

THE BASIS FOR SELF

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

1. The Basis for Self

The Torah tells us that during the seventh year of the Sabbatical Cycle (Shmita), all agricultural activities must cease and all produce of the fields seventh year (Sabbatical year) are considered ownerless. Despite the level of toil and capital investment that the owner of the field, vineyard, or orchard may have expended, he is not permitted to exercise any degree of ownership regarding the produce of the Sabbatical year. All are permitted to enter his property and partake of the produce of the Sabbatical year with the endorsement of the Torah.

If in fact, all the produce of the Sabbatical year is considered ownerless and the owner is not permitted to engage in any agricultural activities, how is one able to survive the future until the field yields the permitted crops of the eighth year? The Torah itself addresses this issue. As it states, "If you will say: What will we eat in the seventh year? - behold we will not sow and not gather in our crops! I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three-year period...." The Torah thus guarantees the Jewish people financial security in advance so that they should not be concerned that their future is in jeopardy. Chazal tell us that the reason the Jewish people were exiled to Babylon for a period of seventy years was that they had violated and not observed seventy cycles of the Sabbatical year. Since they had violated the tenant agreement regarding the Land seventy times, measure for measure, they were displaced from the Land for seventy years. If G'd guaranteed their financial security in advance, why would the Jewish people ever violate the Shmita?

The Torah states in the Portion of Vayikra, "He (G'd) called to Moshe..." The Midrash cites a verse from Psalms, "Bless G'd, His angels mighty in strength (geborei koach) that do His bidding to obey the voice of His word." Reb Yitzchak Navcha says that "geborei koach" refers to those who observe the Sabbatical year (Shmita). Why are they identified as geborei koach (those who are mighty in strength)? The one who remains silent as he sees his field being treated as though it were ownerless, with its fences being breached and the fruits being eaten (by anyone who wishes to do so), is one of enormous strength. This is because it requires unusual fortitude and inner strength to suppress one's inclination to not demonstrate one's ownership rights to prevent others from ravaging the fruits of his labor. Why are they called "geborei koach?" As it states, 'Who is the strong one? The one who subdues and subordinates his inclination.'

Man, by nature, is driven by ego. He has a need to see himself as the master of his own

accomplishment and destiny. When one's sense of accomplishment is taken from him, as a result of his produce becoming ownerless, his essence is compromised and negated. He no longer has any value, because his entire sense of self is identified with his ability to claim his accomplishment. Therefore, the one who remains silent and allows the dictate of G'd to be carried out is mighty in strength. This individual is able to subordinate and negate himself for the sake of G'd.

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia states, "A person prefers his own kav (small dry measure) more than nine portions of his fellow." Although he is able to have multiple times (quantitatively) more than that which he created, one prefers to have less because it is an expression of his own efforts. One prefers something of his own rather than that which belongs to another. This was the basis for the difficulty of the Jewish people to be able to observe the Shmita. Although they were compensated in advance, during the sixth year, it was difficult for them to relinquish their ownership rights and see the fruits of their toil being taken from them.

2. Overstepping One's Bounds

The Midrash cites a verse from Proverbs, " 'The one who is overwhelmed with the desire for wealth has an evil eye, he does not know that diminishment shall come upon him.' This verse is referring to many individuals. An example of one who was overwhelmed with a desire for wealth to his detriment was Cain. G'd said to Cain, 'Your desire for wealth was so great that you wanted to possess the world. I swear on your life, that you will have diminishment.' What was the consequence of his drive for wealth? He became a wanderer (After he had killed his brother Abel, he wandered from place to place until the end of his life). Thus, his drive caused him to have no stability and permanence in existence."

The Midrash continues, "Another example of one who was overwhelmed by his desire for wealth was Ephron the Hittite. (He was the one who had sold the cave of Machpelah to Avraham our Patriarch to be the burial location for Sarah, his wife.) After Avraham had entered into negotiation to purchase the Machpelah, Ephron responded, 'My lord, heed me! Land worth four hundred shekels; between me and you what is it?' (Although he was asking Avraham for an enormous sum, he attempted to make it seem trivial between the two of them.) Avraham began to weigh out an unprecedented amount of silver before him...When Ephron saw the enormous pile of silver he became overwhelmed and excited. G'd said to him, 'Because you were so taken by the enormous amount of silver in the end you will have deficiency.' What was the deficiency? Reb Yehudah bar Levy Bar Shalom said that until Ephron had taken the silver from Avraham, when his name is mentioned in the Torah it is written in its full spelling. However, after he engaged in taking payment from Avraham, his name is written in a deficient form, with the letter 'vav' deleted. In addition, the one who lends money with interest or who derives financial benefit from the produce of the Sabbatical year shall not succeed, but rather he shall be diminished..."

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states, "One's material allocation is set from Rosh Hashanah to

Rosh Hashanah." Meaning, G'd allocates one's financial stipend for the entire upcoming year on Rosh Hashanah. One cannot earn more than what G'd had allotted to him, regardless of his initiatives. In order to draw upon what was allotted for him, he needs to take a sufficient level of initiative that conforms with the Torah. If one were to lend money with interest to a fellow Jew, which is a violation of a negative commandment and thus an initiative that is not endorsed by the Torah, this individual will not only not achieve the result that he wishes, but rather it will deny him of what is rightfully his.

The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states, "Who is wise? One who learns from every man...Who is strong? One who overpowers his inclination....Who is the wealthy one? One who is satisfied with his portion..." The Mishna indicates that one's wisdom, strength, and wealth are determined by one's accomplishment. The Gemara in Tractate Nidah tells us that before a child is conceived, an angel takes the droplet of semen before G'd, Who pronounces upon it the future of the child- "He shall be wise or foolish, strong or weak, wealthy or poor.." The destiny of every human being is pronounced before conception. However, the status of tzaddik (righteous) or rasha (evil) is not pronounced upon the droplet whatsoever because "All is predestined by heaven except for the fear of heaven." Since one's physical predicament is determined at the time of conception, true wisdom, strength, and wealth that are attributed to one's accomplishments can only be what is described in the Mishna of Ethics of our Fathers. Every one of them touches upon the spiritual development and advancement of the individual.

The individual who truly believes and internalizes the fact that every aspect of his life is predetermined by G'd will not be overwhelmed by a desire for wealth. It is because he understands that he will only achieve within the physical realm to the degree that has been determined to be his. By putting things into perspective, he will be less subject to greed. He will understand that it has no value. He therefore will not consider pursuing any material endeavor unless it fully conforms with the Torah.

3. The Profoundness of Remembering the Exodus from Egypt

The Torah states, "For the Children of Israel are servants to Me, they are My servants, whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt..." Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks, "Seemingly the second part of the verse is repetitive. It would have been sufficient to say, 'For the Children of Israel are servants to Me, whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt...' Why does the verse repeat 'they are My servants?' The beginning of the verse 'the Children of Israel are servants to Me' establishes the spiritual status and standing of the Jewish people from the time of their conception until the time they come into existence. They are conceived in holiness and are innately holy because of their relationship with G'd. However, because of the bondage that they had experienced in Egypt, the Jewish people became spiritually tainted and diminished, thus causing their innate spirituality to no longer have any relevance. Thus the Torah states, 'They are My servants whom I have taken out of Egypt' to indicate that because of who they are G'd extricated them from Egypt to be able to function and exist as a holy people."

When the Jewish people were in Egypt, they were exposed to the most intense level of spiritual impurity and depravity. Because of this exposure, they regressed to the 49th level of spiritual impurity, which brought them to the brink of spiritual extinction. Because G'd had taken them out of Egypt it allowed them to be extricated from the impurity they had absorbed to be able to ascend to become His people at Sinai.

The Torah states at the beginning of the Portion of Yisro, "Yisro, the minister of Midian...heard everything that G'd did to Moshe and to Israel...-that Hashem had taken Israel out of Egypt." Rashi cites the Mechilta which states that the greatest miracle that G'd performed on behalf of the Jewish people was taking of them out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus." As a result of the ten plagues, Egypt had been decimated and the Jewish people had been driven out by their Egyptian masters after the tenth plague (killing of the first born). If this is so, why was the exodus from Egypt the greatest of the miracles? If the walls of a prison are destroyed and the warden and all the prison guards are no longer present to confine them, would it be considered a great miracle if the prisoners are able to escape unhindered from that environment? Why was Yisro overwhelmingly impressed and amazed regarding their ability to leave Egypt?

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that Yisro had been one of the three advisors to Pharaoh. When he had heard that Pharaoh intended to enslave the Jewish people, Yisro fled to Midian as a sign of protest. Yisro had a grasp and understanding of the spiritual impurity that existed in Egypt. He understood that as a result of being enslaved in Egypt for 210 years, the Jewish people had become irreparably affected and infected with spiritual impurity. Their state of impurity was beyond recovery. Their spiritual systems had become completely shut down and had no capacity to internalize or process anything that was spiritual in nature. It was virtually impossible for them to ever be extricated from their state of impurity. Despite all of this, upon leaving Egypt, the Jewish people had the capacity to process and internalize all that was spiritual. They had been restored by G'd. Thus, Yisro recognized that the greatest miracle was not that the Jewish people were able to physically leave Egypt but rather, G'd had restored and rehabilitated their terminal spiritual state. G'd wrought this miracle because the Jewish people are His subjects.

The Torah tells us that after six years (when a Jewish slave is meant to be freed) he declares, "I love my master, my wife (a Canaanite maidservant) and my children. I do not want to go free" - they bore a hole into his right ear at the doorpost. G'd had said to the Jewish people at Sinai, "You are My subjects..." This infers that they were to be His subjects and not the subjects of other subjects. Since a Jewish slave desires to remain in a state of servitude, it is evident that he did not appreciate or fully comprehend what G'd had communicated at Sinai. Thus, the awl is put into his right ear to indicate that his ability of comprehension is not operative. If in fact he is G'd's subject, and thus has a unique capacity to appreciate holiness, why would he desire a mortal master? G'd had miraculously purged the Jewish people at the time of the Exodus to allow them to have relevance to appreciate His dimension of spirituality and majesty. A mortal master should have no relevance to his essence.

There is a Positive Commandment to remember that G'd had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt. The Jew must verbalize it twice a day through the recitation of the third paragraph of the Shema. The reason a Jew must continuously remember the Exodus is to allow him to appreciate who he truly is. Within that remembrance lies the understanding that the Jew was purged from the impurity of Egypt in order to restore his capacity to function as a true subject of G'd. The Jewish people were purged and extricated from the impurity of Egypt only for that reason.

4. Man's Susceptibility to Delusion

The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin tells us that if a person engages in commercial transactions with the produce of the Sabbatical Year, which is forbidden, he faces many severe consequences that evolve over a period of time. The Gemara tells us that as a result of selling the produce of the Sabbatical year one will experience financial hardships. Initially the individual's financial losses will be forced to sell his assets, such as his field and home. If he does not recognize and appreciate the cause of his problem and continues to engage in the forbidden sale of the produce, his financial state will continue to deteriorate and he will need to sell his personal effects and daughter into slavery. Ultimately, if he does not repent and continues this forbidden behavior he will be forced to sell himself as a slave, even to a gentile idolater. When one transgresses, G'd brings upon the individual hardships in order to alert him of his misbehavior. By doing so, G'd allows the individual to repent and correct his ways. However, if despite all of the difficulties that are brought upon him he continues to sin, the repercussions will become more severe. How is it possible for one to continue to sin and not be sensitive to the cause of his own misfortune?

The Gemara states, "The individual continues to sin because he is not sensitive to the error of his ways... Rav Huna says, 'If one transgresses and becomes a repeated offender in a particular area, his behavior is permitted to him.' How could his behavior be permitted if in fact it is forbidden! Rather, the individual will see it as if it were permitted." If one realizes that his initial action is a transgression, how could he continue to repeat the wrong knowing that it is not permitted?

The Mishna in Ethics of Our Fathers tell us that there is a concept of "mitzvah goreres mitzvah (the performance of a mitzvah will bring about the opportunity to perform another mitzvah)." In addition, there is a principle of "aveira goreres aveira (the transgression of one sin (even of a minor nature) will lead to other transgressions (of an even more severe nature))."

Reb Chaim of Volozhin in his work Ruach HaChaim explains the principle of "Aveira goreres aveira" based on the Zohar. He explains that when one transgresses a contaminated spirit comes into being which engulfs the individual and encourages him to do more of the same, which is to transgress to a greater degree in an addictive manner. Conversely, when one performs a mitzvah, a positive energy engulfs the individual and motivates the individual to do more of the same.

Initially, before one sins, the contaminated and addictive force that attaches itself to him does not exist. However, once he sins for the first time, that negative influence comes into being and drives

him to continue to sin. At that point, the individual must choose to either succumb to this negative influence or subdue it by repenting. If the individual chooses to succumb to the negative influence, it intensifies as he becomes more addicted. He no longer perceives his actions as sinful, but rather as permitted because his judgment has become impaired due to his addiction.

Rabbeinu Yonah in his work *The Gates of Repentance* writes that initially when one sins, although he does so deliberately, he is not as culpable for his sin as his subsequent transgressions in that area. This is because initially the individual did not understand that he had a vulnerability in a particular area and thus did not take the proper precaution not to sin. However, his vulnerability is revealed, through the initial sin, the individual must realize his weakness and thus take every precaution not to fail again. If he continues to sin in that area, it is a demonstration of his disregard for the Will of G'd. Thus, he is more culpable for his continued transgression than his initial sin, despite the fact that they were both deliberate.

If one has a moral conscience, one cannot deliberately sin a second time in the same area in which he had failed. If one appreciates the wrong of his behavior, he cannot sin. The only way one can continue to sin, is to justify and rationalize his actions in order to appease his conscience. This is the understanding of the Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin that states that if one continues to sin, the sin will be perceived by him as permitted.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos states, "If one sees a Torah sage sinning in the nighttime period, one should assume that perhaps he had repented by the morning. Not perhaps, but he had definitely repented by the morning." Why must one assume that the Torah sage "definitely" repented? The Gemara in Tractate Yomah tells us that a true Torah sage is one whose external behavior is consistent with his inner commitment to Torah. He is not merely a repository of Torah knowledge but rather the Torah sage is one who has fully internalized his Torah study and lives it every moment in all aspects of his life. Such an individual lives his life totally based on the truths of the Torah. The only reason that he falters is because he had a temporary lapse of clarity. However, because he is continuously engaged in Torah study, he will appreciate the wrong and repent immediately. This is rooted in the principle, "I have created the evil inclination and the Torah as its antidote."

5. G'd Orchestrating History on Behalf of the Jewish people

The Midrash cites a verse from Proverbs, " 'The tzaddik knows the life source (nefesh) of his animal but the mercy of the evil is cruelty...' To whom is, 'The tzaddik knows the life source (nefesh) of his animal' referring? It is referring to G'd...To whom is, 'the mercy of the evil is cruelty...' referring? It is referring to Sancheirev, the evil one. Another interpretation is that 'the mercy of the evil is cruelty' is referring to Haman, who wanted to annihilate every Jewish man, woman, and child. Reb Levy says, 'Woe to the evil that they are continuously scheming to destroy the Jewish people. Each of the evil ones says to his fellow, 'My method to bring about the destruction of the Jewish people will be more

effective than yours.' Esav said that Cain was foolish because he killed his brother during the lifetime of his father. Cain murdered his brother because he wanted the world for himself; however, since his father was still alive he was able to have more children. Cain should have waited until his father died. Because he did not, Adam had another son, Sheis. Esav said, 'I will not make the same mistake. The days of the mourning of the passing of my father will come soon and only then will I kill Yaakov, my brother.'"

The Midrash continues, "Pharaoh said Esav was a fool. Pharaoh said, 'Esav should have killed his brother sooner because by waiting until the passing of their father, Yaakov was able to procreate and produce a large family. I will not make the same mistake. I will kill all the Jewish male children after they are born.' Haman said that Pharaoh was a fool. Haman said, 'If one wants to destroy the entire Jewish people, one must not only kill their males, but rather one must annihilate all the men, women, and children. If one does not, the Jewish women will procreate and the Jewish people will be perpetuated.' At the end of time Gog and Mogog will say that all of the earlier ones were fools. The earlier ones believed that they could destroy the Jewish people themselves with their programs of annihilation. Did they not know that they have a Patron in Heaven? In order to destroy the Jewish people one must first remove their Patron. This is what I will do. I will wage war against the Patron and then I will destroy them. G'd said, 'Evil one, you think you can battle against Me? I swear on your life that I will go to war with you.' As it states, '...His Wrath will be aroused against them and the enemies will be destroyed...' This will take place at the end of time when evil will be vanquished."

The Torah tells us that Pharaoh had summoned the midwives, Miriam and Yocheved, who were the mother and sister of Moshe. Chazal tell us that Pharaoh had initially summoned them to cohabit with them. Maharal of Prague explains this based on a verse, "A man who cohabits with a woman has the power to influence her. Thus, by summoning them for this purpose, Pharaoh would be able to put into effect his plan to kill the Jewish males. They rejected his advances. Was Pharaoh aware of the concept that cohabiting with a woman will make her compliant to the male? Definitely not. Every one of the seventy root nations of the world has an archangel that is responsible to maintain its existence. It is this archangel that directs and influences the thoughts and strategies of the leadership of the people for which it is responsible. The behavior and perspective of the nations do not begin as a result of their understanding of the outcome, but rather their origin is implanted by the archangel. Pharaoh had a desire to cohabit with the midwives, but he did not understand the purpose and result of such behavior." G'd allows the nations of the world to devise evil strategies against the Jewish people and be influenced by their archangel because it will lead to the failure and destruction of that nation.

The Torah tells us that after the plague of hail came upon Egypt the wheat and spelt crop were not destroyed. Pharaoh believed that the deity that was responsible for the wheat and spelt was not able to be toppled by the G'd of the Jewish people. He did not realize that G'd only left the wheat and spelt untouched in order to give a false sense of security to Pharaoh (wheat and spelt being the

staple of life). Pharaoh did not understand that G'd had left these crops untouched so that the locust should be able to feed upon them and decimate these two staples. This is an example of how G'd misleads the evil. He allows them to delude themselves to believe that they are secure only to show them that their existence is precarious.

The Midrash tells us, based on a verse, that the Jewish people (Israel) are referred to as a boulder "(in Hebrew) even Yisroel". If one attempts to lift a large boulder above one's head, if he should falter under its weight he will be crushed and destroyed by it. This is the analogy to the Jewish people because all those who attempted to destroy them through out history, were destroyed through them. Reb Yaakov Emdin writes in his siddur that although we live in an era where there are no longer revealed miracles, there remains one - the continued survival and existence of the Jewish people. Despite all of the assaults, upheavals, and tragedies that have befallen them the still exist. As the Midrash delineates, the nations of the world that had attempted to destroy the Jewish people, were each misled as a result of the failure of their predecessor. Text Copyright © 2012 by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky and **Torah.org**.

Rabbi Kalatsky is the founder of the [Yad Avraham Institute](#), a New York-based learning center whose mission is to disseminate Torah to Jews of all backgrounds and walks of life.