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## G-D'S PROMISE

In self-help, we are taught that what makes people move, change, become motivated, is from one of two things: either running away from pain, or running towards pleasure. If we would like to discover how this expresses itself in our observance of Judaism, it can translate into the belief that G-d offers reward for good deeds and punishes for sin. When you believe this, that G-d rewards the righteous and that the sinners suffer, it is easier to stay motivated to keep Mitzvoth and refrain from Averot. The problem, the reason why this is confusing, is because in the world of העולם, G-d allows the illusion that the righteous suffer and the mirage that sinners get away with it.

We all want G-d to grant us a good year. And G-d wants us to give Him a good year, as well, by making Him King. You cannot expect G-d to be good to you, if you do not want to keep your side of the "bargain". As Orthodox Jews, we all believe in reward and punishment. We believe that G-d will pay us for our good deeds, and that our sins have a price tag. But unfortunately, this is mostly a belief that is reflected upon in the past or present. I realized that I never reflect on this belief when I plan my future. That if I daven with more heart, G-d may answer my prayers. That if I learn without interruption, I may have more success in financing my family. And that if I give more Tzeddakah and do more Chessed, G-d will open the gates of Heaven and allow His blessings to pour into my life.

Parashat Ki Tavo has a fundamental lesson interlaced throughout the Parasha. You want good

in life, in this world and the next? Invest in G-d. Do more mitzvoth. Less sins. More Torah.

For example. The Midrash tells us, in the beginning of the Parasha, how powerful a Mitzvah can be. *That someone who does a Mitzvah, has more of a right to have his request granted of G-d than someone who is dealing with a king. When dealing with a king, you can offer him a fortune, just to get in to see him; and you have no way of knowing if he will do as you request. But G-d is not that way. A person goes down to his field and sees a first fig of the crop, or the first cluster of the crop and puts it in his basket. And he comes and stands in the Temple and says,* "הַשְׁקִיפָה מִמַּעוֹן קִדְשֶׁךָ מֶ־הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבִרְךְ אֶת־עַמֶּךָ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֵת הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה לָנוּ G-d, Gaze down from your holy dwelling and bless Your nation, Yisrael, and the land that you gave to us, as you swore to our forefathers, a land flowing with milk and honey. The Midrash adds that the person offering Bikurim now says, *I am not going to leave this spot, until You do all that I need!*

The right the man has to ask, to demand directly of G-d is something Resh Lakish learns from the adjacent words of the following passuk. הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִקְרָא אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִצִּוְתָהּ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־הַחֲקִים הָאֵלֶּה וְאֶת־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים ... "This day Hashem commanded you to do". Resh Lakish explains the flow of pesukim, that a Heavenly voice would go out and say "You will have [plenty, success] again, next year."

What does this mean? I have the power, to decide my fate through my deeds? Having a good life is up to me? I am in control of my destiny, my future, the outcome? We pray to Hashem while bringing the Bikurim, השקיפה ממעון קדשך מן השמים וברך את, Gaze down from Your holy dwelling, from the Heavens, and bless Your Jewish Nation and the Land You gave us. Rashi says on this, that the person bringing the Bikurim is saying, עשינו מה שגזרת עלינו, עשה אתה מה ששליך לעשות, שאמרת (ויקרא כו, ג) אם בהקתי תלכו ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם: We did what you have decreed us to do; now, do Your part, as it says, "If you go in my statutes, I will give your rain in its time".

*R Alexandri writes that usually, the word השקיפה refers to G-d gazing in a way that brings suffering. וישקף יקנול אל-מתנה מצרים בעמוד אש וענן ויהם את מתנה מצרים: וישקף על-פני סדם ועמרה ועל-פל-פני ארץ הכפר. Every time there is the root שקף, it implies something bad, negative. But in the case of the Bikurim, the word השקיפה is an exception, and it brings blessings! After the Bikurim process, after the tithing, after the kindness to the Kohen and to the poor, the evil judgement of שקף is switched to Mercy. And not only that! Usually, our deeds are not enough to make us deserving of goodness, for they are not only leshem Shamayim - they can be observed because of ulterior motives. As it says, לך To You, Hashem, is righteousness, and to us is embarrassment. (See Shemot Rabbah Ki Tisah 41) The Shem Mishmuel writes that giving charity will connect one to G-d and draw blessing from G-d more than most Mitzvot will, because G-d is with the poor and downtrodden, and He uses them for the great Tafkidim, as it says וואני את דכא אשכון (See Sh. Mish' Vayigash, Sotah 5a, Yeshaya 57 15)*

### THE CHAFETZ CHAIM'S FEAR

I wanted to test-drive this article with a mother of children; at first, she said she didn't want to hear anything about it. But, in the end, she was happy she listened...

I started with the Rambam. השמחה שישמח אדם בעשיית המצוה ובאהבת הא-ל שצוה בהן עבודה גדולה היא

Regarding Torah learning, as well. Tremendous blessing is bestowed in financing a family, when one is constantly watchful not to disturb his set times of Torah study. As it says, וקאו עליך פלי-הברכות, והאלה והשיגך פי תשמע בקול: קננו אלהיך. And all these blessings will chase after you, and they will reach you, when you listen to the Voice of YHVH, your G-d.(Devarim 28 2) The Seforno explains this to mean that even without your running after the blessings, they will chase after you, even without your Hishtadlut. But, this is only *when you listen to the voice of G-d*, and the Seforno explains this to mean, when you make your Torah study your primary occupation, and your work, secondary. As we see in the times of the second temple, people were able to have just a Kazayit of food and feel satiated. (See Yoma 39a) Because wealth, in Judaism, does not mean you will have more. Wealth, in Judaism, means you will need less.

Do you believe this? That if you leave your learning, your seder, before time is up, if you answer a phone call that you do not need to answer, you will have to work harder to support your family, for you will be working without G-d's blessings? These are G-d's promises to you, in this week's parasha.

So, before you map out who you want to be and what you want to do for the next year, remember: When you give tzedakah, when you do chessed, you are in control of your destiny, and you can change your bad decree to a good one. When you learn uninterruptedly, you will have less unexpected expenses, and you will be granted Divine Assitance. With these two, you have a promise from G-d that you will have a beautiful year.

וכל המונע עצמו משמחה זו ראוי להפרע ממנו שנאמר תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב The happiness with which a person performs a Mitzvah and his love of G-d Who commanded it, is a great "avoda", G-d's service. Anyone who refrains from this delight is to be punished! Our Parasha gives

the reason for punishments; *Because you did not serve YHVH, your G-d, with happiness and a good heart* (Lulav 8;15). For getting the Mitzvah over with, and off our “to-do” list (see Maggid Mishna).

The Chafetz Chaim’s grandson said that his grandfather was not as worried about punishment for his sins as he was about punishment for not having performed Mitzvoth with the love, joy and passion that they deserve.

“No! Stop! I learnt in seminary; but now my husband is learning full time. I am the breadwinner, nurse, wife, housecleaner, with another zillion roles, chores, and responsibilities! I don’t have time to daven and learn as I did in sem. Punished for not doing mitzvoth with my whole heart? My husband and kids can learn and pray with a whole heart! I don’t have the time or energy!”

I said to her, “Hashem will not punish you for not learning or praying with your whole heart, because that is not your Tefkid- your spiritual mission at this stage in life. Your Tefkid is to be the best mother you can be! Changing a diaper is no less service of G-d than the Kohen Gadol offering Ketoret on Yom Kippur! (This is something I was taught by R Yehuda Ades, Shlita). Do you feel joy when you change a diaper? Do you feel like a zillion dollars when you help your husband and your kids go out to learn? That is your Olam Haba!

I remember the time when a yeshiva boy came to me for help. Once, a kid offered him drugs. He got hooked, became a dealer. At the age 17, he was in yeshiva in Israel. He came to me after the yeshiva discovered his secret. He opened up to me. He hates himself. He hates his parents. He hates life. He feels that G-d is going to punish him for all he has done wrong. I listened and listened. Then I asked him, what do you think is the worst thing you ever did, that you will be punished for?

He said “A”. I said, no. “B” – Nope. “C”? Nope. Still worse. He asked me what gets the biggest punishment. I said – you never enjoyed the life that G-d gives you. תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלוֹקֵיךְ בְּשִׂמְחָה

וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב מְרַב כָּל He was quiet. For a long time. He asked me, “G-d wants me to enjoy life? More than punishing me for sinning, He will punish me for not being happy, appreciative and serving Him?” I said, that’s right. He was quiet. He decided to go to a yeshiva that deals with dealers, and he changed his life. Completely.

We all want to serve G-d with our whole heart, to be great men and women. Probably, for a frum Jew, the hardest question to answer today is, Are you happy to be frum? Yes or No. Frum is not just being part of a system of rules and regulations that you were brought up with. Are you happy to have to get up early enough to pray and say Shema with all your heart? Happy to spend fortunes on your kids’ tuition? To be limited on the internet? To give tzeddaka, to say Birkat Hamazon, put on Tefillin, wear Tzitzit? To keep Shabbat? To stay away from the fun and luxury this world has to offer and learn Torah instead? Happy with all that? Yes, or no?

The truth is that this is not one time, yes or no question. It is what you face each time Judaism conflicts with your lifestyle. Each time it challenges your entire belief system. A man facing a very difficult dilemma asked me for advice. I do not wish such a problem on my worst enemy. “My 19-year-old son told me that he does not want to keep Shabbat.” That is a rough one!! Many parents faced with that nightmare, bark back, “Shabbos!!!??? Mechalel Shabbat?!!! Skilah, Karet! I will take you out of my will!!!” I do not blame them; it’s a scenario that can bring on a heart attack, and I do not wish it on my worst enemy.

Barking, of course, does not work. I believe the response should be, “It pains me greatly to hear that my child, who I love so much, is going to miss out on G-d’s biggest gift!!! Shabbat is the greatest thing in my life!!!” What G-d cares most about is our love in serving Him, our love and joy for Shabbat, more than Shabbat, itself. And the kids see that in their parents. They feel it. They smell it. They hear it. And this is the make-it or break-it

point. Lots of talking, convincing, manipulating, doesn't help. Kids don't learn from words. They are much more tuned in to the other five senses: what they see, feel, smell and taste. Do you give them the taste of Shabbat? Do they smell spirituality in your home, in the simchas you make? Do they feel your love for your religion, or only your sacrifice for it?

Love of the mitzvah is part of the Mitzvah. It is the key ingredient, and that is why the lack of it calls for punishment. Excitement, enthusiasm are the sign that you want Hashem as your G-d. It's all about your happiness, doing the Mitzvah. The Arizal learnt from the end of this passuk, מרב כל, that the Mitzvah's worth in your eyes and how bad you feel on missing out when not able to do the Mitzvah is supposed to be of greater value than all the money in the world!

Close to when the Digital Age began, a new "Judaism" started to take a powerful form. It is The Zombie Jewish. The Army of the Dead. Look into their eye, when they have to keep the 613, and you see something dark and distant. Something is wrong. It's scary. Much is being said about hypocrisy in the frum world. Why is there so much hypocrisy? Why so much inconsistency? Why can't we enjoy the religion that we are giving up so much for? This is a question that bothers me to no end. Because it pains G-d to no end.

The Baal Shem Tov would say that the only way to get out of any problem you have in life is through simcha, כי בשמחה תצאון. Hidden in this passuk, are three secrets for how we can all tap into the love of the Mitzvah תחת אשר לא-עבדתם את-יקנוק אלהיך בשמחה. The first is, *know who you are serving*. People forget to focus on Who they are serving, when serving G-d. As long as you are coming from a self-centered motive, you can never

find serenity because you are not tapping into your spiritual purpose. Once, someone sent the Lubavitcher Rebbe a letter. "I have no parnessah. I have no shalom bayit. I have no motivation to learn, pray or do kindness. I can't seem to find my life's purpose. I would appreciate if the Rebbe would bless me and let me know what I am doing wrong." When he opened the reply, he saw that the Rebbe had sent him back the same letter, but he circled the first letter – I – of every sentence, in red. The problem is that "I" is the beginning of every statement in your life. So often, G-d offers us an opportunity to serve Him. We need to tap into our inner joy for being given that particular opportunity, even if it is not exactly what we want. We cannot compare our service to that of other people, because G-d gives each person something that is "tailor-made", just for him. Comparing our service to others is not serving G-d.

The next lesson in this passuk is, YHVH – G-d's Attribute of Mercy – is your G-d. Elokim is G-d's Attribute of Judgement. The only way you can learn to love G-d and serve Him with passion is if you recognize that all the hard things in life, all the Judgement, come from G-d's Mercy. This recognition is a "make-it or break-it", to be the Happy-to-Be-Frum Jew.

And the last lesson is, מרב כל. *A lot of everything*. To serve G-d with happiness, we need to believe that we have everything we need. Wanting more is endless. You will never have everything in this world. People who are able to serve G-d with love are those who say, if I do not have something, G-d does not want me to have it.

And, believe it or not, this is what Mashiach is waiting for. For us to learn to enjoy doing the Mitzvoth. The letters of משיח are the same letters as the word שמח! Just flipped around!

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A"H

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