

THAT'S WORTH EVERYTHING

by Rabbi Label Lam

If you will follow My decrees and keep My Mitzvos and perform them; then I will provide rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit. Your threshing will last until the vintage, and the vintage will last until the sowing. You will eat your bread with satisfaction and you will live in your land with security and I will give peace in the land and you will lie down without fear... (Vayikra 26:3-6)

If you follow My decrees...If you follow My decrees by engaging in intensive Torah study, with the intention that such study will lead you to observe My commandments properly, and if you actually do perform them, you will merit the blessings given in the following verse. (Rashi: Sifri)

And I will give you peace...By crowning the above blessings with that of peace, the Torah teaches us that peace is equivalent to all the blessings. (Rashi: Sifri)

See how dear peace-is that when the Holy One blessed be He wanted to bless Israel He could find no vessel strong enough to contain all the blessings than to bless them with peace. (Midrash Rabba)

What does it mean that "peace" is greater than all the blessings and that it is a vessel to contain all the other blessings? Imagine that you were given one million dollars cash. What a thrill! The mind runs wild with possibilities. What we could and would do for our families and friends. The money is given one hour before Shabbos in a resort town on an exotic island paradise. What's the problem? All the food is prepared! It's all Kosher! There's no lock on the door. There's no safe in the hotel. What kind of Shabbos will it be? Peaceful? I doubt it! Everything is there potentially but peace.

Why does the Torah promise "peace" as a residual or a side benefit of learning and observing Torah? Isn't peace a goal to pursue and strive for, like happiness or is it always only a byproduct? It is known that the Malbim was not only a genius in Torah and commentator on the entire Tanach but a prolific poet as well. A poet, living contemporaneously with the Malbim once asked him how he was able to write so much beautiful poetry being that it is not his main focus. The poet confessed that he writes much less and yet it is his sole mental occupation.

The Malbim answered with the following parable that I will take the poetic license to update in our terms: A man shopping in Tiffany's purchases a \$25,000.00 vase. At the check out counter the sales person wraps the beautiful vase with ornamental ribbons and places it into a specially designed box worth hundreds of dollars. The exchange is completed and the man leaves with a gorgeous gift box in his hands. An onlooker spies the whole event, approaches the counter, and orders up an array of

fancy ribbons and a handsome box. What a surprise he experiences when the customer service rep hands him a bill for \$250.00. He protests. "No fair! That fellow got it for free!" The agent answers plainly, "He bought an expensive gift and so the wrapping is free! All you want is the wrapping and therefore you must pay for it!"

The Torah is the essential item and the poetry is the pretty wrapping. If one invests in the main thing the other stuff comes along for free and if not there's a charge. Similarly in the blessings offered by the Torah, if we learn and fill our lives with Torah dedication, then a host of good things flow. The vessel to contain it all, "Shalom", is given as a grant.

A person can spend days and years in pursuit of a peaceful tranquility but there's a cost of time and effort and in the end one may get a measure of contentment with no real content and find himself all dressed up with no where to go. However, the bonus for learning and yearning to fulfill the Torah is not less than a beautiful-practical container that preserves all the promises of goodness and that's worth everything. Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.