

PAYMENT FOR MORE

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Abba Tzvi ben Alta Leah Yehudis a"h.

"If you will go in My Laws, and guard My Mitzvos and do them..."(26:3)

Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki) explains: "If you will go in My Laws' - I might think that this refers to performance of the *Mitzvos*, but when the verse continues 'and guard my *Mitzvos*,' I know that the latter phrase refers to their performance. So what is the meaning of 'If you will go in My Laws'? It means that you should toil in *Torah*."

How should we understand this? The *Chofetz Chaim* (Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin) says that our efforts to understand *Torah* are central to "going" in it.

He further notes that the Talmud in *Brachos* 28b (which we read when we celebrate the completion of a tractate, section of the *Mishna*, or other major segment of our studies) says "we toil [in *Torah*] and receive reward, while they toil [in other things] and do not receive reward." Clearly, he says, this needs an explanation. Does a tailor sew a new suit, or a cobbler produce a pair of new shoes, without receiving payment for his efforts?

The explanation offered by the *Chofetz Chaim* is as follows: if a person hires a tailor or cobbler, he only pays for the completed suit or shoes. The work is done on behalf of the final product; if the work is never completed, then the worker never receives payment for all of his work - without the product, the work is worthless, a "wasted effort". Not so, he explains, with *Torah* study.

There is a commandment, as seen above, merely to study; even if a person emerges without fully understanding, nonetheless the effort is never "wasted". So this is what the passage means: we make efforts, and are rewarded for the efforts alone. When we work at other things, we receive reward not for our efforts, but for the products.

Even salaried employees gain bonuses and promotions based upon completion of projects and productivity (bureaucrats excepted). While the *Chofetz Chaim* does not say this, I would argue that just the opposite is true with *Torah* study: if it you understand everything, and your study is easy and enjoyable, then it is clearly easier to continue than it is when everything is an incomprehensible morass. Because more effort is required to continue in the latter situation, that would logically result in more reward. The proof is the Talmudic statement that "better one with difficulty than 100

without." I think we see this quite often - while not everyone who studies comes away understanding everything, everyone does come away with a spiritual push (not to mention the real spiritual rewards that come later).

There are many times when it looks like there's just too much to learn, or where going to a class or setting aside time to study takes a great deal of effort. But if it looks difficult, remember: making the attempt carries its own reward!

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The author is the Director of Project Genesis.