

A Taste of Torah

No Second Chances

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Happiness is a much-touted elixir in our day and age. People who are happy, we are told, are more productive, healthier, live longer, make more money, and all manner of other wonderful things.

Judaism also exhorts us to be happy – specifically, to serve G-d with joy. King David (Psalms 100:2) tells us to “serve Hashem with joy.” And, in this week’s parsha, the Torah tells us what occurs if we fail to do so. Moshe details ninety-eight horrifying calamities that will befall the Jewish People. And, says Moshe, these tortures will occur “because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant.” (Ki Savo 28:47)

I hope that I didn’t just knock you off your chair. Because while all will agree that joy is a vital component of serving G-d, when did it become the end-all? Furthermore, until this verse, it wasn’t! The Torah had already stated that these punishments would befall the Jewish nation due to their failure to properly observe G-d’s commandments. Yet now, it seems like despite the observance of Torah and mitzvos, these tragedies will occur due to lack of joy.

Let’s take a step back for a moment and try to understand the great value placed upon serving G-d with joy. If you think about it, it is a bit odd. After all, what difference does it make if I am smiling when I perform a mitzvah or if I have a grumpy face – as long as I am doing what needs to get done, I should get the same credit for it! Sure, it may be easier to perform many mitzvos – especially when the going gets tough – if I have a good attitude, but this would make happiness a mere means to ensuring I live up to what’s expected, not an integral part of mitzvah performance.

The answer, of course, is that while going through the motions of doing mitzvos, even with proper intent, is vital, there is a higher goal – forming a relationship with G-d. Yes, one can – and, in fact, one must – relate to G-d as His humble servant looking to carry out His bidding. But there is another integral path of relating to G-d, that of our loving Father in Heaven. And while a servant can frown and grumble while going about his daily routine, a child who does so will destroy the connection he has with his father. If one wants to connect with G-d as a child with a father, joy is a prerequisite.

There is another major difference between a servant and a child. If a servant fails to perform, he will be removed from duty. A parent’s relationship with a child, however, will still be strong despite the child’s failures. The father will often give his child second and third chances, and use more merciful methods of steering him back to the straight and narrow, before administering discipline.

Now that we have taken a deeper look at joy, we can understand why its lack brings about the terrible punishments detailed in our parsha. For in fact, it is the sins and spiritual failure of the Jewish People to properly guard the Torah that will bring about their demise, as Moshe states many times throughout the section. But there is an inherent question begging to be asked – are we not G-d’s beloved children? This is *really* tough love! Don’t the Jewish People deserve better treatment, despite their shortcomings? Don’t they deserve more chances to make things right? What happened to our merciful Father in Heaven?

The answer, says Moshe, is that the Jewish People opted out of that relationship. They didn’t serve G-d with

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Stories For The Soul

A Cat Tale

Yeshiva Knesses Chizkiyahu of Kfar Chasidim had a mouse problem. When the issue was discovered, a cat was duly obtained, with the hope that the feline would eliminate the unwelcome rodents.

A few weeks later, Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian (1876-1970), the *mashgiach* (spiritual supervisor) of the yeshiva, was walking in the yeshivah with a student when they ran into the cat. Rabbi Lopian was taken aback – he had been unaware of the cat’s presence, and this was the first time he had seen it on the yeshivah grounds.

“Whose cat is this?” inquired Rabbi Lopian. The student explained that the cat had been brought to the yeshivah to curtail the mice problem.

Rav Lopian inquired further, “And who feeds her?”

The student answered, “She has plenty of food – she eats the mice. We don’t need to bring her food.”

Rav Lopian answered, “I don’t understand. If she does her job well and scares off the mice, she won’t have anything left to eat! We brought her here to perform a service, so we have to feed her!”

Rav Lopian then entered his apartment and brought out a bowl of milk. At that moment, as he knelt to place the bowl before the cat, someone snapped a photo of the event – and that photo is, today, one of the most famous photos in the Yeshiva world. A photo of a great *tzaddik* expressing his gratitude and concern for a cat!

In this week’s parsha, we learn the importance of *hakaras hatov*, gratitude. Gratitude must be expressed to all, even animals and

Kollel Happenings

KOLLEL'S DONOR APPRECIATION EVENT SEP. 20TH

The Kollel will be holding its annual Donor Appreciation Event on Sunday, September 20th, 6:45 pm, at the home of Drs. Joel and Goldie Cohen, 12 Sedgwick Dr. Englewood, CO 80113. To RSVP please email info@denverkollel.org.

SYMBOLIC FOOD PLATTER FOR ROSH HASHANA

There is a widespread Rosh Hashana custom to eat simanim, foods that symbolize a good year. The Denver Community Kollel is proud to offer a simanim platter. For more info, or to order yours for just \$25, email info@denverkollel.org, visit the Kollel website at www.denverkollel.org, or call 303-820-2855. Be sure to leave method of payment and contact information. Order deadline is September 5th.

PRUZBUL ON LABOR DAY

Start your day off on the right foot with Torah study! Learning will focus on the cancellation of debts on shmitah and the pruzbul. Four locations: Kollel West Side Bais Medrash, 1516 Xavier St., selichos at 7:30 followed by breakfast and learning; Aish Denver, 9550 E. Belview Ave., selichos at 7:00 followed by breakfast and learning; EDOS, 198 S. Holly St., selichos at 7:30 followed by breakfast and learning, and DAT, 6825 E. Alameda Ave., selichos at 8:00 followed by breakfast and learning.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: On every festival, after reading the Torah portion of the day, there is a centuries-old custom to read the verses of the *mussaf* offering of the day from a second Torah scroll. Why don't we do this on Shabbos, as well?

A: There are a number of answers offered by the Rishonim (medieval commentators): 1) The Shabbos *mussaf* offering is only two verses long, and a minimum reading requires three verses. 2) Since the *haftarah* read when there is a special *maftir* reading reflects the special *maftir*, it would require ending the Torah reading of Shabbos with a Shabbos-themed *haftarah*, something we

wish to avoid. 3) The primary purpose of reading the *mussaf* offering of the festival is because of the *chatas* (sin) offering mentioned therein; by reading about it, it is regarded as having been offered. Shabbos *mussaf* offerings, however, do not contain a *chatas*, so it is unnecessary to read about it.

This week's question: What practical difference is there between the various reasons discussed above for not reading the Shabbos *mussaf* offerings as part of the weekly Torah reading?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org

Ask the Rabbi

Basic Goodness of Man

Marie Dupont wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I was wondering what Judaism say about man being born evil. Thank you for your answer. Regards.

Dear Marie Dupont,

No, man is not "born evil."

The Torah says that "the inclination in man's heart is evil from his youth." (Genesis 8:21) The Talmud explains "youth" here to mean from the time of birth. However, this evil inclination is external; it is not intrinsic to a person's pure soul. Our pure soul is given to us even earlier, at the time of conception.

So, Judaism sees man as basically good, created in

G-d's image, but with temptation toward evil. While the evil inclination is strong, Judaism believes that a person can choose to overcome it. This is the concept of free choice, which is basically the purpose of our existence: To choose good over evil.

Sources:

Yenishalmi Berachot 3:5

Bereishet Rabba 34

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joy. They related to Him like a servant to a master, slaving away because he has no choice. There is little room for failure before the master puts the servant in his place. Had the Jewish People maintained that father-son bond, G-d would have treated them more mercifully. But in a master-servant dynamic, mercy doesn't have a place. Ninety-eight curses, without letup, to make sure the servant is set back on course.

Both of these aspects, that of a servant and of a child, are vital facets in living our lives Jewishly. On the one hand, we mustn't take liberties that a child might take; rather, we must have an awe before G-d that checks our actions and thoughts. But at the same time, we must strive to develop and establish

a loving relationship with our Father in Heaven. The month of Elul, which precedes Rosh Hashana, is a special month dedicated to establishing this special bond – both in terms of awe and of love – with our Creator. And perhaps this is the intent of our Sages when they say that we always read these terrible curses before Rosh Hashana, in order to "finish the year and its curses" (see Megillah 31b). For although we may have failed during the course of the year to live our lives as Jews with happiness, with the joy we ought to have to merit having such a wonderful bond with G-d, thus bringing Divine wrath upon ourselves, we are ready to renew that relationship as Rosh Hashana approaches.

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