

All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you, if you will hearken to the voice of Hashem, your G-d. (28:2)

A common attitude of (which we will refer to as) spiritual entitlement exists among some of us, which is indicative of feeling of spiritual superiority and self-righteousness: “*Es kumt es mir*, “I deserve it/it is coming to me” is a notion that some of us maintain, although we do not explicitly articulate it. The attitude is, “I am good, and, thus, I deserve to be the recipient of abundant reward.” This applies to those who observe Torah and *mitzvos* and expect a Heavenly check in the mail, as well as to those who have been victims of various forms of adversity which have plagued their lives. They, too, expect something in return.

The **Kotzker Rebbe, zl**, not only assails this attitude; he interprets it as the message of the above *pasuk*. *V’hisigucha*, “And (it will) overtake you” is understandable with regard to curses. One attempts to flee from a curse. He is being told – “No way. They will catch up with you – sooner or later. You cannot escape retribution for your misdeeds.” Here, however, the *pasuk* is addressing the idea of being overtaken by blessing. **Sforno** offers a simple rendering of the *pasuk*. Hashem will be so gracious to us that we will be overtaken with blessing even when we are not out there looking for it, making no effort (or demand) that blessing be our fare for all the “good” that we have done. Indeed, even when logic and nature seem contradictory to blessing, it will happen. Hashem owes no one. Each and every one of us will receive retribution for the good – and for the bad.

The *Kotzker* interprets the word *v’hisigucha* as being related to *hasagah*, criticism, as in *hasagas ha’Raavad*, questions/ critique of the *Raavad* (on the *Rambam*). He explains that the question is for the individual: – “Why did I receive Hashem’s blessing? Am I deserving of it?” Furthermore, “What am I doing in the way of serving Hashem to warrant my good fortune?” When we are the beneficiaries of Hashem’s blessing, we seldom ask “why”; we are happy to accept it and continue with business as usual. We rarely stop to think that perhaps we should act in a manner which warrants such Heavenly attention. *V’hisigucha* – and the blessing will present a question to you: “What are you/I doing to deserve such favor?”

Horav Yaakov Kamenetzky, zl, once met a non-observant Jew who had absolutely nothing to do with religious practice. He did not even know the *pasuk*, *Shema Yisrael*, which is a staple in Jewish life. The man said, “I am aware of one verse from the Torah which I memorized. *Tachas asher lo avadita es Hashem Elokecha b’simchah u’b’tuv leivav meirov kol*, “Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant” (*Devarim* 28:47).

Rav Yaakov was slightly taken aback by this revelation. After all, from among the many *pesukim* of the Torah which impact Jewish life, this was not at the top of the list. The man’s response is in and of itself a lesson in devotion to Hashem, and how one person’s sincere service can have an enduring impact on another person’s life: “*Rebbe*, I experienced seven levels of *Gehinom*. During

the Holocaust, I lived in purgatory on a regular daily basis. In one of the camps in which I was incarcerated there was a holy Jew, a rabbi of distinguished lineage, whose influence upon the other incarcerates was overwhelming. As a result, the Nazis singled him out for singular punishment. This was their way of saying to us: 'Look, we control everyone – even your illustrious rabbis are putty in our hands.' They placed a 50-kilogram stone in his hands and ordered him to carry it up a steep mountain. Once he reached the summit, he was told to carry it down. This was not yet the end. The debasing process continued on all day, as they made the holy man walk up and down the mountain for hours with the relentless heat of the sun beating down on him. During this entire time, all I heard from the man (who was none other than the holy, venerable *Klausenberger Rebbe, zl.*) was this *pasuk*, repeated over and over again.”

The *Klausenberger Rebbe* had already experienced the tragic loss of his wife and eleven children. He had been beaten, degraded and subjected to painful persecution. Yet, the vicious animals in the guise of human beings did not succeed in breaking this man. Indeed, he survived and rebuilt his life, successfully establishing a *kehillah*, congregation, in this country and in *Eretz Yisrael*. He founded a premier hospital and returned *atarah l'yoshnah*, the Crown of Torah, to its original place. Yet, despite all that he had suffered, all that entered his mind that fateful day was: “I am suffering because I did not serve Hashem with joy.” Rather than entitlement, he felt that he owed Hashem!