

All these curses will come upon you ... because you will not have hearkened to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, to observe His commandments and decrees that He commanded you. (28:45)

Halfway through the *Tochachah*, Rebuke, in the midst of the frightening curses, the Torah gives us two reasons for this formidable punishment: We did not listen to Hashem (i.e. did not perform His *mitzvos*); we did not serve Him with joy. Understandably, not listening, disregarding Hashem's command, blatantly not observing His ordinances, is reason for such severe punishment. Should a Jew who serves Hashem without joy, whose observance is lackluster, be held in such contempt as to deserve these curses? Perhaps, we may suggest that the Torah is presenting only one reason: our lack of observance. The Torah, however, immediately explains what it considers the barometer for measuring observance: joy. One who carries out *mitzvos*, but does so dispassionately, without vitality and joy, is, in effect, not listening to Hashem. Imagine your wife/mother slaves in the kitchen all day to prepare a sumptuous meal into which she put her heart and soul. You then consume this meal as if it was your "last meal" with about as much feeling as one who is about to have life-threatening surgery. Such an attitude is counterintuitive. Likewise, one who serves Hashem with an attitude that is, at best, without feeling undermines the *mitzvah*. Having said this, I cite an analogy applied by the *Melitzer Rebbe, Shlita*, to explain the significance of joy inherent in *mitzvah* performance.

A Jew who was looking for a job was fortunate to locate an opening with a successful businessman who was looking for a manager. He had a warehouse off the dock, where ships ferrying all sorts of goods were making deliveries. The job of the manager was to count everything and see to it that it was put in its correct place. The manager did quite well in his new position. The owner was so impressed that he asked if the Jew would be willing to travel to distant countries to purchase the wares that the ships were delivering. The man agreed, and he was told to pack his bag. This ship was leaving in the morning.

On the way home, the Jew began to think to himself, "On a regular day, I work a certain amount of hours and receive a set amount per hour, an arrangement to which I am amenable. At the end of a day's work, I return home, eat dinner and basically do whatever I please with my time. On this trip, however, I will be working all day. My time will not be my time, since I am under obligation to the owner. I am responsible for a large sum of money which he will give me for the purpose of purchasing various wares. Yet, I will be receiving the same salary as before, when I was merely a warehouse manager."

The Jew was not happy about it, but he accepted the mission without argument. He did, however, maintain a log of everything that occurred during the trip – every storm, every near capsizing, the sleepless nights, the seasickness that he experienced. He dated every occurrence to the hour. The

entire trip lasted two months, after which he returned home, exhausted and spent. The owner was very impressed with his purchases – both in quality and price – and he said, “You did well.” It was at that point that the worker read off his laundry list of the hardships that he had endured. He detailed every single occurrence, ending, “To top it all off, I am being paid as a worker who puts in his eight-hour day and goes home to a warm meal and a decent bed that is on solid ground, not shaking in a boat. I think I deserve better and more.”

“Indeed,” replied the owner as he quadrupled his salary. Two months later, the owner asked the worker if would consider making another trip. “Absolutely! I would be more than happy.” Now that he was being paid accordingly, he was prepared to endure the hardships once again. This time again, he kept a log of every challenge and near disaster that he had experienced. When the worker returned from his second trip, the owner met him at the dock and was impressed with the man’s joyful demeanor. “How come you are so happy this time, as opposed to your negative expression and mood when you returned from your last trip?” he asked. “Simple,” the worker replied. “Last time I suffered and had no idea if I would be reimbursed for my troubles. Therefore, I was unnerved and depressed by every challenge, to the point of anger. This time, I knew I was being reimbursed for my troubles. Suddenly, they were no longer troubles!” End of the story.

In applying the analogy to our lives, Hashem is the Owner, *Klal Yisrael* is the hired worker, and this world is the far-off land where the fellow seeks merchandise. The merchandise? The Torah, of course. To acquire Torah, one must be willing and prepared to toil, to suffer, to overcome challenge and triumph over adversity. When the Jew realizes that he receives unimaginable reward for every word of Torah which he learns, and the reward doubles, triples and quadruples commensurate with the challenge and pain, he will be only too happy to endure the adversity in order to learn. Every word of Torah, every penny that he gives to *tzedakah*, charity, every *pasuk Tehillim*, every favor that he does for someone in need, everything adds up to incredible reward.

When one believes in the value of Torah observance and a Torah lifestyle of complete commitment to Hashem, he is filled with joy. Otherwise, one whose service to Hashem is lackluster and dispassionate demonstrates by his very attitude that the Torah way has little value to him. Why does he observe? He has to, but is not happy about it. One who does not manifest joy indicates that he lacks inner commitment.