

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter XVIII: Mishpatim (Ex. 21:1–24:18)

Essay 10. Serve G-d with wholehearted love, not with expectation of a reward

“Then [Moses] took the book of the covenant and read it into the ears of the people, and they said, ‘All that the L-rd has said—we will do and we will hear (נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע) (*na’aseh v’nishmah*).”

- Ex. 24:7

**גְּמָרָא** דְּשַׁבַּת אָמַר ר' אֱלֵעָזָר<sup>1</sup> בְּשִׁעָה שֶׁהַקְּדִימוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל נַעֲשֶׂה לְנִשְׁמָע יִצְאָתָהּ בַּת קוֹל וְאָמְרָה לָהֶם מִי גִילָה לְבָנֵי רְזוּזָה שְׂמֵלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת מִשְׁתַּמְּשִׁין בּוֹ? שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "בְּרָכּוֹ ה' מְלֹאכָיו" וְכוּ' בְּרִישָׁא "עֲשִׂי", וְהֵדָר "לְשִׁמְעָה". ע"כ.

There is a **Gemara of tractate Shabbat** (88a):

**Rabbi Elazar said: When Israel advanced “We will do” before “We will hear,” a Divine Voice (*bat kol*) emerged and said to them: “Who revealed to my children this secret that the ministering angels use? As it is written: ‘Bless the L-rd, you angels of His, you mighty in strength, that fulfill His word, listening to the voice of His word’ (Ps. 103:20).”** ”

...

A heretic said to Rava, “[You] impulsive nation, who advanced your mouths [by saying] ‘We will do’ before your ears [could hear what was expected of you], you still bear your impulsiveness [acting without thinking]. You should listen first. If you are capable [of fulfilling the commands], accept [them]. If not, do not accept [them].

[Rava] said to him: [Regarding we] who proceed wholeheartedly, it is written: “The integrity of the upright will guide them” (Prov. 11:3), while about those people who walk in deceit, it is written: “And the perverseness of the faithless will destroy them.” (Ibid.)

- Shabbat 88a–88b

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<sup>1</sup> The first edition had אר"ע, which should have been אר"א, as <https://bavli.genizah.org> shows that all known editions and manuscripts have “Rabbi Elazar.”

קשה טובא דאיך יתכן שייעשו קודם שישמעו אם לא ידעו מה לעשות, ומהו מי גילה לבני רז זה דמה רז שייך כאן, ועוד בסמוך במעשה דההוא מינא מה שייך דסגינן בשלימותא ובעלילותא וכיו.

**It's very difficult to understand how “they will do” before “they will hear,” if they wouldn't know what to do; and what is the meaning of “Who revealed to my children this secret,” for what secret is relevant here? Further, in conjunction with the incident of the heretic, what relevance is there to the terms “that they proceed wholeheartedly” and “who walk in deceit”?**

וניש לומר שאמרו במדרש על פסוק "אשר יעשה אתם האדם וחי בהם", ישראל פהנים ולויים לא נאמר אלא האדם, לומר לה דאפילו גוי ועוסק בתורה הרי הוא ככהן גדול, אלא שאינם מקבלים שכר כמצנה ועושה אלא כמי שאינו מצנה ועושה.

**It can be said that it says in the Midrash Num. Rabbah 13:16 on the verse, “You shall keep My laws and My rules, for the man who does these shall live by them” (Lev. 18:5), “[The verse] does not say, ‘Israel[ites], Cohanim (the priestly class), and Levites,’ rather only ‘the man,’ to say to you that even a gentile who engages in the Torah is considered as elevated as the high priest.<sup>2</sup> But [such gentiles] do not receive a reward like those who are obligated and perform [commandments], but rather [a reward] like one who is not obligated but who nevertheless performs [commandments].**

ובפרק קמא דאבות תנן אל תהיו כעבדים המשמשים על מנת לקבל פרס, כי זו אינה נקראת עבודה שלימה עבודה תמה.

**In the first chapter of tractate Pirkei Avot (1:3), it is taught, “Antigonus a man of Socho received [the oral tradition] from Shimon the Righteous. He used to say: ‘Do not be like servants who serve the master in the expectation of receiving a reward, but be like servants who serve the master without the expectation of receiving a reward, and let the fear of Heaven be upon you.’ ” For [serving in the expectation of receiving a reward] is not called “a complete service; a pure service.”**

נהכי נמי בנעשה ונשמע הוא דומה לזה, דאין הכי נמי שהיה צריך להם לישראל תחלה לשמוע סדר עבודות והמצוות ואחר כך לעבוד, אמנם פוננת ישראל היתה כך, אפילו אם לא הייתה נותן לנו שכר כמצנה ועושה אלא כשאינו מצנה דיינו. וזהו סוד גדול שמלאכי השרת משתמשים בו, שהם אינם מקפידים לתשלום גמול.

**Indeed, with “We will do and we will hear,” it is like this. Indeed, it was necessary for them, for Israel, to initially hear the set order of the Temple service and the commandments and afterward to conduct the Temple service and other commandments. But in truth, the intent**

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<sup>2</sup> See also Bava Kamma 38a: “[The Gemara asks:] But isn't it taught [in a *Baraita*], Rabbi Meir says: From where [is it derived] that even a gentile who engages in Torah is like a High Priest? The verse states, ‘For the man who does these shall live by them’ (Lev. 18:5). It is not stated: priests and Levites and Israelites, but rather “a man.” You have therefore learned that even a gentile who engages in Torah is like a High Priest.”

**of Israel was thus: even if He doesn't give us a reward as though we were obligated and performed, but only as though we were not obligated but still performed, it is enough for us!**

In other words, a gentile or someone in the process of converting to Judaism (who is not obligated to fulfill the commandments) will receive a reward for observing them, while a Jew (who is obligated to fulfill the commandments) will receive an even greater reward for observing them. Thus, “we will do and we will hear” is equivalent to saying, “If G-d has not yet given us the commandments, then we are not (yet) obligated in them. If we fulfill them anyway, and He gives us a reward, it won't be as great as the reward that we might receive after we become obligated in the commandments. Still, even such a lesser reward would be enough for us.”

Of course, practically speaking, one can't fulfill a commandment unless he has instructions. But they were not focused on the reward, and certainly not on maximizing it. Rather, their motivation was the wholehearted love of G-d, and not the expectation of a reward.

**This is the great esoteric secret that the ministering angels use, for they are not stringent to expect payment of a reward.**

וְעִיקַר הַמִּינוּת יְדוּעַ שֶׁבָּא מִחֵמַת דְּבָר זֶה, שֶׁצָּדוּק וּבִיתוֹס נִשְׁתַּבְּשׁוּ בַּמִּשְׁנָה זוֹ, וְלַעוֹלָם הָיוּ מוֹנִים אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְרָבָא הִשִּׁיב לְהַוּא מִיָּנָא אֲנִן סְגִינָן בְּשְׁלִימוּתָא וְעוֹבְדִים לְאֵל בְּאַהֲבָה רַבָּה וְכוּ', אֲבָל הַנֶּה אֵינְשֵׁי דְסָגְנָן בְּעֵלְיוּתָא וְרוֹצִים לַעֲבֹד עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס כְּתִיב בְּהוּ וְכוּ', וְעַיִן עוֹד לַעֲיִל עַל זֶה בְּסֵדֶר יְתֵרוֹ.

**It is known that the principle of heresy comes about because of this expectation of a reward, that Tsadok and Baitus went wrong on this Mishnah** of Pirkei Avot 1:3. These were students of Antigonus who became heretics, founding the factions of the Sadducees and the Baitusees. They had reasoned: “Can a person expect that his servant work for him all day without receiving compensation? We must conclude that our teacher would not say so if he believed in a life to come and the resurrection of the dead.” (Avot D'Rabbi Natan 5:2). **Rava answered to this heretic,**<sup>3</sup> **“[Regarding] we who proceed wholeheartedly and serve G-d with great love, it is written: ‘The integrity of the upright will guide them’ (Prov. 11:3), but [regarding] those people walk in deceit and want to serve in order to receive a reward, it is written, ‘And the perverseness of the faithless will destroy them.’ (ibid.)”**

Thus, the relevance of “that they proceed wholeheartedly” was that the children of Israel were focused on serving G-d, and not on a reward, as explained above; and the relevance of “who walk in deceit,” was that the heretics taught that Judaism does not believe in a life to come or in the resurrection of the dead.

**See further above on this in the presentation for the previous parsha, Yitro (essay 12).**

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<sup>3</sup> Paraphrasing Shabbat 88b.