

בְּחֻקֵּי

THE REWARD OF MITZVOS

The *Gemara* (*Bava Kama* 87.) relates the following incident regarding Rav Yosef, who became blind due to an illness (*Shabbos* 109.):

“Initially I used to say: ‘If someone would confirm that the *halachah* is in accordance with Rabbi Yehudah who declared that a blind person is exempt from the commandments, I would make a party for the Rabbis,’ because though I am not enjoined, I still perform commandments. But now that I have heard Rabbi Chanina’s teaching:

Greater is the reward of those who are commanded to perform good deeds, than of those who without being commanded perform good deeds,

if someone would tell me that the *halachah* is not in accordance with Rabbi Yehudah, I would make a festive occasion for the Rabbis. Because if I am enjoined to perform commandments the reward will be greater for me” (*Bava Kama* 87•).

Hence, it is apparent that the reward is greater for the individual who is commanded to perform a good deed than for the individual who is not. However, initially, it would seem that one who is not commanded to perform good deeds, but nevertheless performs them, should receive the greater reward. After all, that individual is displaying greater love for his Master.

Tosafos (*Kidushin* 31.) addresses this problem, and proclaims the superiority of the commanded individual over the not-commanded individual by stating that the not-commanded individual may comfortably walk away from the command, without any retribution, at any time. The commanded individual is under pressure to perform. The temptation to shirk his duty is thus greater for the person who is commanded. *Tosafos* (*Avodah Zarah* 3.) further elaborates on this concept by explaining that the commanded individual

constantly worries about combatting the resistance of the Evil Inclination, so that he may successfully perform the commandment on behalf of his Master.

The *Anaf Yosef*, commenting on the Talmud (*Bava Kama* 87.), clarifies this difficult concept. The not-commanded individual who nevertheless desires to fulfill the Master’s command certainly displays a greater love for the Master. However, the commanded individual must overcome his Evil Inclination; hence, the reward is in accordance with the principle “*Lefum tza’arah agra*” — “Reward for *mitzvos* is in direct proportion to the exertion involved” (*Pirkei Avos* 5:21).

The *Ritva* (*Kidushin* 31.) claims that the performance of *mitzvos* does not benefit the Almighty; they were designed only to accrue reward for their observers (see Maharal, *Tiferes*

Yisrael 7). Although the not-commanded displays a greater love for the Master, and that love is certainly rewarded, the greater reward is reserved for the individual who must overcome the obstacles of temptation.

The *Gemara* (*Nedarim* 91:) uses the *pasuk*:

מים גנובים ימתקו ולחם סתרים ינעם

Stolen waters are sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant (*Mishlei* 9:17)

to indicate that the forbidden is desirable. There exists a contrary force in man, which leads him down the path of self-destruction. This force is the Evil Inclination — *yeitzer hara* — which attempts to convince man that the prohibited and forbidden act is infinitely sweeter and more rewarding than the permitted act. The reward, then, that one receives for the performance of a good deed is actually a reward for overcoming the Evil Inclination.

How is the *yeitzer hara* to be identified? Any action or cause which is a distraction from the Torah way of life is his doing. His causes are popular and attractive; at times they may even seem idealistic and virtuous. The global litmus test for the influence of the *yeitzer hara* is the identification of those movements which have mass appeal.

The Torah (*Vayikra* 26 and *Devarim* 7) promises great reward for the performance of good deeds: rain in its time, successful harvests, peace, the presence of Hashem, Divine love and blessings, and much more. It is then puzzling that the *Gemara* (*Kidushin* 39: and *Chulin* 142.) would state: “There is no reward for good deeds in this world.” How could this *Gemara* openly contradict the Torah’s promise of worldly reward? Moreover, the *Mishnah* (*Pirkei Avos* 4:2) states: “The reward of a *mitzvah* is a *mitzvah*.” What type of reward is the performance of another good deed? The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 9:1) explains that all reward is reserved for the next world. However, when we observe the *mitzvos*, Hashem guarantees that we will be blessed with conveniences which make it easier for us to continue with the observance of additional *mitzvos*. The initial reward of a *mitzvah* is the ability to perform additional *mitzvos* under favorable circumstances; the ultimate reward is reserved for the World to Come. Additionally, the rewards enumerated in the Torah are intended for *Klal Yisrael* on a national level whereas the concept of “no reward for good deeds in this world” is a restriction only on the individual.

aA