

Now, O Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem, your G-d. (10:12)

The *Pele Yoeitz* explains Hashem's request pragmatically. "You watch my field, and I will watch yours," or, in modern day parlance, "You have my back, and I will have yours." *Yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, is something that Hashem expects us to achieve on our own. Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for fear of Heaven. Bread, sustenance, is Heaven-sent. The Almighty intimates that we will make a trade: You will have *yiraas Shomayim*; I will owe you, and My payback will be sustenance.

The *Noda B'Yehudah* questions the *pasuk's* choice of wording. First, what is the meaning of *v'atah*, now – why only "now" – why specifically "now"? Why does the Torah use the word *shoeil*, which really means borrow (it also is used as question)? A better choice of word might have been *mevakeish*, seek. "What is it that Hashem seeks of you/wants from you?" He explains with the famous *pasuk* in *Iyov* (41:3), *M'ee hikdimani va'ashaleim*? "Whoever anticipated Me, I can reward him," regarding which *Chazal* say, "Who preceded Me (in anything)? Who is able to circumcise his son, if I do not first bless him with a son? Who can make a *maakeh*, roof guard, before I provide him with a roof? Who made a *mezuzah* for Me before I gave him a house?" It is obvious that Hashem is saying to man: "Whatever you do for Me, I have provided the opportunity for you." The *mitzvos* which we perform are enabled by Hashem: everything that we do for Him is only through His enablement. We do nothing on our own. The *Noda B'Yehudah* observes that *yiraas Shomayim* is different. We fear Heaven on our own. As a result (since we act preemptively), Hashem "owes" us (in return). It is very much like we do for Him, so now, He does for us, almost as if He "owes" us. Thus, the use of the word *shoeil*, as in borrow. We "lend" to Hashem our fear of Heaven. He returns the "loan" by providing our sustenance.

A Jew once came over to the *Chafetz Chaim*, lamenting, "*Rebbe*, I have nothing for which to live." The *Chafetz Chaim* countered, "Do you have provisions from which to die?" In other words, the man was concerned with his material sustenance, so that he completely ignored the fact that he had yet to provide for a more important journey – the one in the next world, where the only sustenance will be the Torah and *mitzvos* which he has accumulated in this world.

In his *Kol Yehudah*, *Horav Yehudah Tzedakah* addresses the Torah's use of the word *v'atah*, now. He cites the *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* who comments on the *pasuk*, *tamus nafshi mos Yesharim vihi acharisi kamohu* (*Bamidbar* 23:10). Bilaam requested that he be able to die like the righteous, "May my soul die the death of the upright, and my end be like his." He asked that he be granted entry into *Olam Habba*, the World to Come. He wanted to live his entire life steeped in evil and moral profligacy. Yet, at the very end of his life of abandon, he was prepared to change and live upright, so that he could leave this world in the way of the righteous.

The response to the Bilaams of the world is: *V'attah*. "Now" is the time to live righteously – not

later. The time is now. If Jews now accept to live with the fear of Heaven, so that their lives be lived upright and righteously, then they can aspire to leave this world as a *yashar*, upright person. One cannot live like a *rasha*, evil person, and expect to die as a *tzaddik*. One dies the way he lives.

While I am quite aware that the following story does not really fit in with the above *dvar Torah*, it does have a tit-for-tat, "you take care of me, and I will take care of you," theme. Furthermore, today (*Sivan* 16) is the *yahrzeit* of the saintly *Horav Sholom Eliezer Halberstam*, zl, *Rav* of Ratzfert, and son of the *Divrei Chaim*, and so I use my writer's license to relate it.

When the *Ratzferter Rav's* train rolled into Auschwitz, his father, the saintly *Divrei Chaim*, appeared before him and offered to save him from certain death. *Rav Sholom Eliezer* replied, "I am prepared to be killed *al Kiddush Hashem*, to sanctify Hashem's Name, together with my *kehillah*, congregation."

Upon entering the waiting room where, together with the others, he was forced to undress (supposedly to take a shower, in what was actually the gas chamber), *Rav Sholom Eliezer* met a Jew from his hometown. This man was in charge of collecting the clothes. As soon as the Jew saw the *Rav*, he began to weep bitterly. When the *Rav* questioned his reason for crying, the man replied, "Does the *Rav* not know what is happening soon?" The *Rav* replied, "Of course, I know. I am prepared to sanctify Hashem's Name, but why are you crying?" The Jew answered, "*Rebbe*, today it is you – tomorrow it will be me." He knew that no one was allowed to keep such a "sensitive" position near the gas chamber. The Nazis did not want anyone who knew their "secret" to be around for very long.

The *Rav* looked at the man and said, "If you will allow me to keep my *tallis kattan* with me when I go into the gas chamber, I promise you that, in that merit, you will survive the war."

The man took a chance, hoping that no one would notice the *Rav's tallis kattan*, and true to the *tzaddik's* blessing – the man survived the war. Tit-for-tat. The *Rav* died wearing *tzitzis*; the man lived to wear *tzitzis*.