

## Bechukosai

The great Maimonides enunciated thirteen principles of faith which form the cornerstone and the basis of the Jew's belief. The eleventh principle states: "I believe with perfect faith, that the Creator, blessed be His name, rewards those who keep His commandments and punishes those who transgress them." Simply stated it means that every Jew must believe in reward and punishment.

In the Torah portion of this week, the A-mighty says, "If you will walk in my laws and guard my commandments and fulfill them, then I will give your rains in their due season, and the land will yield its produce, and the trees of the field will yield their fruit. You shall eat your bread to satisfy, and you will dwell in your land without worry, and I will give peace in the land."

Thus we are assured of great prosperity, satisfaction, peace and harmony. These rewards come in direct proportion to our practice and observance of G-d's word. Loyalty to the teachings of the Torah and full commitment to the upholding of the commandments brings the immediate blessings enumerated in great detail in the first thirteen sentences of the Sedrah.

Subsequently the Torah proclaims, "But if you not hearken unto Me and will not do all these commandments," etc., "then I will decree," etc. and the Torah mentions forty-nine different curses and calamities which will befall the Jewish people and the land of Israel.

In our modern age where permissiveness is stylish and considered chic, educators and philosophers alike seek to minimize the importance of a set of rules and regulations to control our lives. Railing against submission to a Higher Power who declared in clear and unmistakable terms how a person should live in conformity with His Divine directives, the so-called progressives denigrate any concept of regimentation and regulation of life in accordance with a set of rules and regulations as expounded in the Holy Torah.

We are now reaping the fruits of this bankrupt philosophy in direct proportion to the rejection of the above; juvenile delinquents,

dropouts, dope addicts and other forms of degenerate behavior by young and old alike abound. Anything which will provide pleasure is accepted as legitimate. Regardless of the consequences of the mad pursuit of pleasure, be it licit or illicit, normal or abnormal, respectable or shameful, natural or unnatural, so long as it gives one pleasure and joy, it is "Kosher." Eat, drink and enjoy for tomorrow they die, is the slogan of the hedonist of this age.

The blame can be placed squarely at the feet of those self-proclaimed experts who advised parents against reprimanding or punishing children. Children were to be allowed to do whatever they pleased, and parents were never to threaten or impose any penalties on children for bad behavior. Teachers were advised to allow their students full freedom of expression, even if it meant a gradual but sure breakdown of discipline and respect for teachers and school property.

These youngsters grew up in this climate of permissiveness and freedom of action and expression, with the resulting chaos of the 60's on campuses, and the complete breakdown of law and order prevalent today. Enforcers of the law were not to be respected or feared any more than the parents or teachers were. Laws were made to be broken, and if heeding the law meant any inconvenience or hardship, then obviously the law was to be circumvented or willfully broken. After all, was not the pleasure syndrome the most vital goal to achieve. Hence, law and order, respect, reverence, obedience and concern about the result of one's actions were of no consequence.

Further compounding and exacerbating this tragic social malaise, is the sickening scene of recidivists and repeaters guilty of heinous crimes being released by the "soft-hearted" or perhaps we should describe these people as "soft-headed" judges. No society can long endure if there is no system of meting out punishment to fit the crime. Allowing criminals to roam the streets freely, only encourages the breakdown of the system of justice, which was originally ordained to protect the members of society. Perhaps the judges too could use a bit of logical advice; to go back to the Torah principles of reward and punishment and to apply these teachings when sentencing those guilty of breaking the law.

To insure the Jew against these excesses and evil inclinations we

are obligated to read the *Shema* twice daily, in the morning and evening, and in the second paragraph we are reminded that "if you will hearken diligently unto My commandments," etc., "then I will give rain, corn, wine, oil, and you will eat and be satisfied." However, should you turn aside and serve other gods, "and the anger of the L-rd will be kindled against you, there will be no rain," etc.

The Jew who prays is constantly made aware of this Divine attribute, and he is therefore careful in his personal life's activities to conduct himself according to the religious-ethical standards demanded of him. The Jew thus never forgot that Divine retribution was a real concern and he sought to so train his children to recognize and appreciate this principle.

In *Pirkei Avot* it is written in the name of Rabbi Elazar Hakapar that "G-d will judge man in the future; that everything is according to the reckoning; you will have to give account before the Supreme King of Kings." Our Sages in the Talmud teach us that the very first judgment against man after death is neglect of Torah study. Man will be asked: Did you have fixed times for the study of the Torah daily, and woe is to the person who responds in the negative. Make it a habit to study daily and G-d will reward you with success and happiness.