

A PERSON MUST FIND PLEASURE IN MITZVOS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand On Parshas Ki Savo

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 516, Hagbeh. Good Shabbos!

A Person Must Find Pleasure In Mitzvos

In the middle of the terrible string of curses in this week's parsha, the pasuk [verse] says, "Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with gladness and with goodness of heart, out of an abundance of everything." [Devorim 28:47] The Torah is teaching that in some way, the Tochacha (punitive chastisement) resulted from a failure to joyfully perform the mitzvos.

The difficulty with this statement is obvious. The Tochacha is a horrific litany of calamities. When Rashi and the classic commentaries wrote their insights into the pasukim [verses] describing the terrible punishments set out in this parsha, it was as a prediction of what could happen in the future. Unfortunately, we know that everything spelled out in these pasukim actually transpired. The pasukim are not exaggerations. They happened as literally as they were written.

The obvious question is -- did these punishments really occur merely because we did not have appropriate joy and enthusiasm for keeping G-d's mitzvos? Could it be true that despite the fact that we actually kept all the mitzvos, we were punished for our attitude alone?

Rav Simche Zissel Ziv, "the Alter of Kelm," (1824-1898) suggests that the Tochacha did not occur because people did not have the proper joy in fulfilling mitzvos. It came about because they stopped fulfilling mitzvos - period! So why does the pasuk attribute the Tochacha to a failure to fulfill mitzvos joyously? The Alter of Kelm explains this based on human nature.

People do not do things that they do not enjoy. People need an incentive to do things. Sometimes

the incentive is financial. Sometimes the incentive is based on physical pleasure. Sometimes the incentive is emotional. There must be some benefit from an activity or we will not continue to do it.

A person who views the life of Torah and mitzvos as a tremendous goal and tremendous benefit, rather than as a burden, will obviously continue learning Torah and performing mitzvos. Of course, there are times in every person's life when his interest in something may wax or wane. But as long as the general feeling towards Torah and mitzvos is that "this is what it is all about," they will give him pleasure and ultimately give him a purpose in life. When that is the case, he will continue to do them. When that is not the case, Torah and mitzvos may become rote and mundane. They then become a burden. When that happens the person may eventually stop doing them entirely. The result of ceasing to do mitzvos is the Tochacha.

I always try to make the point to my students in Yeshiva that it is crucial for a person to find his own niche in learning. As some point in life, a student must develop a pleasure (geshmak!) in his learning. When he leaves the Yeshiva - at whatever age - and is looking forward to the next 40, 50, or 60 years of life without a yeshiva supervisor (mashgiach) telling him "You need to show up to the Beis Medrash for learning," only one thing will keep him learning. He must enjoy it! He needs to feel a sense of pleasure and accomplishment. If not, he will just stop learning. When a person stops learning, the spiritual ramifications are not pretty.

Every person should strive to find pleasure in some aspect of learning. It can be more expansive study (bekius) or more analytic study (b'iyun). It can be Tanach (Bible) or Talmud; Halacha (law) or Hashkafa (philosophy). Everyone must find pleasuresomewhere in the vast universe of Torah study. He must find a place in Torahwhere he can study "b'simcha" [with joy] and thereby guarantee the continuity of his Torah study commitment.

If there is one thing we as parents must try to give over to our children, it is the esthetic beauty and pleasure of mitzvos. If we can transmit the pleasure of being an honest religious Jew, of properly observing Shabbos, of a Succah experience, of a family Seder, of doing any mitzvah, to the next generation, then we can feel confident that they will cherish those experiences for the rest of their lives. The pasuk "Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with gladness and with goodness of heart..." alludes to the alternative.

Candid Remarks Reveal True Sentiments

At the end of the Parsha, Moshe summoned the Jewish people. He told them that they had witnessed all the miracles that Hashem had performed for them in Egypt and in the years since they

left Egypt. Then, Moshe added the following, "Hashem did not give you a heart to know or eyes to see or ears to hear, until this day." [Devorim 29:3]

There is a very unique Rashi on the expression "until this day": "I have heard that the day on which Moshe gave the Torah scroll to the sons of Levi (as it is written 'Moshe wrote this Torah, and he gave it to the Kohanim, the sons of Levi') all Israel came before Moshe and said to him 'Moshe, our master! We, too, stood at Sinai and we accepted the Torah and it was given to us. Why do you put the sons of your tribe in charge of it, so that one day they may say to us, 'It was not given to you. It was given to us?' Moshe rejoiced over the matter. Regarding this he said to them, 'This day you have become a people to Hashem your G-d.' That is, this day I have understood that you cleave to and desire the Omnipresent."

If we analyze this, it seems rather strange. The claim by the children of Israel that "It's not fair!" seems kind of childish. Why would this incident, of all incidents, prove to Moshe Rabbeinu that they were in fact dedicated in their service and loyalty to the Almighty?

Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi makes an interesting observation on this Rashi. Sometimes you can see what a person is all about by his petty arguments, by what bothers him. Even though the argument may be unjustified or even ridiculous, it is still a barometer of what really agitates him. It is very revealing if what bothered the Jewish people was "Why should the Tribe of Levi get the only copy of the Torah - they are no bigger owners of it than we are!" Granted, the argument may seem tainted with jealousy or somewhat beneath their dignity, but it clearly says "We want the Torah also!"

You can detect the truth in the small, candid, moments of life. When G-d descended on Mt. Sinai and the whole world stopped while Israel responded "We will do and we will hear" (Na'aseh v'Nishmah) - those are the big moments of life. "This is my G-d and I will glorify Him" is a big moment. It goes without saying that everyone will join in the chorus of such great moments of history.

It is much more significant when people say, "We want the Torah, also!" in a candid and unrehearsed fashion, on a regular day, during the month of Adar. Then, Moshe Rabbeinu felt reassured that this was their true sentiment. Now he was convinced that they truly wished to cling to the Ribbono Shel Olam. "This very day, you have become a people to Hashem your G-d".

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