

5778:

Some people are inspired to do things out of a sense of reward, financial, personal or otherwise. Others are moved to action through the threat of punishment or possible loss. Most of us respond to our responsibilities to family, school or work through a combination of positive and negative consequences. The words of Antigonus of Sokho, recorded in the rabbinic work Pirkei Avot, sum up this combined approach: 'Serve the master not out of expectation of reward;' and 'May the fear of heaven be upon you.' Our tradition teaches that there are two possible motivations in our relationship with God, the ultimate master: Love, and fear of punishment. These two approaches are what we might call the carrot and the stick.

But the idea that we require both positive and negative motivations goes back to the Torah itself. This week's parshah is the source for the second paragraph of the Shema, called *v'haya im shamo'a* in rabbinic parlance, after its first words. That paragraph promises rain and abundance if we follow God's laws, and drought and suffering if we do not, a divine carrot and stick. For those who find it difficult to relate to that kind of God, you're in luck, because it has been suggested that the second paragraph is only for the kind of person who needs the motivation of the stick; if you don't, then the first paragraph of the Shema is for you. There, we are charged to relate to God wholeheartedly and lovingly through the symbols of our tradition (mezuzah, tefillin) and through teaching Torah to our children.

So whether you respond better to the carrot of Jewish symbols and learning or to the stick of fear of God, the Shema has you covered. There are many paths of righteousness, many doors to the divine, if we only open ourselves up to them. The Shema is recited twice a day, year round; there is no better way to deepen our engagement with Judaism than to learn its words well enough to read and understand it, a task that daily recitation makes much easier.

My carrot for encouraging you to learn and to recite the Shema twice daily is the feeling of achievement, connection and spirituality that it offers. My stick is...well, I don't really have a stick, but then you're not the type that needs one, are you?

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Jeff Pivo