



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

Parshas Ki Savo 5770 פֶּרֶשֶׁת כִּי תבֹא תש"ע

GOING MESHUGA

We all know what would happen in the following scenario:

COME AND GET IT

A fabulously wealthy man passes away, and the contents of his last will and testament reveal a benevolent and philanthropic spirit. This tycoon decided to bequeath his riches directly to the general populace. He had arranged that an announcement to this effect be broadcast to the public after his death.

The announcement declares that an immense cache of valuables lies in the waiting. In a certain locked warehouse at such-and-such an address, there are piles and piles of copious amounts of gold coins, jewels, ornaments, and plenty of cash. Anyone wishing to avail themselves of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity may help themselves, *v'chol hakodem zachah* (first come, first served). Hurry while supplies last.

What would be the reaction? No doubt, news of this windfall would spread like wildfire. As soon as the word would get out, all normal routine chores and activities would come to a complete halt. A mad dash of hordes of people would ensue, all streaming in the direction of the announced location. Despite the locked doors, the masses – absolutely drunk with giddiness and anticipation – would make short work of any obstacles to entry, jumping through windows and bashing through walls if necessary. Crowds of otherwise cool and collected citizens would literally be tripping over each other with wild-eyed glee to scoop up their piece of the pie.

In a well-known passage, the Ohr Hachaim states that

– if only our eyes were open – this same scenario would play itself out every single day, as we shall explain below.

WHAT IS “GOOD”?

This week’s *parshah* includes a specific exhortation to recognize our blessings and revel in them. “And you shall rejoice *v'chol hatov* (with all of the good) that Hashem your G-d has bestowed upon you” (*Devarim 26:11*). Interestingly, instead of enjoining us to simply rejoice with “the good,” the term selected by the *passuk* is “*chol hatov*” (all goodness).

To what, exactly, does the *passuk* refer? The Ohr Hachaim (*ibid.*) clarifies by quoting the Mishnah in *Avos (6:3)*:

אין טוב אלא תורה שְׁנֵאמַר כִּי לְקַח טוֹב נִתְּתִי לָכֶם תּוֹרַתִי אֶל תַּעֲזוּבוּ.

“*Tov* (good) refers to none other than the Torah, as it states (*Mishlei 4:2*), ‘For I have given you a portion of goodness; do not forsake My Torah.’”

As evidenced from the Mishnah, our *parshah* is reminding us to appreciate the true “good” – the Torah. And it is for this reason that the *passuk* uses the encompassing term “*chol hatov*” (all goodness). As it is the product of the Perfect Hashem, the Torah contains all that is truly positive and beneficial in the entire world.

In fact, being the source of such boundless benevolence, the lure of the entire world pales in comparison – for those who recognize the Torah’s value. An entire planet filled with gold and riches appears completely worthless next to the true worth of Hashem’s Torah.

Against this backdrop, the Ohr Hachaim issues his

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Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
שרה הינדה בת שלמה ע"ה a fellow Jew who passed away with
no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her neshamah.

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wistful, well-known statement: “If people would feel the true sweetness of the Torah’s inherent goodness, they would go absolutely crazy in a frenzied attempt to attain mastery of Torah knowledge.”

In other words, the scenario laid out at the outset should be occurring every day. Unlike in our imaginary drama – where such opportunities are by no means readily available – the Torah *is* open and available to all, at all times. Hordes of people should be charging toward the *beis medrash* (study-hall) on a daily basis, hardly able to contain the excitement of getting their hands on a Gemara and a *shtender* (lectern).

There were, in fact, legendary *gedolei Yisrael* (Torah greats) who were able to attain this level in a significant measure. Their dedication to and infatuation with the Torah was so complete, to the extent that all external factors merely faded into oblivion.

WAR? WHAT WAR?

The famed Rogatchover Gaon was one such

individual.

The years during which World War I raged saw great upheaval over the European continent, as many were forced to flee and wander in the face of strife and plunder. One such Jewish refugee found himself nearing the town of Rogatchov, home of the aforementioned Torah scholar. Suddenly, shots rang out all around him, and the poor wanderer realized that he was caught in the crossfire of a heated battle.

With the deafening sound of exploding mortar shells ringing in his ears, the Jew hurled himself against a wall in a desperate attempt to take cover. He resolved to enter the first house he would come upon in order to seek shelter.

As the battle raged from all sides, the first house he encountered happened to be that of the Rogatchover. Despite the ricocheting bullets, the sage stuck his head out the window, and – with a sense of real urgency – beckoned to the man, “Quick! Come inside!”

Assuming he was being directed to escape the bullets, the Jew dove into the house. The Rogatchover then completed his thought. “You’ll never believe it!” he told his newly arrived “guest.” “I’ve just figured out the Rambam!” (*She’al Avicha V’yagedcha*, vol. 3, p. 15).

For most of us, though, such a level may seem rather remote. While there are many people who hold the Torah in high estimation and devote considerable time to its pursuit, we don’t see throngs of people on a daily basis running towards the *beis medrash* at top speed. There seems to be a significant gap between the ideal as described by the Ohr Hachaim and the actual level upon which the average individual currently finds himself.

The reasons for this state of affairs and the potential remedies are numerous and the subject of much discussion in and of itself; perhaps this will be the focus of future articles. What does seem clear, though, is that much rests on our ability and willingness to simply open our eyes. The sooner we recognize the true value of what Torah is, the sooner our yearning for it will increase.

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based on the Mishnah.

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