

Parsha Ponders

Chukas | June 22, 2023 | 4 Tammuz 5783

*Cheshbono shel Olam*¹

על-כן יאמרו המשלים באו חשבון תבנה ותכון עיר סיחון

Therefore, the conquerors say: "Let's go to the city of Cheshbon; the city of Sichon should be built and established"²

After the Jews successfully captured the city of Cheshbon, the city of King Sichon, the Torah tells us a vague verse. It describes what "the conquerors"³ said after the Jews' victory. Perhaps since it is unclear why we need to know this information, our Sages interpreted⁴ the verse in a homiletic way: "The conquerors", this is referring to those who have conquered their *yetzer hara*, their evil inclination. They say, "let's go to Cheshbon", this refers to calculating the accounting of the world: the loss incurred when fulfilling a *mitzvah* versus its gains, and the gains of transgressing a prohibition versus its losses⁵.

One could ask a basic question on this teaching. Why are we told that those who conquers their *yetzer hara* are the ones who say to make a spiritual accounting of *mitzvos* versus transgressions. I would say the opposite, that someone who conquered their *yetzer hara* already has everything figured out. Only someone who is still struggling with their *yetzer hara* should need a spiritual accounting.

In truth, there are two types of wars, or struggles, with the *yetzer hara*. There are those who are under the control of their *yetzer hara*, who have been overpowered by it, and those who have overpowered their *yetzer hara*. Either way, it's a battle. Those who the *yetzer hara* has them under its control, they have no chance of winning with "calculations". They're not holding there. At that stage, any intellectual contemplation is worthless⁶. This is not true for those who have the *yetzer hara* under control. Their battle is only now beginning, as the *yetzer hara* constantly tries to gain the upper hand⁷. It is these individuals who need to constantly be on their toes and consider the losses or gains of their actions. They're the ones who need to calculate the accounting of the world.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on [Nesivos Shalom](#) to [Numbers](#) 21:27

² [Numbers](#) *loc. cit.*

³ There are different explanations for what this word means and who it is referring to

⁴ [Bava Basra](#) 78b. See also [Targum "Yonasan"](#) *ad. loc.*

⁵ The *gemarra* proceeds to interpret the rest of the verse. See [Nesivos Shalom](#) inside who addresses those parts as well

⁶ The [Slonimer Rebbe](#) cites this from the [Yesod HaAvodah](#)

⁷ See [Kiddushin](#) 30b