

Light Insight

Diamonds That Are Forever

Have you noticed that when you buy presents for young children, after a few minutes they usually seem more interested in the box that the present came in, than the present itself.

When it comes to *mitzvot*, we are like children being given a present which is valuable beyond our wildest dreams. We have no idea what a *mitzva* is. We have no idea of its value. If you give a child a priceless Cartier necklace, he will pick it up and play with it. It's bright and shiny. But after a few minutes he will probably get bored with the necklace and start to play with the red velvet-lined box that the necklace came in.

"And Jacob kissed Rachel and lifted up his voice and wept." Jacob wept because he came to Rachel penniless. While on the

way to Charan, Esau's son Elifaz, acting on his father's command, pursued Jacob and was about to kill him. Elifaz, however, had been raised by his grandfather, Isaac, and he could not bring himself to kill his uncle Jacob.

Elifaz asked Jacob what he should do: How could he let Jacob live and yet fulfill the *mitzva* of honoring his father's command?

Jacob told him to take all his money. For the Sages say that someone who is poor is considered as though he were dead. In this way Elifaz would be able to fulfill the letter of his father's command and fulfill the *mitzva* of honoring his father.

This is a very strange dialogue: If a person's father tells him to eat a Cheeseburger, would he be penalized for failing to honor his parents by refusing to eat the burger? The limit of honoring one's parents is where they instruct you to violate the will of G-d. So why did Elifaz seek Jacob's advice on how to honor

his father? Clearly, there was no *mitzva* incumbent upon Elifaz.

We can see from this how great was the love of those first generations for *mitzvot*. Even though Elifaz had no obligation to fulfill his father's command whatsoever, Jacob spent all his money and impoverished himself so that Elifaz could fulfill the *mitzva* of "*Kibud Av*" (honoring one's father).

A *tzadik* realizes that the smallest gift that G-d gives us is as important as the largest: Neither may be wasted or neglected. Even though Esau wanted Jacob's death and not his impoverishment, nevertheless Jacob gave up his entire fortune so that a *mitzva* could be fulfilled.

The Patriarchs knew the value of "the diamonds in the box." They never would think twice about giving away the box — spending all their money — because the box is only to hold the diamonds. They knew that this world and all its riches are nothing more than a velvet-lined Cartier box.

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LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

Beth El

Abraham's first encampment upon entering the Land of Israel was east of this city (*Genesis 12:8*). (The same name meaning "House of G-d" was applied by Jacob to Mt. Moriah where the Holy Temple would eventually be built.)

It was in Beth El that the patron angel of Esau who wrestled with Jacob (*Genesis 32:25*) eventually conceded to the patriarch Jacob that he was entitled to the blessings he received from his father Isaac in place of Esau (*Hoshea 12:5*). The modern settlement bearing this name is the home of a Yeshivat Hesder.

Response Line

Watching the Detectives

Name withheld wrote:

I am a NYC Police Detective. Part of my duties include interrogation of people who have been arrested for usually violent crimes. Before this process I read the suspect his rights, and then attempt to obtain a written confession from him. I do this by feigning sympathy and understanding thereby gaining his confidence. I never make false promises, threats or use violence. The person usually leaves the room shaking my hand and thinking that I'm his friend. Basically what I am doing is misleading, although legal. I can't help but feel guilty, it's like I've gained someone's trust and betrayed them. Do you think that my guilt feelings are justified?

Dear Name withheld,

I've read your letter many times and each time I am struck by your

extraordinary sensitivity.

According to Jewish Law there is absolutely no

problem with building a relationship with someone in order to be able to right a wrong. However, this is on condition that the suspect is neither promised something that you can't deliver, or coerced into making a confession. Even if it is perfectly clear that he is guilty of a crime, it's forbidden to use physical force or verbal threats to have him admit it. May G-d grant you the ability to carry on with your important work and retain your acute sensitivity.

The Other Six Days

Mike Perchik wrote:

So I sit down at my desk and start the workday...is there a prayer I should be saying? How does a person bring G-d to work?

Dear Mike,

What an interesting question,

and one that everyone should really ask himself.

Working gives you a chance to do countless *mitzvot* and good deeds: Keeping your word to employers, employees and clients, paying workers on time, treating fellow workers with respect, fulfilling obligations to support your family, contributing to the good of society. These are all important parts of Jewish Law which you can fulfill at work.

Simply supporting oneself is a *mitzvah* because it helps eliminate temptation to steal.

In the words of the Sages, it is possible for a shoe-maker to stitch every stitch in the Name of G-d.

Approach your work as an opportunity to serve G-d by doing all that is required, and pray for success in this.

And, if you set aside time to study Torah in the course of your busy schedule (not at your employers' expense), it is possible to elevate the mundane workday to a spiritual plane.