

DIVINE TRUSTEE

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

"When you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you, do not act toward him as a creditor; do not lay interest upon him." (Shemos/Exodus 22:24) Medrash Raba (31:2) expounds that one who passes his Divine tests is fortunate, for everyone is tested by G-d. The wealthy are tested as to their ability to open their hands to the indigent, while the poor are tested in their ability to withstand the tribulations of poverty without becoming angry. If the wealthy one is able to properly fulfill his role as custodian of G-d's resources then he will be allowed to partake of his wealth in this world and will receive his reward in the next, and G-d will save him from punishment in Gehinnom (1); and if the pauper withstands his challenge and does not reject G-d, he will receive a double portion in the next world.

The wealthy man's Divine reward in the afterlife is rational; rather than using his wealth for hedonistic self-gratification, he used it as a tool in his service of G-d. But why is he saved from Gehinnom? So long as he was fulfilling his mandate, how was Gehinnom ever a threat?

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (2) explains that as long as he partakes of his wealth during his earthly life he is constantly at risk of straying into self indulgent pursuit of physical pleasures. This environment is the spiritual equivalent of surrounding oneself with idolatry. One of the facets of Gehinnom is the void of spiritual truth, and one who toils for spiritually vacuous materialism creates such a void of truth in himself. He has, in effect, created a Gehinnom for himself.

What does G-d do to save him? Rabbi Dessler compares him to one involved in the demolition of a wayward city (Devarim/Deuteronomy 13:13) who risks eroding his sense of compassion and sensitivity to human life, but proceeds with a Divine promise of spiritual rejuvenation to reverse any and all ill effects. So too, the affluent benefactor who strives to maintain his G-d consciousness in his use and sharing of his resources, and uses them according to Divine instructions, has a Divine promise to strengthen him and insulate him from the influence of his wealth.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) where souls are cleansed and purified of their transgressions so they may proceed to Paradise for an eternity with the Divine Presence

(2) 1891-1954; in Michtav Me'Eliyahu, his collected writings and discourses; from England and, later, B'nai Brak, he was one of the outstanding personalities and thinkers of the Mussar movement

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