



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

EIKEV

Two Opinions

The Baal Shem Tov had a habit of turning negative statements in the Torah around and making them positive.

As an example, take the phrase in this week's sidra, VAAVADTEM M'HEIRA, "You will quickly perish (from the Holy Land if you disobey God)" (D'varim 11:17).

According to the Baal Shem Tov, the Hebrew of the verse can suggest a blessing - "You shall lose speed", i.e. you will slow down and take life more calmly.

This may not be the original meaning of the phrase, but it still tells us something important - that constantly being in a hurry and doing things in a hurry does us no service.

If the Baal Shem, living in a much quieter age, thought that speed was not a good thing, his advice is all the more pertinent at our juncture in history.

Too much haste means that we have too little time to think, too little time to see and breathe in the beauties of

the universe, too little time to enjoy being alive and to enjoy our family and friends.

Probably the only thing we should be doing in a hurry is finding mitzvot to do and carrying them out without dawdling. As the sages say, "When a mitzva comes to your hand, don't let it become stale."

Do You Need a Reward?

The Torah is clear. "If you listen intently to My commandments I will give the rain of your land in its season" (D'varim 11:13-14).

Rain, corn, wine and oil, grass for the cattle - the catalogue of rewards is endless.

But is that the reason why we decide to obey the commandments? Are we spurred on by the thought of reward, or do we do the right thing for its own sake?

One answer is that the righteous need no reward. They act LISHMAH, doing the right thing because it is right.

They probably prefer that rewards should not exist so that they never feel tempted to act for an ulterior motive. For them the reward is at

best a consequence but not the motive of a mitzva.

That's all right for the tzadikim, but most people are not (yet) on that level. For the ordinary person the thought of a reward is useful. If they will only act when there is talk of a reward, then let the reward be there as an encouragement. Better a mitzva with a reward than no mitzva at all.

Nonetheless this is not the highest ethic. We hope the thought of a reward will train people so well to do mitzvot that the time will come when the possibility of a reward will become quite unnecessary.

That's when we will be able to say with Pirkei Avot (4:2), S'CHAR MITZVA MITZVA, "the reward of a mitzva is the mitzva". -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH

Ed. note: The Baal Shem Tov tweaked the saying in Pirkei Avot - S'CHAR MITZVA, SIMCHAT MITZVA, the reward for a mitzva is the joy a person gets from obeying G-d).