saying, "We turned and ascended by way of the Bashan, and Og king of Bashan went out toward us, he and his entire people, for war at Edrei. Hashem said to me: Do not fear him, for in your hand have I given him and his entire people and his land..." Moshe, because of his faith in Hashem feared nothing. When he went to war against Sihon (also a giant), the son of Og, the Torah does not say that Hashem told Moshe not to fear him. However, when Moshe was to confront Og, Hashem assured Moshe with the words "Do not to fear

him." Indicating that Moshe had to be reassured. Why was Moshe afraid?

Rashi cites the Chazal, which explains that the reason why Moshe was concerned about Og was because he had a special merit for doing a kindness with Avraham Avinu (our Patriarch) hundreds of years prior to this moment. The Torah tells us in the Sefer Beraishis (Book of Genesis) that when the Four mightiest Kings defeated the Five Kings they took Lot, the nephew of Avraham, captive. Og, who narrowly escaped the battle with the Four kings, went to Avraham to inform him that his nephew had been taken captive. Upon hearing the information from Og, Avraham immediately gathered an army of 318 men to rescue Lot. Chazal tell us that in fact 318 is the numerical value of the name Eliezer, who was Avraham's servant. Meaning Avraham had only taken Eliezer into battle with him. Miraculously, Avraham defeated the Four mighty Kings and rescued his nephew Lot. Because Og provided the information to Avraham (which facilitated Lot's rescue), Og was rewarded with longevity to live until the time of Moshe Rabbeinu.

Chazal tell us that Og's true intention was that Avraham should go into battle and be killed so that he could take Sarah (our Matriarch) as his wife. Og believed that because Avraham was a zealot that he would immediately go into battle to save his nephew regardless of the danger, ultimately causing his death. We see that regardless of Og's sinister intent to have Avraham killed, nevertheless the Torah tells us that his act of chesed must be rewarded. Og remained alive for an additional 500 years because of this merit. Moshe was concerned that the merit for the chesed (kindness) that Og provided for Avraham was still in effect. Hashem therefore reassured Moshe, "Do not fear him" because that merit no longer exists.

We learn from this that despite the degree of deficiency in the performance of a mitzvah it nevertheless has value. If someone benefits from another's actions, there is merit in that action regardless of the intent behind it. A mitzvah has incalculable value and this is the reason why Mishnah Pirkei Avos tells us that we should even pursue even the mitzvos that seem to be of lesser importance.

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