

THE LONG SHORT WAY

by Rabbi Label Lam

If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them, then I will provide your 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 to satiety and you will dwell securely in the land. I will grant (Shalom) Peace in the land... (Vayikra 26:3-6)

If you will follow My decrees: That you should be striving in Torah learning. (Rashi)

How does "following HASHEM's decrees" translate into "you should be striving in Torah"? The verse seems to be more focused on the doing dimension, the observance rather than the learning factor. Of course we could say that if you don't learn you cannot do but that's way too obvious and simplistic. Rashi decodes the message as meaning, "that you should be striving in Torah!" That means learning!

Secondly, is the promise of peace intended as an incentive, a reward, or is it a natural consequence? Why should striving in Torah deliver peace? What's the connection?

Just this past Shabbos I was taking a slow paced walk home with my oldest son and my youngest son. I began to quiz the younger fellow who is 17 years his brother's junior. It was a subject that unbeknownst to would be mentioned in this week's Daf HaYomi-Eruvin 54B. I queried, "Which is the better way to go, "the shortcut that is a long way" or the long way which is a shortcut"? He got the right answer- the long way which is a shortcut! Then we began to search for practical examples of each of the two ways so we could anchor the idea even more.

Eventually our attention turned to a primary case study that really hit home. My wife and I often jest seriously that the best investment we ever made was to pave a segment of our back yard and to plant a basketball hoop. For a number of very good reasons this is so. 1) There the boys would go daily for recreation. 2) They got plenty of practice and being good in basketball is a big confidence booster for boys. 3) We could promise that the action was in our back yard and we could know where our kids are. Now our youngest son spends many good day light hours back there perfecting his shot.

There's one problem though. The rim has a little "give" to it- that is it's not firmly connected and it tends to dip to one side when the ball lands on it. It doesn't stop us from playing and enjoying but it is a painful reminder of a foolish episode from some 15 years ago. When we were installing the

basket and the rim I was in a hurry to get it all cemented and connected. It was a family event. People could wait to play (that means me). As I was busy assembling my oldest boy was busy studying the instruction which were spread out on the court. He was trying to slow me down but I felt I knew better.

When everything was finally in place I proudly stepped back to admire the fruit of all my hard work. I noticed then that amongst the small pieces there was an "extra" nut and bolt. I wondered aloud, "What's this thing for?" Then my son who was still staring deeply into the instruction manual asked me if I had done step "D" after step "C". I had never known there was a step "C". Well it was all there and it looked fine. Then when we took the first shot it was apparent that this parent had made a mistake. With everything locked in there was no way to undo step "D" and go back to step "C".

That extra nut was no vestigial piece of hardware. We have lived ever since with the imperfection of that shaky rim and it serves as a perfect example of the shortcut that turned out to be a long way. I should have taken the time to study the manual of instructions.

The Torah is a Divine instruction manual. We are cautioned; If you study it intently and build your life decisions according to the details of its dictates then the peace that follows is a consequence of having traveled **the long short way**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.