

This Week's Parshah - Parshas Eikev

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of

Faygle *bas* Yoel *a''h*

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Olam Haba (The World to Come) in *Olam Haze* (This World)

Infrared glasses enable the wearer to see in the dark what he normally would not have been able to detect. If there was such a thing as “spiritual glasses” that would enable us to see the immediate spiritual effects of our earthly deeds, we would be amazed and overwhelmed. Being that, of course, such devices have not yet been invented, we suffice with the knowledge of these phenomena that we receive from the teachings of our Sages, whose vision was uncannily clear.

One of these singular lessons emerges from this week’s *parshah* and *haftarah*. As with a significant portion of Sefer Devarim, parshas Eikev recounts some of the key sections of the rest of the Torah. One of the events elaborated upon in the *parshah* is the tragic Sin of the Golden Calf. The people incurred Hashem’s wrath through their fashioning of and paying homage to the molten image.

Selective Memory

Chazal perceive a reference to this episode and its lasting effects in the *haftarah*, where a significant emphasis is placed on the theme of “forgetting.” “And Tziyon said: ‘Hashem has abandoned... and forgotten me.’ Shall a woman forget her baby... Even these will forget; but I will not forget you” (*Yeshayah 49:15-16*). The Medrash (*Yalkut Shimoni 471*) accounts for these “forgetting” references, by casting these verses as a dialogue between Hashem and the Jewish people. Fully aware that Hashem does not “forget,” Klal Yisrael (“Tziyon”) was concerned that the Sin of the Golden Calf will never be forgotten (“Shall a woman forget...”). Hashem reassured them: “‘These’ will be forgotten” (a reference to the sin, the commission of which was highlighted by the people’s declaration of “*These* are your gods, O Yisrael” [*Shemos 32:4*]). Upon hearing that this act will eventually be “deleted” from the Divine account, Klal Yisrael had a new concern. “If that’s the case,” they said to Hashem, “perhaps You will also overlook our meritorious deed of accepting the Torah?” The Almighty replied: “I will not forget you” (i.e., your virtue).

R’ Baruch Sorotzkin (*Habinah Vehaberachah*) identifies a fundamental principle contained in this teaching of Chazal regarding the power and superiority of good over evil. Our actions have wide-ranging effects — not only on the doers in terms of eventual reward or retribution, but on the entire universe (as elaborated upon extensively in *mussar* and *kabbalistic* literature). But the “impact” left by a good deed is much greater. The effects of sin can eventually be erased, while those of a meritorious act will remain for eternity.

This same idea is manifested in the classic and enlightening comments of R’ Chaim Volozhiner to another well-known statement of Chazal. The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (4:2) states:

בן עזאי אומר, הוי רץ למצוה קלה, ובורח מן העברה. שמצוה גוררת מצוה, ועברה גוררת עברה. ששכר מצוה, מצוה. ושכר עברה, עברה.

“Ben Azai says: One should run to perform (even) a minor mitzvah and flee from an *aveirah* (transgression). For one mitzvah brings another mitzvah in its wake, and an *aveirah* brings another *aveirah* in its wake; for the

reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah, and the recompense of an *aveirah* is an *aveirah*.”

The Mishnah appears to contain some redundancy; “One mitzvah leads to another... the reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah...” Obviously, these two statements must each be conveying a different idea. Moreover, these teachings require some explanation. “One mitzvah leads to another” — how, exactly? “The reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah” — what does this statement even mean? Isn’t the reward of a mitzvah the eternal bliss of Olam Haba, and the “reward” of an *aveirah* a sojourn in Gehinom? What is the Mishnah’s intent that “the reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah, and the reward of an *aveirah* is an *aveirah*”?

What Really Happens When One Fulfills a Mitzvah

Here, R’ Chaim lays down some fundamental principles regarding the notion of *s’char va’onesh* (reward and punishment) and reveals — to a certain extent — some of the inner workings of the inter-relationship between this world and the next. Of course, as believing Jews, we are fully aware that an individual is rewarded for meritorious deeds and punished for sins and that the principal arena for this repayment occurs in the World to Come (*cf. Mesilas Yesharim, ch. 1*). But, R’ Chaim explains, many people have a somewhat incomplete understanding of this situation. People think that if someone does a mitzvah, for instance, then he receives some “credit”, which in effect he “redeems” at the time he passes on to the next world. In other words, he goes to Olam Haba to “claim” and receive his reward. The inaccuracy of this characterization, however, is that it depicts the reward as a separate entity from the mitzvah act; a mitzvah is performed, and at some future time, he will receive a reward for his efforts.

But this is not the complete picture. In fact, the reward is *part and parcel* of the mitzvah itself. Based on Chazal’s *kabbalistic* teachings, R’ Chaim describes what we were to “see” if we possessed those “special lenses” spoken of in the outset. When a person begins to perform a mitzvah — even while merely contemplating the idea — he is immediately enveloped by a sacred light emanating from sanctity aroused from on High. As it derives its essence from the Celestial spheres, the light is imbued with the “scent” of Gan Eden; thus, as one performs a mitzvah, he is essentially surrounded by and residing in a portion of Gan Eden itself. It is actually this light — summoned by and participating in the performance of the mitzvah — that then returns to Gan Eden and will serve as the reward for the performer when he passes on. In other words, the reward for a mitzvah is the light of the mitzvah itself.

Furthermore, this special light serves as a type of energy force, which propels the doer forward and aids in bringing the mitzvah act to its successful completion. When the mitzvah has been fulfilled, the task of the “mitzvah light” is not done; it leaves the individual illuminated and spiritually strengthened and propels him further on to other *mitzvos*: “One mitzvah leads to another.”

The same is true of the converse; the commission of an *aveirah* summons a force of spiritual impurity, which likewise propels the individual to other sins and forms the basis of the eventual retribution. But here there is a difference. Just as R’ Baruch Sorotzkin mentioned previously, the spiritual effects of a mitzvah act are infinitely longer-lasting than those of a transgression. Gehinom, in most instances, is a temporary situation — the soul is cleansed there of the blemishes inflicted upon it through its sins. Afterwards, however, the soul transfers to Gan Eden, to revel there in the blissful spiritual light created through its *mitzvos* — a light that shines forever.