

כי תבא

THE JOY OF DOING A MITZVAH

תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרב כל

Because you did not serve Hashem with joyfulness and with gladness of heart, by reason of the abundance of all (*Devarim* 28:47).

Klal Yisrael is herein blamed for not serving Hashem with joy (*Targum Onkelos*, *ibid.*). The observance of the *mitzvos* mandates not merely going through the motions of each commandment. We must also experience a sense of joy in the performance of the *mitzvah*. This joy is a *mitzvah* unto itself, with its own reward. Moreover, he who forfeits this special *mitzvah* is subject to punishment (*Rabbeinu Bechaya*, *ibid.*).

The concept of punishment for not observing a positive precept, as opposed to committing a negative precept, seems unduly harsh. This is precisely the debate Rav Kattina had with the angel, who criticized him for not wearing a four-fringed garment which would have to be worn with *tzitzis*. Rav Kattina asked: “Do you punish a person who omits to perform a positive precept?” The angel replied: “In a time of wrath we do.” Rav Kattina again asked the angel: “Would the All-Merciful punish one who wears [without fringes] a garment that is not subject to it?” Again the angel criticized Rav Kattina: “You find every excuse to free yourself from the law of *tzitzis*” (*Menachos* 41•).

It is evident from this discussion that Hashem demands the performance of positive precepts and punishment will be exacted for their non-performance. Particularly, punishment will be exacted in a time of wrath — meaning a time of judgment. The *Tochachah* is just such a time of wrath (see *Sha'arei Teshuvah* 2:3, 4), and therefore *Klal Yisrael* was reprimanded for failure to exhibit joy in their performance of the *mitzvos*. The failure to demonstrate this joy is particularly punishable — at a time when punishment is already being meted out.

This sets up a fascinating scenario. One is required to perform even a positive precept, such as *tzitzis*, which is conditional upon wearing the appropriate garment. If one fails to execute the positive precept, he is subject to punishment. Even if one does properly discharge the positive precept, he is still subject to punishment, if he did not demonstrate adequate joy in the performance of the *mitzvah*. For each *mitzvah* is technically two *mitzvos*: first, the actual performance of the good deed, and secondly the exhibition of joy associated with the performance of the deed.

It is with this in mind that the *Gemara* (*Sukkah* 38•) states:

שירי מצוה מעכבין את הפורעניות, שהרי תנופה שירי מצוה היא

Even the dispensable parts of a commandment prevent calamities; for the waving [of the *lulav*] is obviously a dispensable part of the commandment.

The actual requirement in the due fulfillment of the *mitzva* of *lulav* is merely the picking up of the *arba minim* (*lulav, esrog, hadasim* and *aravos*). Once one picks up the *arba minim*, one satisfies the indispensable requirement of the commandment. The prescribed waving of the *lulav* in all four directions is actually a dispensable part of the *mitzvah*, and is not essential to the actual performance of the *mitzvah*. Hence the *Gemara* refers to the waving as “*shi’urei mitzvah*” — “remnants of a *mitzvah*.”

Hashem views the waving of the *lulav*, the expenditure of extra effort, as a demonstration of enthusiasm for the *mitzvah*. The enthusiasm confirms that the waver exhibits the necessary joy in the performance of the commandment. That joy is rewarded with the protection from Divine calamity.

Moreover, the *Gemara* (*Menachos* 93:) considers the omission of a dispensable part of a commandment as a failure in the actual performance of that *mitzvah*. As an example, the “laying on of hands” on a *karban* is a dispensable part of the *mitzvah* and does not in any way effect atonement (which comes through the blood of the *karban*). Should the owner choose not to “lay on the hands,” the *Gemara* continues that although atonement is attained, it is not the highest form of atonement. The elimination of the extra joy involved in the manifestation of a *mitzvah*, is not only subject to punishment, but also minimizes the *mitzvah* itself.

This sort of payment for joy in the performance of *mitzvos* is documented in the *Midrash* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 55:8) in the cases of Avraham and Yosef. Both of these individuals demonstrated extra zeal in their performance of commandments. En route to the *Akeidah*, Avraham saddled his own donkey in his enthusiastic devotion to carrying out Hashem’s word. Although he had many slaves to do his mundane work for him, Avraham demonstrated the joy of the *mitzvah* by doing it himself. The reward for this act was the stymieing of an equally zealous, but contrarily intended act of Bilaam *Harasha*, who many years later saddled his own donkey in his eagerness to curse *Klal Yisrael*.

וישכם אברהם בבוקר ויחבוש את חמורו... ויקם בלעם בבוקר ויחבוש את אתונו... תבא
חבשה ותעמוד על חבשה

Avraham arose early in the morning and saddled his donkey... Bilaam arose in the morning and saddled his donkey... One saddling came and stood in the way of the other saddling...

Similarly, Yosef was so excited about performing the *mitzvah* of greeting his father, Yaakov, that he, the aristocratic prince, the second most important man in Mitzraim, performed the lowly task of harnessing the horses to the chariot in order to hasten his encounter with his father. The slaves and commoners looked askance at this unbecoming, unaristocratic behavior on Yosef’s part. Yet the sheer joy of the *mitzvah* prompted Yosef to perform even an undignified act if that would expedite the honor to his father. The reward for this act was also the thwarting of an equally zealous, but oppositely intended act of Pharaoh, who many years later personally harnessed the horses to his own chariot in his eagerness to subdue and destroy *Klal Yisrael*.

ויאסור יוסף מרכבתו... ויאסור (פרעה) את רכבו...תבא אסרה שאסר יוסף לקראת אביו
ותעמוד על אסרה של פרעה שהיה הולך לרדוף את ישראל
And Yosef harnessed his chariot... And (Pharaoh) harnessed his chariot... There
came the harnessing which Yosef harnessed in honor of his father and it stymied
the harnessing of Pharaoh who went to conquer *Klal Yisrael*.

The joy associated with the performance of a *mitzvah* is not only an independent *mitzvah*, but
it also protects the individual, and *Klal Yisrael*, in a time of wrath.

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