

JewishTimes

VOL. XIV NO. 11 — SEPT. 4, 2015

Gentile & Jew

LETTERS

**WE'RE
PERFECT
EQUALS**

Punishment
WHY SO SEVERE?

LETTERS

Life's
Challenges
THE BENEFIT

Why Wear
Tzitzis?

**DANI'S
QUESTION**



(Aug. 18, 2015 — Prime Minister Netanyahu)

"The ruler of Iran, Khamenei, said yesterday, 'We will take all measures to support all those who fight against Israel.' Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif said in Beirut a few days ago, at a meeting with the head of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, and I quote, 'The nuclear agreement has created an historic opportunity to stand against the Zionist entity.' What we have said all along is being seen as correct and accurate. The money that will flow to Iran in the wake of the nuclear agreement will serve it to strengthen the terrorist organizations operating against us, in its name and under its auspices, in the avowed goal to destroy Israel. I am here today at IDF Northern Command, along with the Defense Minister, Chief-of-Staff, GOC Northern Command and field commanders to closely observe the IDF's readiness against these threats. I was positively impressed both by the IDF's preparedness and by the determination of its commanders and soldiers. The IDF is strong. The State of Israel is strong. We are ready for any eventuality. Those who try to attack us – we will strike at them."

We can still fight the Iran Deal.

 <p>"My predecessors had not reached a deal with Iran for 50 years.</p> <p>But I did." <i>Barack Obama</i></p>	 <p>"Poor inspections, 100s of billion of dollars handed to Iran, and lifted sanctions...Iran's terror will live on for 50 years.</p> <p>But I won't." <i>Killed by Iran-sponsored terror</i></p>
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The Journal on Jewish Thought



Sept. 4

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LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Gentile/Jew Equality

Reader: My family and I are really struggling with what to believe, what we are, and who or what to follow right now. We have been Christian our whole lives and about 5 years ago were moved to search for the real truth. As a consequence we had to leave our church at the time because "I was asking questions that the flock did not want to know the answers to" from the pastor. We tried messianic and were not satisfied that this was the answer either. We have been listening to the Rabbi and studying from the Chabad website. Chabad treats gentiles as second-rate beings. We have heard several things that

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

concern us a great deal and feel by participating in some things, we are in fact doing things that may be displeasing God, like keeping Sabbath, eating kosher to mention a few. We are very concerned that what we are doing is pleasing to God. I have been looking around and have found out about the Noahide laws. I am concerned about this because I can not find it specifically in the Torah. We trust that the Jews would not purposely mislead anyone. However, after coming out of Christianity and the messianic realm, I am having a hard time trusting anything that I can not find specifically in the Torah. I hope I don't come across as a cynic, but I guess I am. I do not want to drag my family through another change only to find that it is incorrect too. Could you please provide guidance for me and my family? We are very scared, frustrated and mostly, feel all alone. I have mailed 2 other sites and have not received any advice other than keep the Sabbath but transgress one of the laws because we are not Jewish. Thank you for your time.

Rabbi: I am glad you are searching and found Mesora. You are correct to abandon Christianity, messianic Judaism and Chabad. All have their major theological problems and outright idolatrous beliefs.

You must know that anyone who says a gentile is second rate, ignores God's selection of gentiles, from whom to create the nation Israel. The patriarchs were all gentiles. And it was with them that God gave prophecy, not some Christian, messianic or Chabad member. All mankind descend from Adam and Eve...we are all identical. God never recreated a new type of "Jewish" soul and elevated its level, as foolish and arrogant Jews claim. As we discussed on the phone, Jew and gentile are perfectly equal. This explains why God says many times, "one law for the Jew and the convert." This means that a gentile who converts to Judaism is capable of fulfilling the same Torah a Jew fulfills, and this can be so only if we share the identical design.

A gentile will perfect himself more by accepting additional commands, as the more we understand and fulfill, the more perfect we become. The gentile does not have to convert to accept these laws: he can keep most of the 613 as a gentile. This, then, allows that gentile to study those laws, so as to follow them properly. But without intent to take on more commands, a gentile is prohibited to study Torah for mere theoretical knowledge. The reason being, he will then blur the lines concerning from whom others seek Torah education. And as the gentile has not accepted to fulfill more laws, in this case, his diligence in study is questionable. His teaching too would then

be compromised, and this would disseminate imperfect Torah knowledge to others.

Torah is truly for every human being. However, God knew all nations except Abraham's descendants would not accept to abandon thievery, adultery and other instinctual outlets mandate in the Torah. Therefore, he gave His law to Abraham's children alone, to ensure those monotheists of great moral caliber would preserve and share Torah with the world. The treatment you received from gentiles and Jews is against God's will. I am gratified by helping you, as is my obligation and desire, to treat you as an equal, as Abraham our gentile father exemplified. ■

Why God Challenges Us

Reader: In the story of Adam we read that God tells him not to eat from the fruit of knowledge. But still the sin takes place. Why did God put the tree there in the first place, and why did He create it if it was not for the purpose of eating?

In the story of Abraham, we read that he was childless and hence his wife persuaded him to have a child from her maid Hagar. But when Sarah bore a child, she advised Abraham to send away Ishmael and his mother. Why did God cause this to happen in the first place? Why was Sarah not blessed? Why the delay? This led to hatred towards Isaac and his generation.

In the story of Jacob and Esau also we see that two different nations are born out of one parent, but hatred for stealing the blessing takes place. Why did this happen? Why didn't God stop it? The sons of Jacob are called thieves for this act.

It seems in the above scenarios, God is playing a major role of watching the fun from afar. He wants man to struggle and strive...He wants the Jews to have a tough time with the non-Jewish world. Why? Hatred against the Jews is borne out of the above history. Why instead, were the seeds of love not germinated in the minds of non-Jews?

Rabbi: Man possesses free will. God did not cause any of the people you cited to do evil: they did so of their own free will. In all generations there are those who are sinners and those who are righteous.

Regarding Adam and the forbidden fruit, God's prohibition teaches that He preferred Adam not to eat that fruit. God knew the outcome. He knows the outcome of each of us. Yet, He does not remove challenges to leave man without a choice. Meaning, had God allowed man to eat any fruit, he would have no opportunity to select the good over the evil. And

God created man with this very purpose, to use his intellect to rule over his instincts. God wishes to reward man for choosing properly, and this cannot occur if man has no challenges. God designed mankind where our minds are more powerful than our passions. So we can succeed.

Sarah and the matriarchs were all barren, the reason is as the Rabbis teach, "God desires the prayers of the righteous." This means God desires the righteous people become even more righteous, and this is achieved by reflection and improvement, the essential component of prayer. As the matriarchs were humans like us, they were faced with a human maternal desire for children. However, there are many levels of this desire. Channa too was barren. But only once she pledged that her child would be dedicated to God's Temple, did she conceive. Thereby, we learn that God's withholding children intended the matriarchs to elevate their desire for children to be in line with God's plan for mankind. This should be the true desire for children. Perhaps too, as the patriarchs did not have children until old age, the child raised by an older, more perfected father and mother, would be all the more perfect himself. He would have wiser teachers. And when Sarah saw improper behavior in Ishmael, she correctly decided Ishmael should not influence Isaac. God did not cause this to happen. People possess free will.

Rebecca understood Esav was unfit to receive the birthright. Rebecca's difficult pregnancy of Jacob and Esav was interpreted by the prophet. She was told the older Esav would serve the younger Jacob. She must have told Jacob this, as Jacob was too fast to ask Esav for the birthright that day the exhausted Esav wanted Jacob's lentils. Why would these be the first words out of Jacob's mouth, unless his mother previously told him to rightfully purchase the birthright when the opportunity presented itself. And Rebecca was given clues as to how to obtain Isaac's blessing. For we see that God created Esav very hairy, and recorded this in the Torah. The only other time this is mentioned, is when Rebecca dressed Jacob in the animal skins so as to feel like his hairy brother in front of his blind father. So, although people like Esav possess free will, and choose the evil path, God orchestrates events to assist the righteous. The righteous use their minds, following God's clues and devices (hairy son) to succeed.

We learn that God is far from "viewing at a distance." Actually, He is ever-present and assists those who follow His ways. Rebecca's difficult pregnancy too was God's manner of directing her to a prophet, so as to obtain divine guidance. If we

examine the Torah, we arrive at the realization that God desires only the good for man. Why else did He create us? The Torah is God's precise design, containing perfectly arranged clues in the verses. But we must study patiently, analyzing our great Rabbis' words so we too, like Rebecca, are directed to new divine marvels. ■

Judgement

Reader: Is the soul judged after death immediately?

Rabbi: We are judged not only after death, but during our lives as well. This explains why God will reward and punish on Earth. But the true reward is the afterlife, if we earn it. ■

Gentiles & Torah Study

Reader: It is mentioned on your site that only Jews can teach the Torah. I'm assuming that a non-Jew cannot study the Torah. However, in Deuteronomy 17:9 it is talking about the Levites instructing, so how does that relate to "any" Jew teaching the Torah? Shouldn't Torah education be only from the Levites? I am trying to determine whether to continue to be a Christian because there is evidence that I am seeing that is making me doubt. Now I'm not sure how to look for the truth when I don't know if a website is written by Levites, or even whether I can find one in my town. Thank you for your response.

Rabbi: Good question. The Torah's words relating to Levites being teachers is referring to the Temple times. As the tribe who did not own land or work, the Levites were to teach. God designed the Jewish nation in a manner where there is a group, the Levites, who secure the transmission of Torah. But even back then, their role did not exclude from teaching, any man or woman from other tribes. Throughout time, our greatest teachers were not Levites. Consider Kings David and Solomon, the Prophets, and countless Talmudic sages.

A non-Jew may study Torah relating to the Noachide laws, of which one can spend his or her lifetime learning. And as a non-Jew may take on almost all other laws, they are permitted of course to study those additional laws, so they might fulfill them properly.

There is much available on Mesora.org that will help you obtain answers. Use the Search tool. Be in touch. ■

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Initiative by Rabbi Kalman Topp and Rabbi Yonah Bookstein

1000 Rabbis Against the Iran Deal

As of 8/23/15 9:02 PM



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Additional activism includes many Rabbis signing this letter:

“ We, the following Rabbis, are unequivocal in our rejection of the Iran Deal. As recently as today, Aug. 20, mass media reported Iran will not allow access of international inspectors at their nuclear facilities. Rather, Iran will conduct its own inspections. A terrorist regime who for years denied such facilities, is to now be trusted? This renders obsolete Pres. Obama's calming words “The deal is based not on trust, but on inspections.” Unbiased inspection is the core of the Deal, making the deal 100% ineffective. Compound this with releasing 100s of billions of dollars to Iran, and Israel's worries are justified; she is the target of Iran's venomous missiles and Iran-financed terrorists' arms caches stockpiled for the Jewish state's annihilation. In other words, we're giving money to Iran so they can murder Americans and Israelis. This is their declared charter.

The proper course of action is not to release sanctions with nothing in return, but to increase sanctions until Iran has no choice but to concede to a complete abandonment of nuclear weapons, a halt to the finance of terror groups, a halt to their own terror, dismantling of all centrifuges, and 100% transparent anytime-anywhere inspections. Only once these terms are met, will any release of sanctions be considered.

”

Rabbi Israel Chait
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva B'nei Torah

Rabbi Asher Schechter

Rabbi Reuven Mann
Rabbi Torat Emes, Phoenix, AZ

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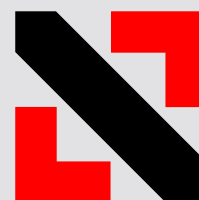
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Why Tzitzis?

MEANING OF THE MITZVOS

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Mitzvos are designed by God, the same designer of the universe. As there are marvels of wisdom found in science, we find the same brilliance in the mitzvos...if we search for them.



My best friend Dani and I share Torah questions every Friday evening at shul. Dani is very smart, and has quick and excellent answers to questions we discuss. Last week, as he celebrated his 9th birthday, I asked him, "So what's your Torah question this week?" He looked down at his tzitzis and said, "What are tzitzis...why these strings and knots?" This is quite important and I am glad Dani asked it. My dear friend Rivka, who suggested the creation of the Jewishtimes magazine some 15 years ago, gave me a book "Horeb" by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. Rabbi Hirsch enlightens us to marvelous Torah concepts and philosophy, and he wrote a brilliant essay on Tzitzis.

Dani, since you asked me the question, I am writing this for you...

Rabbi Hirsch noticed a number of interesting things. I will list them for you Dani:

Why does the Torah portion that teaches us about tzitzis, come right after the story of the man who broke Shabbos by carrying wood? (We can't carry wood on shabbos.) The way God wrote the Torah, is that each section that follows another section, is somehow related to it...there is some connection between Torah sections that follow each other.

Why did God say tzitzis should be strings, and why place these strings on our clothing? Why not place the strings on a door, like mezuzah? (I know Dani, now you

will want to know why we have a mezuzah! Keep reading and you will find an answer here!)

Why 5 knots and 8 strings?

What does the word tzitzis mean?

Why does tzitzis have a blue string?

Rabbi Hirsch starts answering, by telling us something very important. So listen well Dani...

In all our daily activities, everything we see or experience, is something we can see or touch. But God is not something we can see. This makes people think God does not exist, and so many people decide to make idols, and say that the idol created the world! Other people get very attached to pleasures, like eating anything, and some people like money so much, they steal because they are too lazy to work. These sins all happen because people think that what is real, and what life is all about, is only what they see, or how they feel. Now, since they can't see God, and they don't remember that God gave the Torah, and since this isn't on their minds, they follow their feelings. Our feelings is what the Rabbis call the "yetzer hara." Our minds, the part of us that thinks and understands truths, is what the Rabbis call the "yetzer hatove." And in the world around us, we don't see anything telling us to stop making idols or stop doing what our yetzer hara feels like doing. So what is going to remind a person that he must follow Torah and God? Yes, tzitzis is the reminder.

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Dani, the letters of tzitzis in Hebrew add up to 600. Add 8 strings and 5 knots, and that is 613. This we discussed in shul last week. But Rabbi Hirsch also said that the translation of tzitzis is “to appear visibly.” What Rabbi Hirsch means is that the very purpose of tzitzis, is that we all have a reminder of Torah and mitzvos, that we can see, that appears visible. This is needed, since we said before that we don’t see God, or see mitzvos. But God knows this, and that’s why He created a special mitzvah that helps us remind ourselves to not just do whatever we feel. Tzitzis remind us of the 613 mitzvos, and also of God who gave these mitzvos to us.

Now Dani, you can understand why in the Torah section on tzitzis, God warns us not to “follow our eyes and our imagination.” God writes this to teach this very lesson, that tzitzis are made exactly to remind us not to follow what we see or feel! People feel they know everything, or they feel they are right all the time. But its funny, people don’t decide what pills to take, they ask the doctor. Because people know they might kill themselves with the wrong pills. So they ask someone who knows better about the body, a doctor. Well, the same thing here...we can’t just think we know what is best, like people who make idols. We must first read what God teaches us. So even though we see things in the world that we want to do, to eat, to make...we have to look at our tzitzis, and remember that God wants us to follow His 613 mitzvos, since they are best things to do. God knows what’s best for us, because He created us. And when we study what God says, we will find it always makes sense. Just like when we study His science and math laws, they too always make sense. Torah is the same.

When we look at the tzitzis, we wonder why they are on our clothes, since they don’t really cover us or keep us warm like clothes are supposed to do! The shirt does, but the strings don’t. So what’s the idea of wearing something that doesn’t do what clothes are supposed to do? Great question! Right? Rabbi Hirsch asked: “When was the first piece of clothing made?” It was Adam and Chava’s garments that God made right after they sinned by eating from the fruit that God said not to eat. We see from here that clothes are connected to sin. So God wants us not to

sin, and made the tzitzis in the clothes we wear. The tzitzis in our clothes reminds us of Adam and Chava’s sin, and that we should not sin. And it says there that they felt the fruit was “good to their eyes”, exactly what the parsha of tzitzis tells us NOT to do, not to “follow our eyes.”

Clothes also separate man from animals: animals live only by feelings, they have no yetzer hatove. So clothing also remind us not to be like animals that don’t wear clothes, we are different than they are, and we should follow our yetzer hatove. So wearing tzitzis on clothes, also reminds of of those creatures that don’t wear clothes, and they are animals that only have instincts and no yetzer hatove.

Now Dani, why do you think God placed this section of tzitzis in His Torah, right after the story of the man who went outside and carried wood on Shabbos? Rabbi Hirsch said it was because outside, and on shabbos, this man did not have any mezuzah to remind him of God, and we don’t wear tefillin on shabbos, so he had no reminders of God. So he broke the shabbos, since maybe he was cold, and wanted wood to make a fire that day or at night. He didn’t stop to think about God’s command not to break shabbos. Therefore, at this time in history, God created a new mitzvah of tzitzis. The story of tzitzis comes right after the story of the man carrying wood, to teach that tzitzis comes to correct this man’s mistake. Since outdoors and on shabbos he had no reminders of God that he could see, God said we must now wear tzitzis so we always have a reminder of God and His mitzvos, and we won’t sin so fast.

Why a blue string? Well, if you hold up a blue string to the sky, you can’t see it, since it blends in to the same color as the blue sky. So the blue string reminds us again of what we cannot see, meaning God and His commands!

Dani, thanks so much for your question, and I hope you have a good shabbos. With your question and Rabbi Hirsch’s answer, you both helped teach this important mitzvah of tzitzis to 1000s of people!

I think you also see how much knowledge God placed in the Torah. Just from one question, we learned so many new ideas. But remember, you must review what you learn, if you want to remember it. So read this again. ■



Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch



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Being Like Hashem

KI TAVO

Rabbi Bernie Fox



We are commanded to observe all of Hashem's commandments and to also go in His ways.

How does one go on the ways of Hashem? What is the expectation established by this imperative?

Hashem will establish you before Him as a sacred nation as He has promised you when you observe the commandments of Hashem your G-d and you go in His ways. (Sefer Devarim 28:9)

1. How do we travel in Hashem's way?

In the passage above Hashem describes the conditions that the nation must meet in order to enjoy the blessings outlined in the parasha. The people must observe the commandments and they must travel in the ways of Hashem. We are commanded to observe all of Hashem's commandments and to also go in His ways. How does one go on the ways of Hashem? What is the expectation established by this imperative?

Despite the vagueness of this directive, Maimonides includes it in his enumeration of the Torah's commandments. He defines this mitzvah in his Sefer HaMitzvot – Book of the Commandments. He explains that we are commanded to imitate Hashem to the extent of our capacity. We are to strive to adopt all of the characteristics and virtuous actions that are attributed to Hashem.^[1]

This is an odd commandment. What specific requirement does it engender? The Torah includes six hundred and thirteen commandments. These commandments describe a life of virtue. Certainly, the virtues that are reflected in the Torah's commandments are the same virtues that

are ascribed to Hashem. By observing the Torah's commandments, is one not imitating Hashem and adopting His virtues? What additional expectation is communicated in the imperative to travel in the ways of Hashem? What obligation does this commandment place upon us beyond the observance of the Torah's commandments?

2. Guidance in situations not addressed by halachah

It seems that this commandment acknowledges that the other commandments do not provide guidance in every conceivable situation that a person encounters. In some instances a person faces a challenge in which he must make a decision without recourse to a specific halachic ruling. In such instances we are to strive to emulate or imitate Hashem. When halachah cannot provide specific guidance, then we fall back upon this mitzvah – we seek to act in a manner that imitates Hashem.

Gershonides adopts this approach to understanding the mitzvah. However, he adds an important element. He explains that the Torah's commandments direct us in our actions. It commands us how to act and how not to act. This commandment's focus is not our actions. It addresses our character. In other words, with this commandment, the Torah communicates to us that it is not adequate for us to act properly and to abstain from incorrect behaviors. Our fundamental character is

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the subject of this commandment. We are to strive to develop our character in the image of Hashem.[2]

3. Molding one's character in the image of Hashem

In other words, this commandment does provide us with guidance when we are confronted by challenges that are not addressed by a specific halachic ruling. However, the commandment has another aspect. It requires that we not only act properly but that we also mold our character to reflect the virtues of Hashem. We must not only focus on what we do but also on who we are.

4. We imitate Hashem by acting with moderation

Maimonides seems to provide an alternative explanation of this commandment. According to Maimonides, this commandment requires that we conduct ourselves in all areas with moderation. Maimonides provides various examples. We should not be glutinous, but neither should we be overly restrictive in our diet. We should not be greedy, but neither should we be spendthrifts. We should not be overly sensitive to the pain of others, but neither should we be bereft of empathy. In these instances, and in all areas, we should strive to seek moderation.[3]

Although it is understandable that Maimonides praises a life of moderation, it is not clear how this idea is communicated by the commandment to travel in the ways of Hashem. Furthermore, Maimonides agrees that the commandment to travel in the ways of Hashem directs us to imitate Him. He maintains that the commandment requires that we imitate Hashem and also that we act with moderation. This means that according to Maimonides, these two obligations which are subsumed within a single commandment are closely related. How are imitating Hashem and acting with moderation related to one another? In order to answer this question, further study of Maimonides' position is required.

5. Character illnesses and the healthy character

Maimonides introduces his discussion of moderation by commenting that behaviors

at the extremes reflect character illnesses. In other words, gluttony, extreme parsimony, extreme frivolity, and lack of empathy are character disorders. He suggests that moderation should be regarded as not only a virtue but as the state of a healthy character.[4]

Maimonides' use of this paradigm provides some insight into his association of moderation with imitation of Hashem. Maimonides is suggesting that kindness to others can derive from thoughtful consideration of the other's needs or from a compulsive internal need. Similarly, generosity can reflect a thoughtful use of one's resources or it can reflect a careless or carefree attitude toward one's resources. When one practices moderation, acts of kindness and charity are the product of thoughtful action. When one is fixated at an extreme, the same action is the product of a personality disorder.

6. Thoughtful action imitates Hashem

Now the question on Maimonides can be addressed. What is the relationship between imitating Hashem and acting with moderation? According to Maimonides, to imitate Hashem does not mean to simply perform an act that conforms to a virtue ascribed to Hashem. If one performs charity as a consequence of a compulsion stemming from a personality disorder, one is not imitating Hashem. Our virtuous actions only rise to the level of imitation of Hashem when they are thoughtful and performed with consideration. This requisite thoughtful behavior is the product of a moderate character.

Proper actions can reflect a virtuous character. However, the same behavior can be the product of a flawed and damaged personality. We are expected to strive to imitate Hashem. This means we must seek to do the right thing for the right reason.

7. Lessons for life

There are three outcomes of this discussion. First, as Gershonides explained we cannot expect halachah to provide absolute guidance in every situation. At times we are required to exercise our own judgment. In such instances, the absence of clear halachic guidance does not mean that we are free to do as we please. We must act in a manner that emulates Hashem.

Second, Gershonides explains that we are not required by the Torah to only act properly; we are also required to integrate the virtues ascribed to Hashem into our character and personality. We must direct our attention to not only how we act, but we must also focus our attention upon who we are.

Finally, Maimonides teaches us that we must strive to not only do the right thing but to also consider our motivations. Proper actions can reflect a virtuous character. However, the same behavior can be the product of a flawed and damaged personality. We are expected to strive to imitate Hashem. This means we must seek to do the right thing for the right reason. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 8.

[2] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Devarim, chapter 28, toalet 4.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Deyot 1:6-7.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Deyot 1:1-4.

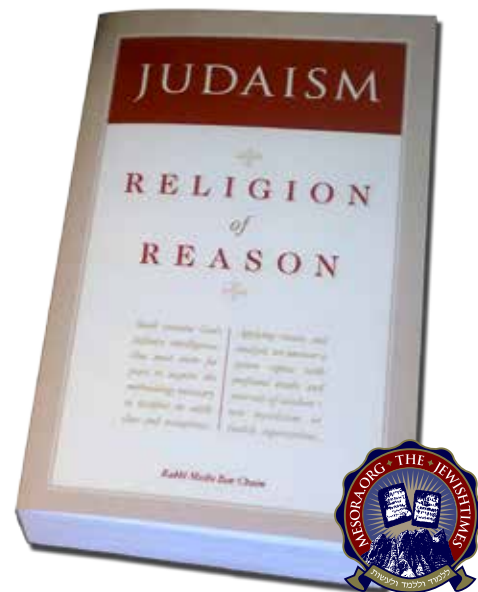
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The Punishments: Why So Extreme?

KI TAVO

Rabbi Reuven Mann



This week's parsha, Ki Tavo, contains the section known as the Tochaha (Rebuke). It spells out in lengthy detail the many calamities that will befall us in the course of our history. The doctrine of reward and punishment is a fundamental principle of Judaism.

It is an idea that, at first glance, makes perfect sense. For individuals and societies to thrive, actions must have consequences. For most people, the incentive to refrain from evil and to pursue the good lies in the positive results that will ensue.

We are creatures of powerful instincts and drives, engaged in a constant struggle with the yetzer hara (evil inclination), which is a formidable and tricky opponent. It takes a great deal of energy to overcome this antagonist and to act in accordance with the dictates of wisdom.

We are motivated to live wisely, not only by our love of truth, but also by our contemplation of the consequences, both positive and negative. Who is wise? ask the Rabbis: "one who contemplates the outcome." The rewards of the mitzvot (commandments) are twofold. The first reward is the spiritual and practical

benefits of guiding our actions according to Divine wisdom. If we do this, we will necessarily have a happier and more tranquil existence.

In addition, we also become eligible for a Divine reward. We need Hashem's assistance in virtually all areas of life. One who elevates himself to a higher state by properly fulfilling the commandments is assured of Heavenly protection.

The rebukes in the parsha are challenging. The extreme severity of the punishments is difficult to comprehend. A certain amount of hardship and distress is expected when we commit major sins. However, the intense affliction depicted in the parsha goes beyond all expectation.

It's hard for us mortals to understand how the extreme suffering depicted is commensurate with the sins that engender it. Yet, this is not just a theoretical problem. The amazing thing is that virtually all the catastrophes the Torah warns about have come to fruition in our history.

Jewish history is the story of exile, dispersion, persecution, Inquisition, mass expulsion, pogroms, and Holocaust. We cannot understand why. I have a thought about this. By way of explaining these calamities, the verse states, "Because you did not serve Hashem with joy from the midst of plenty."

This means that we abandoned His greatest gift, the Torah, and chose to indulge in materialistic gratification. Jews need to realize that they are an endangered species whose survival is contrary to the laws of nature. The most enduring hatred is antisemitism, and Israel is the only state that is openly targeted for annihilation, Heaven forbid!

Jews must realize that the hatred they face is such that it led to a Holocaust in which the rest of the world was indifferent. We need a Protector to save us from the murderous antisemites who constantly scheme to destroy us.

When we reject G-d and His Torah, we push away our Defender and become subject to the merciless predators who are waiting to pounce on us. Their cruelty and sadism knows no bounds.

It is only when we return to Hashem and He comes back to us that we gain immunity from all our foes. May this happen speedily and in our time.

Shabbat shalom. ■

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