

THE THREAT AND THE TREAT

Parshas Eikev

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

The three portions of Shema, recited twice daily, are selected for reading in sequence. The Mishna (Berachos 2:2) expounds the reason why Shema is recited first, Vhoya im Shomoah (of this week's Parsha) the second, and the parsha of Tzitzis the third.

One may logically surmise, in addition that the sequence is meant to promote growth in the observance of a Mitzva, to continually advance, "from strength to strength" (Tehillim 84:8). Especially is this sequence indicated regarding the Mitzva of Torah study. Whereas in the Shema, Torah study with one's child and study himself is mentioned separately, in the second portion it indicates the higher level of study, where father and son can debate and deliberate with one another.

Also, as a sequence, Vhoyo Im Shomoa, concludes with a blessing "in order to prolong your days and the days of your children upon the land..." (11:21). According to Rashi this blessing is the reward for the aforementioned observances, including Torah study. Rashi adds that the blessing is conditional: If the mentioned Mitzvohs will be observed, then they will be rewarded with the blessing. Rashi quotes the principle of MICHLAL HEN ATO SHOMEA LAV, from the positive (if we hearken) we can suppose the opposite (punishment) for violating the precepts.

This brings us to the more direct threat in this portion: "HISHOMRY..." "beware for yourselves lest your hearts be seduced to turn astray (the Torah enumerates retribution) ... you will be banished from the goodly land..."

This addition, however, in the sequence, spells an additional blessing to those who adhere and fulfill the Mitzvohs, as Rashi quoted (above) MICHLAL LAV... From the positive we can learn the negative and vice versa.

The real advanced blessing in this sequence is the following principle: The Talmud teaches (Sotah 10a) that when a blessing is promised

in the Torah by way of MICHLAL (opposite of the negative) the blessing is multiplied five hundred times. This is taught in the MIDOS (attributes) of Hashem. In the negative (retribution for sin) Hashem “remembers the iniquities of parents upon four generations of descendants” (Shemos 34:7), whereas regarding the positive (reward for observance of Mitzvoths) “Hashem preserves the kindness for thousands of generations” (ibid), “two thousand generations” (Rashi), five hundred times four, minimum of the plural term. As a result of the mention of the negative, the positive doubled so many times, for the observer, so the threat becomes a TREAT.

The third portion of Shema, Tzitzis, is even more ambitious in attaining higher levels of spiritual achievement “L’maan Tizkeru”, to attain good memory. And since the first and second portions included fundamentals of Torah study, it stands to reason that the third portion, too, refers to Torah study, at least by REMEZ, indication. So teaches Tosfos (Menuchos 39a).

Tosfos seeks to explain the teaching that Tzitzis is numerically (b’gimatria) תר"ג (Taryag) 613, the number of Mitzvoths in the Torah. ציצית equals 600, 5 knots, 8 fringes, equals 613. How is this calculated? asks Tosfos. Tzitzis is spelled with only one “yud”, the total missing ten. Tosfos’ answer is profound: Tzitzis is mentioned in the Parsha three times; the last time the Torah writes L’Tzitzis. That letter “lamed” equals numerically thirty (30). When you take 30 divided for the three words (Tzitzis), ten for each, the total equals Taryag.

The profundity of the Tosfos is the greater stride in the sequence of Shema. For this contains the reward of “Uzchartem” - “You shall remember” (15:39). The letter Lamed means learning. It seems learning a portion three times contains the benefit of memory. The Talmud (Kidushin 30a) prefers learning a subject three times.

The former Gerer Rebbe, Reb Pinchus Menachem zt”l, suggested for Daf Yomi participants to repeat briefly yesterday’s Daf before studying the day’s Daf, and then get acquainted with tomorrow’s Daf. This way one will remember the context for a long time. This reward, indeed, is a gift, a divine TREAT.

