

Parashat Haazinu – Succot 5777, 2016:

The Torah and Its Rewards

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzhak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the refuah shlaimah of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka and Leah bat Shifra, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

As Moshe nears the end of his life, he urges our nation to adopt a passionate approach to guarantee the future of Torah, and our consequent sovereignty over the Land of Israel:

And he said to them, “Set your hearts to all of the words which I bear witness for you this day, so that you may command your children to observe to do all the words of this Torah. For it is not an empty thing for you, for it is your life, and through this thing, you will lengthen your days upon the land to which you are crossing over the Jordan, to possess it.” (*Sefer Devarim 32:46-47*, this, and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Initially, Moshe teaches us what the Torah is not, “For it is not an empty thing for you,” and only subsequently describes the Torah in positive terms, “for it is your life.” Rashi (1040-1105) elucidates the relationship between these two statements and, in so doing, demonstrates their interconnectivity: **For it is not an empty thing for you:** “You do not labor over it in vain, for a great reward is contingent upon it, for ‘it is your life’ [that is, the reward is life itself].” In sum, Rashi views life, itself, as the reward for conscientious Torah study, an idea that is found in the well-known phrase from the Evening prayer service: “For they [the words of the Torah] are our life and the length of our days, and about them we will meditate day and night.” (Translation, *Artscroll Siddur*)

A different, yet complementary approach to understanding our passage was offered by the great Spanish philosopher, Rabbi Yosef Albo (1380-1444). He begins his analysis of our *pasukim* (verses) by noting that Moshe's words are similar in kind to the type of terminology one finds in the summary portion of any standard contract. Following this, he focuses upon the two types of reward that are promised in our verses:

So, too, *Moshe Rabbeinu*, may peace be upon him, in this instance, wrote these words to remind [the Jewish people] of the two conceptual categories of reward (*sh'nay minay ha's'char hamusagim*) that are inherent in the Torah, namely, spiritual and physical reward. In reference to spiritual reward the text states, "for it is your life," whereas in regards to physical blessing the Torah writes, "and through this thing, you will lengthen your days upon the land." (*Sefer HaIkkarim*, Section IV, Chapter 40, this and subsequent translations my own)

The expressions "spiritual reward" and "physical reward" are frequently found within Torah literature. They are rarely defined, however, leading to confusion as to their exact meaning. Fortunately, Rav Albo was sensitive to this challenge, and explains the difference between our terms in a convincing manner:

In order to differentiate between spiritual and physical rewards, the Torah states, in reference to the former, "For it is not an empty thing for you," this means to say, do not think that the Torah is something extraneous to you (*davar achare zultchem*) – instead, it, in and of itself, is your very life. This refers to the essence of life that remains with a person even after they pass away. This comes to teach us that the knowledge one acquires through the continuous study that is part of the service of Hashem may He be blessed... is, itself, the life giving and sustaining force of the soul after death. This concept is hinted at through the double use of the word "*hu*" ("it") [in verse 47].

Spiritual reward, for Rav Albo emerges as "the essence of life that remains with a person, even after they pass away." As such, Torah knowledge remains with a person's *neshamah* (soul) throughout all eternity.

At this juncture, Rav Albo demonstrates the manner in which the expression "and through this thing, you will lengthen your days upon the land" references physical reward:

This comes to teach us that the concept of physical reward is the direct outcome of fulfilling the Torah and *mitzvot*. [As valuable as this reward is, however,] it is not the essence of the [highest] reward – instead, it is the natural result of fulfilling the Torah’s [precepts]. By way of example, when the Torah states in reference to the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* (just distribution of money, goods and services to the less fortunate), “for because of this thing the L-rd, your G-d, will bless you in all your work and in all your endeavors,” (*Sefer Devarim* 15:10) one ought not to think that the underlying reason for performing this *mitzvah* is to receive multiple blessings; [rather, the service of Hashem is its own reward].

In sum, for Rav Albo, spiritual rewards are the ultimate attainments that enable us to draw closer to Hashem and that remain with our souls - even after death. In contrast, physical rewards are definitionally limited to this world and, therefore, ought not to be pursued on their own account. This notion is reminiscent of the well-known adage in *Pirkei Avot*, “Do not be as servants who serve their master for the sake of reward. Rather, be as servants who serve their master not for the sake of reward.” (I: 3, this and the following translation, Rabbi Yosef Marcus)

As we know, we need both physical and spiritual rewards in order to thrive in this world. This thought, as well, is given powerful voice in *Pirkei Avot*: “Rabbi Eliezer the son of Azariah would say: ‘If there is no flour, there is no Torah; if there is no Torah, there is no flour.’” (III: 17) Herein, “flour” represents our normative physical needs, whereas “Torah” may be understood both as Torah knowledge per se, and as a metaphor for all spiritually related matters.

We have just begun a new year and are on the cusp of celebrating Succot, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. May the joy of these festivals continue throughout the coming year, and with Hashem’s help and our renewed devotion, may we fulfill the goals we set for ourselves during the *Yamim Noraim*, and merit the rewards of Torah. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom and *Chag Sameach!*

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.