

Dvar Torah for 17th Tammuz

written by breslov.org

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Based on Likutey Halakhot, Kriat HaTorah 4:4

There are a number of virtues and qualities you need if you want to succeed as a Jew. Most are well-known: faith, Torah knowledge, mitzvah observance and fear of God. I haven't even named the topic yet, but allow me to digress before I do.

Most people, when they hear the words "fear of God," immediately assume that some sort of neurotic fear is meant. Fantasies of a Divine—or Satanic—torture chamber take up residence in the mind.

Some respond by becoming uptight—a totally un-Jewish disposition—and "religious," others recoil in despair and drown themselves in temporarily pleasant diversions, while others are repulsed and dismiss the whole enterprise, much to their and our detriment.

Fear of God is a normal, healthy fear, akin to the fear of sticking a fork in an outlet or changing lanes without looking in the rear-view mirror. The driver's manual counsels to check our mirrors and make sure there are no hazards before we pull out of the driveway or parking space. The Whole Life Manual, aka the Torah, offers counsel about hazards we might not have recognized on our own. It pays to heed those warnings. End of digression.

One necessary quality for Jewish success that is too rarely discussed is ratzon, desire. To succeed at any endeavor one needs ambition, commitment and determination. Whatever inborn measure of ambition one has, one can always add to it. Most of us have not been taught to spend our ambition on Jewishness. On intellectual endeavors*, on making money, on popularity, on being a good person, yes. But on being a "big" Jew, a person

dedicated to becoming a manifestation of the fine behavior and refined character traits that God's Torah teaches to have, no. When did anyone tell us that we should use (some of) our ratzon on that?

The 17th of Tammuz is the anniversary of Moshe Rabbeinu's (Moses) breaking the Luchot (Tablets of the Decalogue). He broke them because he saw that the Jewish people had made the Golden Calf. Reb Noson explains that what underlay the making of the Golden Calf was a denial that God's ratzon determines every event that occurs. If, as the calf-makers mistakenly supposed, there was a vacuum of ratzon, they could manipulate events to their liking, any way they chose.

Moshe Rabbeinu broke the Luchot because the world was unready for such a strong expression of Divine ratzon. His next two forays to Sinai changed that and he was able to bring the second Luchot safely into the world. Reb Noson writes that when we do hagbah (lifting the open scroll after the Torah reading) we are making amends for the Golden Calf. Hagbah is a declaration that the knowledge of God's ambition and desire, ratzon, for Creation, that was just read, needs our ratzon, determination, to become true. The scroll of all-encompassing wisdom and kindness is lifted skyward, to remind us to raise every vestige of our ratzon to God's.

May we soon see the coming of the righteous Redeemer and the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash, swiftly, in our lifetime. Amen.

agutn Shabbos!

Shabbat Shalom!

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