

A BILL OF GOODS

by Rabbi Dovid Green

All of our Holy Torah is Prophecy - G-d's words - dictated to Moses from beginning to end. At the beginning of this week's Parsha (Leviticus 26:3 - 27:34) we find promises of peace, prosperity, and security which mirror the loftiest hopes of the most elevated society. These promises are referred to as "the Brochos," or "the blessings." Following the blessings are some of the most fearful promises of what are referred to as "the K'lalos", or "the curses." What is more fearful is that we have seen their fulfillment. The Torah and its commentators enlighten our eyes as to the path which leads to the blessings, and vice versa. Let us briefly examine the two paths.

"If you will go in My laws, and you will guard My commandments, and you will perform them..." Doesn't "going in My laws", mean performing the commandments? Why is "and you will perform them" repeated? Rashi, the medieval French commentary, explains that these expressions refer to two different things, one necessarily leading to the other. Rashi explains that "going in G-d's laws" refers to diligently studying *Torah. Perhaps the word "going" is used in order to convey that learning Torah is an ongoing, growing process, and not something one studies, and takes finals, and is done with. One is always going and growing through Torah study. Torah has the ability to appeal to children of all ages on the one hand, and adults at all stages of life on the other. There is always something new and relevant one can find in the Torah and its many levels of explanation, provided that one put in diligent effort in its study, with an emphasis on learning in order to perform. This is the condition which all of the blessings are predicated on. Then G-d will give the rain in its time, and bring peace to the land, and security from outward threats will be guaranteed. G-d's unique presence will dwell among us, and we will enjoy a tangible, close, personal relationship with our supernatural Creator.

The Rabbi of Slonim, in his work "Nesivos Shalom" points out that if one looks in nature we will see that G-d gave an immutable order to the celestial bodies which must be maintained. So it is with the earth itself. G-d created limits and borders which each part of nature must necessarily maintain. Even below the surface in the depths of the earth everything must be maintained in its place. If the sun would be slightly closer or further away, that would be the end of existence as we know it. If the shores of the oceans and other bodies of water wouldn't limit the water within its boundaries we know that devastation would result. When the earth below shifts, it brings calamity. Order in nature must be consistent. The Prophet (Yirmiyahu Chap. 33) states in G-d's agency: "If not for My covenant (of Torah observance) I would not have established the order of heaven and earth. This verse tells us

that since mankind is the purpose of creation, everything depends on us. We are a microcosm of the universe, and it is inextricably linked to our actions. We have a choice. G-d is telling us that He wants us to choose observance of His commandments which spiritually constitutes and strengthens the foundations of the universe in a profound way.

What stands in counter distinction to "going in G-d's laws? "And it will be, if you will not listen to Me, and you will not perform all of these commandments. And you will despise My laws, and be disgusted by my judgements - not doing all of My commandments, annulling My covenant (Leviticus 26:14-15). Again we turn to Rashi who explains that this verse delineates seven sinful acts, one leading to the next. 1. "If you will not listen to Me," means not learning. 2. "And you will not perform etc." means not actively doing the commandments. 3. "And you will despise My laws" means despising others who do perform commandments. 4. "and you'll be disgusted by My judgements," means hating the Torah sages. 5. "not to do," means preventing others from performing commandments. 6. "all of my commandments" means claiming that G-d never commanded us to perform the commandments. 7. "annulling My covenant" means denying the existence of G-d.

The progression upward toward blessing begins with diligent Torah study, and the downward slide begins with improper study , or complete lack of study. It all hinges on that point. Subsequently the Torah enumerates what happens G-d forbid, when we begin the downward slide. It is not intended as a punishment, just as rain in its proper time is not a reward. It is simply a natural consequence of maintaining the laws. When mankind keeps the order which is dictated by G-d, the creation is thus positively affected. If not, then the opposite occurs.

Nowadays most Jews know very little about the Torah and what it requires of us. So many Jews in the Western world are raised with very little Jewish knowledge, and most are not orientated to appreciate the beauty of dedication to a Torah life. Most are not exposed to people who do dedicate themselves to such a lifestyle. For them, the above seven sins don't apply directly. Even so, the following analogy may apply.

I personally know an older man who is going blind. His doctor told him that if he had regularly eaten even small amounts of certain vegetables his blindness would have been avoided. The analogy is obvious. If there is something we need to be doing, we want to know. If this Torah is really something we should be learning and observing, we want to know, and as soon as possible. Let's be like textile buyers. Let's examine the (Torah) material, and see if it is indeed worth the price. Let's subject it to our scrutiny. Let's talk to people who wear these materials, and see how well it wears, and lasts. Perhaps it is a commodity worth buying.

Good Shabbos!

*Torah refers briefly to the Five Books of Moses and commentaries, the Subsequent scriptures of the Old Testament, the (now written) Oral law consisting of the Mishnah and Talmud and its commentaries, The legal works based on the Talmud, and moral and ethical works based on

Scriptural and Rabbinical origin.

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