

BEN AZZAI:

BE QUICK IN CARRYING OUT A MINOR COMMANDMENT AS IN THE CASE OF A MAJOR ONE, AND FLEE FROM TRANSGRESSION: FOR ONE GOOD DEED LEADS TO ANOTHER GOOD DEED AND ONE TRANSGRESSION LEADS TO ANOTHER TRANSGRESSION; FOR THE REWARD FOR A GOOD DEED IS ANOTHER GOOD DEED AND THE REWARD FOR A TRANSGRESSION IS ANOTHER TRANSGRESSION. (4:2)

בן עזאי אומר: הוי רץ למצוה קלה, ובורח מן העברה. שמצוה גוררת מצוה, ועברה גוררת עברה, ששכר מצוה מצוה, ושכר עברה עברה.

RABBI:

BE AS ATTENTIVE TO A MINOR COMMANDMENT AS TO A MAJOR ONE, FOR THOU KNOWEST NOT WHAT IS THE REWARD TO BE GIVEN FOR THE COMMANDMENTS. TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE LOSS INCURRED BY FULFILLING A COMMANDMENT AGAINST THE REWARD FOR IT, AND THE PROFIT GAINED BY TRANSGRESSION AGAINST THE LOSS IT ENTAILS. (2:1)

והוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבבמורה, שאין אתה יודע מתן שכרן של מצות. והוי מחשב הפסד מצוה כנגד שכרה, ושכר עברה כנגד הפסדה.

BE AS ATTENTIVE TO A MINOR COMMANDMENT AS TO A MAJOR ONE

If thou hast carried out one commandment and dost not regret having done so, in the end it will lead to many commandments [to be carried out]; if one commits one transgression and does not regret having transgressed, in the end it leads to many transgressions (ARN).

Recoil from a light sin, so that you may recoil from a grievous sin. Hasten to overtake a good act so that calamity should not overtake you. If transgression has come your way, then do not be distressed by that transgression, but by the one coming after it. If a good deed has come your way, then do not rejoice at that good deed, but at the one coming after it (ARNB).

A MINOR COMMANDMENT:

That is to say, even a commandment that seems insignificant in your sight—hasten to carry it out (Vitry).

ONE GOOD DEED LEADS TO ANOTHER GOOD DEED

It is a natural thing for a person who carries out one small commandment to find it easier afterward to carry out another, which in comparison with the first may be even more difficult—because by nature he has already grown accustomed to carrying out commandments. And if he carries out the commandments twice and three times . . . habit will govern him and he will carry out the commandments. . . . And if a person has committed one transgression and withdrawn from the service of the Lord, blessed be He, then he will commit another transgression when it comes his way, even if his evil impulse does not particularly desire it—because he has become victim to the evil impulse; though he may not desire very much to commit that sin, he will go on transgressing because his nature has grown accustomed to committing every abomination which the Lord hates (Rabbi Jonah).

THE REWARD FOR A GOOD DEED:

If you carry out a minor commandment you will be rewarded by the opportunity to carry out an even greater commandment, and then you will receive a rich reward for all the commandments you carried out (Vitry).

The reward for carrying out commandments and the punishment for committing transgressions take place not in this world but in the world to come. . . . If we eagerly carry out the commandments, the Holy One, blessed be He, rewards us with prosperity. . . . And along with this reward comes the pleasure of engaging in the fulfillment of still other commandments, and then we receive rich reward in the world to come. Thus the reward for carrying out the first commandment brings leisure from worldly preoccupations, and the opportunity to carry out other commandments, which win for a person the life of the world to come. But if we commit transgressions and pursue worldly vanities then the Holy One, blessed be He, withholds prosperity . . . so that we do not get the leisure to carry out commandments. Moreover, evil decrees are decreed against us which compel us to transgress the words of the Torah. Thus it turns out that those transgressions which we com-

mitted by choice become the cause of still other transgressions (Aknin).

There are some who interpret this saying as follows: the reward for carrying out a commandment is the very commandment which the man carried out. What greater reward can a person seek in this world than to be inscribed as one whose actions shine in the splendor of the living God in the world to come? (Nahmias).

BE AS ATTENTIVE TO A MINOR COMMANDMENT AS TO A MAJOR ONE

Rabbi Hiyya taught (Pesikta Rabbati 121b) by way of parable: A king brought laborers into one of his orchards, but did not inform them in advance what would be the compensation for the respective plants they would cultivate. For had he given this information, each of them would have looked for that plant for which the compensation was liberal and taken care of it. As a result only some of the work in the orchard would have been taken care of; some would have been neglected. Said Rabbi Aha in the name of Rabbi Abba bar Kahana: The Holy One did not reveal what would be the reward for the different commandments of the Torah, lest only some of these be carried out, while some would be neglected (Vitry).

One must be as attentive to a commandment which he regards as minor—for example, rejoicing during the festivals, learning the Holy Tongue (Hebrew)—as to a commandment of whose major importance we have been informed—for example, the law of circumcision, Fringes (Numbers 15:37-41), the paschal offering. . . . For as regards “positive commandments,” we have never been informed what is the reward set aside by the Lord, blessed be He, for each of them . . . ; and that is why we must be attentive to all of them (Maimonides).

There may be a commandment which seems minor to you, but from it may be derived one of the basic principles of the Torah: for example, in your eyes the “benediction of the day” in the Kiddush prayer of the Sabbath may seem a minor matter; yet it is something which fixes in men’s hearts the belief in *creatio ex nihilo* (Meiri).

TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE LOSS INCURRED BY FULFILLING A COMMANDMENT AGAINST THE REWARD FOR IT.

If it seems to you that by fulfilling a commandment you will be incurring a loss—for example, when you have to dispose at a loss of meats that have become ritually disqualified, or when because of the Sabbath

you cannot save produce from being damaged in your field—don't even think of saying, "How shall I stand by and suffer a loss?"; compare rather your present loss with the reward, a thousand times as much!, in store for you in the world to come. Restrain yourself and compare your loss with that gain! . . . And do not covet your fellow's wealth in your heart. Think not of robbing or stealing, or keeping what he has lost and you found. Take stock of what you may profit now as against what your loss will be; take to heart that you will lose a thousand times as much in the world to come (Vitry).

Although we have not been informed how precious each particular commandment is, a distinction between them may be made, thus: In the case of a positive commandment, if you find that the penalty for transgressing it is a heavy one, be sure that the reward for fulfilling it will be a goodly one. . . . If the penalty for a sin which a person commits is a heavy one, then if he refrains from that particular sin, his reward is correspondingly great. This is the meaning of the statement in the Talmud (Makkot, end): Whoever refrains from sinning is rewarded like one who has carried out a commandment (Maimonides).

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