

THE ANTE-ROOM

by Rabbi Dovid Green

It is not far into the career of a young Torah student that s/he is taught about the belief in the world to come. The Talmud (Tractate Kiddushin 39.2) states that there is no reward for (observing) commandments in this world. Rather, the reward is stored away to be received in the world to come. Every Torah student is taught that we have a soul, and that after its business is over in this world, it goes back to a spiritual existence where it will receive the dividends. The existence is spiritual, and the reward as well is spiritual.

Rabbi Dessler (20th century England/Jerusalem) comments on the the following statement of the Talmudic Sages (Avos, Chapter 4:17). "Rabbi Yaakov says: This world is compared to a corridor before the world to come. Prepare yourself in the corridor in order that you can enter the palace...and one time cooling the spirit in the world to come is better than all of life in this world." The sages meant what they said literally. When they said one time in the world to come is better than all of life in this world, they meant it to the furthest extreme. Rav Dessler explains that it should be understood that if one could place into one moment all of the pleasures enjoyed in this world by every person from the beginning of the world, until the end of the last generation, it still could not compare to the one time of cooling the spirit in the world to come. Rav Dessler explains that cooling the spirit is not even a direct experience of reward, but rather like the pleasure derived by passing by a hall and smelling the delicacies being served inside. Even just a whiff of the world to come is greater than the aforementioned pleasure moment! This is just the reward for the performance of one commandment, not to mention the millions which someone could perform in a lifetime!

We see from this what awaits us in the world of souls! However, it apparently contradicts what is stated in this week's parsha (Deuteronomy 11:13-21). "And if you will listen to my commandments...I'll give the rain in its time...and you'll gather your grain, wine, and oil...and you'll eat and be satisfied." The Torah seems to be promising reward for commandments in this world. Again Rav Dessler quotes Maimonides (Chapter 9, Laws of Teshuva) which clarifies this topic. "And He promised us in the Torah that if we perform it with joy and willingness, and we contemplate wisdom continually, that He will remove from us all of the things which prevent us from performing it such as sickness, war, hunger and the like. And He will (then) give us all of the goodness which strengthens us to perform the Torah such as satiation, peace, and prosperity so we won't need to be busy with material matters and we'll be free to learn wisdom and perform commandments so we can merit the world to come."

These promises are not a reward at all, but just the tools through which we can accomplish our lofty spiritual goals. Rabbi Dessler concludes from the words of Maimonides that from a Torah perspective, the good which we receive in this world is a vehicle through which we can accomplish what we are here for. They are a means to an end, and not an end in itself.

The student of Torah attempts to use the material aspect of this world as a means to accomplish his goals. He views emphasizing material gain as an end in itself, a misappropriation of G-d's blessing. May we all be given the wisdom to recognize the value of the material world in its proper context.

Good Shabbos!

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