

PARSHAS BEHAR - BECHUKOSAI – RABBI JONATHAN SHOOTER

In this weeks haftara, the verse says, "I, Hashem, examine the heart and test the mind, to give to man according to his ways, like the fruit of his deeds." (Yirmiyahu 17:10).

Rav Binyomin Moskovits once related that one can take *mussar* from everything. To catch a flight, one has to undergo many stringent security checks. One's hand luggage must not contain any sharp objects; one's shoes even have to be checked. Then there is the x-ray machine, which reveals everything to the watchful inspector. (Actually on our return to Israel recently we had a container of cream cheese confiscated, we thought it was a solid, but they paskened it was a liquid). So too, Hashem puts us through a test: "I, Hashem, examine the heart and test the mind." The heart and mind of a person go through Hashem's "x-ray machine" to determine what's going on in his heart. People think that what is most important is deeds, followed by words, and then thoughts. Rav Moskovits explained that really it is the thoughts behind something that Hashem is most interested in, the motives and feelings he has behind his actions. Hashem inspects each person's motives and hashkafos most thoroughly to determine the status of a person's deeds.

What follows from this is that we may think we have mountains of mitzvos, higher than Everest. Once they are scrutinized, it may be proven that they are not all we think they are. Was a mitzvah done by rote without any thought to it? Maybe a mitzvah is just done because it's fashionable? Maybe even in his mitzvos they are done for some other ulterior motive? There is what's called *leshem Shomayim*, and then there is *leshem aretz*. Then there is also a mixture, what you could call '*leshem shm-aretz*', where you harness the *leshem aretz*, with a mitzvah, yet that mitzvah is solely motivated by *aretz*, with just a veneer of *leshem Shomayim*.

We find this in the book of Rus, which we read on Shavuot. Elimelech deserted the people and left Eretz Yisroel during the terrible famine. He was one of the leaders of the generation, and one of the wealthiest. Rav Shlomo Brevda said as follows. If you would have asked Elimelech at the time why he left, he would have said 'you know I am trying to finish Shas. Every time I sit down to learn there's a knock at the door, someone else asking for money. Then I go to shul and a dozen beggars approach me. It's bad for my avodas Hashem to stay.' The truth was that he should have given and given. Also his leaving was a demoralising factor for those who remained, a leader was deserting them. Similarly, his two sons married Moabite women. If you would have asked them what they are doing, they would have said 'we aren't just marrying non-Jewish women. We have come to uncover the sparks of kedusha that are found in Moav, to bring the Shechina'. Yet they too were punished severely.

This is what our verse says, that Hashem examines the heart and tests the mind, 'to give to man according to his ways, like the fruit of his deeds'. Hashem knows one's true motivations. You can fool some of the people some of the time, and even all the people all the time, but you can't fool Hashem any of the time. If one realises his true motives, then at least there is hope, one knows where he stands and one may even move up. If one acts *leshem aretz* and then proves everything is *leshem Shomayim*, then there is no hope. May all our actions, deeds and motivations be truly for the purpose of bringing us closer to Hashem.