

Near the end of our *Parashah*, in the middle of listing various abominable practices that are forbidden to us, the Torah states (18:4), "You shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and by which he shall live -- I am Hashem." The *Midrash Torat Kohanim* interprets this verse as an exhortation regarding Torah study. "Make it primary, not secondary," says the *Midrash*. "Occupy yourself with it and do not mix foreign things into it. Do not say, 'I have finished learning the wisdom of the Jews; now I will learn the wisdom of other nations.' There is no end to one's obligation to study Torah." [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' Avraham Yoffen z"l (1887-1970; *Rosh Hayeshiva* of the Novardok Yeshiva in Bialystok, Poland; New York and Israel) writes: Certainly, this *Midrash* is teaching an important lesson regarding Torah study, but what does it have to do with our *Parashah*?

He explains: The *Midrash* is teaching that Torah is not just something to be studied; it is something to be lived, a way of life. The *Midrash* is not disparaging other areas of study. They, too, contain wisdom, but it is not wisdom that touches a person's soul. Nor is the *Midrash* prohibiting a person from studying the wonders of nature, so long as that study is secondary to one's Torah study. When one makes Torah study primary and views the Torah as a guide for life itself, he will never be at risk of committing the abominations described in our *parashah*. (*Ha'mussar Ve'ha'da'at*)

Shabbat

R' Yechezkel Taub z"l (1772-1856; *Chassidic Rebbe* of Kuzmir, Poland; ancestor of the *Modzhitzer Rebbes*) observes: It is customary for Jews to wish each other "Good Shabbos" and "Good Yom Tov" on *Shabbat* and the festivals, respectively. We do not mean to wish that those occasions should be good, for *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov* are inherently good. Rather, we are blessing each other that we should become good by taking to heart the holiness of the day.

(Quoted in *Otzar Peninei Ha'chassidut: Shabbat Kodesh* II p.71)

R' Avraham Abish Zehnwirth *shlita* (*Chassidic Mashpia* and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim) writes: Kabbalists teach that *Shabbat* has greater holiness than *Yom Tov*, for the Torah calls *Shabbat*: "Kodesh" / "holy" (*Shmot* 31:14). This greater holiness is evident in the fact that one may not cook on *Shabbat*, but may do so on *Yom Tov*, and the fact that the punishment for transgressing the Sabbath is more severe than is the punishment for performing a prohibited labor on a festival.

R' Zehnwirth continues: *Shabbat Kodesh*, the day that is sanctified to *Hashem*, is the root of the holiness of all other days. Therefore, one must be more meticulous in his behavior and deeds on *Shabbat* than on weekdays, taking care not to break the bond that connects one to *Hashem*.

R' Zehnwirth adds: The special holiness of *Shabbat* is expressly reflected in a *Mishnah* (*Demai* 4:1), which teaches that one who buys produce from a person who is not trusted to have tithed them must tithe them himself. However, if one wants to eat that produce on *Shabbat*, when tithes may not be separated, he may simply ask the seller if he tithed them, for the awe of *Shabbat* will cause him not to lie. (*Matanah Tovah*)

Hamaayan / The Torah Spring

10815 Meadowhill Road, Silver Spring, MD 20901 / 301-775-9623

Send e-mail to: TheTorahSpring@gmail.com

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Pirkei Avot

Antignos of Socho received the tradition for Shimon Ha'tzaddik. He used to say, "Do not be like servants who serve their master in order to receive a reward; instead be like servants who serve their master not in order to receive a reward." (1:3)

The *Gemara* (*Rosh Hashanah* 4a) teaches: "If one says, 'I give this coin to *Tzedakah* so that my son shall live [*i.e.*, be cured from illness], he is a perfect *Tzaddik*." Seemingly, this teaching is inconsistent with our *Mishnah*! The *Tosafot* (*Avodah Zarah* 19a) explain that our *Mishnah* is speaking of someone who regrets performing a *Mitzvah* when he does not see the reward coming to him. Do not serve *Hashem* with that attitude! In contrast, the *Gemara* is speaking of someone who performs a *Mitzvah* and requests reward, but does not regret his good deed when his request is not fulfilled. Serving *Hashem* in that way is permitted.

Arguably, the *Tosafot*'s interpretation is implied in the wording of our *Mishnah*. R' Gedaliah Silverstone *z"l* (1871-1944; rabbi in Belfast, Ireland and Washington, D.C.) explains: If the *Mishnah* had said, "Do not be like servants who serve their master '*Bi'shvil*' (בִּשְׁבִיל) to receive a reward," it would have meant: "Do not be like servants who serve their master with the hope of receiving a reward." However, the *Mishnah* actually says, "Do not be like servants who serve their master '*Al me'nat*' (עַל מְנַת) to receive a reward," which means: "Do not be like servants who serve their master on the condition that they receive a reward." This implies that as long as one's *Mitzvah* performance is not conditional--rather, it is sincere--there is nothing wrong with also anticipating a reward.

But what is wrong with demanding a reward? continues R' Silverstone. Surely, the Torah is not against a *Tzaddik* "having two tables" (a Talmudic expression for someone who has both Torah scholarship and wealth)! R' Silverstone explains with a parable:

Imagine Baron Rothschild visiting the Volozhin Yeshiva (the preeminent Russian *yeshiva* for most of the 19th century) and engaging one of the students in a lengthy conversation. Before departing, the Baron gives the young Torah scholar his calling card and asks him to visit the Baron and his family in their lodgings. When the student arrives, he meets the Baron's daughter, and the Baron tells him, "You have found favor in my eyes, and I would like to take you as a son-in-law." How utterly foolish would the young man be if he replies, "I would be honored to be your son-in-law, but how big is your daughter's dowry?" Obviously, someone who finds favor in the eyes of Baron Rothschild and is taken as his son-in-law can be certain of living comfortably forever after!

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"Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died." (16:1)

Midrash Tanchuma relates that Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, died because they said, "When will those old men [Moshe and Aharon] die so that we can lead the nation?" [Until here from the *Midrash*]

How can this be? Even the most crass person does not speak that way about his father and uncle, and Nadav and Avihu were not crass people; they were among the greatest *Tzaddikim* of the generation (see *Rashi* to *Vayikra* 10:3)!

R' Noach Weinberg *z"l* (1930-2009; founder and *Rosh Yeshiva* of *Aish Ha'Torah*) explains: Nadav and Avihu's comment reflected their eagerness for their turn to lead because they wanted to serve *Hashem* and the Jewish People. But, precisely that was their sin! Why did they need to wait until their elders died to begin using their talents? They should have found ways to start using their G-d-given talents immediately!

(Quoted in *48 Derachim L'Chochmah* p.2)

The Torah reading for *Yom Kippur* begins with the above verse, which is the beginning of the Torah's description of the *Yom Kippur Avodah* / Temple service. However, the reference to the sons of Aharon is not coincidental. R' Yisrael Meir Kagan *z"l* (the *Chafetz Chaim*; died 1933) explains:

The *Zohar* teaches: "If one feels pain over the deaths of the sons of Aharon, or cries for them, all of his sins will be forgiven." The point, writes the *Chafetz Chaim*, is that these feelings will inspire a person to repent. "If the cedars have caught fire, what will the hyssops that grow out of the wall say?" [This quote is a proverb originating from the eulogy given for one of the Talmudic Sages (see *Mo'ed Kattan* 25b), meaning: If even great people cannot escape judgment for their sins, what can ordinary people expect? Therefore, repent!] (*Mishnah Berurah* 621:2)

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Similarly, concludes R' Silverstone, *Hashem* offers us His beloved "daughter"--the Torah and *Mitzvot*--as our bride. All of the angels wanted to "marry" this daughter (see *Shabbat* 88b), but *Hashem* gave her to us. He even sustained us with *Mahn* for the first 40 years of our "marriage," as a father-in-law supports his new son-in-law in *Kollel*, before giving us our own home in a "Land flowing with milk and honey." How foolish would we be if, after seeing the riches *Hashem* has to offer us, we nevertheless demand a reward for performing *Mitzvot*!

(*Lev Avot*)