

THIS VERY EARTH

by Rabbi Label Lam

And you shall perform My decrees and keep My laws and fulfill them and you will dwell in the land securely. (Vayikra 25:18)

If in My decrees you go and keep My commandments and fulfill them and I will give your rains in their due season and the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field their fruit. (Vayikra 26:3-4)

In each of this week's Torah portions we are offered what amounts to an insurance policy for the performance of Statutes and the maintenance of Mitzvos. One demands that the laws of the Sabbatical be reverently observed and the other calls for a tenacious loyalty to the study and fulfillment of Torah. Why does the Torah offer what seems like material rewards for Mitzvahs and can one really expect measurable results?

Professor Nicholai Berdysev in "The Meaning of History" in 1935 writes: "The Jews have played an all-important role in history. They are pre-eminently an historical people and their destiny reflects the indestructibility of the divine decrees. Their destiny is too imbued with the "metaphysical" to be explained either in material or positive historical terms...And, indeed, according to materialistic and positivist criterion, this people ought long ago to have perished. Its survival is a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon demonstrating that the life of this people is governed by a special predetermination, transcending the processes of adaptation expounded by the materialistic interpretation of history."

The Kuzari points out that Mitzvos are really living things. What looks like nice traditional behavior or symbolic actions are really much more like well timed plantings. Certain actions done in the right time and place yield fruit and others may either produce no result or even damage. Plant tomatoes in the winter or citrus fruits in the northern climate and expect nothing to grow. Eating past the setting of the sun on Yom Kippur is to have crossed a non-arbitrary boundary as much as trampling the garden of certain sacred relationships. We can understand how a collision of the wrong person place and time can cause chaos while the appropriate coordination of the same ingredients may bring bounty in a blessed context.

Rabbi Simcha Wasserman ztl. had a profound ability to encapsulate large subjects in a few brief

words. I once heard him present the following analogy which he delivered in his sweet- broken yet sufficiently articulate English. Suppose someone would invent a synthetic potato that tasted and smelled and looked like a real potato. How would we ever be able to tell the difference between the real one and the imposter? Simple! Just put them in the ground. The real potato can produce a potato but the fake potato could never produce another potato. The effects of any attempts to manufacture, even a near imitation of Torah, can be felt in a generation. If it produces a loyal replication of itself then it is authentic. If, however, it cannot organically replace itself but must be artificially engineered and re-reinvented then this is symptomatic of a lack of authenticity.

The Zohar says that the Torah is really 613 pieces of advice. To the unwilling body they present a regimen of Mitzvos-Commandments, some not appreciated until performed over time. To the knowing heart and soul the Torah speaks as a wise counselor.

At the risk of oversimplifying, we are asked to appreciate that we are in possession of a sublime book of gardening that offers not just helpful tips for raising daisies or a field of potatoes but an actual garden of spiritual delight. Whether or not or to what extent the book is heeded is often evident right here in our lives on this very earth. Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.