

What is your concept of Reward?



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Weekly Parsha

Re'eh

RABBI BERNIE FOX

“Since the place that Hashem, your G-d, has chosen to dedicate to His name is far from you, you may slaughter your large and small cattle that Hashem has give to you, in the manner that is commanded. And

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Life

FEAR AND LOVE OF GOD

& ATTAINING THE AFTERLIFE

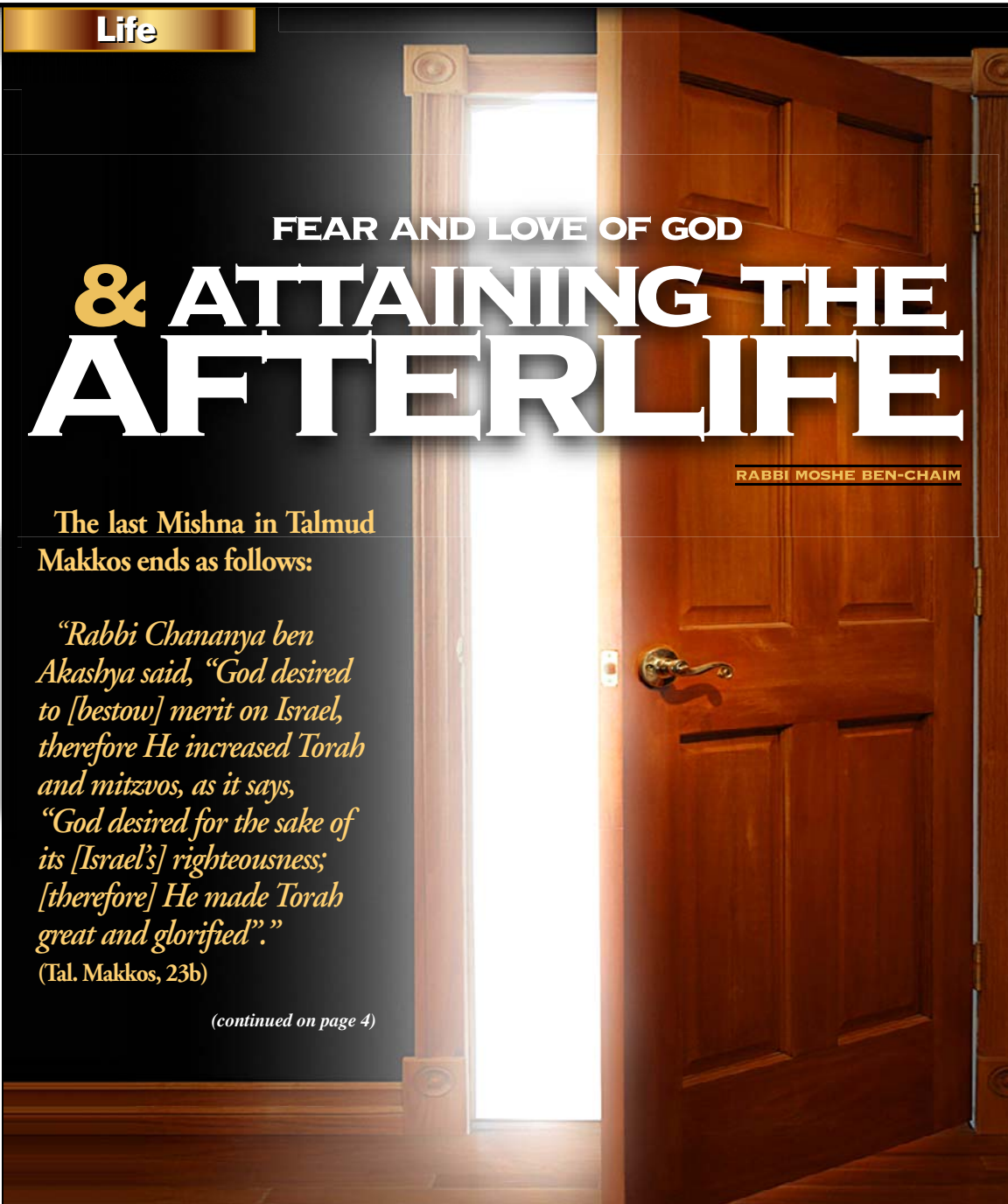
RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The last Mishna in Talmud Makkos ends as follows:

“Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya said, “God desired to [bestow] merit on Israel, therefore He increased Torah and mitzvos, as it says, “God desired for the sake of its [Israel’s] righteousness; [therefore] He made Torah great and glorified.””

(Tal. Makkos, 23b)

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(Re'eh cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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you may eat in your gates to the extent you desire." (Devarim 12:21)

During the sojourn in the wilderness, the slaughter of animals was strictly controlled. Animals could not be slaughtered freely and eaten. Instead, animals were only slaughtered as sacrifices. A person wishing to slaughter an animal for personal consumption offered it as a Shelamim sacrifice. A portion of the animal was offered on the altar. A portion was distributed to the Kohen. The remainder was consumed by the individual offering the animal.

This restriction was not a hardship in the wilderness. The entire nation camped around the Tabernacle – the Mishcan. It was not a burden to bring an animal to the Mishcan for sacrifice. However, Moshe is preparing the nation for its entry into the land of Israel. In the land of Israel, this restriction would be onerous. It is not realistic to require that the slaughter of every animal be performed at the Mishcan or Holy Temple. The Torah acknowledges this problem. In response to this issue, Moshe announces the creation of a new institution – Shechitat Chulin.

What is Shechitat Chulin? In the wilderness as slaughter – shechitah – was performed as part of the process of sacrifice. Shechitah was not performed merely to prepare meat for consumption. Shechitat Chulin is the slaughter of meat for personal consumption. Shechitat Chulin is non-sacrificial slaughter.

Not all meat is prepared for consumption through shechitah. Cattle, venison and fowl require shechitah. However, for fish there is no equivalent of shechitah. We are permitted to eat certain locusts. These creatures do not require shechitah in order to be consumed. This raises an interesting question. Why is shechitah limited to specific species? Why is there no form of shechitah for fish and locusts?

The Talmud discusses this issue. The Sages explain that the exclusion of fish from shechitah is based on a passage in the Torah. Bnai Yisrael complain to Moshe. They are dissatisfied with their diet in the wilderness. They subsist on manna. The availability of meat is limited. Hashem responds that He will provide the nation with meat. Moshe is astonished. He says, "Even if the cattle and sheep are slaughtered, will it suffice them? If all the fish of the sea are

gathered will it be enough for them?"[1] The Talmud explains that a careful analysis of this pasuk reveals that shechitah does not apply to fish. Moshe uses the term shechitah – slaughter – in reference to sheep and cattle. However, in discussing fish Moshe does not refer to shechitah. Instead, he adjusts his phraseology. He describes the fish as "gathered". This indicated that fish merely need to be gathered. Shechitah is not required.[2]

The Talmud does not discuss the basis for excluding locusts from shechitah. Maimonides provides a basis for this law. First, Maimonides explains the exclusion of fish from shechitah. He quotes the Talmud. Fish are excluded because they are "gathered" and not "slaughtered". Then, Maimonides extends the Talmud's reasoning. He explains that the term "gather" is also used in reference to locusts. This reference is not found in the Torah. It is pasuk in the Sefer Yishayahu. The Navi uses the phrase, "a gathering of locust". Maimonides concludes that this association of locusts with the term "gather" is the basis for their exclusion from Shechitah.[3]



Rabbaynu David ibn Zimra – RaDvaZ – discusses Maimonides' position in his responsa. RaDvaZ explains that Maimonides' position is difficult to understand. Maimonides extends the

reasoning of the Talmud to locusts. He maintains that because the term "gather" is used in reference to locusts, they are excluded from Shechitah. This is a difficult line of reasoning. The term "gathered" used in reference to fish does imply that shechitah is not needed. The pasuk juxtaposes fish and cattle. The pasuk states that cattle must be slaughtered. Fish must merely be gathered. However, no such distinction is made in the case of locusts. The Navi is not distinguishing between locusts and other creatures. The passage is not dealing with shechitah. Therefore, the use of the term "gather" in reference to locusts does not seem to imply that they are exempt from shechitah. [4]

How can we explain Maimonides' position? It seems that, according to Maimonides, the Talmud is not merely indicating the source for excluding fish from shechitah. The Talmud is providing an insight into the basis for this exclusion. The Talmud is explaining that there is a basic difference between fish and the animals that require

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shechitah. Animals requiring shechitah are slaughtered individually. They are not gathered or consumed in bulk. In contrast, fish are generally gathered in nets and consumed in quantity. It is true that this is not the case for every species of fish. Some fish are individually caught and consumed. However, the overall characteristic of this genus is that it is gathered and consumed in quantity. This distinction is the basis for the exclusion of fish from shechitah. Animals that are – in general – individually slaughtered require shechitah. This criterion dictates that cattle and fowl require shechitah. Fish do not meet this criterion. Therefore, they do not require any form of shechitah.

We can now understand Maimonides' extension of the Talmud's reasoning to locusts. These creatures are also not slaughtered or consumed individually. They are gathered and consumed in quantity. This is demonstrated by the pasuk in the Navi. Locusts do not meet the criterion for shechitah. Therefore, they do not require any form of shechitah.

RaDvaZ offers an alternative explanation for the status of locusts. An introduction is needed to understand his rationale. The Torah permits the consumption of specific species. Other species are prohibited. The status of each species is determined by its characteristics. The Torah – in Parshat Shemini – discusses the various species that are permitted and prohibited. The discussion concludes with this pasuk. "This is the law concerning mammals, birds, aquatic creatures and lower forms of terrestrial animals." [5] The Torah outlines four categories of creatures – mammals, birds, aquatic creatures and lower forms of animals. Locusts are members of this last category. RaDvaZ explains that locusts are mentioned after fish. Fish do not require shechitah. Therefore, locusts are also exempt from this requirement. [6]

RaDvaZ's reasoning is difficult to understand. This passage is not dealing with shechitah! Why should the order of this passage influence the requirement of shechitah?

It appears that, according to RaDvaZ, the passage is delineating a hierarchy of creatures. In this hierarchy, mammals are at the highest position. They are followed by birds, fish and then the lower creatures. RaDvaZ maintains that this hierarchy is fundamental to understanding the requirement of shechitah. Only the higher creatures require this special treatment of shechitah. Creatures that are lower in the hierarchy do not receive this distinctive handling. Fish

are too low in the hierarchy to require shechitah. Locusts are even lower in the hierarchy. Therefore, they too are exempt from the requirement of shechitah.



"This is what you must do if your blood brother, your son, your daughter, your wife, or your closest friend secretly tries to convince you, and says, 'Let us go worship a new god, previously unknown to you or to your fathers.'" (Devarim 13:7)

This passage introduces the discussion of the Maysit – the missionary. This is an individual who attempts to convince others to worship idols of some other deity. The Torah explains that this person attempts to undermine the spiritual perfection of the Jewish nation. No mercy is shown the Maysit. This person is executed.

Throughout our history, we have been confronted with individuals, institutions and governments that have attempted to convince us to abandon our Torah. We have been subjected

to forced conversions, expulsions and other forms of religious coercion. At other times, force was replaced by polemics and efforts to proselytize. Bnai Yisrael have consistently resisted all of these various efforts. These many attempts to corrupt the Jewish people have generated a vast quantity of fascinating accounts and narratives. Many of these accounts retain their relevancy and timeliness. One of these involves Rav Chaim Soloveitchik Zt"l.

Rav Chaim was traveling on a train. A missionary entered his coach and sat next to two Jews. The missionary engaged these Jews in a conversation regarding religion. In the course of this conversation, the missionary acknowledged that the Sages of the Talmud rejected Jesus' Messianic claims. However, the missionary insisted that this rejection is not credible. He claimed that one of the greatest Sages of the Talmud – Rebbe Akiva – believed that Bar Kochva was the Messiah. Rebbe Akiva was wrong. The missionary argued that this error proved that the Sages of the Talmud are fallible in their analysis of Messianic claims. Therefore, their rejection of Jesus' claims is of little consequence.

At this point, Rav Chaim interrupted the conversation with an amazing claim. He exclaimed that Rebbe Akiva was not wrong. Bar Kochva was the Messiah! The missionary was astounded by this claim. He could not believe that Rav Chaim could make such a ridiculous assertion. The missionary eagerly explained that Bar Kochva could not have been the Messiah. Bar Kochva had died without saving the Jewish people!

Rav Chaim had been waiting for this response. He countered immediately. If Bar Kochva's death proves that he was not the Messiah, then death disqualifies any claimant from consideration as the Messiah! [7] ■

[1] Sefer BeMidbar 11:22.

[2] Mesechet Chulin 27b.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Shechitah 1:3.

[4] Rabbaynu David ibn Zimra (Radvaz) Responsa, volume 1, number 4.

[5] Sefer VaYikra 11:46.

[6] Rabbaynu David ibn Zimra (Radvaz) Responsa, volume 1, number 4.

[7] Rav Y. Hershkowitz, Torat Chaim, pp. 154-5.

In his commentary on this Mishna, Maimonides writes:

“It is of the fundamentals beliefs in the Torah that when man fulfills a mitzvah of the 613 mitzvos as is fitting and properly, and he does not join with that performance any Earthly [ulterior] motivation in any manner; but he performs it for its own sake, with love as I have explained to you, behold...he has merited eternal life [Olam Haba]. And on this did Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya say, “For the mitzvos, as they are numerous, it is impossible that during his life, man will not perform one of them in its true intent, and completely. And when he performs that mitzvah, his soul will live [eternally].”

Rashi comments as follows:

“In order that they receive reward with their refrain from sins, therefore God increased [mitzvos] for them. For it was not necessary to command many mitzvos and many warnings regarding [eating] despicable insects and carcasses...for there is no man who doesn't loathe them. Rather, they were commanded so man receive reward on account of refraining from [eating] them.”

On the surface, Maimonides and Rashi appear to agree: observance of mitzvos earns us our reward. But examine their words carefully...what does each Rabbi address? There is quite a difference.

Maimonides

Maimonides addresses ‘any’ command – positive or negative – as he states, “when man fulfills a mitzvah of the 613 mitzvos...” He is also addressing the attitude of the person “and he does not join with that performance any Earthly [ulterior] motivation in any manner”. Finally, he is addressing the attainment of the Afterlife.

Rashi

Rashi appears to be addressing only negative commands, as he writes “refrain from sins”, and the aspect of “reward”. It is not clear if Rashi means that veering from sin earns us the Afterlife, or merely earns another matter he refers to as “reward”. It seems more plausible to suggest the latter. A safe explanation of Rashi would be that he is addressing why Rabbi Chananya felt many prohibitions were given: to insure our increased reward. Meaning, securing the Afterlife is not achieved through adhering to many mitzvos. Rashi is only addressing what “increases” our Afterlife’s reward. For example, one may obtain a ticket to a show, but how good of a seat, is another issue. Obtaining a ticket is akin to attaining the Afterlife through following fundamentals. But the better seat is attained – as Rashi says – through one’s avoidance of more sins. Rashi addresses the nature of the seat...the increase of the reward. It is unreasonable to suggest that man harbors incorrect views of God, but earns the afterlife by avoiding consumption of shrimp, pork, and other non-Kosher animals.

2 Types of Good Acts

Controlling one’s desires is far different than the intellectual activity of pondering God, His will and His laws. The Talmud teaches that Torah study is the greatest mitzvah, for this very reason. When one abstains from a sin, he is involved in controlling his desires. But this act in no way compares to man when he is engaged in intellectual pursuits. It is only when man ponders new ideas, and realizes their truths, that his soul is affected by such realization, when substantiated by an ensuing action. One who values giving tzedaka, but

doesn’t actually donate, in truth does not really value it. Action must follow. But it is the newly learned and appreciated ‘concept’ that affects our soul, and improves us. Thus, Torah study is the greatest mitzvah, for it alone improves our souls.

To be clear, God created man with the potential for an Afterlife by adhering to His word. Had man simply despised insects, this abstention would not earn him reward. For in such a case, abstention is not akin to fearing God’s word. But now, as God commanded man to abstain, man is conscious of God’s will when he avoids even loathsome things. Regardless of the innate disposition not to eat such vile insects, man earns himself reward, as he is “obeying God”. God increased such commands that are so easy to follow, so man’s reward is increased. Another of God’s numerous, kind acts to us. This explains Rashi.

However, this act of refrain from sin is surpassed by intellectual pursuits, whereby we improve our souls, as Maimonides teaches...

Love & Fear of God

These two views in fact address Love of God, versus Fear of God. Rashi addresses the latter, while Maimonides addresses the former. The Torah commands us in both, as Maimonides discusses in his Mishne Torah, Laws of Torah Fundamentals 2:2. But it is important to note that although both are commands, Maimonides concludes that law by stating “In accordance with these matters, I explain great principles from the acts of the Master of the Universe, in order that there be an opening [commencing point] for one who understands, to love Hashem. As the wise men have stated on this matter of Love of God, “for due to this you will recognize Who spoke and created the universe”.” He isolates Love of God without mentioning Fear. It appears he is indicating Love as the preferred state.

Maimonides seems to focus our goal on “Love of God”. Fear of God is a command, but perhaps this is not where man is to end his journey as his final objective. The true objective is a higher plain of existence, where we are not simply awestruck with God, but where we move towards a positive relationship with Him. This is called Love of God, meaning, the state of one’s soul where he or she is enamored with His creations and Torah. Fear of God is a response to this knowledge, whereas Love of God describes man in the process of attaining greater knowledge. When man’s mind is active, his soul is growing in its intensity of Love of God, and man is excelling. Fear of God is a reflective but stagnant status. Furthermore, Fear is not something we can positively generate. It is a “response” to something...to Knowledge of God. Also, Fear is dependent on our Knowledge and Love of God.

We then see that fear is both stagnant, dependent, and not something positive we can at once create. Fear depends on Love, which depends on Knowledge of God. In contrast, Love of God, or study, is a positive search where the mind is in the preferred, active state of probing thought. Certainly, as Maimonides commenced this section in 1:6, he describes the command to “Know God”. I feel this command again accentuates the greater level of Love of God over Fear of God. Love of God is synonymous with greater knowledge of God, as Maimonides states, “in accordance with the knowledge, is one’s love of God” (Laws of Repentance, 10:10)

All or Nothing

Now that we have come this far, let us investigate how man actually earns his share in the World to Come, the Afterlife. For this must be of greater importance than anything whatsoever that concerns our temporal stay on Earth. The Rabbis too desired to focus man on this truth that we are here but for a brief moment: “Rabbi Jacob said, “This world is equated to an entry chamber before the next world; fix [prepare] yourself in the entry chamber so

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“It is of the fundamentals beliefs in the Torah that when man fulfills a mitzvah of the 613 mitzvos as is fitting and properly, and he does not join with that performance any Earthly [ulterior] motivation in any manner; but he performs it for its own sake, with love as I have explained to you, behold...he has merited eternal life...”

you might enter the banquet hall, the Afterlife”.” (Ethics, 4:16) It is clear; our primary existence is not on Earth, and also true: we forfeit the eternal life, if we don’t “fix” ourselves here.

At burials we recite the Tzidduk HaDin (Confirmation of God’s Justice): “Man, if a year he is, or one thousand years he lives, of what benefit is it to him? He is as one who never existed. Blessed is the true Judge who kills and revives.”

How is a life of 1000 years null and void?! Is there no benefit to all the good the deceased performed for his family, friends? All the good life he or she had is noting? The answer is a deafening “Yes”. This statement teaches that anything that comes to an end is worthless. It matters none whether a person lives 1000 years, since after that time, he does no longer exist. The only thing of value is that which endures. If you thought you would die tonight, with no further existence, would that leave an empty feeling in your stomach? Wouldn’t you immediately feel “What was my life for?” You sense this as true. That is why the verse above ends with “Blessed is the true Judge who kills and revives.” We are taught that a life is of value, since God revives us in the next world.

It is therefore vital that we engage only in matters that contribute to our greater portion, as Rashi describes, and more so, to that which enables our very entrance to the next world, as Maimonides describes. Both are required: Fear and Love of God. That is why both are commandments. But we must examine these commandments to understand their roles in our lives. King Solomon wrote, “Fear of God is the beginning of knowledge...” (Prov. 1:7) This indicates that Fear is a prerequisite, while Knowledge is the goal. And, “in accordance with the [level of] knowledge, is the Love of God”.

I would just note at this point, that we must not fear the Afterlife. Typically, the human being fears the unknown. Therefore, we must counter our frail disposition of fear, with the knowledge that God’s acts are all for man’s good. We see this in all areas of history, and in God’s design of man; pleasant emotions, delicious foods, and interrelations with others. We see this most in the enjoyment experienced in studying His wisdom. For with all other pursuits, we experience frustration: plane delays, poor weather, loss of wealth and health, etc. But in study, there is no physical exertion, or pain. Even when we realize we made a mistake, that too is learning! God wants us to have the good; these are Rabbi Chananya’s words. So the next world, which is a world of wisdom, will be of the greatest good, and most pleasurable. We must remain true to what our minds know, and that is that God desires our good.

Attaining the Afterlife

Maimonides addresses a more fundamental issue. He interprets Rabbi Chananya as explaining “how” man attains the Afterlife. This is a deep idea. Maimonides teaches that if one performs any mitzvah – Tzedaka for example – for an incorrect motive, then he does not attain the Afterlife. Why is this so? How does man attain the Afterlife, and what is Maimonides’ reasoning? Let’s read his words again:

“It is of the fundamentals beliefs in the Torah that when man fulfills a mitzvah of the 613 mitzvos as is fitting and properly, and he does not join with that performance any Earthly [ulterior] motivation in any manner; but he performs it for its own sake, with love as I have explained to you, behold...he has merited eternal life [Olam Haba]. And on this did Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya say, “For the mitzvos, as they are numerous, it is impossible that during his life, man will not perform one of them in its true intent, and completely. And when he performs that mitzvah, his soul will live [eternally].”

It is when man endorses by performance, God’s commands in their true intent, that man is in line with God’s will. At this moment, man’s soul mirrors those eternal truths contained in the mitzvos. Somehow, this human value of a mitzvah’s true ideal gives life to our souls, and thereby, earns for us an eternity, the Afterlife. I don’t know the mechanics, but this is what Maimonides teaches. The soul exists in man. It has a potential, but it can go un-actualized, and will then expire with his Earthly death. But, if we study the commands, and seek to grasp the underlying values and truths in each one, our soul then partakes of those eternal truths, rendering itself eternal.

The True Reward

In his tenth chapter of the Commentary on the Mishna on Talmud Sanhedrin, Maimonides describes five groups of Torah observers, characterized by their imagined, conflicting and erroneous views of the “reward” received for our Torah adherence, and the evil meted out for its rejection. Many assume our reward is sensual, or involves rejoining our departed family members. Maimonides single’s out a common flaw: all these Torah observant Jews “pain” themselves with performance of mitzvos, since they would rather be doing something else, like travel, earning more money, and other temporal activities. They all assume there is “something else” which is the “reward”. So they are tolerantly observant. Here is their flaw.

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Life

Maimonides teaches here, what he initially refers to as a core idea. There is nothing better than the involvement in the Torah's ideas. To suggest to someone that you will reward him or her if they win one billion dollars is ludicrous. The billion dollars itself is the desired object! They would not be motivated by something extraneous. Similarly, all those Jews who seek something extraneous to Torah wisdom as a reward harbor an incorrect view of Torah. Had they truly understood the joy of the process of study and the realization of knowledge, they would not perform mitzvos or study except for the very act itself, with no ulterior motive. A person does not climb a mountain for the view, just so someone gives him a reward. It is the view itself that compelled this climber to such exertion. And when he sees that vista after weeks of hiking, he wants nothing else but to enjoy that vision. One who has reached the perfection of the human species is alike. He too studies and performs mitzvahs, for he sees nothing else in life that is more intriguing. Newton, Einstein and others would go for weeks in study, as it was the most captivating experience. You could not lure them outside their labs with any other concern. As Maimonides says here, "one seeks the truth for the truth". He has no other motive. God designed us to enjoy knowledge of Him and His creations more than any other enjoyment. There is no "reward" as the masses think. God gave us a great pleasure here, the Torah. And in Torah is what we engage in the Afterlife, if we prepare ourselves here.

Maimonides contrasts the pleasure of a king's rule, to that of a child playing with a ball. The child knows nothing of the joy the king experiences when he successfully rules. We are as the child, immersed in physical pleasures. We have no idea of the metaphysical pleasure we will experience in the next world, but it far surpasses any temporal enjoyment here. Maimonides quotes the Rabbis in Ethics describing the righteous in the next world as "wearing their crowns on their heads and enjoying the splendor of God". "Crowns" refers to their level of intellectual perfection, which earned them this eternal repose of endless wisdom.

We learn a vital lesson. In order to earn the world to come, we must examine whether our view of that reward, is anything other than an intellectual pursuit. For if we pain ourselves with mitzvos, not knowing their true worth, all for some imagined good...we do not raise our souls to the level to earn the next world. In this case, we imagine it is something, which it is not. And following any imagination cannot lead to anything real.

If however, we abandon unproved assumptions about the reward of the next world, and we study our wise Rabbis and Maimonides, we will open our minds to a truth that will impact our temporal Earthly lives, and our eternal lives.

Maimonides is actually saving your life. He is unveiling the fallacy of all assumed views of reward and punishment. He quotes our Rabbis in Ethics of the Fathers. He explains the unanimous view of our greatest educators: We die. The Afterlife is a reality. We must prepare for it. It can be enjoyable beyond compare. But the only way to earn it is by removing all false motivations for Torah observance, and devoting ourselves to study for no other reason than to uncover new truths. As we proceed, we will start to see great new insights. We will be amazed. We will find greater satisfaction in study, than in any other pursuit. If this sounds odd, it shows you how far from this you might be. But at the same time, if those light-years ahead of us held this as true, isn't it worth your while to investigate it? Take a look at any child. "Why" is their favorite word...since questioning is naturally our favorite activity. It is the blame of faulty schools and Yeshivos that turns learning into a nightmare of tests, instead of a refinement of thinking and the appreciation of

thought. If a child were able to develop as intended, he would be as thrilled to learn, as he is to play. In fact, a "plaything" is how King David referred to learning.

If we chase after the Afterlife as some imagined, greater thing than Torah, this reveals an incorrect view of Torah. We will obtain neither Torah, nor this imagined, non-existent thing.

However, if we study our great Rabbis, and comprehend their words, we will realize that the Torah is the end, not a means. There is nothing greater. There is no imagined "reward". The reward IS Torah. If we pursue the wisdom in Torah with no ulterior motive, but only to learn more about God...we will merit seeing this wisdom in this life, enjoying life thoroughly and we will thereby inherit the next world. For the next world is a continuation of one's joy in a life of wisdom. Therefore, we must live for THIS life – Torah study for its beauty – if we desire the next life.

"Prepare yourself here so you might receive the next world" can be interpreted as "Enjoy yourself most here, so you inherit and enjoy the next life".

I urge everyone to study all the sources quoted herein. ■

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