

Singer-Jordan Edition

Bechukosai

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Dedicated for the *refuab shblaimab* of Batya Shoshanah bat Rivkah

Last Thursday I got to *shul* a little bit early for *Minchab* and was learning when I overheard a conversation taking place a few rows behind me. Three men were speaking, one of whom was a Holocaust survivor I personally know.

It wasn't my conversation and I wanted to keep learning. I tried to shut it out, which was easier since they were speaking Hebrew. But when the younger of the three asked, "*What God does want?*" my attention involuntarily jumped from my world to theirs.

It was clear that they were talking about the October 7th atrocity, and what has occurred since. The older man, the survivor, calming emphasized that they cannot know for sure and, they could have *emunab*. This led to questions about the Holocaust, but as more people entered the room it became too hard to hear anymore, and *Mincha* began.

The truth is, we know what God wants. It's all through the Torah. Moshe *Rabbeinu* spells it out explicitly in *Parashas Aikev*, using those exact same words. The *Gemora* discusses what the Torah means in clear detail, and this week's *parsha* speaks about the repercussions of not delivering on that Divine expectation. *Again*, in explicit detail. So we know *exactly* what God wants from us.

And does anyone think that we're so close to being on target as a people that we still have to ask the question? Given what the Torah asks of us, and given how well we fulfill it, the more accurate question might be, "Why did it take so *long* in happening, and why hasn't it happened more *often* throughout history, *God forbid?*"

We don't like to ask such questions because we don't like their answers. The answer has rarely ever been because God is happy with our level of commitment. It's been more because God is merciful and gives man time to do things like *teshuwab*. We just tend to mistake His mercy and patience for His approval, which is why we ask the question when He takes action against us that proves otherwise.

We are told not to trust ourselves until the day we die, and that we should always do *teshuvah* (at least) one day before we die (which means every day since we don't know when our last day will be). The point is that we should never assume we're doing enough in God's eyes, even if we are. If we're praiseworthy, He's the One Who should do the praising, not us.

Because that is what we do when we pray with half a heart. The young man who asked the question, "What does God want?" let out three loud yawns during the quiet of *Shemonah Esrai*, making it sound as if he was not only tired but bored. It's not the way we act before someone we believe we need to keep impressed.

We praise ourselves when we do any *mitzvah* half-heartedly, or put our needs before those of others. We may not consciously say it, but we indicate that, from our perspective, we're good enough, do enough, or perhaps count more than others whom God holds in higher esteem.

This is what it means in the *parsha*, "*and if you despise My statutes and reject My ordinances*" (*Vayikra* 26:15). If you think this warning doesn't apply to you, ask yourself, "What would I do differently if I truly loved performing *mitzvos*?" If the honest and informed answer is, "Nothing," then you're right, you are praiseworthy. But if the answer is, "This . . . and this . . . and this . . . etc." then you have basically admitted that, on some level, you despise God's *mitzvos*.

The Torah tells us that Ya'akov *Avinu* hated Leah, and we wonder how that could be true about someone like him. But *Chazal* explain that it only means that Ya'akov did not love Leah as much as Rachel, and yet the Torah still calls it hatred. Likewise, we might not feel as if we despise *any* of God's Torah, but if our love for it is not as great as it can be, should be, then from God's perspective, it is as we despise it.

The same is true of the spies who rejected *Eretz Yisroel*. Contrary to how it appears, they were not suicidal. They were just gravely mistaken about how God would view their decision to remain in the desert and not enter the Promised Land. They certainly did not intend to appear as if they were rejecting God. But that's how God viewed it, and we know what followed.

The question, "What does God want?" is a *good* one. But only if asked with a desire to improve, and not because *we* believe suffering was unwarranted. ***Chazak!***

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