

BEHAR (LEVITICUS 25:1-27:34)

Labor Gains

2001 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

Jewish life is all about choices. We are given the option of choosing the path that G-d wants us to follow, or a path that goes the other way. Either way, says the Torah, there are consequences to our choices.

This Torah Portion begins with the promise of blessings for walking in G-d's ways. It then continues by warning us of the repercussions created by abandoning the Torah. (It is customary to read this "*Tochachah*" -- Rebuke, in a lower volume and faster speed than the rest of the Torah reading. In so doing, we demonstrate our reluctance to even read about the negative events that could possibly befall us, G-d forbid. It is also customary for this Aliyah to be given to the rabbi, the Torah Reader, or the Gabbai, so as not to offend a member of the congregation by calling him up for the reading of these curses.)

In introducing these rewards and punishments, the Torah lets us know what is, and what isn't, expected of us: "*If you will walk in My decrees, and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time and the land will give its produce...*"(Leviticus, 26:3-4)

"*IF YOU WILL WALK IN MY DECREES...*" this teaches us that G-d wants us to labor in Torah." (Sifra, sec. 1)

The Sifra, in explaining this verse, is telling us that Torah must be an indispensable part of our lives. The Torah continues with the flip side of this commandment: "*And if you will behave casually with Me... then I too will behave toward you with casualness.*"(Ibid. 21,24)

We are, of course, proud to be Jewish. We fulfill Mitzvahs and we recite prayers. But do we *LABOR IN TORAH*? Do we toil and struggle to make Torah the be-all, end-all emphasis of our lives? Is Torah our lifeblood? Or is it little more than a cultural appendage, a potpourri of chicken soup, matzah balls and gefilte fish?

We live in a time when, thank G-d, we have the opportunity to live our lives as Torah Jews. Do we take full advantage of this wonderful fact and labor in Torah, working at modeling our lives around the paradigm of Torah Judaism, refining our character and deeds to meet the demanding standards of Torah Judaism?

There are two types of people who subscribe to my weekly messages -- those who are not yet observant Jews, and those who already are. For those of us who are not quite there yet, isn't there a new Mitzvah that we can introduce into our daily lives? Isn't it time that we worked a little harder at fulfilling G-d's

will?

Those of us who consider ourselves "*Frum*" should not delude ourselves into thinking that we have "made it." The message is the same -- How is our *Tefillah*? Do we *daven* with a recognition that we are talking to the King of Kings? Do we give *Tzedakah* with compassion? Do we wake up every morning and say "*Modeh Ani* --Thank You, G-d for putting me into this wonderful world and giving me the opportunity to sanctify my life by dedicating every waking moment to Your Torah"?)

Being totally devoted to Torah does not mean running away from the real world. It doesn't mean to be obsessively and compulsively locked into a cult-like religious fanaticism. Laboring in Torah means that we are making every effort to use the world as it was meant to be used -- as a means of serving our Creator (and His children!).

Did you ever buy a computer or some other machine that doesn't seem to work no matter how hard you try? There's usually a simple solution: Read the owner's manual supplied by the manufacturer. Do we want all the blessings that this world can provide? Same suggestion: Read the manual supplied by the Manufacturer, and follow the instructions to the letter!

Have a great Shabbos.

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