



Mitzvah Mindset

Parashat Bechukotai is well known for the extensive blessings and curses outlined if *Am Yisrael* follows the ways of the Torah. We find a fascinating stipulation, “*Ve’im telchu imi **keri***, if you behave casually with Me...then I shall lay a further blow upon you,” (*Vayikra* 26:21). It seems we are held responsible for relating with Hashem with the attitude of *keri*, casually or with happenstance. What does this mean? How is it manifested in our daily behavior?

Rav Gamliel Rabinovich in *Tiv HaTorah* explains that this easily refers to one who learns and practices mitzvot yet lacks focus and passion in his actions. In particular, Rav Rabinovich is critical of one who multi-tasks while doing mitzvot. When a person performs a task and is distracted by other things, it demonstrates that the task is not a primary focus. For example, one who stacks dishes and clears his table while he recites *birkat hamazon* or tries to open a water bottle while making the brachah *shehakol* is not thinking about the mitzvah he is doing

rather he is concentrating on cleaning up or getting the bottle open. We can only do one thing at a time and that one thing is getting our dominant attention. When we do other things while performing a mitzvah “we walk with Hashem casually, with happenstance”. It degrades the mitzvah and negatively affects our relationship with Hashem.

Rabbi Kaufman in *Mishchat Shemen* advises to try and do a mitzvah with the fullness of one’s being and presence of mind. We should activate all three aspects of anything we do: the thought, speech, and the deed. Ideally, when we set out to a mitzvah, we should be mindful of one we are about to do, we should articulate the mitzvah we are about to fulfill, and then do the mitzvah with conscious action. For example, how much more elevated the experience of paying a worker can be we have in mind that this is a mitzvah from the Torah, if we say the specific *passuk*, “*beyomo titen secharo*”, or articulate the mitzvah, and then actually pay the person. In doing so, we raise the experience from one of incidental circumstance, *keri* to one of focus, and true intent.

Acting this way allows us to break from living a life of habit to living with meaning and purpose. Rav Reiss in *Merosh Tzurim* explains that although much of our mitzvah observance operates on automatic pilot, we must make the effort to be more alert, to know when and how to invest these actions

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with more meaning. This can be compared to the way a seasoned driver navigates his car. Although his decisions to accelerate or break are more instinctive, he is always alert to his surroundings on the road and will respond appropriately. We can be that 'alert driver' and infuse our mitzvah observance with consciousness and intent.

Rav Gifter in *Pirkei Torah* adds that the more we invest our energy into living a Torah life, the more we find the sweetness and beauty in such a life. One who relates to Torah and mitzvot when it is convenient or only when he's in the mood is primarily serving himself. This kind of attitude is what the Torah means by *keri*, happenstance. Each one of us has the capacity and *bechirah* to make Torah "our lives, and the length of our days", it just takes a bit more application and focused direction. ■

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