

“Doing What the Torah Demands- *Is Not Enough*”

We read in the parasha, (12:28) “Safeguard and hearken to all these words that I command you, in order that it will be well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is **good and right (hatov ve’ha’yashar)** in the eyes of HaShem.” In other words, even if one does follow all the commandments, it will not be considered as sufficient, if the Tov (good), the Torah which is known as Tov, (KI LEKACH TOV NATATI LACHEM) is not combined with Yashar, righteousness.

Seifer Devarim is called by our Sages “Seifer HaYashar, the “Book of Righteousness, because that is, in essence what the Torah is, and should be all about. Indeed, the Torah is a book of Law, and the letter of the law, which is the body of the law, must be upheld at all times. But this same body of law also has a spirit, and it is this spirit of the law which is the focus of our parasha.

Chazal understood this very well. That is why Gemara Bava Metzia (83a) provides an example of how the spirit of the law functions in an actual case. Rabba Bar Bar Chanan, a wealthy Talmid Chacham (scholar), hired workers to transport barrels of wine. In the course of their employment they were negligent and the barrels broke. Rabba Bar Bar Chanan knew that they didn’t have the money to pay for the damages he incurred so he demanded and took their clothes which he could sell and thus retrieve part of his loss. The workers took him to the Beit Din of Rav, the leading scholar of that generation. Rav ruled in favor of the workers, and their garments were returned. Rabba Bar Bar Chanan, who was a renowned scholar, asked Rav, “Is this the law?” Rav attested that in **this case it was indeed the law**, quoting from the Book of Mishlei (2:20), “Ve’archot Tzaddikim Tishmor”, and you shall guard the path of the righteous.

The workers however, were still unhappy, having worked all day with nothing to show for it, with no money to bring home food for the table. Rav, sympathizing with their situation, then issued another ruling, that the workers must be paid their full wages for the day. This astonished Rabba Bar Bar Chanan and he again exclaimed: “Is this the law?” and Rav again responded in the affirmative, citing our passuk, “VE’ASITA HATOV VE’HAYASHAR B’EINEI HA’SHEM”, that we are commanded to follow not only the Din, but we must also do LIFNIM MESHURAT HA’DIN, that is, over and above of what we are required, and that then becomes, the *spirit of the law*.

The message to us is quite clear. We are approaching chodesh Elul, just a month away from Yamim Noraim. Let the morning sound of the Shofar remind us about HaTov VeHayashar in our daily encounters.

Shabbat Shalom from Brooklyn NY
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