

# GENUINE WEALTH

*by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch*

Ben Azai teaches us in Pirkei Avos (The Ethics of Our Fathers), "Run to perform even a simple mitzvah (Divine command) and flee from transgression, for one mitzvah brings in its wake another mitzvah and one transgression brings in its wake another transgression, for the reward for a mitzvah is another mitzvah and the reward for a transgression is another transgression." (4:2) Rabbi Yaakov teaches later that, "Better is one hour of spiritual bliss in the World to Come than the entire life in this world." (4:22) These two lessons come together to teach us that the reward for a mitzvah is so sublime, so spiritually intense, that this transient world and its temporal pleasures cannot be the medium in which genuine reward is given; that is held in reserve for the World to Come. The only meaningful compensation available in this world is the opportunity to further forge the bond with our Creator through more mitzvos.

The Torah seems to tell us otherwise. "And it will be that if you continually listen to My commandments that I commanded you today, to love G-d your L-rd and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, then I shall provide you with the rain of your land in its time, the early rain and the late rain, and you shall bring in your grain, your wine and your oil. I shall provide grass in your field for your animals and you will eat and you will be satisfied." (Devarim/Deuteronomy 11:13-15) In the Torah, G-d takes the most imperative command - to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul - and gives it the most basic, mundane reward: food. How are these two concepts reconciled?

Rambam (Maimonides) (Laws of Teshuva [Return, Repentance], chapter 9) teaches, "We are promised in the Torah that if we fulfill [the mitzvos] with joy, a positive spirit and wisdom, then G-d will always remove from our paths all impediments to our success, such as illness, war, hunger and the like. He will shower us with the good that will strengthen us with that which we need to fulfill the Torah, such as bounty, peace and wealth, so that we will not need to distract ourselves with our mundane bodily needs and we will be free to pursue Torah learning with wisdom and fulfillment of mitzvos so we can acquire the World to Come."

Michtav Me'Eliyahu (collected writings and discourses of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1891-1954) of London and B'nai Brak, one of the outstanding personalities and thinkers of the Mussar movement) explains that all our worldly possessions with which we are blessed are not given to us to revel in them. Rather, they are Divine tools for achieving holiness. Indeed, there is NO reward in this world for a mitzvah other than a mitzvah, and the material benefits we enjoy are simply vehicles to assist in the accomplishment of that goal. As such, all of our mundane possessions are now elevated. They

are vessels for holiness and spiritual growth, akin to the implements utilized in the Bais HaMikdash (Holy Temple in Jerusalem).

With this we can truly understand the final words of the verse above, "you will eat and you will be satisfied." Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon), the wisest of men, taught us "A lover of money will never be satisfied with money" (Koheles/Ecclesiastes 5:9) If the Torah's verses were discussing one who values wealth for its own sake, the elusive blessing of satisfaction would be impossible. Only one whose vision is spiritual fulfillment, for which possessions are a means to those ends - only one whose desire is a relationship with G-d - can be satisfied with all G-d has blessed him.

Rabbi Dessler concludes we also understand our Sages teaching, "Who is [truly] rich? He who is happy with his portion." (Pirkei Avos 4:1) If someone's spirituality would dictate poverty and separation from all possessions, then he has no desire for any material items; even what he does own is a burden. He cannot be considered wealthy. But one who appreciates that material wealth is the means to spiritual ends also appreciates the delicate balance - each one of his possessions has no inherent value, but as a key to facilitating spiritual growth is priceless. This person is genuinely satisfied, genuinely wealthy.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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