

Parsha Ponders

Behar/Bechukosai | May 12, 2023 | 21 Iyar 5783

Maintaining the relationship¹

אם בחקתי תלכו ואת-מצותי תשמרו ועשיתם אתם

If you will walk in My decrees, and safeguard My commandments, and perform them²

Would it be strange to say that Hashem has *ta'avos*, often translated as desires or lusts? One would be right to think so. However, we find statements from our Sages that indeed, Hashem has *ta'avos*. Our Sages ask³ why the foremothers were all barren. The reason was so that they would pray for children, for Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous.

We find another example with regard to this week's *parsha*. We are told that if we walk in Hashem's decrees and safeguard His commandments, we will be a blessed nation. If we don't, the opposite extreme will also be true. What does it mean to walk in Hashem's decrees? It can't mean following the commandments, for that is also mentioned as a requirement. We are taught⁴ it means that we are to toil in learning Hashem's Torah. Why is this so important? For Hashem lusts, desires, that the Jewish people toil in His Torah⁵.

Why is it that when discussing prayers, it specifically says that Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous, yet when discussing toiling in Torah, it says that He desires that the entire Jewish people toil in Torah? Another question. There are three sins that are so bad that one has to give up their life rather than transgress them: idol worship, murder, and illicit relations⁶. Nevertheless, we are taught⁷ that Hashem overlooks these transgressions, but doesn't overlook the sin of *bittul Torah*, refraining from learning Torah when one has the opportunity. How can this be? These three are considered the worst sin. We are told they are why the First Temple was destroyed⁸. How can we understand this?

Rav Chaim Volozhin, the primary student of the Vilna Gaon, credited for creating the first yeshiva in the modern era, has a fascinating insight⁹. In our prayers we say, "*Our Father*, please return us to Your Torah", and then we say "*Our King*, bring us close to Your service"¹⁰. Why is it by Torah Hashem is our Father, but by Divine service He is our King? The answer is that we start off as Hashem's servants. He is our Master. He is our King. However, if we develop a relationship with Him, by learning His ways, by learning His Torah, we become His children. Our relationship with Him becomes one of a Father and a son.

With this in mind, everything proceeds to make sense. So long as we maintain that relationship, Hashem will always give us a second chance. If we stop learning Torah, we revert to being Hashem's servants, and the most grievous of sins cannot be forgiven. It's much easier to forgive one's child, regardless of the severity of the crime. It's no wonder then that Hashem desires we toil in His Torah. He wants us to want that relationship, and to maintain it. Only then can we be worthy of His endless blessing and supervision.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on a *shiur* heard from [Rav Shmuel Baron](#), *Rosh Yeshiva* of *Yeshivas Imrei Binah*

² [Leviticus 26:3](#)

³ [Yevamos 64a](#); [Bereishis Rabbah 45:4](#). See also [Chullin 60b](#)

⁴ [Rashi ad. loc.](#), quoting [Toras Kohanim ad. loc.](#)

⁵ [Toras Kohanim loc. cit.](#), brought by [Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim § 831](#); [Midrash Lekach Tov](#) and [Midrash Aggadah to Leviticus loc. cit.](#)

⁶ [Sanhedrin 74a](#)

⁷ [Yerushalmi Chagigah 1:7](#). See [Sha'arei Teshuva 2:9, 3:14](#), [Alshich](#) to [Genesis 2:10](#)

⁸ [Yoma 9b](#)

⁹ [Ruach Chaim](#) to [Avos 2:1](#) (end)

¹⁰ [Shemoneh Esrei](#)