

Dvar Torah Outline — Parashat Devarim: Conquering Sichon and Og as Removing Inner Barriers to Teshuvah and Torah

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman explains why the Torah—after already giving the time and place—adds that Moshe spoke to Israel only after defeating Sichon and Og. Drawing on Chazal and Rabbi Tzadok, he presents Sichon and Og as spiritual forces of the *יצר הרע* that block a person's mind (preventing *הנפש*) and heart (hardening it like stone), making *תוכחה* unable to penetrate. The repeated emphasis on “בעבר הירדן” then becomes a conceptual map: the “east bank” represents (*דעת*, *בינה*, *חכמה*) *מוחין* that must be “brought down” into action as the nation enters Eretz Canaan.

I. Why does the Torah add yet another “introduction” before Moshe’s words?

A. The initial setup already seems complete

- The Torah begins with location/time, then states:
 - “וַיְהִי בְּאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּעֶשְׂתֵּי־עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל” (“It was in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first of the month, Moshe spoke to the children of Israel.”)
 - “כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֹתוֹ אֲלֵהֶם” (“According to everything that Hashem commanded him regarding them.”)
- Rabbi Shulman: it sounds like we are finally “ready to begin”—yet the Torah continues with more framing.

B. The added clause: after defeating Sichon and Og

- The Torah adds:
 - “אַחֲרַי הִכְתּוּ אֶת סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָעַמּוּרִי... וְאֵת עוֹג מֶלֶךְ הַבָּשָׁן...” (“After he struck Sichon king of the Emorites... and Og king of Bashan...”)

- Questions Rabbi Shulman raises:
 - We already know the date and context—why repeat “after he defeated them”?
 - We also know historically these wars occurred earlier—what is the Torah adding?

C. A linguistic oddity: “יושב” (present tense)

- The Torah describes the kings as:
 - “...as if they are “currently sitting/dwelling — “יושב”
 - Rabbi Shulman: why use לשון הווה (present tense) if they were already defeated?
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II. Sichon as the כוח that blocks חשבון הנפש (3:00)

A. The Gemara’s “חשבון” as introspective accounting

- Rabbi Shulman cites the famous Gemara (Bava Batra) on:
 - “בואו ונחשב חשבוננו של עולם” — a call to make a חשבון הנפש.
- “חשבון” becomes the symbol of honest self-evaluation: where I am, where I’m going, what I’m doing.

B. Rabbi Tzadok’s idea: Sichon embodies a קליפה that prevents deep thought

- “סיחון... יושב בחשבון” becomes a spiritual portrait:
 - Sichon “occupies” the space of חשבון—he blocks introspection.
 - Rabbi Shulman: Sichon is linked to “שיחה” (talking/schmoozing), i.e., surface-level chatter that crowds out depth and self-analysis.
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III. Og as the כוח that hardens the heart against Torah’s influence (4:00)

A. Og and “rocky cliffs” as metaphor

- “עוג... יושב בעשתרות באדרעי” (described as dwelling among rocky places) symbolically.

B. Og corresponds to בינה of the heart—and its blockage

- Rabbi Shulman: Rabbi Tzadok frames Og as opposing the inner “בינה” that lives in the heart (“בינה ליבא”).
 - Instead of letting חכמה penetrate and transform a person:
 - the יצר הרע can turn the heart into a “לב של אבן,” a stone-heart.
 - Two complementary strategies of spiritual stagnation:
 1. **Mind blocked** from reflection (Sichon/חשבון).
 2. **Heart hardened** so Torah can't be משפיע (Og/rock-heart).
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IV. Why this must precede Sefer Devarim: Devarim as תוכחה meant to transform (5:30)

A. Devarim is largely מוסר and rebuke

- Rabbi Shulman: Sefer Devarim is “כמעט כולו מוסר,” designed to change a person's life direction.

B. The “seven ספרים” approach and Devarim as מלכות (6:00)

- Rabbi Shulman notes an alternate counting:
 - If “ויהי בנסוע הארון” is treated as its own “book” (bracketed by inverted נוטים), the Torah can be viewed as **seven ספרים**.
- In that framework:
 - Sefer Devarim becomes the **seventh**, aligned with **מלכות**—bringing lofty truth down into lived human reality.

C. “משה מפי עצמו אמרה” and the root of תורה שבעל פה (6:30)

- Rabbi Shulman cites the Gemara (Megillah):
 - Devarim is distinct: “משה מפי עצמו אמרה.”
- Meaning (as Rabbi Shulman explains):
 - This is still divine and fully true, but it comes through Moshe's participation—“בחינת אדם.”
 - This becomes a שורש (root) for תורה שבעל פה: Torah as it enters the human domain.

D. Therefore: first weaken the inner Sichon and Og

- If rebuke is meant to land, it requires access to:
 - an open **mind** (for honest חשבון), and

- an open **heart** (to be emotionally moved).
 - Rabbi Shulman: the Torah signals that Moshe must first “deal with” these blocking forces before the words of Devarim can work.
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V. “He didn’t kill them”—he “struck” them: the ongoing nature of these forces (8:00)

A. Rabbi Tzadok’s precise reading: “הכה” not “הרג”

- The pasuk says Moshe “הכה” (struck) Sichon and Og.
- Rabbi Shulman:
 - Historically, Moshe killed them in the physical world.
 - But spiritually, these “כוחות” are not fully removed until the end of history, when there is no more בחירה.

B. In our avodah: these barriers are weakened, not erased

- The Torah’s wording suggests:
 - Moshe reduced their כוח, enabling transformation,
 - but the struggle remains part of human life.
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VI. Why repeat “בעבר הירדן”? Mapping “east bank” to מוחין that must be brought into action (9:00)

A. The textual question

- Rabbi Shulman: the parashah already said “בעבר הירדן” earlier—why say it again?

B. The promised land as “ten nations”: 7 + 3 (9:30)

- Rabbi Shulman explains:
 - The full promise to Avraham includes **ten nations**:
 - **Seven** in Eretz Yisrael proper (Canaanite nations),
 - **Three** across the Jordan (Amorite lands).
 - The “three” are associated with **לעתידי לבוא** in a deeper sense.

C. Seven as the realm of action; three as the realm of mind

- Rabbi Shulman:
 - “Seven” aligns with the structure of this-worldly action (like seven days), the middot unfolding into practice.
 - aligns with (the Amorite side) “מוחין” בעבר הירדן:
 - what is meant to shape and guide action from above—דעת, בינה, חכמה.

D. “ירדן” as “bringing down” (ירידה): translating ideals into life (10:31)

- Rabbi Shulman reads “ירדן” through the lens of “ירידה”:
 - to bring down lofty understanding into practical reality.
 - Thus:
 - Conquering Sichon and Og “בעבר הירדן” = conquering the distorted “mind/heart” forces at the level of מוחין,
 - so that entering Eretz Canaan can become “bringing it out למעשה”—turning Torah into lived action.
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VII. Practical closing: times that “break the heart” can open it for change (11:30)

- Rabbi Shulman ends with an application:
 - Certain מועדים or experiences “break” a person’s heart in a constructive way,
 - loosening the grip of the “לב אבן” associated with Og “in the rocky cliffs.”
 - This opening of the heart is necessary for genuine personal transformation—exactly what Sefer Devarim demands.
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In Summary

- Rabbi Shulman explains that the Torah’s “extra” setup—mentioning Sichon and Og—signals spiritual preparation, not historical information.
- Sichon represents the יצר הרע’s blockage of חשבון הנפש (a mind too distracted for introspection).
- Og represents the hardening of the heart that prevents Torah from penetrating and changing a person.
- Moshe “struck” these forces—weakening them—so the תוכחה of Devarim can be received.

- The repeated “בעבר הירדן” frames the east bank as the realm of מוחין (חכמה/בינה/דעת) that must be brought down into action as Israel enters the land.