

# Rav Kook Torah

by Rabbi

Chanan Morrison • [www.ravkooktorah.com](http://www.ravkooktorah.com)



## Reward & Punishment

How did Moshe present the Torah to the Jewish people?

According to Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, Moshe first announced the penalties for transgressing the Torah's precepts. Then he described the rewards that one gains for observing the mitzvot.

The Talmud, however, quotes a second opinion that asserts the order was just the opposite. First Moshe described the rewards for observing the Torah, and only afterwards did he publicize the penalties for violating it.

This disagreement, Rav Kook explained, reflects two very different educational approaches.

### First: Liberate the Soul

Rabbi Yehuda felt that in order to educate and enlighten, it is necessary to first battle one's darker tendencies, the body's self-centered and materialistic forces. Only then will the soul be free to elevate itself in purity and realize its lofty potential.

Initially, the unbridled traits of

crassness and vice must be neutralized and uprooted. The bad and the ugly must be separated from our true desires and inner essence. We need to recognize evil's despicable and destructive nature.

Then, when the light of the Torah illuminates, there is nothing to obscure its clarity. Our spiritual enlightenment is unsullied and pure. For this reason, Moshe began by announcing the penalties for transgressing the Torah, thus weakening the grip of evil. With the foundations of vice uprooted from their souls, Moshe went on to describe the rewards for observing the Torah, so that their souls' yearnings for good and truth would be wholehearted.

### Refining All Forces of the Soul

But there is another educational approach, one that seeks to take advantage of the crass, unbridled forces and sublimate them for holy purposes. We do not attempt to uproot the bad from the start. Rather, we flood the soul with pure, holy light. If there exist some negative traits among the soul's forces, they do not hinder the light. On the contrary, the Divine light shines more brightly, as it utilizes those raw energies which gravitate towards evil to serve holy matters.

After the negative traits have been utilized for the highest good, we then uproot any remaining dregs which could not be refined and streamlined into elevated life.

According to this approach, Moshe began by describing to the Jewish people the rewards for observing the Torah. He spoke words which are MEISHIVIN DA'ATO SHEL ADAM, thereby bolstering their self-confidence and kindling the inner light in their souls. As the sparks were elevated to the ultimate good, all life-forces were drawn towards holy service. Negative powers were also refined, and boosted their souls' spiritual strength.

Only the most hardened dross remained unredeemed. In order to eliminate these darkest traits, Moshe described the penalties for abandoning the Torah. Then their souls' capacity for holiness was fully engaged, in complete strength and purity.

*Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV,  
pp. 181-182 on Shabbat 87a*