



Turning Bad Times to Good Times

There are good times and bad times. This week's Parsha relates of the horrendous results of not fulfilling our obligations to Hashem with the proper attitude. Curses will be actualized upon the people "because you will not have hearkened to the voice of Hashem... because you did not serve Hashem your God with gladness and goodness of heart when everything was abundant" (Devarim 28:45-47).

Now, we would expect that misfortunes would occur to us on account of idol worship or because of Lashon Hara or any number of other significant misdemeanors. But because we did not serve Hashem in joy when things were going well? How do we explain that?

We might first recall the importance that our kings of old attached to Simchah. Who is not familiar, for example, with verses such as "עבדו את ה' בשמחה בואו לפניו ברננה" - "Serve Hashem with joy and present yourself to Him in ecstasy" (Tehillim 100:2) or

ה' - "And I praised the [concept of] joy" (Kohelet 8:15). The latter verse, in particular, was said to relate to the joy attached to the Simchah of Mitzva.

Our Parsha speaks of the rewards for *fulfilling* the Mitzvot. The rabbis, however, also stressed the *emotional involvement* in their observance. If we now return to our opening verse, we could imagine – in good times – uttering the Birkat Hamazon, thus thanking Hashem for His benevolence. That is well and good. But we mumbled the prayer; we felt it was a burden to express; we were thinking about our next meeting at work.

In short, we had no joy in the Mitzva at all! Our service of Hashem was lacking – because we should enjoy being involved in the Mitzva for its own sake. That, too, is a Mitzva! Moreover, notes R. Shlomo Aviner, there is an additional reward for delighting in its observance.

The corollary of this mindfulness, the Rav remarks, is that *any* Mitzva should be carried out with *Kavannah*, with the proper intentions and the understanding of the Mitzva's intrinsic value so that the joy attached to its observance is genuine.

Rav Aviner is aware that joy is not an attribute that is easy to attain, especially when we are absorbed in the day-to-

day humdrum of life and coping with its issues. Perhaps that is why the Torah stresses that we should serve Hashem with the right attitude of mind when all is going well for us. Then, we have no excuses.

In any case, Rav Aviner offers a small piece of advice to set us on our way to gladness, appreciation, and thankfulness: Let each day be a new beginning. At every dawn, put aside thoughts of the iniquities we have performed, not in a light-headed spirit but with thoughts of better serving Hashem – with joy. In that spirit, and following the words of the prophet Yeshayahu (49:15), measure for measure, Hashem will “forget” our transgressions and (joyfully) forgive our sins – and, Be’ezrat Hashem, turn the curses into blessings. ■

Shabbat Shalom!

Menachem Persoff

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