

IT'S ALL IN THE EXTRAS

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

It's All in the Extras¹

Rashi begins the *parshah* like a *rosh yeshiva* with a mission. It's all about toiling in Torah study. Lest you think that "walk in My decrees"² refers to some other part of Torah life, like living according to the precepts of His commandments, Rashi, (citing *Toras Kohanim*), proves this impossible. What would the next phrase - "observe my mitzvos" - mean? This latter phrase quite clearly deals with following the dictates of the law, which means that the first refers to something else entirely. What better candidate than working hard at mastering Torah?

So the two phrases, separate and distinct, establish the labor of learning and the observance of mitzvos as coequals in meriting all the blessings with which the *parshah* continues. So it would seem, until Rashi arrives at the "observe my mitzvos" phrase, and promptly turns it as well into a plug for more energized learning. Not content to have the words make the case for doing the deeds of Torah living, Rashi once again works Torah study into the text. "Toil in Torah - so that you will properly observe the mitzvos." The Torah does not quite mean observance, so much as the intense and rigorous study that facilitates observance.

By the time Rashi concludes his commentary, Torah study has gained an exclusive as prerequisite for *berachah*, with observance itself left out in the cold.

While Rashi pins all our *berachah* hopes on learning, Rambam³ plunges into the *parshah* from a different perspective. What troubles him is not the identity of the factors that bring a surfeit of Divine blessing. He tries to understand the promise of reward altogether. Doesn't the gemara⁴ tell us that this world is not where such reward is collected?

A teaching of the *seforim hakedoshim* is the key to putting the pieces together. There is no reward for the observance of the mitzvos in this world, but the reward for the extras, the enhancements, does not have to wait for the next one. Reward for the mitzvos is withheld in the here- and-now not because Hashem is somehow reluctant to apply out "credits" to earthly existence. Rather, mitzvos, in their supernal fullness, do not lend themselves to a present-world payback. Their holiness and power transcends the limitations of our world. They come from a higher place, and their reward looms larger than our imagination. The world is too small a place to contain the richness of their reward.

This is not true of what we as humans can contribute to the mitzvot: our longing to see them fulfilled, and the way we adorn them with beauty and embellishment. (The Saba Kadisha of Lechovitch used to point to a passage in the Zohar.⁵ "All *berachah* of Above and below depend on Shabbos." It is only spiritual *berachah*, he maintained, that flows directly from Shabbos. Material *berachah*, however, has no direct link to it. Shabbos' elevation and loftiness preclude a direct connection to mundane things. We draw the week's material success from a tributary of Shabbos: Tosafos Shabbos, the human contribution, that which we (literally!) add to it. He used to urge that this fact be shared with the common folk.)

Torah study itself, as a fulfillment of the mitzvah "You shall occupy yourself with it day and night," does not belong to this world, and is not paid back in this world. We are paid - quite richly, as the Torah goes on to describe in its list of benefits - for our enhancement of the mitzvah. Hashem cherishes and responds to the extra toil and effort we bring to it. (*Toras Avos* observes that the word "*teleichu*" is an anagram for "*kalos*," as in "*kalsah nafshi*,"⁶ my soul pines. The Torah reserves the bounty of our *parshah* for the person who brings the longing of his soul to opportunity to fulfill the wishes of His Creator.)

We could suggest an entirely different approach to the specialness of toiling in Torah. *Toras Kohanim* describes Hashem Himself as desirous of Klal Yisrael's *amelus* in Torah. The meaning of this can be mined from Rambam's description⁷ of what learning looks like to those livening on the spiritual edge. "One who raises his heart to fulfill this mitzvah [of Torah study] properly, to crown himself with the crown of Torah (i.e. his Torah study already firmly in place, he elevates his thoughts to seek a more elevated approach to it), must not be distracted by anything else, and must not hope to acquire Torah alongside wealth and honor. Rather, this is the way of Torah: You must eat bread with salt, and drink only a measured amount of water. You will sleep on the ground and live a life of pain. And the reward is according to the pain."

After a full and detailed description of the votive life, Rambam links its reward to a single element. The pain determines the reward. The *amelus* that Hashem desires is the complete subordination of self to a life of Torah, as evidenced by the willingness to experience discomfort in its pursuit - eating sparsely, banishing consideration of personal pleasure because Torah is so much more attractive. This life style brings *nachas ruach* to Hashem; it is the *amelus* upon which the *berachos* of our *parshah* are contingent.

*Tana D'vai Eliyahu*⁸ reports this dialogue: "A student came to me and said, 'My involvement is with Torah. I cherish it, I desire it, I look that it should come to me. But it doesn't.' I said to this student, 'My son, no person merited Torah without sacrificing his very life for it - for the sake of Heaven.'" The student's cherishing and longing were admirable, but insufficient. Pursuing Torah as the ultimate object of his attention and desire will not get him there; only a person who offers himself to Torah

will achieve it.

Are all parts of Torah equal in cementing our relationship with Hashem? Apparently not, according to a midrash.⁹ "Through (*al pi*) these words I established a covenant with you."¹⁰ The midrash detects in this His declaration that *Torah she-b'al-peh* is critical to the relationship. Our development above makes this eminently understandable. Studying anything takes dedication, concentration. Mastering *Torah she-b'al-peh* requires more than that. We see that those who succeed push themselves beyond their capacities, neglecting their other interests, and even their needs. Only those who love Hashem with all their hearts, all their souls, and all their possessions truly master it.

"I will place my sanctuaries in your midst and travel among you."¹¹ This is the Torah's expression of the ultimate form of *devekus*. With it, the Torah concludes its detailed list of *berachos*. Despite the rule that mitzvos are not rewarded in this world, He does reward the extra measure of selfless dedication that turns Torah study into a completely different experience. That life style so neatly conforms with His Will, that it calls for all the *berachos* of our *parshah*.

¹ Based on Nesivos Shalom, pgs.133-134

² Vayikra 26:3

³ Teshuva 9:1

⁴ Kiddushin 39B

⁵ 2:88B

⁶ Tehilim 84:3

⁷ Talmud Torah 3:6

⁸ Rabbah, Chapter 22 s.v. ad

⁹ Tanchuma, Noach, 3, s.v. eleh toldos. Gitin 60B makes the same point about the specialness of *Torah she-b'al-peh*, but does invoke the theme of painful self-denial in the course of its study.

¹⁰ Shemos 34:27

¹¹ Vayikra 26:12