

## **Fringe Benefits**

### **Rabbi Maury Grebenau**

Our Jewish tradition is rife with references to the two worlds that define our existence. We exist first in this physical world (*Olam HaZeh*) where our goal is to follow Hashem's commandments and amass an account of Mitzvot (commandments) and merits whose benefits we will enjoy in the next world (*Olam HaBah*). The Talmud (Kiddushin 39a) comments that the reward that we are to receive can only be given in the next world. The reward is so great that it can't possibly be repaid in this world. The physical world is too restrictive and does not contain enough pleasure to possibly reward us for even one Mitzva!

Chazal make this comment explicitly in Pirkei Avot (Ethics of our Fathers 4:22). Even one moment of enjoyment in the next world is better than all the pleasure in this world. Rav Dessler (1892-1953) comments on the magnitude of this statement. This means that the aggregate pleasure of the entire lifetime of each and every person from the creation of the world until the end of time all harnessed into one moment of pleasure will still not match up to the enjoyment that we will get in one moment of the next world! Our Mitzvot are worth so much that they can only be rewarded in the unbounded spiritual world, even the aggregate of the pleasure available in the entire physical world will not suffice.

If one looks at the second half of this week's Torah portion (Bechukosai) they will be struck by a problem. We are told that if we do what Hashem asks then we will be rewarded with rain in the proper time, crops and other physical payment. This is very difficult. Didn't we just say that no Mitzva can be rewarded with anything physical? Why are we told that our reward for listening to Hashem's command will be realized in the physical world? The same problem is present in the second paragraph of Shema that we recite daily. Are we being cheated out of our just reward? Why are we getting rain at the expense of our spiritual reward?

The Rambam (Laws of Repentance 9:1) explains that all of the physical amenities that are recorded in the Torah are not a payment for our Mitzvot at all. Rather, he explains, our reward for following the Torah is in fact waiting for us in the next world. Yet, Hashem promises us that if we involve ourselves fully in following His commandments and striving to be the best servants of G-d that we can be, all of the obstacles and difficulties that could hinder our development will be removed. If we dedicate ourselves fully to the pursuits that Hashem has laid out for us, then Hashem will make sure that we are in receipt of all of our physical necessities.

The Dubna Magid (an 18<sup>th</sup> century Rabbi and lecturer) was famous for his parables which he would use to illustrate Torah concepts. He gave the following parable to explain the Rambam's comments. A salesman who travels from city to city selling his wares is given money by his employer in two distinct ways. He is given a salary as a payment for his efforts in sales and he is also given an expense account. The salesman

will no doubt spend a good amount of money in room, board and traveling expenses on his many trips. If the salesman is doing well then the employer will increase the money in the expense account. The salesman has made good use of the money and so he will be given the means to continue and even expand his travels. On the other hand if a salesman is not doing a very good job he may find his expense account cut. The employer does not want to continue to fund an account which is not being put to good use.

We can understand our parsha in much the same way. Our salary will be paid in the next world but in this world we still have our expense account. As we travel through this world doing the work that our “Employer” expects of us, we encounter many expenses and have many physical needs. When Hashem sees that we are following the commandments then our expense account is well funded, we receive rain at the proper time, our fruits grow, we make a comfortable living. This is the idea expressed in Pirkei Avot (Ethics of our Fathers 3:6), if we accept the yoke of Torah then the yoke of making a living will be removed! May Hashem bless us all with sustenance and a comfortable living so that we can be free to spend our time in pursuit of our spiritual goals.