

TORAH WEEKLY



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A Call to Action

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This week's parsha discusses many laws regarding our everyday conduct. This is a very important point to discuss, as a Jew's life is filled with many laws beginning from when one wakes up in the morning and recites Modeh Ani until one lays down at night and recites the Shema. It seems, at times, due to the abundant number of commandments, that we just go through the motions without feeling any connection in our relationship with G-d. Would we not be better off, some wonder, simply contemplating G-d, which would enhance our relationship?

The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan; 1839-1933) addresses this question and points to a verse which we recite every Shabbos afternoon at the end of the mincha prayers. The verse states (Psalms 36:7), "Your righteousness is like mighty mountains, and Your laws are deep waters."

This verse, simply understood, is praising Hashem for His righteousness and for His laws. However, the Chofetz Chaim suggests that the verse is teaching us a fundamental lesson. Sometimes, a person can feel very righteous due to a lofty spiritual level he has reached through inspiration; one can feel as if he has scaled the mountain of God and reached the summit. The verse therefore continues that without following the laws of the Torah, one will eventually fall to the deepest depths. Inspiration is great, but without action constantly strengthening the relationship, everything will inevitably fall away.

This same concept is true regarding the relationship of a husband and wife. It is not uncommon for a couple to initially forge a bond of great closeness early on. However, if the couple banks on living their whole life based on the strong emotions they shared when they first met, they are setting themselves up for failure. The only way a relationship grows properly is if there is constant commitment and dedication toward the other party.

Now that we understand why it is so important to engage in and perform mitzvos, we are still left to explain how we can make our performance of mitzvos more meaningful. The answer for this is found in the Talmud (Bava Kama 17a), where there is a discussion of what is greater, the study of Torah or the practice of Torah. The conclusion is that study is greater for it leads to performance. The obvious problem is that if the greatness of study is only because it leads to action, then practice is really at the top, while study is a means to achieving it. The commentators explain that the Talmud is teaching us that when someone performs a mitzvah after studying the topic, the mitzvah is greater than someone who merely performs that same mitzvah. After studying and grasping an understanding and appreciation of the mitzvah, its performance takes on a whole new level. Besides having a deeper understanding of what is being done, the person has absorbed the mitzvah into himself through studying it; when he performs it, it is an expression of his appreciation of the mitzvah, which is far greater than simply going through the motions. Through Torah study, one inculcates the Torah within himself, and all mitzvos thus become an expression of self.

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