



Return on Investment

11 Nissan, 5732-1972

There is a well-known question, appearing in part in the Midrash, and asked regularly:

If God wants a Jew to follow Jewish law, to live in accordance with Torah and *mitzvos*, why does He make so many obstacles?

For one wishing to live according to Jewish law — and that includes every Jew, as the Rambam rules: Every Jew, were it not for the Evil Inclination's schemes, would fulfill God's Will, study Torah and perform *mitzvos* — why must there be so many difficulties and complications in his path, so much effort required, even to the degree of serving God “with all your might”: self-sacrifice!

When one encounters a hardship, the Evil Inclination shows up promptly with the contention: “If God really wants this — and you fully believe that God is in charge of every single detail of life, everywhere, every moment — how can there be such a contradiction; if He wants you to perform this *mitzvah*, why does He make you work so hard to achieve it?”

The reason is not, Heaven forbid, that God — the Essence of good — wants a Jew to exhaust himself. On the contrary: He gives him the opportunity to do the *mitzvah* in a manner distinct from our “unearned bread” in Egypt. The Zohar explains: On the side opposite *kedushah* things are “free of charge.” With *mitzvos*, on the other hand, God wants “payment,” exertion; there is nothing “free,” and yet, for just that reason, one can feel *they are his*.

It is expressly because of the preciousness of Torah and *mitzvos*, and the preciousness of the Jewish people, that God wants them to achieve true perfection. And in order that their Torah accomplishment emerge in a manner of “*you shall find it*,” He has made it contingent upon exertion — as the Talmud states in Tractate *Megillah*: “If one claims, ‘I have exerted myself but have not achieved,’ do not believe him.” It simply cannot happen. God would not have a Jew exert himself unless a significant benefit resulted.

And when the effort is applied in accordance with God's directive to “work hard in Torah,” it is a certainty that not only is one rewarded commensurately, but even more, one “*finds*” — far beyond the natural end result.

This accounts for the hardships one endures to achieve anything worthwhile in general, and to arrive at true Torah knowledge and the proper fulfillment of *mitzvos*. They cannot come “free of charge,” rather only as a reward — and after effort. And in doing so one reaches the level, as it were, of the One Who commanded the *mitzvah*, Who gave us the Torah.



פרשת נשא

But this does not suggest, God forbid, that we must undergo excessive hardship.

The Midrash relates that when Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa wanted to come to the Temple for a festival but lacked an offering to bring, he found a giant stone far too large to carry by himself. Angels appeared, disguised as humans, and volunteered to help. "Place your little finger under the stone," they told him. He put his finger underneath and was instantly transported to Jerusalem with the stone.

Now, this seems illogical; what did he accomplish with his little finger?

The *Halachah* states: "One must not come to the Temple empty-handed." Had angels brought the stone, it would not have been *his*; he would have been "empty-handed." It had to be *his*, even through the effort of his little finger.

So, too: "It was not with hard labor that God created the world, but with the words of His mouth." We can understand then, that to become "God's partner in creation" does not require drudgery or "blackening your hands." Labor is unnecessary; "the words of his mouth," alone, suffice.

But one's words must, as it were, emulate God's. "I give you My soul in the writing," God says. The *words of His mouth* refer to the "Ten Utterances with which the universe was created" — God's ten statements with which Torah begins. "I give you My soul in the writing," the Talmud in Tractate *Shabbos* states. And the Baal Shem Tov explains: *God put His soul into the writing* — and *gave it* to the Jewish people.

And then "our words," alone, becomes effective. Whatever it is we work to achieve, as long as we fully put our soul into it, then — with even minimal effort, but "with all your heart, all your soul and all your might" — then we have an equal share with the Creator of the universe, and become partners with God.

