



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 19 | Eikev | Sichah 2

## Finish What You Start

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## 1.

### WHAT IS RASHI'S PROBLEM?

In his commentary on the verse,<sup>1</sup> “All of the *mitzvah* {כל המצוה} that I command you today you shall observe to perform,” Rashi addresses {the Torah’s use of} the phrase “all of *mitzvah*” and explains: “{This is to be understood} according to its simple meaning;<sup>2</sup> and according to the *Midrash Aggadah*, if you start a *mitzvah*, complete it...” (as will be explained in section 2).

What difficulty in the first explanation — “{this is to be understood} according to its simple meaning” — led Rashi to offer a second explanation, and from the *Midrash Aggadah* no less?

The commentaries explain that the difficulty is in the phrase, “all of the *mitzvah*,” because “*mitzvah*” is in the singular — implying just **one** *mitzvah* — whereas “all” refers to “**all** *mitzvos*.”

We must say that the meaning here of “all (of the *mitzvah*)” is (not “**all** of the *mitzvos*,” but rather,) “**each** *mitzvah*.” However, we are still left with a question: According to this explanation, the verse should have said “every *mitzvah*” — “כל מצוה” (without the letter “ה” — “the”), and not “all of **the** *mitzvah*” — “כל המצוה”!

Therefore, Rashi brings two explanations: “{This is to be understood according to} its simple meaning; and according to the *Midrash Aggadah*...” Without looking at the difficulties in the first explanation, “its simple meaning,” we can accept the first interpretation as primary (according to *pshuto shel mikra*).<sup>3</sup> However, in order to address the above question, Rashi brings a second explanation (from the *Midrash*) — “if you have started a *mitzvah*, complete it” — because according to this explanation, we see that the verse does in fact refer to **one** *mitzvah*, and the use of the word “**all** of the *mitzvah*” refers to the

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<sup>1</sup> *Devarim* 8:1.

<sup>2</sup> {“*Kepshuto* — כפשוטו,” in the original Hebrew.}

<sup>3</sup> {The plain meaning of Scripture, also referred to as *pshat*. Rashi says in his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:8: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of the Scripture.” Though there are many levels and depths of interpretation on the Torah, Rashi adopts a straightforward approach.}

requirement for the person to fulfill the *mitzvah* **completely** (and not just partially).

But if we're looking for accuracy, it is not reasonable to say that Rashi aims to address this question, because the Torah already used this exact wording **earlier**, and Rashi does not comment over there at all. Therefore, we must say that Rashi doesn't see this wording as problematic since (according to him) the phrase "all of the *mitzvah*" can mean (even according to Rashi) "all of the *mitzvos*."

If this is the case, then our original question returns. What difficulty with the phrase "all of the *mitzvah*" written in **our parshah** prompted Rashi specifically here to explain it "according to its simple meaning" and also to bring another explanation from the *Midrash Aggadah*?

## 2.

IT'S ALL ABOUT WHO FINISHES IT

The explanation from the *Midrash Aggadah* is quoted by *Rashi* at length:

If you start a *mitzvah*, complete it, because it is ascribed only to the one who completes it, as it says,<sup>4</sup> "As for Yosef's bones, which the children of Israel had brought up from Egypt, they were buried in Shechem." But didn't Moshe alone occupy himself with bringing them up? However, since he was unable to complete this task, and the children of Israel did, it is ascribed to them.

We need to clarify a few points in Rashi's nuanced wording. Among them:

- a) Seemingly, the beginning of the explanation, "If you start a *mitzvah*, complete it," is sufficient to explain the words of the verse "all of the

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<sup>4</sup> *Yehoshua* 24:32

*mitzvah*.” Why is it necessary to add that a *mitzvah* “is ascribed only to one who completes it”?

- b) More specifically, it seems unnecessary to offer proof (from Moshe), “as it says, “Yosef’s bones...”!
- c) If Rashi offers proof in order to emphasize the severity of not completing a *mitzvah*, it would have been more fitting to bring proof from our Sages (in the *Talmud*<sup>5</sup> and the *Midrash*<sup>6</sup>) who teach that one who starts a *mitzvah* but does not complete it “is removed from his position of prominence,” and moreover, “he buries, etc.,” as was the case regarding Yehudah.
- d) Rashi says, “since Moshe was unable to complete it.” If the whole point that Rashi wishes to make is that “it is ascribed only to the one who completes it,” then what difference does it make *why* Moshe did not complete it?

Since Rashi adds the words “unable, etc.,” this implies that the reason that Moshe did not complete the *mitzvah* is germane. It is relevant to know that he didn’t complete the *mitzvah* because of extenuating circumstances<sup>7</sup> (“unable”), for reasons beyond his control.

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<sup>5</sup> *Sotah* 13b.

<sup>6</sup> *Tanchuma*, “*Eikev*,” sec. 6; *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 85, par. 3; *Devarim Rabbah*, ch. 8, par. 4: {Rabbi Yannai said, Anyone who starts to do a *mitzvah* but does not complete it will bury his wife and two of his sons. From whom do we learn this? From Yehudah (*Bereishis* 37:26): “Yehudah said to his brothers, ‘What gain (*betza*)...?’” They sat to prepare for their meal. He said to them, “Are we going to kill our brother and then recite a blessing {over the bread}?” As it says (*Tehillim* 10:3), “The robber (*botzea*) who blesses reviles Hashem.” Hence it is written, “What gain....” {Yehudah said,} “Come, let us sell him to the Yishmaelites” (*Bereishis* 37:27). They listened to him, since he was treated as a king. Had he said that they should bring him back to his father, they would have listened. However, he started to do a *mitzvah* and did not complete it. Hence, one who starts to do a *mitzvah* should finish it.”}

<sup>7</sup> {In the original Hebrew, “אונס”; lit., “force majeure.”}

### 3.

#### CAN IT MEAN IDOLATRY?

These issues will be clarified by prefacing with a question: Why doesn't Rashi understand the phrase "all of the *mitzvah*" (as do all the other commentaries) to refer to the verses that precede it, "The carved images of their gods you shall burn in the fire; you shall not covet... {the silver and gold that is on them}... and you shall not bring an abomination into your home...,"<sup>8</sup> which deal with the prohibition of idolatry? Regarding this, the Torah writes "the *mitzvah*" in the singular. On the other hand, regarding this the verse says "all," and idolatry can also be called a "*mitzvah*," unqualified, as Rashi remarked earlier:<sup>9</sup> "Transgressing idolatry is tantamount to transgressing all of the *mitzvos* {combined}, and whoever is careful with it is as if he has observed them all." Accordingly, the phrase "all of **the** *mitzvah*" – "כל המצוה," using the definite article "the," fits this explanation {of the other commentaries} because it refers to the *mitzvah* that was just discussed.

The explanation: In the previous verses, Moshe told the Jews that they would acquire the land of Israel, and "He {Hashem} will deliver their kings into your hand."<sup>10</sup> Moshe warned them that "the carved images of their gods you shall burn in the fire... and you shall not bring an abomination..." Moshe was instructing the Jews how to act **following** their conquest of the land.

Therefore, it is unreasonable to say that our verse, "all of the *mitzvah*," refers to the previous *mitzvah* commanding that "the carved images of their gods you shall burn in the fire... and you shall not bring an abomination..." Since our verse ("all of the *mitzvah*...") continues, "**so that** you may live... **and come** and possess the land" {we learn that} **by observing to perform** "all of the *mitzvah*" we will live to **later** enter and possess the land of Israel. This is unlike the previous *mitzvos* that would only apply **after** "you enter and possess the land." (Although with difficulty, it is possible to say that this *mitzvah* refers to the prohibition of idolatry generally, and not only after entering the land.)

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<sup>8</sup> Devarim 7:25-26.

<sup>9</sup> Shemos 23:13.

<sup>10</sup> Devarim 7:24.

#### 4.

##### THE LAND IS A REWARD FOR THE COMMANDMENTS

In this context, we can understand why Rashi comments on this verse and explains, “according to its simple meaning.” Moshe Rabbeinu began to say *Mishneh Torah*<sup>11</sup> “on the first day of the eleventh month,” which is Rosh Chodesh Shevat. Therefore, *parshas Eikev* was said either on that day, the first of Shevat, or shortly afterward.

Moshe Rabbeinu said, “All of the *mitzvah* that I command you today you shall observe to perform **so that** you may live and increase, and come and possess the land.” Meaning, by following “all of the *mitzvah*,” they would merit to possess the land of Israel.

If what Moshe meant was that **after** {and because} the Jews observe **all** of the (613) *mitzvos*, they would then ({implied by} “so that”) “live and increase, and come and possess {the land},” then this would be perplexing because this statement was made in the month of Shevat, when they were about to enter the land. They only had the ability to observe a few of the *mitzvos*, and they certainly were not able to observe any *mitzvos* involving the land itself. There wasn’t even enough time to observe many of those *mitzvos* that apply also outside of Israel, for example, the festivals {which fall at a different time of year}.

[Only with extreme difficulty could we say that “all of the *mitzvah*” means (not **all** of the *mitzvos*, but rather,) only the *mitzvos* “that I command you **today**” — on this day itself — because:

- a) Why would the promise, “come and possess the land,” be a {fitting} reward for fulfilling the *mitzvos* commanded on **that** {one} day?
- b) Simply understood, “(that I command you) **today**” does not refer to one day, but rather, in a general sense, to the current (present) **time**. (In any

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<sup>11</sup> {Lit., “the second Torah,” this refers to the book of *Devarim* as much of its content is a “review” of the previous four books, and not to the halachic work of this name by *Rambam*.}

event, the phrase, “that I command you today” refers simply to all of the *mitzvos* (in the book of *Devarim*). This dovetails with {a verse at} the end of *parshas Vaeschanan*:<sup>12</sup> “You shall observe the *mitzvah* and the decrees, and the ordinances that I command you **today**, to perform them.” Understood plainly, this means to perform all of the *mitzvos*.

- c) If we were to say that “today” means **that day** {of Rosh Chodesh}, we wouldn’t know which *mitzvos* were given on that day (and also what day it was then)! This would contradict the principle that “Scripture does not seek to obscure, but rather to clarify.”<sup>13</sup>]

Therefore, Rashi explains: “*All of the mitzvah* — {this is to be understood} according to its simple meaning,” and points out that we must understand the phrase “all of the *mitzvah*” to refer to all the *mitzvos*. The use of the singular {*mitzvah* and not *mitzvos*} is conventional in the case of a collective noun that includes many particulars, although this is not an entirely straightforward interpretation.

Accordingly, “all of the *mitzvah*” {does not imply that the Jews were expected to perform every *mitzvah* in the Torah; it} only refers to those *mitzvos* that they were able to perform before entering the land.

There is still a problem with explaining that on the one hand, “all of the *mitzvah*” is a collective term that includes all *mitzvos* equally, yet on the other hand, includes a small minority {only *mitzvos* that could be performed in the desert}. Rashi, therefore, offers a second explanation: “If you have started a *mitzvah*, complete it.” According to this interpretation, “all of **the mitzvah**” (does not refer to all of the *mitzvos* collectively, but rather, it) means the entirety of an {individual} *mitzvah*.

However, what is the connection between fulfilling a *mitzvah* completely and entering the land? Rashi therefore says that a *mitzvah* “is ascribed only to the one who completes it,” as will be explained.

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<sup>12</sup> {*Devarim* 7:11.}

<sup>13</sup> Rashi’s commentary on *Bereishis* 10:25.

## 5.

### IT BEGINS SOMEWHERE

Conquering and possessing the land of Israel was a consequence of the promise “that Hashem swore to your forefathers”;<sup>14</sup> nevertheless, it was also linked to the *mitzvos* fulfilled by the Jewish conquerors, as Moshe says explicitly in the verse. [Therefore, we see that despite the promise to the forefathers, because of the Sin of the Spies that generation forfeited the privilege of entering the land of Israel.]

This is the point of the verse: Even though the previous generation of Jews, during the forty years {in the desert}, fulfilled *mitzvos*, and thus helped (facilitate)<sup>15</sup> the entry of the Jews into the land of Israel, nevertheless a *mitzvah* “is ascribed only to the one who completes it.” Meaning, when Moshe said, “All of the *mitzvah*.. you shall observe to perform **so that** {you may... possess the land},” he was speaking to the Jews who lived at **the end** of the forty years {in the desert}, and his intent was that that the Jews entered and possessed the land in the merit of **their** *mitzvos*.

According to this explanation, we also understand that the *Midrash Agaddah* does not dismiss the *pshat*<sup>16</sup> (entirely, and thus reject the simple meaning) of “all of the *mitzvah*,” because even according to the *Midrash*, this phrase refers (not just to a single *mitzvah*, but) to all of the *mitzvos*. That is, all the *mitzvos* that the Jews fulfilled throughout the forty years in the desert were credited to the final generation who “completed” the *mitzvos* (before entering the land).

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<sup>14</sup> {*Devarim* 8:1, the conclusion of our opening verse.}

<sup>15</sup> {Their *mitzvos* not only helped to make the conquest and settlement of Israel possible, but also positively impacted the manner in which this would unfold.}

<sup>16</sup> {The plain meaning of the text; there are many levels of Torah interpretation aside from *pshat*.}



## 6.

CREDIT GOES TO THE ONE WHO COMPLETES IT

But a question still remains: We understand why the *mitzvos* performed by the Jews connected to the Sin of the Spies, and who didn't want to enter the land of Israel, are ascribed (not to them, but rather) to those who *did* want to enter the land of Israel. (On the contrary, the actions of the Jews associated with that sin actually delayed the Jews in the desert for forty years.)

However, there were some Jews who were not involved in the Sin of the Spies. The only reason they died in the desert was because they were included in the decree {that people} “from the age of twenty and older” {would die in the desert}. {Since *they* had wanted to enter the land,} why couldn't they take credit for the *mitzvos* they had fulfilled, which had enabled the Jews to enter the land?

On the other hand, some Jews under the age of twenty at the time of the Sin of the Spies also did not want to enter the land. But because they were under the age of twenty at the time of the sin, the {divine} decree {to remain in the desert for forty years, and die there} did not apply to them, and they entered the land with everyone else. Why should fulfillment of the *mitzvah* be also credited to them?

Rashi therefore quotes: “As it says: ‘Yosef’s bones....’” But didn't Moshe **alone** deal with them to bring them out of Egypt? However, since **he was unable to complete this task**, and the children of Israel did {it is ascribed to them}.” According to the above explanation, it is understood:

- a) It makes no difference why a person does not complete his assigned task, even if the cause was out of his control, as was the case with Moshe, who was “unable to complete this task.” Regardless, the *mitzvah* is always ascribed to the one who completes it.
- b) Conversely, we see that “Moshe **alone**” took care of Yosef's bones. Even though there were those who were below the age of twenty when they left

Egypt and did not help Moshe at all with the task, yet because they were the ones to actually bury the bones of Yosef in Shechem, they were given the credit because they finished the job.

The same is true in our case regarding the Jews who entered the land:

- a) The *mitzvah* is ascribed to those who completed the task {and entered the land}, even though some of the Jews in the desert {had died earlier, and thus} were unable to complete it due to no fault of their own.
- b) The *mitzvah* is ascribed to those who completed the task {and entered the land}, even though earlier they had (not only been uninvolved in fulfilling the *mitzvah*, but had) involved themselves in something different.<sup>17</sup>

We can now understand why Rashi **only** remarks that a *mitzvah* “is ascribed only to the one who completes it” and offers proof from Moshe. However, Rashi does not remark that {by not completing a *mitzvah*,} a person “is removed from his position of prominence, etc.,” as was the case regarding Yehudah. This is because the lesson being conveyed here is not how grievous it is to leave an *mitzvah* incomplete, but rather, that a *mitzvah* “is ascribed only to the one who completes it” (as with the generation that crossed into the land of Israel). This is true even when those who began doing the *mitzvah* could not complete it due to no fault of their own.

## 7.

### MAKING SENSE OF RASHI

We can now resolve another difficulty in Rashi’s commentary. It seems that the beginning and the end of his commentary {on our verse} are addressing different points. Rashi begins (with the explanation of the *Midrash Agaddah*), “If you have started a *mitzvah*, complete it,” implying that there is an obligation

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<sup>17</sup> “The entire nation involved themselves in taking spoils, while Moshe involved himself with Yosef’s bones.” (*Tanchuma*, “*Ekev*,” sec. 1) {see fn. 42 in the original}.

to finish what you start. Later in his remarks, however, Rashi continues: “A *mitzvah* is ascribed only to the one who completes it.” This implies that there is *no* obligation for a person who begins performing a *mitzvah* to complete it; rather {Rashi’s intent is to teach us that} as a reward, the *mitzvah* is ascribed to the person who completes it.

But from what was explained earlier, this makes sense. It is true that **the person who begins** to fulfil a *mitzvah* is obligated to complete it, but Rashi’s intent in remarking on our verse that a *mitzvah* “is ascribed only to the one who completes it” is to emphasize a novel insight {conveyed by the verse} regarding **the person completing** a *mitzvah*. Although the person who begins performing a *mitzvah* may be unable to complete it due to no fault of his own (as in our case regarding those who could not enter the land of Israel because of Hashem’s decree, and also regarding Moshe), the *mitzvah* is ascribed **only** to “the one who completes it.”

## 8.

SHOULD I EVEN BEGIN

Among the wondrous ideas we find in Rashi’s commentary:

Rashi uses the wording (of *Tanchuma*), a *mitzvah* “is ascribed only to the one who completes it.” The *Gemara*, however, uses the wording, “Scripture considers the one who completes it {the *mitzvah*} as if he had done it.”

The wording “it is ascribed only to the one who completes it” (as found in the *Midrash*) conforms with the simple meaning of the verse, unlike the expression “as if he had done it” (as it is in the *Gemara*).

[The simple reason why Rashi brings the wording of the *Midrash* and not of the *Gemara* is that the *Gemara* does not refer to the verse “all of the *mitzvah*,” and doesn't even mention the term “*mitzvah*.” Rather, it writes, “Whoever does **something** and does not complete it, and someone else comes

along and completes it, Scripture considers {him to have done it}.” The *Midrash*, on the other hand, does use the term “*mitzvah*,” and it refers to our verse. Since Rashi’s remarks on the verse relate to the **mitzvos** given to the generation that entered the land, it makes sense that Rashi would use the wording of the *Midrash*.]

This is because in our case, although “the *mitzvah* is **ascribed**... to the one who completes it,” it is not possible to say, according to the **plain** meaning of the words, that it is “as if he had **done** it,” because this would apply only if he himself had performed the *mitzvah* and others had no connection to it at all.

In other words, there are two elements at play here: The idea that *mitzvah* is “ascribed... to the one who completes it” relates only to the person who completes it; but the person who started it also has an obligation to complete it. However, his commencement of the *mitzvah* (particularly if he didn’t complete it only as a result of duress) is also considered (from his perspective) a *mitzvah* act.

From the above, we can understand how this translates into practical guidance: Based on the simple meaning of the adage, “if you have started a *mitzvah*, complete it,” it is clear that we have an obligation to complete a *mitzvah* that we have started. We do **not** learn from here that a person should not start performing a *mitzvah* that he is certain he will **not** be able to complete.

The discussion above helps us understand straightforwardly Rashi’s remarks (quoting the *Gemara*)<sup>18</sup> on the verse,<sup>19</sup> “then Moshe set aside three cities {east} side of the Jordan”: “Even though they would not serve as cities of refuge until those of the land of Canaan were designated, Moshe said, ‘Any *mitzvah* that is possible to fulfill, I will fulfill.’” Moshe did so, even though he knew that he would not be able to complete the *mitzvah* of setting apart the cities of refuge by (also) designating the three cities of refuge in the land of Israel. From here we learn that the commencement of a *mitzvah* is a part of the fulfillment and performance of the *mitzvah*.

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<sup>18</sup> *Makos* 10a.

<sup>19</sup> *Devarim* 4:41.

## 9.

### A PART-MEASURE

In light of the above explanation, it is understood why there is no correlation between our discussion and the well-known dispute: Is fulfilling a *mitzvah* **obligation** in partial measure (or by a partial action) considered to be partial fulfillment of the *mitzvah* itself, and if so, a person would be obliged to fulfill that part? Or not? For example, consuming a half-olive sized piece of *matzah*<sup>20</sup> {when this is all the *matzah* he has available}, or the like.

For [in addition to the explanation above, i.e., according to Rashi, the adage, “if you have started a *mitzvah*, complete it” doesn't imply that the commencement of a *mitzvah* act is not a part of the *mitzvah*,] the debate {regarding the obligatory nature of performing a *mitzvah* in part-measure} relates to an obligation placed on the individual, and the obligation on the individual is to perform the **entire** *mitzvah*. In contrast, our discussion concerns those *mitzvos* that don't obligate the **individual specifically** to perform, except that the person, in fact, began to perform it. In that case “(if you have started a *mitzvah*) complete it.” Since he began to fulfill it, there is now an obligation on him to complete it.

Similarly, regarding the bones of Yosef, the Torah says, “for he {Yosef} had bound the children of Israel by an oath, saying, ‘Hashem will surely remember you, and you shall bring up my bones from here with you.’”<sup>21</sup> The oath and obligation rested equally on all Jews (to remove Yosef's remains from Egypt).

Afterward, however, Moshe began to fulfill the *mitzvah*: “Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him.” At that moment, Moshe specifically became obligated to complete this task. But since he was unable to actually complete it due to no fault of his own, and “the children of Israel completed it,” this *mitzvah* is therefore attributed to them.

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<sup>20</sup> {The required amount of *matzah* to be eaten on Pesach is an olive size; if a person has only a half-olive sized piece of *matzah*, would he still be obligated to eat it?}

<sup>21</sup> *Shemot* 13:19.

The explanation is as follows: If one person begins to fulfill a communal obligation, he is **similar** to an emissary who is acting on behalf of the entire community in this regard. Therefore, a distinct obligation (as an agent) falls on him to complete the *mitzvah*.

## 10.

### COMPLETE THE CONQUEST

This issue is **similar** to that regarding the narrative of the tribes of Gad and Reuven. {Before entering the land of Israel,} they requested: “Let this land be given to your servants as a heritage; do not bring us across the Jordan.”<sup>22</sup> Moshe initially challenged them: “Shall your brethren go out to battle while you settle here?”<sup>23</sup> to which the two tribes replied, “We shall arm ourselves swiftly in the vanguard of the children of Israel....”<sup>24</sup> Moshe commanded them (“If you arm yourselves before Hashem for the battle before Hashem, and every armed man among you shall cross {the Jordan} before Hashem... the land shall be conquered before Hashem”), while at the same time, he made it clear that “If you do not do so, behold! — you will have sinned to Hashem. Know your sin that will catch up to you.”

Seemingly, we could ask: Granted, the two tribes had offered to *arm* themselves swiftly. So why did Moshe come down on them so hard {warning that} if you do not “cross {the Jordan} *armed*”<sup>25</sup> “before your brethren, the children of Israel,” “you will have sinned to Hashem”?<sup>26</sup> This implies that even if they were to join the armed forces together with the other Jews **swiftly** but without arming themselves, it would be unacceptable — “you will have sinned.”

We can relate all the above to the adage, “if you have started a *mitzvah*, complete it”:

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<sup>22</sup> *Bamidbar* 32:5.

<sup>23</sup> *Bamidbar* 32:6.

<sup>24</sup> *Bamidbar* 32:17 ff.

<sup>25</sup> *Devarim* 3:18.

<sup>26</sup> *Bamidbar* 32:23.

The *mitzvah* to conquer the land of Israel was a communal obligation and applied to all Jews equally.<sup>27</sup> When the lands of Sichon and Og were given to the tribes of Gad and Reuven, these territories became a part of the land of Israel. Therefore, it turns out that when Gad and Reuven were given these territories, they (retroactively) had begun the *mitzvah* of **conquering the land of Israel**.

[This also resolves a contradiction in Rashi's commentary. In one place,<sup>28</sup> he says: "When Moshe entered the **portions** of the tribes Gad and Reuven, he rejoiced and said, 'It seems that the vow regarding me has been annulled.'" <sup>29</sup>This implies that {Moshe} only believed "that the vow regarding me" was annulled (not immediately upon conquering the lands of Sichon and Og, but) only after the lands of Sichon and Og were granted to the tribes of Gad and Reuven ("the portions of the tribes of Gad and Reuven"). However, elsewhere<sup>30</sup> Rashi says {quoting Moshe}: "After I **conquered** the land of Sichon and Og, I thought that perhaps the vow might be nullified."

{This contradiction can be resolved as follows:} Only after the land became "the **portion** of the tribes of Gad and Reuven" did it become part of the land of Israel." At that moment, (retroactively) the *mitzvah* to **conquer** the land of Israel began {to be fulfilled}.]

Once these two tribes **began** the *mitzvah* of conquering the land of Israel, they became uniquely obligated (in addition to their shared obligation together with all the Jews of that generation) to **complete** the job — "If you have started a *mitzvah*, complete it."

Therefore, when they asked to be granted the lands of Sichon and Og as their portion, Moshe replied that they would thereby have the legal status of *one who begins to fulfill a mitzvah*. Therefore, he told them that it would not have been enough to merely **help** the other tribes to conquer the land, on the west of

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<sup>27</sup> In the time of Moshe — according to all rabbinic opinions. The dispute between *Rambam* and *Ramban* concerns only whether there is a positive command to do so in all subsequent generations.

<sup>28</sup> *Bamidbar* 27:12.

<sup>29</sup> {The promise made by Hashem that Moshe would not be allowed into the land of Israel. Now that he was allowed into the portion of Sichon and Og, which was to be a part of Israel, he thought that Hashem must have reconsidered}

<sup>30</sup> *Devarim* 3:23.

the Jordan; they must “complete” the conquest. They must “cross {the Jordan} armed, **before** your brethren, the children of Israel.” This is because they had a unique responsibility over and above that of the other Jews.

## 11.

CONTINUE TO SPREAD THE WELLSPRINGS

From “the wine of Torah”<sup>31</sup> in Rashi’s commentary, from which we can learn a life lesson relevant to our times: All signs<sup>32</sup> point to this generation living at the heels of Moshiach {entering the Messianic age}. With the true redemption through our righteous Moshiach, we will very soon leave exile and go to our holy land.

It is (also) said regarding these times that a *mitzvah* “is ascribed to the one who completes it.” Although the work of previous generation in matters of Torah and *mitzvos* was greater and more sublime compared to our current generation, still, we say that “it is ascribed to the one who completes it.” The redemption comes in the merit of the *mitzvos* that Jews fulfill in this generation, by **completing** and concluding the *avodah* during this time of the “heels of Moshiach.”

This {knowledge} ought to give, and does give, extraordinary encouragement to every Jew to increase in matters of Torah and *mitzvos*. Then the redemption, by our righteous Moshiach, will come sooner.

On the other hand, there is also a lesson in this for every Jew: “If you start a *mitzvah*, complete it.” As known, the Baal Shem Tov wrote in a sacred epistle {to his brother-in-law, regarding a transcendent experience in which he entered the chamber of Moshiach}: The Baal Shem Tov asked Moshiach, “When is the Master {Moshiach} coming?” Moshiach replied, “When your wellsprings have

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<sup>31</sup> {I.e., the deeper teachings of *Torah*.}

<sup>32</sup> At the conclusion of tractate *Sotah*.



spread forth to the outside.” This obligates every Jew to disseminate to the outside, to all Jews, the wellsprings — the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov.

This is especially true for those who have “started a *mitzvah*” — those who have begun to disseminate the wellsprings. Should there come a time where one becomes lax in his efforts, he might think that he can rely on someone else to continue, while he will assist by offering a piece of good advice, etc.

The lesson is “if you start a *mitzvah*, complete it.” Since you have begun to work in the field of teaching *Chassidus*, you now have an obligation (and a merit) to continue and to complete the task.

[This holds true especially since we want to have a multitude of blessings and benefaction from Hashem. The benevolence is channeled through his servants, the leaders of each generation, who in our case is the Rebbe, my father-in-law.]<sup>33</sup>

When a person resolves to sincerely commit to continue working in the field of disseminating Torah to the world, specifically the wellsprings of Torah, Hashem helps and empowers him to overcome any challenges.

Together with all Jews, we will complete the *mitzvah* and bring our righteous Moshiach down below, into this world, speedily, in actuality, in our days.

Based on a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Eikev*, 5727 (1967)

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<sup>33</sup> {The Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn.}