

Forward and Upward **Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer**

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Parshat Behukotai

If you follow My Statutes and observe My Commandments and do them, we read (Leviticus 26:3), G*d will respond by granting us a veritable litany of blessings. A more literal reading of the Hebrew text provides an important lesson.

The literal translation of this verse is, **If you walk in My Statutes**, etc., and this teaches us perhaps the most important spiritual lesson of all; we must always be walking, moving forward in our spirituality.

Our Master and teacher, Rebbe Menahem Mendel of Kotzk (c. 1787-1859) goes so far as to say that one who is not on a higher spiritual level today than yesterday has actually fallen. It may indeed be the case that we sometimes (even often) feel we must struggle just to maintain our present level, but the deeper truth, the lesson which we are taught by this verse, is that we need always to be pushing ourselves to higher and higher levels of spiritual attainment, to strengthen and enhance our connection to our Creator.

This, then, is the lesson the Torah is teaching us; it is not enough merely to try; we must always be “walking” – moving ahead on our respective spiritual paths. It is as if our spiritual path were an escalator going down. If we continually push ourselves, if we lengthen our stride, we can move up the down escalator. If we stop, however, the escalator will carry us down.

We may say that we can just move across to the “up” escalator, but there is no “up” escalator. There is a continual flow of Divine energy from “above” that sustains the world, but that very flow has the constant effect of carrying us with it, and we must work at every moment to move upward, against the current, so to speak.

It is as if, to change the metaphor, we were like salmon. The salmon swim upstream, leaping over waterfalls and negotiating rapids to go back to the very stream in which they were hatched. Just so, we swim upstream in the flow of Divine energy to reach the Place from which we have come, to go back Home again.

When we become spiritually stagnated, when we stop moving forward, we allow the current to carry us to a lower level, and, so very often, we do not even realize it is happening.

To a realization of the need to walk, to move constantly forward and upward in our spirituality, may we soon be led.

Shabbat Shalom.