

HASHEM DOES NOT NEED OUR MITZVOS

by Shlomo Katz

**Hamaayan / The Torah Spring
Edited by Shlomo Katz**

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**Volume XIV, No. 45
18 Menachem Av 5760
August 19, 2000**

Today's Learning:

Beitzah 3:8-4:1

Orach Chaim 314:8-10

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Nedarim 31

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Kiddushin 36

Among the sections of this week's parashah is the second paragraph of the daily Kriat Shema - "Ve'hayah eem shamo." The mishnah (Berachot 2:2) states that the order in which we read the three paragraphs of Shema (which is not the order in which they appear in the Torah) is based on the following: First we accept G-d's sovereignty, the subject of the first paragraph, and only then do we accept the yoke of the mitzvot, the subject of the second paragraph. (The third paragraph is not discussed here.)

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (see page 4) elaborates on this and also explains why the blessing which we recite immediately before Shema speaks of G-d's love for us. Hashem does not need our mitzvot. As we say in the first verse of Shema, "He is One," implying that He is complete and perfect, and needs nothing. We must acknowledge this before we accept the yoke of mitzvot, for otherwise our

acceptance of the mitzvot would be misguided.

If Hashem does not need our mitzvah performance, why did He give us the mitzvot? Because He loves us and wants to give us opportunities to earn reward. This love is described in the berachah before Shema. After we acknowledge that love, we return it by accepting His sovereignty and affirming our own obligation to love Him (in the second verse of the first paragraph, "Ve'ahavta"). Only after establishing that the basis of our relationship with Hashem is our mutual love is it appropriate to accept the commandments (in the second paragraph of Shema). (Yeriot Shlomo in Siddur Bet Yaakov p. 62a)

"It shall come to pass as a result of your hearkening to these ordinances, and you will observe and perform them; Hashem, your G-d, will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers. He will love you, bless you, and multiply you . . ." (7:12-13)

R' Avraham Berish Flahm z"l (1804-1873; leading disseminator of the teachings of the "Dubno Maggid") writes: The mishnah (Peah 1:1) teaches--

These are the things whose fruits man eats in This World and whose principal is preserved for the World-to-Come: Honoring one's father and mother, acts of kindness, and bringing about peace between man and his fellow.

Why does man "eat the fruits" of these mitzvot in This World? Are we not taught that the reward for all mitzvot is given in the World-to-Come?

R' Flahm explains: There are two types of mitzvot - those which are "bein adam la'Makom" / between man and G-d, and those which are "bein adam la'chavero" / between man and his fellow man. However, within the latter type of mitzvah there are two aspects: (1) a bein adam la'Makom aspect, i.e., the fact that His Will is being done, and (2) a bein adam la'chavero aspect, i.e., the fact that another person benefits from the mitzvah.

All of the mitzvot listed in the above mishnah are mitzvot from which another person benefits. For such mitzvot, one does receive some reward in This World, just as he has brought pleasure to others in This World. At the same time, the mishnah teaches, the reward for the fact that G-d's Will is being done, is preserved for the World-to-Come.

In the last verse of last week's parashah we read, "You shall observe the commandment, and the decrees and the ordinances that I commanded you today, to perform them." "Decrees" ("chukim"), writes R' Flahm, refers to mitzvot which are between man and G-d, while "ordinances" ("mishpatim") are the rational mitzvot which are between man and his fellow man. The Torah appears to equate these two types of mitzvot by mentioning them in one verse. Moreover, the verse seems to imply, "Perform both of these types of mitzvot only because 'I commanded you'." It seems that Hashem has no interest except that His Will be done; He is not interested in the benefit received by others from

our mitzvot. And, if that is true, it follows that there is no reward for mitzvot in This World (contrary to the teaching of the above mishnah).

The first verses of our parashah (quoted above) resolve this seeming contradiction. "It shall come to pass as a result of your hearkening to these _ordinances_ - i.e., the rational mitzvot which are between man and his fellow man - Hashem, your G-d, will love you, bless you, and multiply you . . ." These are all rewards which are given in This World for performing "ordinances," the rational mitzvot which are between man and his fellow man. One does receive reward in This World for the pleasure that he gives to others through his performance of certain mitzvot. The verse in last week's parashah addressed only half of the mitzvah (the bein adam la'Makom aspect), while our verse addresses the other half (the bein adam la'chavero aspect). (Shemen Ha'mor II, ch. 6, "Roshei Besamim" n. 2)

"And you will eat, and you will be satiated, and you shall bless Hashem your G-d . . ." (8:10)

In his work on Torah-derived table manners, R' Bachya ben Asher (14th century; Spain) writes: When one finishes eating he should remain at the table for some time, as Chazal said (Berachot 54b), "If one extends his meal, his life will be extended." Why? Because the longer a person sits at the table, the greater the likelihood that a poor person will chance by and will be fed. In this vein, the prophet Yechezkel (41:22) uses the words "altar" and "table" interchangeably, and Chazal explain that just as one's sins are atoned for upon the altar, so they are forgiven when one feeds the poor at his table. (So great is this mitzvah, writes R' Bachya, that some people had their coffins built from the wood of their table so that the boards could "testify" on their behalf before the Heavenly court.)

One is obligated to say "Divrei Torah" / word of Torah while sitting at the table. The Sages taught (Avot, ch. 3) that if one eats at a table where Divrei Torah are said it is as if he has eaten at G-d's table, but if he eats at a table where no Divrei Torah are said it is as if he ate from sacrifices brought before idols. Why did the Sages use such harsh words about one who does not speak Divrei Torah at his table? Because man needs constant reminding that he was not created in order to eat and to drink, but rather in order to study Torah. (Shulchan Shel Arbah)

"And you shall teach them to your sons, to speak about them . . ." (11:9)

Rashi writes: "'To speak about them' -- From the time that your son knows how to speak, teach him Torah (for example, the verse, 'Moshe commanded us the Torah, the inheritance of the congregation of Israel'). The purpose of this is to accustom the child to devote his speech to Torah."

Ramban interprets this verse similarly, asking, "What is the difference between the command in our verse and that found in last week's parashah, 'And you shall repeat them to your sons, and you shall speak of them'? The answer is that the earlier verse contains two separate commands: The first, that a man should teach his sons Torah, and second, that one's speech should be devoted to Torah.

However, how do we know the extent of a father's obligation? This is learned from our verse, stating that "you shall teach them to your sons, to speak about them," meaning, that a father must ensure that his sons devote their speech to Torah. (R' Shmuel Deutsch, Birkat Kohen section 85)

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l

R' Shlomo Kluger was one of the leading halachic authorities and among the most prolific writers of the 19th century. R' Kluger wrote of himself, "Praises to G-d, I have approximately 115 large works on Tanach and the entire Talmud, and commentaries on the early and later poskim / halachic authorities." It should be noted that R' Kluger lived 25 years after writing these words, so that his total literary output may have been much greater. Ha'eleph Lecha Shlomo, his best-known work of halachic responsa, has 1,008 chapters.

R' Kluger was born in 1786 to R' Yehuda Aharon, rabbi of Komarow. R' Yehuda Aharon was a sickly man who died before age 40, leaving his son a homeless orphan. One day, R' Yaakov Kranz (the "Dubno Maggid") met the young boy wandering the streets of Zamosc, Poland, and he took him in. (Interestingly, in his work Chochmat Shlomo, Even Ha'ezer 1:1, R' Kluger analyzes whether one fulfills the mitzvah to "be fruitful and multiply" through adoption.)

The Dubno Maggid arranged teachers for his charge, including R' Mordechai Rabin, rabbi of Zamosc, and R' Yosef Hochgelernter. The Maggid himself taught R' Kluger the aggadic (i.e., non-legal) parts of the Torah, meeting with him in regular Friday night sessions.

At the young age of 22, R' Kluger was already sitting on batei din / rabbinical courts with more seasoned scholars. However, not until he was 36 did he receive his first appointment as a town rabbi, in Kelokow, Galicia. Later, a certain R' Yosef Yozpa suggested that R' Kluger apply for the then-vacant rabbinate of Brody, and R' Yosef wrote R' Kluger a letter of introduction to R' Ephraim Zalman Margaliot. (R' Margaliot was a businessman, and was Brody's leading scholar. His works include the popular Sha'arei Ephraim and Mateh Ephraim.) R' Margaliot interviewed R' Kluger and declared that R' Kluger was the first person who had ever bested him in a scholarly discussion. He later wrote of R' Kluger:

The rabbi, the great and sharp genius, Sinai [i.e., having far-ranging knowledge] and uprooter of mountains [i.e., having a sharp intellect], the famous one, our teacher R' Shlomo, may his light shine, who several years ago came to reside honorably in our city, and he was raised and elevated at the suggestion of the great and lofty ones of the city to be the head of the bet din and the teacher of righteousness and speaker of truth [i.e., lecturer on moral subjects] - his name is 'Shlomo' and his Torah is 'shleimah' (whole), fortunate is the man who gave birth to him . . .

R' Kluger remained in Brody until his death in 1869. (Source: Gedolei Ha'dorot p. 665)

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