AFTER ALL, THE LORD DOES NOT ASK FOR MUCH!

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> *And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you this day for your good* (Deut. 10:12, 13).

It is generally accepted that the core of the book of *Devarim* [Deuteronomy] consists of three distinct orations delivered by Moses to the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan at the end of the 40th year since the Exodus.[1] The first (Deut. 1:1-4:40), reviews the historical events leading up to their present position, the second (5:1-26:19) deals with the commandments of the Torah, and in the third (27:9-31:13) Moses renews the Covenant between God and the people of Israel.

The two verses which appear at the head of this article occur in Moses' second oration, dealing with statutes and judgments received from the Lord. Here, Moses had been relating the wondrous manner by which the commandments had been revealed to the people and his personal role in their dissemination. Particularly now, as the people are about to enter the land, Moses exhorts them not to forget the commandments, to study them constantly and to transmit them faithfully to the next generation. In addition, Moses does not hesitate to remind them of their deep-rooted tendency (9:13) to rebel against the Lord and scorn their mission by perversely looking back with longing to their Egyptian experience (referring to Numbers 21:5).

I wish to suggest that in these verses Moses reaches a climactic point in his oration. He wishes to make a summary statement that will somehow encompass the major components of the Divine service, present them in sequential order, and at the same time persuade his audience as to why they should be observed.

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And so Moses begins: *'And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but* [ki-im] . . . (v. 10:12).

The elements of persuasion are found at the beginning and end of the statement. Before listing the actual elements of the Divine service, Moses provides the context in which they are to be considered. The phrase *ki-im* is a diminutive implying smallness.[2] After all, what the Lord requires of you is not really much (or very difficult).[3] Moses then proceeds to list five by no means easy requirements:

1. *to fear* [le yirah] *the Lord your God*
2. *to walk in all His ways* [lalechet bechol d'rakhav]
3. *and to love* [u le ahava] *Him*
4. *and to serve* [ve la'avode] *the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul*
5. *to keep* [lishmor] *the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you this day*.

In what sense did Moses believe that the Israelites might actually consider these five weighty and by no means easy demands to be "not much"?[4] Only, I submit, in a comparative sense. Moses knew that as a result of their recent encounters with the people of Moab and Midian, and their recent conquest of Sihon and Og, the Amorite kings, the Israelites had become acquainted with their gods and cult practices which included child sacrifices.[5] It is with this as backdrop that Moses urges the people to compare, paraphrasing Deuteronomy 10:12: *But as for you Israel, all that your God asks of you is only* [ki-im] *to . . . .*

The five requirements listed by Moses follow a particular sequence which in terms of the psychology of religious experience is both chronological and connected causally. The first stage is *to fear* [le yirah] *the Lord your God*.[6] Before one can worship there must be a unique feeling of "ultimate concern" for the object of worship which is experienced as "wholly other" and as "*mysterium tremendum*."[7] In this context, the biblical term *yirah* is best translated as "reverence." We have encountered as Someone before whom we are prepared not to flee nor to hide, nor to grovel but to stand in awe and bend our knee in worship.

The step that follows is *to walk in all His ways* [lalechet bechol d'rachav]. While sounding very vague, this phrase has a very specific meaning. By the

"ways of the Lord" is meant not only "the ways in which the Lord wishes man to walk," but also "the ways in which the Lord Himself walks," particularly actions and attitudes that are of moral value. This is clearly indicated in the following verse which speaks of Abraham's obligation to his children: *that they may keep the way of the Lord* [derech HaShem] *to do righteousness and justice* (Gen. 18:19). While *yirah* may aptly describe the awe felt before the "wholly other," it can develop religiously only when moral value can be associated with the object of worship. In biblical religious experience, He who is "the great, the mighty and the awesome" is also He *Who does justice for the orphan and the widow and loves the stranger* (Deut. 10:17, 18).[8]

Therefore, you shall *walk in all His ways* and once you begin to experience the intrinsic good of moral action and moral character, and to realize that these values are indeed in some sense part of God's essence, then we are ready for the next step which is to love Him. Once the object of our awe is perceived as the Good, as the source of moral value, then our reverential relationship can develop into love.

It will be recalled that the original experience contained an element we called "ultimate concern." The worshipper begins to feel that this is the most important element in his life, which, once saturated with love, becomes a consuming passion. Thus, he may now be called upon to serve God in a manner befitting the overwhelming nature of his experience; that is, to serve God *with all your heart and with all your soul*. What is important in biblical worship is not only what you do but how you do it. The biblical God demands a relationship of exclusivity. You must serve Him *with all your heart* so that no room is left therein for worship of anything else.

Finally, the fifth requirement, which now sounds rather prosaic, is the insistence *to keep the commandments and the statutes*. What is the relationship between such lofty states of religious consciousness as reverence and love of God and the observance of the *mitzvot* which cover all aspects of life, touch upon all relationships, and concern the action, speech and attitudes? It is first an authentic expression of the reverence, the love and passionate desire to serve God. But where the reverence and love are weak, the actual observance of the commandments, with its evocation of the Presence of God, can strengthen these elemental emotions. Thus, the function of the practical commandments is both expressive and impressive.

In the last two words of his statement, Moses reverts to the task he set for himself in the opening phrase, which was not only to inform but also to persuade, to explain to the people why they should respond positively to these demands. After all, it is *le tov lakh* [for your own good].[9] It is not for the benefit of the Lord that He asks this of you. Unlike the gods of the pagans, He is self-sufficient, totally autonomous. He needs neither your offerings nor your praise. It is all *le tov lakh*. By exercising one's free will to decide to walk in His ways each individual can actualize his potential as one created in His image to become like unto Him, a moral personality who has earned fellowship with the Divine.

NOTES

1. See David Tzvi Hoffman in the introduction to his commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy
2. Compare Micah 6:8.
3. See Deuteronomy 30;11-14: *For this commandment which I command you this day, is not too hard for you, neither is it far off . . . but the word is very close to you in your mouth and in your heart that you may do it*.
4. See the wonder of the rabbis in Berachot 33b, "is *yirah* a small matter?"
5. Deuteronomy 12:31
6. See Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957) p. 3.
7. See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958) pp. 12, 25.
8. *Praise the Lord for He is good . . .* (Ps. 136:1).
9. The dramatic impact of these last two words is enhanced by the fact that they are introduced by the same prefix "*le*" as the previous five requirements. While in these *le* simply means "to," here in the last two words *le tov lakh* it takes on the meaning "in order to benefit you," which comes as a surprise.