

## Regarding this the poets would come to Cheshbon, let it be built and established as the city of Sichon. (21:27)

In the *Talmud Bava Basra* 78b, Rabbi Yochanan understands this *pasuk* differently. He contends that the word "*moshlim*," "rulers," refers to those who rule over themselves/their *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, while "*cheshbon*" means "reckoning." Those who govern their passion -- who are not controlled by their *yetzer hora* -- say, "Let us make a reckoning of the world: the loss that a *mitzvah* entails against its reward; the profit from a transgression against the loss it brings." In order to progress spiritually, one must triumph over the formidable challenge presented by the *yetzer hora*. The key to success is making a *cheshbon*, assessing what one gains and what one loses by everything that they do, whether good or bad. When one performs a *mitzvah*, the loss, if there is one, is temporary and miniscule in comparison to the everlasting reward he receives. For a transgression, the pleasure is fleeting and quickly forgotten; the loss, the harm that results, in contrast, is devastating and permanent.

Why does everyone not make this very simple reckoning? Some individuals do - at the end of their lives. After they have raised their families, they look back at their mistakes and how these errors affected the spiritual development of their families. For the most part, however, we tend to ignore the obvious. Indeed, most of us scrutinize a simple monetary investment much more than we weigh our actions prior to evading a *mitzvah* or even worse - performing an *aveirah*. We do not stop to think, because the *yetzer hora* does not give us the opportunity to do so. We are so involved in ourselves that we refuse to see what is happening to our lives. Because we do not stop to think, we do not balance the immense and everlasting benefits of a *mitzvah* against the epic and eternal loss incurred by sinning.

**Horav Shalom Schwadron, zl**, recounted the following story in conjunction with this *Mishnah*. One *Shabbos* night, after a *shiur* about the importance of weighing the value of a *mitzvah*, an elderly Jew came to him to tell the following story: After the first World War, prior to the Bolshevik rebellion, the Jews were finally permitted some form of freedom. Peaceful coexistence was in the air. Those Jews who were fortunate enough to have had invested in diamonds benefitted immensely from this reprieve in Jew-non-Jew hostility. "I was one of those who had a successful diamond business," said the Jew to *Horav* Schwadron. "Every morning I would be at my office in the diamond center at eight o'clock to get an early start on the trading. One day, I left somewhat earlier than usual, since I was carrying with me a large and expensive shipment of uncut diamonds, hoping to get an early start on the cutting and polishing. As I was walking, I heard someone shouting, 'A *tzenter*, a *tzenter*!' 'A tenth man for a *minyán*!' The man came over and begged me to join his *minyán* so that he could say *Kaddish*. Assuming that I was the tenth man and it would not take very long, I followed him to the *shul*. When I entered the *shul*, however, I was surprised to see that there were only three other people waiting for the *minyán*.

"I attempted to leave , saying it would take all day to gather a *minyan* -- to no avail. The man begged me to stay so that he could say *Kaddish* on his father's *yahrtzeit*. I sat down in the corner of the *shul* and recited *Tehillim* with the hope that there would soon be a *minyan*. I was mistaken. Finally, at ten o'clock the *minyan* was assembled and *Shacharis* commenced. I told the man who so badly need the *minyan* that we were all present for him. Could he just speed it up? He responded angrily, 'It is my father's *yahrtzeit*, how can I speed up the *davening*? How would you like it if it was your father's *yahrtzeit*?' I saw that I was obviously not going to be at work until the afternoon, so I resigned myself to participating patiently with the *minyan*. Finally, *davening* ended, and I was able to leave. As I walked toward the diamond center carrying my bag of diamonds, I noticed a friend of mine running towards me, disheveled and shook up. 'Run from here,' he cried out to me. 'Escape. The Bolsheviks have rebelled against the government. As usual the Jews are their first victims. They have destroyed the diamond center and killed many Jews. They are now gathering their ill-gotten booty. Escape while you can!'

"I ran into the forest with my bag of diamonds. After a few days in hiding, I was able to return. I left Russia and eventually came to *Eretz Yisrael*. I was saved only because I had participated in a *mitzvah*. Had I ignored the man who needed the *minyan*, I would have gone to work and probably met the same fate as so many of my friends."

The merit of performing a *mitzvah* does not always immediately manifest itself. It is sometimes covert. We have only to open our eyes and look so that we might see it.