

COLLECTING THE PROMISED REWARDS OF REDEMPTION

BEGIN WITH A GRIN

A little Toyota made a sudden stop in the middle of traffic. The Mercedes behind smashed into it and the Rolls Royce behind it smashed into the Mercedes.

The owner of the Rolls Royce examined the damage and said, “Oy, my bumper is ruined. This will cost me a day’s salary.”

The owner of the Mercedes looked at the damage and shouted, “The entire front end is wrecked. It’s going to cost me a week’s wages!”

The owner of the Toyota got out and screamed, “I don’t believe it! My entire car is destroyed! I will have to work for an entire year to buy another car!”

Said the owner of the Rolls Royce to the owner of the Mercedes, “How do people allow themselves the indulgence of spending so much on a car?”

DELAYED REWARDS

The Torah is full of promises of reward and punishment that are destined for whoever delves into Torah and does the mitzvos. Many people struggle with the question: Where is this reward? Where is the financial success? Where is the nachas from children and joy? Where is world peace?

This is one of the most fundamental questions in Jewish thinking, in life around us, and every rav, lecturer, pundit and Jewish philosopher has what to say. We will try to convey the message from the teachings of the great commentator, Rashi, through the unique approach of the Rebbe.

At the end of parshas Vaeschanan, it says “today, to do them,” words that are etched into the mind and heart of every Jew, especially that of a Lubavitcher Chassid. Rashi cites these words and comments, “And tomorrow, in the World to Come, to take their reward.”

Commentators on Rashi explain that Rashi wants to bring and clarify the Talmudic principle that “there is no reward in this world.” You want payment – you need to wait!

However, the Rebbe, defender of Israel, refuses to accept this. With one, simple question he contradicts what the other commentators have to say. How can one say, according to the simple meaning of the text, that there is no material reward for doing mitzvos when the Torah is full of verses and prophecies that promise all sorts of abundance as a reward for doing mitzvos? Are all these verses metaphors? Are they all meant to be understood on the spiritual plane, in Gan Eden and the World to Come? Go and tell that to a “ben chameish l’mikra”!

We must say that Rashi’s approach in his commentary on Chumash is that the reward promised in the Torah will take place down here, on the physical plane. Then what does Rashi mean when he says to take the reward in the World to Come? What reward is he talking about?

By looking at the sources that Rashi relies on, we see that Rashi bases what he says on two places. In Eiruvim 22a, the Gemara says, “Today to do them and tomorrow to receive their reward.” in Avoda Zara 3a, the Gemara says, “Today to do them and not today to take a reward.” Sounds similar, practically the same, right? No!

While the Gemara in Avoda Zara focuses on negating the idea of reward in this world (“not today”), the Gemara in Eiruvin is zoning in on the positive, on the real reward in the Future (“tomorrow to take”). If Rashi wants to say that there is no reward in this world, why didn’t he use the phraseology of the Gemara in Avoda Zara which focuses on negating reward. Rashi chooses a combined wording! He begins with the first version (in Eiruvin), “tomorrow,” and explains that this is the World to Come. Then he continues with the second version (from Avoda Zara) “to take a reward.”

What is the difference in the versions? What difference is it if you take or receive?

Receiving is passive. I don’t do anything. Someone else needs to do something so that I can receive an item or reward. Likewise, I am not the balabus, I am not an active player. The giver is dominant; he is the one who decides who will receive, how much, and when.

Taking is active. The taker is the one who decides the facts on the ground. He is the real owner of the item and he takes it when and how he likes. The giver, in this scenario, plays a far less important role and the action of the taker is more dominant and significant.

What practical lesson does this teach us? What does this have to do with us?

When the Gemara says that in this world there is no reward, that doesn’t mean that in this world there is no reward altogether. That would contradict all the material promises made in the Torah. What it means is that in this world the reward comes in a way of “to receive.” G-d gives but since a Jew doesn’t have the power and ability to take a reward himself, things can get lost in the delivery. There might be side reasons (sins, foreign thoughts) or other considerations that would alter the decision making process and result in the giving not reaching its destination.

In the World to Come, on the other hand, the reward will be in a manner of “taking.” A Jew will have the strength to take his reward on his own. Nobody will be able to thwart him from taking what he deserves for the mitzvos that he did.

REWARD FOR THE TAKING

Why is there this difference between reward now and reward in the Future? Who is it that can delay the receiving of reward today?

At this time, payment of a reward depends on the heavenly court, and the heavenly court can issue a “restraining order” or a “writ of execution order” for a Jew’s material reward. In the Future, on the other hand, the World to Come is compared to the “day that is entirely Shabbos,” and on Shabbos the courthouses are closed ... Nobody can thwart a Jew who is demanding his reward that he deserves for the mitzvos that he did!

Furthermore, in this world, the reward is material; in the Future, the reward will be spiritual. The difference between them is that a material reward merely needs to be “received.” G-d gives every Jew bountiful blessings of children, life and parnassa, amply. Just stand off to the side, quietly, with an empty vessel (making sure it has no hole, i.e. sins).

However, the reward in the Future is an altogether different type of reward. It’s a spiritual reward, “basking in the ray of the Shechina.” For this kind of reward it’s not enough to “receive.” One needs “to take,” to do something to get it!

This is precisely what Rashi wants to explain! Keeping Torah and mitzvos pertains (just) to this world, “today (specifically) to do them.” What will our avodas Hashem be in the Future? With what will be occupied? To say that in the Future we won’t have any sort of avodas Hashem does not seem reasonable!

Rashi explains, tomorrow? What will we do in the Future? “Take reward!” We will have another sort of avoda in which we will need to take a reward, to increase knowledge and conceptual grasp in spiritual matters so we can

“bask in the ray of the Shechina.”

There is an additional point connected with spiritual reward – there is a significant difference between a spiritual reward associated with Gan Eden and the spiritual reward of the world of Resurrection. Gan Eden is a limited reward which is connected with the finite immanent aspect of G-dliness, *Memalei Kol Olmin*, while the reward of the Resurrection is unlimited and connected with the infinite transcendent aspect of G-dliness, *Soveiv Kol Olmin*. The difference between the two is that a limited reward can simply be “taken.” When a Jew learns Torah and does mitzvos, the reward in Gan Eden is ready for him. It’s a proportionate reward which depends on the level of devotion of man to G-d. He “deserves” it. All that’s left to do is to show up and “receive” it.

The reward of Resurrection is an infinite reward. Nobody “deserves” this kind of reward. It’s like a “bonus” that you never imagined and never thought of. This type of reward needs to be “taken.”

In summary, the material reward which we deserve needs to be “received,” we cannot force it to come. We can only do all we can so there won’t be obstacles in the receiving of it. The spiritual reward in Gan Eden can also be “received,” as a matter of course, after 120. But the true and complete Geula needs to be taken, something has to be done; we can’t sit with folded hands because this type of reward, to live now as we will live after the Geula, requires action and not passive waiting.

TO CONCLUDE WITH A STORY

We will end with a story that teaches us about “true reward” which is not money, gold and diamonds, but rather the essential bonding with G-d through Torah and mitzvos.

In a conversation that the famous Israeli economist Ofer Petersburg had with Bill Gates, former Chairman of the Board of Microsoft, the economist asked: What can you buy with all your money?

Bill Gates said, “I can buy everything except for one thing: the Sabbath of a Jew.”

Petersburg found out the following: Author and keynote speaker, Kivi Bernhard was asked to open a big Microsoft conference. There was one big problem – the opening was on Shabbos.

Bernhard, a shomer Shabbos Jew, said he can’t because of his religion.

Microsoft offered him more money, but Kivi refused. (The first offer was \$10,000!)

They offered him an exorbitant amount but still Bernhard politely declined.

Eventually, Microsoft was forced to move the entire conference by a day so that Kivi could speak.

When billionaire owner of Microsoft heard about Bernhard’s refusal to work on Shabbos, even for vast sums of money, he quipped: “That’s what happens when you have something that money can’t buy.”

Good Shabbos!