

Letting G*d Provide Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer

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Yom Kippur

The rabbi of Brisk was among those who were confined in the Warsaw Ghetto. Food was sorely lacking in war-time Warsaw, especially in the Ghetto, but there was one individual who was able to gather some bread each day and bring it to the rabbi.

It was the eighth of Tishri. The next day would be Erev Yom Kippur (the day preceding Yom Kippur), and, as our sages tell us, it is as great a Mitzvah, a Commandment, to feast on Erev Yom Kippur as it is to fast on Yom Kippur. (That seems to be the part of the Yom Kippur observance that most people, strangely, forget about; they eat well, of course, but they forget that it is a Mitzvah, a great Mitzvah, to do so.) Considering his difficult situation, the rabbi decided to refrain from eating his entire ration of bread, so that he would be certain of having – if not a greater ration than usual – at least something to eat on Erev Yom Kippur.

The next day came, Erev Yom Kippur. The rabbi's supplier came to him with the usual ration of bread, but this time he brought an apology as well. "I am sorry, Rabbi," he said, "for bringing only your usual ration of bread. I had obtained some nice fish for you, but, as I was leaving to bring you the food, a bomb fell near me, and the explosion destroyed the piece of fish."

The rabbi understood the message from Heaven. If he had exercised faith in G*d's Providence, if he had eaten his full ration of bread the previous day, Heaven would have provided him with a piece of fish with which to celebrate Erev Yom Kippur.

Should we, then, not prepare for the future? Are we to leave everything in the hands of Heaven? Well, ultimately, yes; we know that, ultimately, everything is in the hands of Heaven (except, as our sages never weary of reminding us, the awe of Heaven). But most of us are not at that level of trust, and so we are not expected to exercise that degree of faith. (We do, however, have an obligation to work toward it.) The rabbi of Brisk, on the other hand, was a man of great spiritual attainments; he knew better.

For us ordinary people to put something aside for Erev Yom Kippur, so that we will be able to observe the Commandment to eat on the day before the fast, is praiseworthy; for someone of the attainments of the rabbi of Brisk it is a breach of faith.

To the level of faith which will enable us consciously to rely on G*d to provide our every need, may we speedily be led.

A gentle fast to you all.

L'shanah tovah tikatevu v'tehatemu; may you be inscribed and sealed for a good year.