



Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 65

Devarim | Successful Parenting



MESILLOT

Pathways to the Soul

illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly parasha
by **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel zt"l**

From the weekly lectures of his son,
Rabbi Israel Abargel shlita

...*~* PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL *~*...

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Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets

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Parashat Devarim

Forgive and Forget

Once, a wise and intriguing teacher taught in a famous school in the United States. This teacher would arrive every day with new and amusing ideas, most of them with a hidden message.

One day, at the last minute of class, this mischievous teacher stood up, gave a wise look at his forty students, and after a few moments of silence, he announced, “Tomorrow, each student must bring a thick plastic bag and a medium-sized sack of potatoes.”

The next day, among the swarm of students that flowed into the school, stood out plastic bags full of potatoes.

At the beginning of class, the teacher explained the task of the day. “Concentrate on your life,” he said passionately to his students. “Remember all the wounds and insults you suffered from people during your lifetime. Any insult you

still remember, please write it down on a potato. Each potato represents only one insult.”

An awkward silence ensued. Everyone tapped into feelings of pain, rejection, disregard, and hurt. Students were sucked into frustration, anger, difficulty, and tears.

Each student took out their sack and from that sack a potato, and then another potato, and another one, and another... On each one, they wrote the name of the offender next to the date of the wound. When they finished, each one put their potatoes in a plastic bag.

The teacher then made it clear that the plastic bags must not be left alone for even a moment. They must be carried everywhere. The class then ended...

For two whole weeks, the students carried the potatoes everywhere...

Parashat Devarim - Learn From Their Mistakes

They didn't dare go anywhere without the bags. To the playground. The cafeteria. On the bus. To the doctor. To a friend's party... They even slept with them at night.

Quite naturally, as happens with vegetables, they became sticky, smelly mashed potatoes. Yet, no one dared go anywhere without their bag. The students bravely dealt with the repulsive looks of others, and in any place where it just wasn't practical to go with the bag, they gave up and didn't go.

Learn From Their Mistakes

It was a day like any other. Rabbi Yehoshua Rosenblatt walked down the street with his little nephew on their way to the Talmud Torah. Suddenly, as they walked past one of the houses, they heard yelling coming from inside... An argument between husband and wife. Each one taking their turn to shout at the other.

Two weeks passed, and all the students came to class with their awful-smelling bags. The teacher turned to his students and said, "We all felt these last two weeks what a terrible price we pay when we choose to be offended, not to forget, not to forgive, and to carry our heavy baggage of insults everywhere we go. If, until today, we thought that forgiving others means doing *them* a favor, it's now clear that we're doing a favor first and foremost only for ourselves..."¹

Before we continue, we'll tell another story...

Rabbi Yehoshua's heart broke... He couldn't content himself with just a sigh and instead sought how to help. One problem, though, no one asked for his help... He asked his nephew to climb up to the home's window and push his face against it... Admittedly an impolite act, but when your uncle asks, you fulfill his request.

Inside the house, the argument got heated. The screaming intensified. It looked bad... Their faces looked towards the window inadvertently, and what they saw made them feel truly embarrassed. A small, smeared face against the window, with a pair of large, black eyes, stared at them...

“Get out of here! How dare you be so rude?! Who raised you?!”

Rabbi Yehoshua took the opportunity, asked his nephew to wait for him outside, and knocked on the door. The door opened, and Rabbi Yehoshua said, “I came to apologize. My nephew did a rude act and looked through the window of your house.” With unparalleled cunning sophistication, he managed to be welcomed into their home, warm their separated hearts, and draw them back to one another...²

One of the things that concern every person in the world is raising and educating children.

This issue raises questions like... How can children be taught the truths we’ve reached and the life experiences we’ve acquired?

We’ll explain. The animal closest to the level of “intelligence” of a human is the monkey, yet the monkey, for thousands of years, remained a monkey and progressed in nothing!

The reason for that is that a monkey acquires abundant knowledge in its lifetime, but it doesn’t pass it on to its descendants, and its offsprings continuously begin from the previous starting point.

But humans, on the other hand, pass on their experience to their children, and they continue from the point that the previous generation left off. Therefore, after accumulating the years and knowledge, mankind advances...

If this issue bothers the nations of the world, all the more so, it must bother and occupy a

Parashat Devarim - Rolling the Dice

place among every Jew since the essence of Judaism's survival depends on the transmission of the Torah and *emuna* from generation to generation...

If so, how can we convey this ?
We don't have a clear answer to that, but from our parasha, we can get a direction of thought.
 But first, let's preface...

Rolling the Dice

In all the countries of the ancient world, the news spread like wildfire... There's a new king. His name is Achashverosh... We'll skip the first years of his kingship and focus on an event that occurred

in the month of Nissan of the 12th year of his reign.

Haman, a descendant of Amalek³ and the second in charge of the kingdom, tossed and turned restlessly, "How ? !... How do I get rid of them ? !"

...*~* **Wellspring of Wisdom** *~*...

3. Michael Tobias was a fifty-two-year-old lawyer in New York City. A child Holocaust survivor whose father was killed by the Nazis, may their memory be erased. Michael was happily married with children, happy to lead a stable, productive life after the horrors of the holocaust.

Michael was a model citizen. Successful and well-liked, he respected his colleagues and the letter of the law. Even his driving record was impeccable, never ticketed or in an accident, until...

One morning, Michael was driving within the speed limit, as he usually would, and out of nowhere, an elderly man stumbled into the street. He couldn't stop his vehicle in time, colliding with the old man to his complete horror.

In shock, realizing what had just happened, Michael got out of his car to tend to the old man. He called for emergency help and telephoned an ambulance, but it was too late. The old man died in his arms.

It was clear that Michael was not at fault. The old man was negligent for wandering into a busy street. The police and courts also determined that the old man was at fault for his own death, and Michael was completely exonerated. No charges were pressed against him.

Yet, Michael couldn't come to terms with the fact that he was the cause of this old man's death. How could he sleep at night knowing that he murdered someone, albeit unintentionally? Michael

Parashat Devarim - Rolling the Dice

Suddenly he remembered and ran like crazy to his backgammon game. With

trembling hands, he took the dice out of the box and prepared to cast lots, “In the first month,

~ Wellspring of Wisdom ~

Tobias fell into a state of deep depression. He couldn't eat, his work was suffering, and he couldn't function like a normal human being. He was a shell of his former self. Even his oldest son's engagement didn't succeed in lifting the cloud of gloom he was shrouded in.

One of his extremely concerned close friends, Moshe, wanted to help. He managed to convince him to take time off and travel with him to Israel for a short vacation. There they could pray at the holy sites and ask for the blessing of Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky zt"l. Skeptical at first, Michael begrudgingly agreed to go. Although he wasn't one who would usually ask tzaddikim for blessings and wasn't convinced that any rabbi could help, he reasoned that the change of scenery would do him well.

Upon his arrival in Israel, he made an appointment to meet with Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky and made his way to his home. When he arrived, he immediately poured out his soul, reliving that traumatic day when he ran over the old man. Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky zt"l listened intently, and when Michael finished, he only answered one word, “Amalek!”

“**What** does that mean?” asked Michael. Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky then repeated

even louder, “Amalek!” With that, Michael was ushered out, even more confused than before he had entered.

A short while later, his son asked him to join him in seeing a house he was interested in purchasing before closing on the deal. Michael, still suffering from his depression, bleakly agreed.

The house was an estate furnished with many of the deceased's belongings. Looking around the house, an old photo album caught Michael's eye. He opened it up, and beyond his belief, it was filled with photos of a Nazi S.S. officer massacring Jews during the second world war. As he turned the pages, he couldn't contain his anger. Before him was lay a registry of Jews murdered by this Nazi. It struck him like a bolt of lightning, “Amalek!”

Then, he began to look more closely at the face of the young Nazi S.S. officer shown in the subsequent pages, “Amalek!” He had no doubt. It was unmistakably the old man that he ran over with his car.

Instantly, at that very moment, Michael Tobias understood the prophetic words of Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky zt"l. The cloud lifted. He avenged the blood of his father, whom he never knew...

Parashat Devarim - Rolling the Dice

which is the month of Nissan, during King Achashverosh's twelfth year, a *pur* (lot) was cast before Haman concerning every day and every month, [until it fell on] the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar" (Megillat Ester 3:7).⁴

He drew the month of Nissan yet knew that the merit of Pesach in this month would stand for Am Israel, and he wouldn't be able to destroy them. He drew again and got the month of Iyar, yet once again knew that the merit of Pesach Sheni would guard them. Again, he drew and received the month of Sivan, but that's the month that Am Israel received the Torah...

Tammuz and Av – In these two months, Am Israel suffered severe tragedies, but "no trouble will arise twice."

Elul – A month of repentance and atonement for Am Israel.

Tishrei – The merit of the many *Chagim* (holidays) in this month protected them.

Cheshvan – The flood... Noach and his sons were saved.

Kislev – The foundations of the Temple were laid.

Tevet – A severe calamity had already befallen them on this month... Nevuchadnetzar's besiege of Jerusalem.

Shevat – Rosh Hashanah for the trees, from which Am Israel brings *Bikurim* (first fruits).

Haman started sweating, "What will I do?! They have so many holidays, so many events!"

Nervously, he drew one last time, and suddenly, he erupted with cries of joy, "Yes! The month of Adar! The *mazal* (zodiac) of *Dagim* (Pisces)! They're caught in my net like fish! I'll swallow them whole

...*~* **Wellspring of Wisdom** *~*...

4. Haman's goal in drawing the lot was to find out which month and day would be the most opportune time to carry out his

plot to destroy Am Israel, *chas ve'shalom*.

He drew two lots... One to choose the month and one to choose the day.

Parashat Devarim - It All Starts From The Beginning

like big fish swallow smaller fish!"

Then, he began to doubt, "Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I won't succeed?!"

Suddenly... "How did I forget?! In the month of Adar, *mazal* doesn't help Am Israel because in the month of Adar,

their rabbi, Moshe, died, and if so, I'm sure that I'll succeed in my plot!"⁵



The Gemara finishes,⁶ "Moshe died on the seventh of Adar, but he (Haman) didn't know that he (Moshe) was also born on the seventh of Adar," and one's *mazal* strengthens on their birthday!⁷

It All Starts From The Beginning

The moment it's decreed for a soul to descend into a body in this world, the angel appointed over conception takes the drop from which a person will be formed and presents it before Hashem and asks Him, "Master of the Universe, what will be of this drop? Will the person fashioned from it be strong or weak? Will they be clever or unwise? Will they be wealthy or poor?"⁸

At that moment, Hashem determines for the soul all the components of its life down here on earth. Health, wisdom, wealth, beauty, etc. But, there's one thing Hashem doesn't determine, *Yirat Shamayim* (Awe of Hashem)!

Righteous or wicked aren't part of the initial determinations because everything is in the hands of *shamayim* except for *Yirat Shamayim*! It's the role of a Jew to take all the capabilities

— *Wellspring of Wisdom*  —

5. Midrash Rabbah Ester 7:11.

6. Megillah 13b.

7. **On** a person's birthday, their *mazal* strengthens, as it says in the Talmud

Yerushalmi (Rosh Hashana 3:8), "Not easily does a person get harmed on the day of their birth for their *mazal* rules and assists them."

8. Niddah 14b.

Parashat Devarim - Refuge

they've received from Hashem, and with them, serve Him, and be a *tzaddik* and *Yirei Shamayim*!

This moment is called the "moment of conception," and also, then, one's *mazal* strengthens! That is, in addition to the immense power that one receives at the moment of birth (for one's *mazal* strengthens then), they receive immense power even at the moment of conception!

The Vilna Gaon writes, "A general rule in the wisdom of *mazalot*, is that the zodiac sign activated at the time of conception is the same

sign activated at the time of birth!"⁹

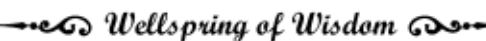
In the beginning of parashat Shemot, it's told about the birth of Moshe Rabbeinu and how his mother, Yocheved, had to hide him from the Egyptians.

From Rashi on the verse, "When she (Yocheved) could no longer hide him (Moshe)" (Shemot 2: 3),¹⁰ we learn that Moshe Rabbeinu was conceived on the 6th of Elul,¹¹ and according to what we preceded that thanks to the "moment of birth" of Moshe, the decree of Haman was nullified, we should try to find out what happened thanks to the "moment of conception" of Moshe...

Refuge

The Torah in parashat Mishpatim explains that someone who murdered intentionally should be sentenced to death by the *Beit Din HaGadol* (High Court), and if they murdered

by accident (such as while driving according to the laws of the road), they should be sentenced to exile at one of the 48 cities of refuge (while the Temple still existed).



9. See his commentary on the book of Iyov 3:3.

10. See there for Rashi's calculation.

11. If you take the 7th of Adar (Moshe Rabbeinu's birthday), and subtract 6 months and 1 day, you get to the 6th of Elul.

Pretty basic... Nothing too hard to understand. Yet, when the Arizal learned this verse,¹² he had difficulty with the words, “I will assign you a place to which he can flee” (Shemot 21:13). Why is the verse in the second person, “I will assign you,” it’s seemingly more appropriate to use the third person, “I will assign him...”?

The Arizal answers by saying that just as Hashem designated a place of refuge for murderers, so too He assigned one month out of the year, Elul, for any person that sinned to flee there. Hence the acronym of the words “אָנֶה לְיָדוֹ וְשִׂמְתִּי לְדָ” (Brought it to his hand, I will assign you) is “אלול” (Elul).

Every person who does *teshuva* (repents; but literally “return”) in the month of Elul, Hashem will accept their *teshuva* and bring them close to Him with excessive love.

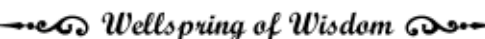
The basic requirements for *teshuva* are recognition of the sin, awareness that the path currently taken is incorrect, regretting having sinned, and taking upon yourself true *teshuva* (to truly return)...

This power, the power to recognize your true state, is revealed mainly in the month of Elul.

Hashem continues and reveals to Moshe... Know that this power is given to Am Israel thanks to the moment of your conception, which was on the 6th of Elul.

This is the meaning of the verse, “Brought it to his hand, I will assign you” – “you,” that is, thanks to you (Moshe), Elul!

This was the power of Moshe Rabbeinu – to guide every individual to understand why they should continue on a righteous path...



Free Will

The Gemara¹³ relates an incident involving Talmi HaMelech, who assembled seventy-two elders from the sages of Am Israel, put them into seventy-two separate rooms, and didn't reveal to them the reason he gathered them. He entered each room and said to the sage, "Write me a translation of the Torah of Moshe, your teacher."

Those sages, who knew with who they were dealing, understood that if they translated the Torah as it is, the senseless minds of the idol-worshippers would find hints in the Torah that idol worship should be practiced. Being so, they changed all the places that might cause them to believe that...

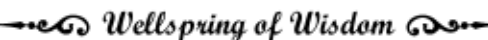
Even though all the sages were separated from one another, each in a different room, they managed to all translate the

Torah in exactly the same way!

One of the verses they changed was the verse, "And Elokim said, Let us make man in our image, as our likeness" (Bereshit 1:26), where they feared that the idol-worshippers would mistakenly conclude that there are multiple gods, for it says "us." So, they changed the verse to "I will make man" instead of "Let us make man."

Rabbi Menachem Mendel David Chodorov writes¹⁴ that at the time of the creation of man, it was said, "Let us make man," in the plural form. Indeed, two forces *did* participate in the creation of man, Hashem, and man himself! For truly, we are a partner in the act of our own creation.

If we look closely, we'll discover that out of all the abilities gifted to us by



13. Megillah 9a.

14. B'Moadoh (p. 31).

Parashat Devarim - Choose Good

Hashem, the most important is the power of choice... free will. This is what elevates us over all of the rest of creation.

Through our ability of choice, we must develop our minds to know how to choose good and reject evil. Our deeds shouldn't be that of habit but rather by choice.

If so, there are truly two partners in the creation of humans, Hashem and we ourselves. Hashem created our bodies and the ability for us to choose. We, with the ability of choice, create ourselves, work on ourselves and develop spiritually into a "complete person," and become a partner in the creation of ourselves...

Choose Good...

From the 1st of Shevat to the 6th of Adar, Moshe Rabbeinu taught the Book of Devarim to Am Israel for thirty-five days. The next day on the 7th of Adar, his last day on earth, he gave over the last parasha, parashat VeZot HaBeracha.

Within thirty-six days, he taught the entire book of Devarim. One of the things he taught during those days was the matter of choice, "I invoke, as witnesses against you this day, heaven and earth. Life and death, have I placed before you,

blessing and curse. Choose life in order that you live, you and your descendants" (Devarim 30:19).

At any given moment, we're faced with the possibility of choosing between good and evil, between doing and doing nothing.

In the book Likutei Moharan¹⁵ we found the following...

"I heard that one man asked him (Rebbe Nachman of Breslov), how does free will work? The Rebbe replied that choice is simply in the hands of man. If he desires, he does, and if not, he

Parashat Devarim - Ice Cream !

doesn't do... Many people are already accustomed to their actions and the ways they act from their youth. For that reason, it seems to them that they have no choice, and they can't change their ways. But this isn't so, for surely each and every one of us always has a choice, for we do what we desire..."

This is the foundation of Judaism... The Rambam wrote that free will is granted to each and every one of us. If we desire to turn ourselves to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is ours. Should we desire to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is also ours... "The man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad" (Bereshit 3:22). That is, we, as human beings, became unique

in this world, that we, on our own initiative and with our knowledge and thoughts, can know good and evil and do what we desire. There's no one who can prevent us from doing good or bad... Rather, the choice is in our hands...

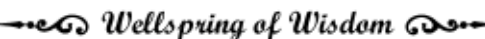
This is one of the great principles and pillars of Torah and Mitzvot... "I have placed before you today life and good, and death and evil" (Devarim 30:15)... "I place before you today, a blessing and a curse" (Devarim 11:26)... The authority is in your hands, and whatever you desire to do, you can do. Whether good or bad... Hashem doesn't compel or decree that anyone do good or evil. Rather, everything is in their hands..."¹⁶

Ice Cream !

So far, we've explained that every Jew is constantly faced with "choice" and that our job is to choose life... Love of

Torah and observance of all the mitzvot.

No one can claim that this is an easy thing, though, for it's



our nature to be attracted to various types of sins, and the evil inclination is constantly trying to overcome us.

There are two methods for overcoming our evil inclination: The first – Reward and punishment.

Needless to say, this method works great. However, it has a terrible downside...

This method deprives you of “choice.” After all, you see the reward and punishment standing before your eyes...

Even if, for some reason, you decide to “give up” on the punishment and behave nicely, it’s only out of a lack of choice, but when the “threat” of punishment stops, our behavior immediately returns to how it was before.

Therefore, we recommend the second method: To logically explain to yourself why you should choose the good path and distance yourself from the wrong path.

With this method, we don’t give up our choice. Instead, we

elevate ourselves to a higher place where we face a higher degree of choice.

For example, mom just cooked steak for dinner, and everyone sat at the table and enjoyed the home-cooked meal...

Suddenly, knocks were heard at the door. Uncle Yaakov came to visit and brought ice cream! One of the children saw the ice cream and started screaming, “I want ice cream!”

Dad tried to explain, “You just ate meat. In another six hours, I’ll give you the ice cream.” This child is now faced with a choice... To eat milk after meat or not.

This is a low degree of choice...

For someone who has already worked on themselves, this isn’t even a choice for them. They will obviously wait six hours. For them, “choice” is in a much higher place...

This is because they logically understood the magnitude of the

damage done to the soul by eating meat with milk. Thus, this isn't even a test for them...

Now, let's continue with the words of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov zt"l...

The Logic of Contemplation

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov wrote¹⁷ that every Jew must always focus on the inner intelligence of every matter and bind themselves to the wisdom and inner intelligence that is to be found in each thing so that the intelligence which is in each thing may enlighten them and draw them closer to Hashem.

More simply... A Jew needs to look at the reality surrounding them and find the divine force that sustains it. For example, when being served a plate of food, we must find the divine force that sustains the food and connect ourselves to that divine force while eating and intend to raise it back up to its root.

In addition to that, this could be understood in another way...

Many times, a person acts out of habit and without any thought... Thus, the reason they keep the mitzvot and avoid sinning is only out of habit.

For example, a child who grew up in a home where Torah and mitzvot are observed was educated already from childhood that it's forbidden to violate Shabbat and eat unkosher food...

They're also educated that they should pray three times a day and that before going to bed, they should recite *Shema*...

Since their *avodat Hashem* is only done out of habit, there's no guarantee that it won't cease. It may be that the day they feel that they aren't obligated to anyone, neither to their parents nor to

Parashat Devarim - What Is Education ?

their teachers, they'll throw everything away...

For this reason, Rebbe Nachman came and shouted, "We must refine our minds in such a way that all our actions will result from logic. We should be keeping Torah and mitzvot out of logic, recognition, and understanding that this is the way of truth and the reason for which we were sent to this world!"

HaRav Yoram Michael Abargel zt"l once told us that

during his childhood, there was a time when he worked on the *middah* of *simcha* (happiness). During that time, he took all the things that scare people and contemplated on them. He then got to the understanding that none of them can stop *simcha*! We are obligated to be always happy, and there's no power for anything, anyone, or any event to prevent us from being happy!

This, is the real strength of contemplation ...

What Is Education ?

One of the great leaders of chassidut and of Polish Jewry during his time was the holy Rebbe Kalonymus Kalman Shapira Of Piaseczna, author of the book *Chovat HaTalmidim* – The Students' Obligation.

Thousands of chassidim and followers took refuge under the arms of Rebbe Kalonymus and were warmed by his love, and too, everyone that neared him became engraved on his heart.

Rabbi Kalonymus invested tremendous effort into education, for the young, for the old, to those being educated, and to those educating, and this is how he described "education" at the beginning of his book *Chovat HaTalmidim*...

Education doesn't mean giving orders, instructions, and commands!

Education doesn't mean accustoming and training those

Parashat Devarim - Parasha Devarim

who are being educated to perform specific actions!

Education doesn't mean handing the child information and filling their head with "informative" material about the world and its activities.

Education isn't commands, nor practice, or knowledge...

Education is a beginning...

Education is the beginning of fulfilling the purpose of the one being educated... After having a child, we can educate

them by guiding them toward the fulfillment of their purpose, as a person and as a Jew.

The intention of education is to raise and develop the child's small and hidden natures and talents and reveal them.

Every person has their own unique way in *avodat Hashem*, already paved for them and only them! And, on this path, they must go on their journey of revealing the presence of Hashem in this world!

Parasha Devarim

Our parasha opens the entire book of Devarim. "These are the words which Moshe spoke to all of Israel on that side of the Jordan in the desert, in the plain opposite the Red Sea, between Paran and Tofel and Lavan and Chatzerot and Di Zahav. It is an eleven-day journey from Chorev by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea" (Devarim 1:1-2).

Rashi says that because these are words of rebuke and

mention all the places that Am Israel angered Hashem, Moshe mentioned them through hints, not to embarrass them.

"In the desert" - alludes to how they angered Hashem by saying, "If only we had died by the hand of Hashem in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat, when we ate bread to fullness! For you have brought us out into this desert, to starve this entire congregation to death" (Shemot 16: 3).

“In the plain” - alludes to their sin with the *baal peor* in the plains of Moav.

“Opposite the Red Sea” - alludes to how they rebelled against Hashem while approaching the Red Sea, “Are there no graves in Egypt that you have taken us to die in the desert?” (Shemot 14:11), “They were rebellious by the sea” (Tehillim 106:7).

“Between Paran” - alludes to the sin of the spies that took place in the Paran Desert.

“Between Tofel and Lavan” - alludes to how they angered Hashem with the *mann* (which is white, *Lavan* in Hebrew), “We are disgusted with this rotten bread” (Devarim 21:5).

“Chatzerot” - alludes to the dispute of Korach and his assembly and to the fact that Am Israel didn’t learn anything from Miriam being punished for speaking slander about Moshe, which all took place in Chatzerot.

“Di Zahav” - alludes to the sin of the golden calf (gold is *Zhav* in Hebrew).

“It’s an eleven-day journey from Chorev by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea” – Hashem wanted to bring Am Israel into the land of Israel quickly, and because of their sins, a path that should have taken them eleven days took them forty years. This caused Hashem great sorrow.

Moshe Rabbeinu continues and says, “Surely you are asking yourselves, why is he reprimanding us now? After all, these sins happened (for the most part) over thirty-eight years ago.

So know, this whole time I couldn’t rebuke you for you didn’t have the means to understand me, “Until this day, Hashem has not given you a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear.” (Devarim 29:3), and only now, after I have killed Sichon and Og, you have the means to understand me...”

The entire forty years that Am Israel was in the desert, they were

Parashat Devarim - Open Your Eyes !

treated according to the verse, “I remembered the kindness of your youth” (Yirmiyahu 2:2), for Am Israel acted like youth. Hence all the sins they committed during the last forty years.

Therefore, they were still unable to hear and understand the rebuke that Moshe wanted to say to them, and so he waited for the right time to tell them...¹⁸

Open Your Eyes !

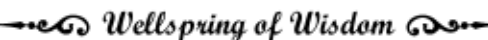
From the day Moshe Rabbeinu started his mission to redeem Am Israel, they had to go through numerous wars. Why then did Moshe mention specifically the war of Sichon and Og ?

HaRav Yoram Michael Abargel zt”l¹⁹ said that the *Klipot* of Sichon and Og are responsible for causing a person “numbness of the senses.” Therefore, as long as Am Israel was in this situation, there was no benefit in rebuking them.

Rebbe Simcha Bunim of Peshischa zt”l further explained that Sichon and Og managed to defile the minds and hearts of Am Israel...

Moshe Rabbeinu knew that as long as these two *Klipot* defiled the minds and hearts of Am Israel, his words of rebuke couldn’t penetrate deep into their hearts and do them any good. Instead, they would reject them. Therefore, Moshe waited until he struck these two kings and, in doing so, subdued the power of the two *Klipot*, and the minds and hearts of Am Israel were freed. Only then did he reprimand them, knowing that his words would now enter their hearts.

This is what Moshe meant when he said to them, “Until this day, Hashem has not given you a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear” (Devarim 29:3). Only



18. Netivot Shalom – Devarim (p. 9).

19. Imrei Noam (Parasha Ki Tavo, Maamar 7).

after these two *Klipot* were removed from Am Israel could their hearts and eyes be open to receive the words of Moshe Rabbeinu.

The first benefit that Am Israel gained from beating Sichon and Og was the ability to receive rebuke...

I Have No Friends...

“These are the words which Moshe spoke to all of Israel” (Devarim 1:1).

“He who reproves a man, will, in the end, find more favor than he who flatters him” (Mishlei 28:23).

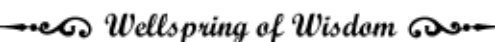
Thousands gathered before Rabbi Yechezkel Levinstein zt”l as I went to comfort him on the death of his wife...²⁰

I sat before him, not knowing what to say, and suddenly he muttered gloomily... “Our sages said,²¹ or *Chevruta* or *Mituta*,²² and I, unfortunately, have no friends...”

I was stunned. What did he mean by “I have no friends” ?

He then continued... “I’ll explain. Indeed, many have come to comfort me, but none of them asked me to do any soul-searching or contemplation...”

After all, when four hundred barrels of Rabbi Hona’s wine turned into vinegar,²³ his friends came to him and said, ‘It’s time to contemplate. You received suffering. If so, you have to find out where you wronged!’ After he figured out where he wronged and fixed it, the price of vinegar increased to the cost of wine, and he came out without any loss...”



20. VeHigadeta – Devarim (p. 11).

21. Ta’anit 23a.

22. “Either friendship or death,” meaning that someone who doesn’t have any friends doesn’t find any reason to live and prefers death.

23. Brachot 5b.

Sometimes It's Better Not To Say Anything...

Moshe Rabbeinu began his rebuke to Am Israel but said it only through subtle hints and without prolonging or using any harsh words.²⁴

From this, we learn that we shouldn't prolong with excessive rebuke when attempting to reprove someone and certainly not resort to harsh expressions that will cause them sorrow and shame. Instead, we must remember to act gently and with caution, thinking twice before every word.

The reason for this is because it's the nature of every person to love to be praised, and when they're rebuked inadequately, it only causes them to distance themselves, and

therefore there's no benefit in the rebuke.

The Rambam writes²⁵ that someone who rebukes their friend must rebuke them away from the presence of others and speak to them calmly without any harsh words. Also, they must remember that it's forbidden for anyone to humiliate another.

A parent who sees one of their children doing something wrong or misbehaving must remember never to reprove the child with anger or in front of others, and definitely not to embarrass them. Rebuking a child in the wrong way will only cause them to distance themselves...²⁶ Instead, we must wait patiently and keep

...*~* *Wellspring of Wisdom* *~*...

24. Imrei Noam (Parasha Devarim, Maamar 1-2).

25. Rambam - Halachot Deot 6:7-8.

26. **Elishai**, a teacher who works with immigrant youth, sat on a bus on his way to the north of Israel. It was a hot September day, and the bus was packed. The bus stopped at the next stop on its route, and an old religious man wearing

a long coat and black hat entered and found the last remaining seat on the bus, next to Elishai. After settling down, and he engaged in conversation with Elishai.

As the bus approached their destination, the old man turned to Elishai and asked him about his work. Elishai told him about

Parashat Devarim - Sometimes It's Better Not To Say Anything

his young students and noted that many of them are far from Torah and mitzvot.

The man fell silent.

After a few minutes, he began to tell Elishai a story...

Next month, I'm taking an early retirement from my job in the *Beit Din* (Rabbinical court), where I've worked as a judge for the past twenty-five years. But you should know... I didn't always look like this. These clothes, the beard, the hat... It's not something I was raised with at home.

My parents were older Holocaust survivors, and they didn't have the emotional ability to give me the attention I needed. I spent most of my time on the streets, and before I even reached the age of *bar mitzvah*, I already had many problems with the law."

Next to my parent's house was a synagogue, and next to it was a soccer field where I would play with friends during the week and especially on Saturdays. More than once, the ball would fly into the synagogue courtyard. Once, it even smashed one of the windows.

One Saturday, we were on the field playing, I was then about 15 years old, and everyone in the neighborhood had already given me the nickname "the criminal," and I kicked the ball hard. It flew out of the field toward the synagogue just as the rabbi came out.

The ball hit his black hat and knocked it to the ground. My friends and I couldn't stop laughing...

Calm and collected, the rabbi came over.

"**Shabbat** Shalom, would his honor like to make *Kiddush* or to join the game?" I asked mockingly, but he didn't seem fazed. He looked at me and asked, "Where are your parents?" I answered, still mocking, "My parents are dead."

The rabbi then said, "Come with me." I was amused and decided to play along and go with him. We reached his house. He entered, and I followed him. He sat down at his table, made *Kiddush*, gave me to drink from the cup, and asked, "Are you hungry?"

"**Starving,**" I said.

The rabbi gestured to his wife, and they set the table and gave me food. I ate like someone who hadn't eaten in a week. The rabbi ate only a little bit but mostly looked at me and talked. I later realized that I had also eaten his portion.

When I finished eating, he asked, "Are you tired?"

I responded that I was exhausted.

The rabbi offered me a bed, and I went to sleep. I ended up sleeping there the entire day. When I woke up, it was already night. The rabbi asked me, "What would you like to do?" I told him I wanted to go to the movies and see a movie.

"**How** much do the movies cost?" he asked. I told him that the cost of a ticket was one and a half shekels. He gave me the money,

Parashat Devarim - Sometimes It's Better Not To Say Anything

a close eye on them for the right moment to bring them aside to calmly explain, with love, what they did wrong, and what the correct way to act is. When a child receives rebuke in this way, the rebuke stays in their heart, and they'll surely change for the better.

Rabbi Chaim Ben Atar zt"l wrote in his book *Ohr HaChaim* that the reason Moshe Rabbeinu waited until they were past the Jordan to rebuke them was that, now, they had arrived at their

destination, and before so, when they were still traveling, they wouldn't have been ready to receive the rebuke.

This is because as long as Am Israel was traveling in the desert, they were troubled by the wandering and the exhaustion of the traveling and just wanted to see the land promised to them. Therefore, any rebuke would have fallen on deaf ears and closed hearts.

For that reason, Moshe Rabbeinu waited and delayed his

~ Wellspring of Wisdom *~*

and as I took them and ran off, he only said, "Come again tomorrow if you want."

In truth, I went back again the next day. I ate, slept, and again received money for the movies. This continued for quite a while... Over time I discovered that there were twelve other kids like me, from the streets, who came to this rabbi's house. In all honesty, I started to love him as a real father...

Slowly, he began to teach me about the mitzvot... After a while, he even bought me tefillin. He would sit down with me every day and teach me... Thanks to him, I eventually went to yeshiva, learned to be a rabbi, and ultimately, a judge in a

Beit Din. He was the one that married me off, as well as my children, and even sat *sandak* at my grandsons' *brit*.

Ultimately what I'm trying to tell you is, don't despair or give up on your students. You see me today as a judge in a *Beit Din*, but once I was just like them. All they need is love. Just love. Love them as if they were your own children...

As they descended from the bus, Elishai asked the man, "What rabbi, the one that brought you into his home. What was his name?"

"His name?" countered the man. "Rabbi Ovadia Yosef..."

rebuke until Am Israel arrived at the Jordan and stood on the land's border. There, their hearts opened and filled with joy, and they were ready to accept rebuke.

Rabbi Ila'a said in the name of Rabbi Elazar, "Just as a person is commanded to say something that will be heard, so too, they're commanded not to say something that won't be heard."²⁷

Shabbat Shalom !



The Pathway...

1. The essence of Judaism's survival depends on the transmission of the Torah and *emuna* from generation to generation... One of the things that concern every person in the world is raising and educating children. This issue raises questions like... How can children be taught the truths we've reached and the life experiences we've acquired?

2. If we look closely, we'll discover that out of all the abilities gifted to us by Hashem, the most important is the power of choice... free will. This is what elevates us over all of the rest of creation. Through our ability of choice, we must develop our minds to know how to choose good and reject evil. Our deeds shouldn't be that of habit but rather by choice. The authority is in your hands, and whatever you desire to do, you can do. Whether good or bad... Hashem doesn't compel or decree that anyone do good or evil. Rather, everything is in their hands...

3. Free will is granted to each and every one of us. If we desire to turn ourselves to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is ours. Should we desire to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is also ours... We, as human beings, became

unique in this world, that we, on our own initiative and with our knowledge and thoughts, can know good and evil and do what we desire. There's no one who can prevent us from doing good or bad... Rather, the choice is in our hands...

4. There are two methods for overcoming our evil inclination: The first – Reward and punishment. The second - To logically explain to yourself why you should choose the good path and distance yourself from the wrong path.

5. Needless to say, the method of reward and punishment works great. However, it has a terrible downside... This method deprives you of "choice." After all, you see the reward and punishment standing before your eyes... Even if, for some reason, you decide to "give up" on the punishment and behave nicely, it's only out of a lack of choice, but when the "threat" of punishment stops, our behavior immediately returns to how it was before. Therefore, we recommend the second method, to logically explain to yourself why you should choose the good path and distance yourself from the wrong path. With this method, we don't give up our choice. Instead, we elevate

The Pathway...

ourselves to a higher place where we face a higher degree of choice.

6. Many times, a person acts out of habit and without any thought... Thus, the reason they keep the mitzvot and avoid sinning is only out of habit. For example, a child who grew up in a home where Torah and mitzvot are observed was educated already from childhood that it's forbidden to violate Shabbat and eat unkosher food... They're also educated that they should pray three times a day and that before going to bed, they should recite *Shema*... Since their *avodat Hashem* is only done out of habit, there's no guarantee that it won't cease. It may be that the day they feel that they aren't obligated to anyone, neither to their parents nor to their teachers, they'll throw everything away... For this reason, Rebbe Nachman came and shouted, "We must refine our minds in such a way that all our actions will result from logic. We should be keeping Torah and mitzvot out of logic, recognition, and understanding that this is the way of truth and the reason for which we were sent to this world!"

7. Every parent and educator must know that education doesn't mean giving orders, instructions, and commands! Education doesn't mean accustoming and training those who are

being educated to perform specific actions! Education doesn't mean handing the child information and filling their head with "informative" material about the world and its activities. Education isn't commands, nor practice, or knowledge... Education is a beginning... Education is the beginning of fulfilling the purpose of the one being educated... The intention of education is to raise and develop the child's small and hidden natures and talents and reveal them.

8. Every person has their own unique way in *avodat Hashem*, already paved for them and only them! And, on this path, they must go on their journey of revealing the presence of Hashem in this world!

9. We must always remember that when it is necessary to rebuke someone for any action that they may have done, we shouldn't prolong with excessive rebuke when attempting to reprove someone and certainly not resort to harsh expressions that will cause them sorrow and shame. Instead, we must remember to act gently and with caution, thinking twice before every word.

10. It's the nature of every person to love to be praised, and when they're rebuked inadequately, it only causes them to distance themselves,

The Pathway...

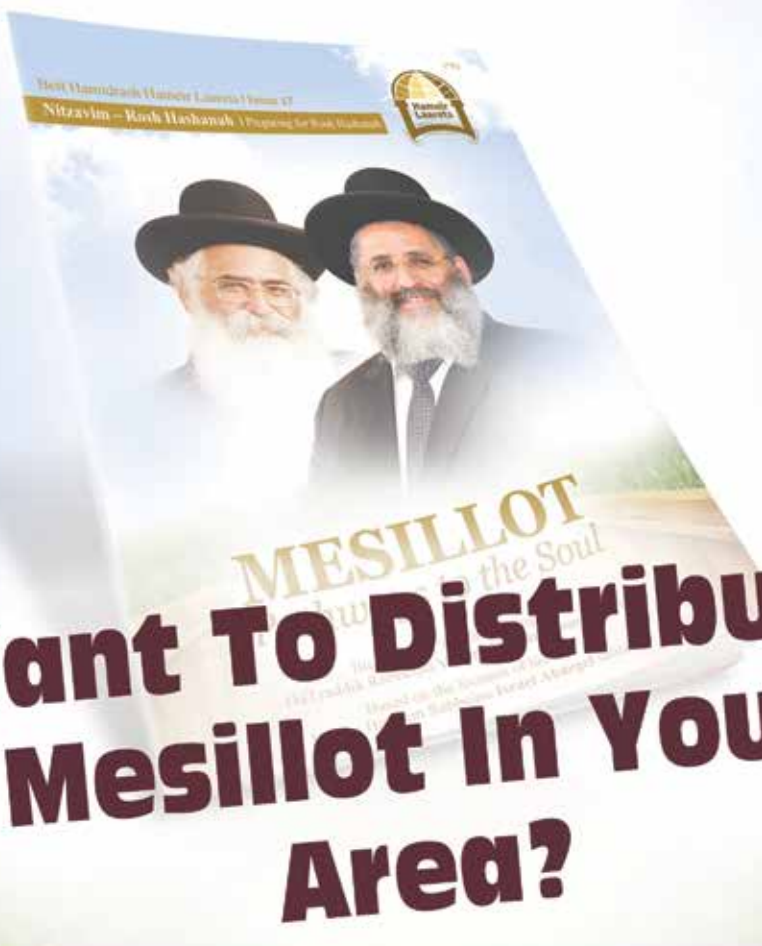
and therefore there's no benefit in the rebuke.

11. A parent who sees one of their children doing something wrong or misbehaving must remember never to reprove the child with anger or in front of others, and definitely not to embarrass them. Rebuking a child in the wrong way will only cause them to distance themselves... Instead, we must wait patiently and keep a close eye on them for the right moment to

bring them aside to calmly explain, with love, what they did wrong, and what the correct way to act is. When a child receives rebuke in this way, the rebuke stays in their heart, and they'll surely change for the better.

12. Rabbi Ila'a said in the name of Rabbi Elazar, "Just as a person is commanded to say something that will be heard, so too, they're commanded not to say something that won't be heard."





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9th of Av, 5782



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Miami	7:46 pm	8:40 pm	9:16 pm
Los Angeles	7:32 pm	8:30 pm	9:02 pm
Montreal	7:58 pm	9:06 pm	9:28 pm
Toronto	8:17 pm	9:23 pm	9:47 pm
London	8:26 pm	9:40 pm	9:52 pm
Jerusalem	7:17 pm	8:06 pm	8:59 pm
Tel Aviv	7:14 pm	8:04 pm	8:55 pm
Haifa	7:15 pm	8:04 pm	8:56 pm
Be'er Sheva	7:13 pm	8:02 pm	8:53 pm

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HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l*

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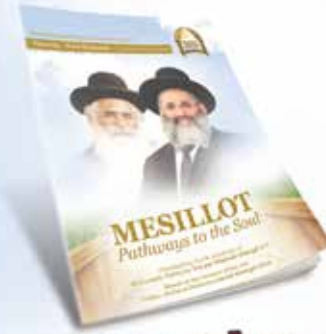
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