

# RECEIPT OF THE KEY

*by Shlomo Katz*

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Today's Learning:

Terumot 7:5-6

Orach Chaim 145:2-146:1

Daf Yomi: Rosh Hashanah 27

Yerushalmi Mo'ed Kattan 17

Our parashah begins: "This shall be the reward when you hearken to these ordinances . . . Hashem, your G-d, will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that he swore to your forefathers." The Torah continues with a list of rewards: He will love you, He will bless the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your land, your grain, wine, oil, sheep, etc.

We then read: "Perhaps you will say in your heart, 'These nations are more numerous than I; how will I be able to drive them out?' Do not fear them! You shall remember what Hashem, your G-d, did to Pharaoh and to all of Egypt." R' Baruch Yashar (a contemporary Israeli rabbi) offers the following insight and interpretation of these verses:

Chazal teach that, contrary to our intuitions, one who lives his life without experiencing open or

obvious miracles is preferable to one who does experience such events. Why? When Hashem performs an open miracle for someone, it is as if He gave the person access to a locked room by breaking down the door. On the other hand, when He gives someone else the same benefit through natural means, without performing an open miracle, it is as if He gave that person the key to the room. Which is a greater sign of closeness? Obviously, being given the key!

Our verses teach that if we develop a close relationship with G-d by keeping His ordinances, He will bless us with all of the gifts of nature. We will lack nothing, and we will require no open miracles. On the other hand, if our faith weakens and we become scared of the inhabitants of the Land, then we will fall to a lower level where He will be required to perform open miracles, just as He did for us in Egypt against Pharaoh. (Bein Ha'shittin Shel Torah p.252)

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*"Then you shall remember Hashem, your G-d; that it was He Who gave you strength to be successful."* (8:18)

R' Yosef Chaim of Baghdad z"l (died 1909) writes: This verse teaches us a fundamental concept, i.e., that all that a person receives from this world comes to him from Hashem Himself. It does not come to man through his own strength or handiwork.

However, man's nature is to attribute his success to his own hard work. Therefore, Hashem has given us three mitzvot that remind us that we are not in control of our own physical well-being. Fulfilling these mitzvot helps us recognize that Hashem is the One Who gives us the tools to succeed in life, that everything is His, and that we are always receiving from Him.

One of these is the mitzvah of shemittah, letting the land lie fallow every seventh year. One who fulfills this mitzvah acknowledges that the Land is not his and that everything belongs to Hashem. Another such mitzvah is berachot, reciting blessings before eating. By doing so, one acknowledges that everything belongs to Hashem. A third such mitzvah is the prohibition on ribit/interest and the commandment to give free loans to one's brethren. One who observes this acknowledges that all the money that he has belongs to Him as well.

The initials of these mitzvot spell "bassar"/"flesh." This reminds us that (in the words of Tehilim 136:25), "He gives nourishment to all flesh." (Ben Ish Hai: Eikev, Second Year)

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*"And now Israel, what does Hashem, your God, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem your God, to go in all His ways and to love Him, and to serve Hashem, your God, with all your heart and all your soul, to observe the commandments of Hashem and His decrees."* (10:12-13)

R' Moshe Chaim Luzzato z"l (the "Ramchal") cites this verse as containing all the virtues necessary for fulfilling the will of Hashem with perfection. These attributes are: "Fear of Hashem," "going in His

ways," "love of Hashem," "a perfect heart," and "observance of all His mitzvot." The following is Ramchal's description of each of these attributes and how they relate to serving Hashem:

"Fear of Hashem": Fear his greatness and majesty as you would a great and powerful King.

"Going in His ways": A person should perfect all his character traits so as to emulate those of Hashem, as our sages said (Shabbat 133b), "As He is merciful, so, too, you should be merciful. As He is giving, so, too, you should be giving."

"Love of Hashem": A person should have such love for Hashem in his heart that he strives to please Him just as he would strive to please his own parents.

"A perfect heart": One's service to Hashem should be with pure intentions, i.e., one should serve Hashem for the sake of serving Hashem and for no other reason.

"Observance of all His mitzvot": This means exactly what it says, i.e., that one should observe all the mitzvot and each detail of each mitzvah.

Through the study of mussar, Ramchal writes, you can perfect each of these attributes and do what Hashem, your G-d, asks of you. (Mesillat Yesharim: Introduction)

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*"It will be that if you hearken to My commandments that I command you today, to love Hashem, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul . . . that you may gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil." (11:13-14)*

The gemara (Berachot 35b) cites a disagreement between Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai over whether a person should work for a living or whether he should learn Torah full-time while depending solely on Hashem for sustenance. Rabbi Yishmael's opinion is that a person should work as well as learn Torah. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, on the other hand, is of the opinion that to engage in work is to neglect the Torah.

A Rabbi Yishmael quotes our verse, "[T]hat you may gather your grain," as support for his view. But, the gemara asks, is it not written (Yehoshua 1:8), "Do not remove this Torah from your mouth," which seems to suggest that a person should never stop learning Torah? Necessarily, says Rabbi Yishmael, our verse teaches that the verse in Yehoshua should not be taken literally.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, on the other hand, supports his opinion with a verse from Yishayah (61:5): "Foreigners will stand and tend your flocks." You need not do this yourself. As for our verse, this refers to a time when we do not do the will of Hashem. That is when we will gather our own grain. If we do Hashem's will, however, we will not need to work.

Many commentaries (including Tosfot) ask: How can Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai say that the verse, "[T]hat you may gather in your grain," will be fulfilled when we do not do the will of Hashem? After

all, the section in which the verse appears begins with the words: "It will be that if you hearken to My commandments . . ." It would seem from this juxtaposition that gathering in the grain is a reward for those who listen to Hashem!

R' Shmuel Eliezer Eidels ("Maharsha"; died 1631) answers as follows: Our verses do indeed tell us what will happen when we do the will of Hashem. However, they refer to a time when we are not perfect tzaddikim. Our verse states: "[I]f you hearken to My commandments . . . to love Hashem, your God, to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul." However, unlike Devarim 6:5 (part of the first paragraph of Shema), our verse (which is part of the second paragraph of Shema) does not say, "[W]ith all your possessions." This suggests that the second paragraph is referring to those who are not perfect tzaddikim, i.e., who would not sacrifice their belongings for Hashem. (Chiddushei Aggadot)

There are other differences between the first and second paragraphs of Shema that suggest that the first paragraph is addressed to perfect tzaddikim while the second refers to "ordinary" doers of G-d's will:

- 1) The first paragraph does not speak of a reward, while the second paragraph does. This suggests that the second paragraph is addressed to those who need more reminders and incentives, while the first paragraph is not.
- 2) The first paragraph does not mention those who do not observe His mitzvot, while the second paragraph warns of the consequences of not following His commandments.
- 3) The first paragraph is written in the singular, because perfect tzaddikim are few, while the second paragraph is written in the plural.

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### Letters from Our Sages

In this week's letter, R' Yehuda Leib Graubart z"l (1862- 1937; noted rabbi and posek in Poland, St. Louis, and later, Toronto) analyzes a famous Greek legend in light of halachah. The story of Damon and Pythias relates that in the 4th century B.C.E., Pythias was condemned to death because he opposed Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse, in Sicily. He begged to be allowed to return home to say good-bye to his wife and child. Damon came forward and offered to die in place of Pythias if the latter did not return in time.

As the legend goes, Pythias had not returned when Damon was brought to be executed. Suddenly Pythias rushed through the crowd; his horse had been killed, and it was only through great effort that he was able to arrive on time. Then each of the friends pleaded to be allowed to die for the other. Dionysius was so moved that he pardoned them both.

In this letter, which appears in R' Graubart's responsa, Chavalim Ba'neimim, Vol. III, No. 108, the

author explains that the above story does not represent an ideal that is consistent with the Torah. (As always, practical halachic questions should be referred to a competent rabbi.)

Regarding your honor's question why we do not find in Jewish history an example of love between friends such as in the story of Pythias . . . I quote to you from the work Halachot Ketanot of R' Yaakov Chagiz, regarding two people whose love was as strong as life itself and one of them was sentenced to death. The other one then came in his place - who has the "right" to be killed in such a case? [R' Chagiz wrote:] "This question does not deserve an answer; however, since we find in the gemara (Niddah 69b) that even foolish questions are answered, I will answer you. . . Hillel, too, answered foolish questions even late on Friday afternoon [when he was busy preparing for Shabbat] (see Shabbat 31a). Can it really be said that one of these men loves the other more than life itself if he allowed his friend to suffer in jail for him? Clearly he loves himself more!" Thus ends R' Chagiz's answer. As you can see, that author scolded the questioner and did not really answer him.

Indeed, this is a simple matter. One is not to be praised for this, and suicide is prohibited . . . Short of this, we do find examples of great valor by the unique people among us. For example, Avraham chased the Four Kings to save Lot, . . . Tamar preferred to be put to death rather than to shame Yehuda in public - indeed, from here we learn that one should prefer being burnt at the stake rather than to embarrass another person, . . . [and] the Talmudic sage, Mar Ukva, hid inside a furnace rather than shame a beggar . . .

*Sponsored by Marion Krakow and family on the yahrzeit of her brother Louis Frankel a"h*

The Mailman family on the yahrzeit of grandfather Shalom ben Dov Ber a"h

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