

APPRECIATE IT WHILE YOU HAVE IT

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 364, The Melacha of Memachek. Good Shabbos!

Appreciate It While You Have It

When the Torah teaches about Moshe receiving the Luchos [Ten Commandments] on Tablets of Stone, the Torah says that they were written by the Finger of G-d (etzba Elokim) [Shemos 31:18]. No further details are provided. Later in the parsha, just prior to Moshe's breaking the Luchos, the Torah reveals more about the Luchos -- they were miraculously readable from both sides, even though the letters penetrated the entire width of the stone [32:15-16]. The Torah describes the Luchos in superlative terms: "The Luchos were G-d's handiwork, and the script was the script of G-d, engraved on the Luchos."

The logical location to describe the unique nature of the Luchos was the moment when they were first given, rather than when they were about to be broken. The Torah does the exact opposite. Why is that?

I saw an observation from the Shemen HaTov. Perhaps the Torah is teaching us a lesson that not only applies to the Luchos, but also applies to life in general. The lesson is that whenever we possess something for a long, almost indefinite time, we fail to appreciate what we have. It is only when one is on the verge of losing that which he possesses, that he first begins to realize its magnificence and beauty. When we love and are close to people and we think that we will have them indefinitely, human nature is to take the people for granted. However, when we are faced with the specter of losing somebody, and we know that our time with him or her is limited, then we suddenly begin to realize the preciousness of what we have and of every moment with that person. Our attitude then totally changes.

Perhaps the pasuk is trying to emphasize this lesson. When Moshe descended from the mountain with the Luchos, and was about to break them, then we suddenly pause. For the first time, we consider the uniqueness and the magnificence of those Luchos.

This is a lesson that has countless examples throughout our lives. One of the most appropriate examples relates to Yeshiva students. I tell this lesson over to my students frequently, but I still do not feel that I say it often enough. The overriding sentiment of anyone who ever learned in a Yeshiva is that they did not appreciate the experience while they had it. In retrospect, they look back and see how precious the experience was when they did have it.

When I travel and meet former students, they invariably tell me that they remember my lecturing them that they should take advantage of their years in Yeshiva because they will be the 'best years of their life'. Time and again they tell me, "You were right!" While one is in Yeshiva, the time stretches out in front of him and can seem infinite. Unfortunately, that is not the case. It is a limited amount of time.

A person's approach becomes different when he realizes that his time in Yeshiva is limited -- for example, if he has the luxury of returning to the Yeshiva for a short period after taking off a year or two.

The food in Yeshiva might not be all that it could be and dorm life has its problems. There are many little 'complaints' that one has when he lives in Yeshiva. But the overall experience is so rewarding and so rich and so unique. The test is to see the forest and not get caught up in the trees.

And so it is with child rearing. It requires significant effort to raise little children. They can sap someone's energy and drain him physically. But when the person grows older and sees his children grown up, he will look back and say, "those wonderful years flew by all too quickly".

And so it is with our relationships with our parents. Yes, there can be tensions and hassles. Sometimes life can be trying for both parents and children. But many people fail to realize the blessing that we have when we can still turn to a parent.

One of the biggest tests of life is to appreciate a situation while we are still experiencing it. Life is far too fleeting because we are overwhelmed by the nitty-gritty and the little bumps in the road. We simply do not have the time and peace of mind to appreciate what we have.

This is the test of life that cuts across generations. It faces people in all aspects of their lives. We even take our jobs for granted. There is a fallacy in the mind of many Americans who look anxiously forward to their 65th birthday, when they can retire. After a person retires, what will he do the next morning? There are only so many times that a person can read the newspaper. If a person has the physical ability to be active and productive, that should be valued and acted upon.

This is the lesson that the Torah is teaching us. We only notice that the Luchos are the miraculous handiwork of G-d, when we are about to lose them. The challenge is to appreciate what we have while we still have it.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Ki Sisa are provided below:

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