

# COMING EVER CLOSER

*by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch*

G-d gave us the mitzvos (Divine commandments) as a means of emulating His ways and, thereby, becoming closer to Him. When we choose to follow His path, He facilitates the accomplishment of our goal by blessing us with bounty and protecting us from enemy threats. "If you will go in My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them..." (Vayikra/Leviticus 26:3) There is a maxim that the Torah contains no extra words; there are no poetic repetitions for stylistic purposes. Why, then, if observance and performance of commandments are clearly stated, does the Torah need to state, "go in My statutes"? What does it add that the others did not?

Rashi explains that the "going" connotes toiling in Torah study. The exercise of delving into the depths of insight and progressing to more sophisticated levels of understanding is akin to a journey.

The Talmud (Tractate Berachos 28b) relates the concept that we toil and the nations of the world toil: we toil and receive remuneration while the nations of the world toil and go uncompensated. But is that so? Does not a gentile tailor receive payment for his garment or a shoemaker get paid for his shoes?

The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen Kagan of Radin; 1838-1933; author of basic works in Jewish law, philosophy and ethics and renowned for his saintly qualities) expounds that were a tailor to toil and labor but not produce a garment, there would be not compensation for his efforts; the shoemaker can sweat as he struggles with the leather, but without a pair of shoes, his efforts will go unrewarded. They are not paid for their toil and effort; they are paid for results.

Not so one who toils in the profundity of Torah. The command is to expend genuine effort, to toil and work and delve and try. Success in understanding is the desired goal, but not a requisite result. No matter the intensity of insight at the end of the exercise, the compensation is received for the effort spent.

But why is this so? Why does G-d need to be so free spending in doling out reward for the mitzvah of toiling in Torah?

Our Sages teach (Pirkei Avos/Ethics of the Fathers 4:2) that the reward for a mitzvah is the opportunity to fulfill another mitzvah. We must understand that the fulfillment of mitzvos is not about accruing "brownie points" but rather rising another rung on the ladder in our journey to elevate ourselves in coming closer to G-d. Thus, we comprehend the maxim, "G-d wanted to benefit the

Jewish nation, therefore, He increased for them Torah and mitzvos." Mitzvos and Torah learning are the opportunity for growth and connection with the Divine, a chance to further forge a loving relationship with G-d. When a seven-year-old draws a picture of pretty flowers "for Mommy", with little hearts dotting the background, the mother does not even see that the work is obviously that of a seven-year-old. The child put all of his heart and soul into that picture and that expression of love from the child fosters the endearment of the mother. When we toil to understand the Divine wisdom of Torah, no matter how complete or "pretty" the result, the relationship is built in the effort, for which we are rewarded with more opportunities to grow ever closer to our Father in heaven.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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