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Prosperous Sages

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1.

YOUR REWARD IS VERY GREAT

In his commentary on the verse,¹ “Fear not, Avram, I am a shield for you; your reward is very great,” Rashi explains² that Avraham was worried: He thought that since “this miracle had been performed — that he killed the kings... — ‘Perhaps I have been rewarded for all my righteous acts,” to which Hashem responded: “‘Fear not, Avram’... (and) regarding your worry that you have received all your reward {the verse continues}, ‘your reward is very great.’”

At first glance, this is problematic: Avraham’s service to Hashem was (**not** motivated by a desire for reward. He served Hashem solely **for its own sake**. As Rambam³ says when discussing the virtue of “a person who serves out of love”: “He occupies himself in Torah study and mitzvos... for no ulterior motive... and not to acquire benefit. Rather, he does what is true because it is true.” Rambam ends: “This is a very high level... it was the level of **Avraham**... whose service was motivated only by love.”

In light of this description, how could it be said that Avraham, “whose service was motivated only by love,”⁴ **feared** that ultimately he would not receive any reward, to the extent that Hashem needed to reassure him, “Fear not... your reward is very great”?⁵

2.

THE GOOD THAT FOLLOWS

Seemingly, this quandary might be resolved as follows:

Avraham’s service was indeed completely selfless, with no regard for reward (not even the {more sublime} reward of the World to Come).⁶ Nevertheless, knowing that no reward was forthcoming {would still cause him distress, as it} would indicate that his service had been flawed.

¹ *Bereishis* 15:1.

² Also see *Targum Yonasan ben Uziel*, *Targum Yerushalmi*, and *Bereishis Rabbah* on this verse; and *Sefer Chassidim*, ch. 196.

³ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Teshuvah*,” ch. 10, par. 2; Rambam’s *Mishnah Commentary*, on tractate *Sanhedrin*, beg. of “*Chelek*”; also see his *Sefer HaMitzvos*, positive mitzvah 3.

⁴ This is even more difficult based on the version (*Pirkei Avos*, ch. 1, mishnah 3): “{who serve their master} not for the sake of reward.”

⁵ A similar question is asked in *Chana Ariel* (by Reb Aizik Homiler) on our *parshah* (*Bereishis* 18:2).

⁶ This motive is also included in “not for its own sake” (*Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Teshuvah*,” ch. 10, par. 1, 4).

[Through this lens, the wording of the teaching of Rambam mentioned above is better understood. Rambam writes: “A person who serves out of love... does what is right because it is right, **and ultimately, good will come because of it.**” With this statement, Rambam is not trying to clarify that those “who serve out of love” also receive a reward (even though it does not motivate them), as this is obvious! Moreover, what is he adding with the words “because of it”? These words intend to show that the resulting good proves that the person truly “serves out of love.” When he indeed serves Hashem “because it is right,” then “ultimately, good will come because of it.”]

Therefore, when Avraham realized that Hashem had rewarded him in this world, he was worried that the end result — “ultimately, good will come because of it” — was missing. This would mean, he feared, that his service was flawed.

However, the above interpretation of this narrative is challenging. If Avraham’s fear was not about the reward in its own right but what the lack of reward signaled, namely, that his service to Hashem was flawed, then Hashem’s reassurance, “Fear not, Avram,” should have addressed Avraham’s primary concern: Avram had no reason to be anxious because his service was, in fact, complete.

Since the verse says: “Fear not... your **reward** is very great” (with no mention of the quality of his service), this proves that the reward, in this context, was (not merely valuable as a flag for something else but instead was) valuable in its own right.

As such, our question returns.

3.

REB YOSSEI’S ORIGIN STORY

This will be better understood by first elucidating a (seemingly astonishing) story in the *Zohar* on this week’s *parshah*,⁷ on the verse “your reward is very great.”

The *Zohar* explains there that a person who occupies himself in Torah study “will be given a long life in the World to Come, and wealth and honor in this world.” The *Zohar* continues and relates the following story:

Rabbi Abba had once announced that anyone who “desires wealth and a long life in the World to Come” should come and learn Torah. An unmarried man stepped forward and said,

⁷ *Bereishis* 88a ff. (*Sisrei Torah*).

“I want to toil in Torah study so that I can become wealthy.” Rabbi Abba agreed. He asked the volunteer for his name, and the unmarried man responded: “Yossi.” Rabbi Abba then told his students they should refer to the newly admitted student as “Rabbi Yossi, the possessor of wealth and honor.”

After some time, Rabbi Yossi approached Rabbi Abba and asked: “Where is the wealth?” “(Rabbi Abba) said: ‘From this question we can infer that he didn’t learn for the sake of Heaven.’” (Rabbi Abba wanted to pray that “this student should die since he studied not for its own sake”).⁸ “But Rabbi Abba heard a Heavenly voice declare: ‘Do not punish him, for this student is destined to be a great man.’” So Rabbi Abba told Rabbi Yossi to continue his studies and said, “I will provide you with wealth.”

The *Zohar* continues: A very wealthy but unlearned man approached Rabbi Abba and asked him to find someone to study Torah on his behalf. In exchange, the magnate would enrich that person. Rabbi Abba then instructed Rabbi Yossi to study Torah on the other’s behalf in exchange for a generous reward from the wealthy man. “The wealthy man gave Rabbi Yossi a golden cup.... (Rabbi Yossi) sat and toiled in Torah study while the other man paid him.”

After some time passed, Rabbi Yossi came to appreciate the value of Torah study {in its own right} and wept. After all, in his ignorance, he had exchanged (the merit of) his Torah learning for riches. Upon hearing of Rabbi Yossi’s bitter remorse, “Rabbi Abba said: ‘We can now see that Rabbi Yossi was learning {all along} for the sake of Heaven.’ He summoned the {rich} man and said: ‘Take back your wealth; give it to orphans and the poor, and I will personally give you a greater portion of Torah’... Rabbi Yossi returned the golden cup, and until today, he is referred to as ‘**ben Pazi**’ (because of the ‘golden {paz} cup’).”

⁸ *Or HaChamah*, and cited in *Nitzutzei Oros* on *Zohar* there.

4.

A FEW PUZZLING POINTS

Many elements in this story need to be addressed, including:

a) Why did Rabbi Abba want to punish Rabbi Yossi for studying with ulterior motives when there is a clear ruling that “a person should **always engage** in Torah and mitzvos, even if he does so not for their own sake, because by {performing mitzvos} not for their own sake, he comes to perform them for their own sake”?⁹

This question grows more puzzling in light of the following: Rabbi Abba himself announced, “Anyone who **desires wealth**... should come and toil in Torah.” Rabbi Yossi only started learning Torah “**so that** I can become wealthy” [to the extent that Rabbi Abba instructed his students to refer to Rabbi Yossi as “the master of wealth and honor”]!

What changed when Rabbi Yossi later asked, “Where is the wealth?” Why did Rabbi Abba want to punish Rabbi Yossi for his question and even pray for his death?

b) The fact that Rabbi Abba not only instructed the wealthy man to stop paying Rabbi Yossi in the future so that he could study Torah for its own sake but also told Rabbi Yossi to **return** the “golden cup” [that he received immediately after their agreement] suggests that Rabbi Abba wanted to nullify the entire agreement retroactively, including the Torah Rabbi Yossi studied **previously** in the merit of the rich man.

This is puzzling: The rich man had *already* acquired the merit of that Torah study!¹⁰

c) The story’s conclusion in the *Zohar* (**after** recounting Rabbi Yossi’s **regret**) — “until today, he is referred to as... ‘ben Pazi’” — is seemingly coming to highlight the virtue of Rabbi Yossi. Yet, it seems to do quite the opposite! It focuses on the fact that his Torah study was {initially} motivated by **ulterior motives** (for the sake of the “golden cup”). Moreover, the halachah is that we are forbidden to remind a *baal teshuvah* of his former misdeeds!¹¹

⁹ *Pesachim* 50b, and the sources referenced there; *Jerusalem Talmud*, “*Chagigah*,” ch. 1, par. 7; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Talmud Torah*,” ch. 3, par. 5; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Teshuvah*,” ch. 10, par. 5; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Yoreh Deah*,” sec. 246, par. 20; Alter Rebbe’s *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, sec. 4, par. 3.

¹⁰ All the more so in light of the teaching that a person does not have rights over the Torah that they already learnt, even to sell its rights to someone else (*Rama* on *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Yoreh Deah*,” sec. 246, par. 1).

¹¹ *Bava Metzia* 58b (in the mishnah); *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Teshuvah*,” end of ch. 7; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Mechirah*,” ch. 14, par. 13; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Choshen Mishpat*,” sec. 228, par. 4; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Choshen Mishpat*,” “*Hilchos Onaah*...” par. 28.

5.

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS

Additionally, many nuances in this story are of particular concern, including:

- a) How did the heavenly declaration that “he is destined to be a great man” deter Rabbi Abba from punishing Rabbi Yossi? This question can be asked from two angles: If learning for ulterior motives is indeed forbidden and Rabbi Yossi deserved to be punished for failing to do so, how does the fact that he would *become* “a great man” in the **future** change anything? Would such an outcome permit a forbidden act? And if he didn’t deserve punishment because “a person should always engage in Torah and mitzvos, even if not for their own sake,” then the reason given — “he is destined to be a great man” — is unnecessary.
- b) Why is it relevant for the *Zohar* to tell us that Rabbi Yossi was “an unmarried man” when he approached Rabbi Abba?

6.

DEMAND FOR WEALTH

We could seemingly explain Rabbi Abba’s conduct as follows:

Our Sages specify that the dispensation for a person to perform Torah and mitzvos for ulterior motives is granted only because “through {performing mitzvos} not for their own sake, he will come to perform them for their own sake.” In other words, this dispensation is granted not (only) because action is primary,¹² and thus, a person’s positive actions outweigh his improper motive (as the Alter Rebbe writes: “For the mitzvah was performed properly... it is only that his intent was not for the sake of the mitzvah”);¹³ this dispensation is granted because, ultimately, the person will be led to perform Torah and mitzvos “for their own sake.”

Accordingly, we could explain that when Rabbi Abba saw Rabbi Yossi **demand** wealth — and with such intensity — he assumed that this type of “not for its own sake” (with such intensity) would never lead him to perform it “for their own sake.”

¹² *Avos* ch. 1, mishnah 17.

¹³ Alter Rebbe’s *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 4, par. 3, in *Kuntres Acharon*.

However, this explanation does not suffice: Even if such conduct would absolve Rabbi Abba of his requirement to teach Rabbi Yossi,¹⁴ there still seems no room to now assume that he should be **punished** for such conduct and all the more so be culpable of death!

7.

MOTIVATION TO STUDY

We can posit the following explanation:

Two types of people learn Torah for a reward:

a) One learns Torah to receive **Hashem's** reward for observing Torah and mitzvos. In the words of the Alter Rebbe: "He studies... to receive a reward in the World to Come or even in this life — wealth and honor of 'those who relate to it with the left {hand}'¹⁵ — that is given **from Heaven**."¹⁶

b) A person learns Torah "to **acquire** honor and greatness: so that others will call him 'Rabbi,' or to become a *rosh yeshivah*,"¹⁷ or "to earn a living by teaching, or from serving as a judge or halachic authority."¹⁸ Such a person is motivated by the benefit **he** "takes" from his Torah study.

This second type of person is guilty not only of learning Torah "not for its own sake" (similar to the first type of person) but moreover, this conduct is **forbidden** — "Do not make it (the Torah) a crown with which to achieve greatness or a spade with which to dig."¹⁹ [It is only that "a person who does not have a fear of Heaven to speak (words of Torah) for its own sake and is motivated only by the desire to become great or to make a living, it is preferable for him to learn Torah for ulterior motives rather than to stand idle and separate himself from it. For by studying Torah not for its own sake, he comes to study for its own sake."]²⁰

¹⁴ For it is forbidden to teach an unprincipled pupil (*Chullin* 133a; *Mishneh Torah*, "Hilchos Talmud Torah," beg. of ch. 4; Alter Rebbe's *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 4, par. 17.

¹⁵ {The Talmud (*Shabbos* 63a), in explaining the verse, "Length of days is in her right hand and in her left hand are riches and honor" (*Mishlei* 3:16), ascribes Torah study with the "right hand" to those who study Torah for its own sake and Torah study with the "left hand" to those who study Torah not for its own sake; see Rashi on *Shabbos* 63a.}

¹⁶ Alter Rebbe's *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 4, par. 3.

¹⁷ {The dean of a Talmudic academy.}

¹⁸ Alter Rebbe's *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 4, par. 14.

¹⁹ *Pirkei Avos*, ch. 4, mishnah 5; Alter Rebbe's *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, *ibid*.

²⁰ Alter Rebbe's *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, *ibid*.

We can now also understand a nuance in the Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch* (where the Alter Rebbe records various types of Torah study not for its own sake): He first says (regarding a person who studies) "to receive reward... even in this world — wealth and honor... that is given from Heaven"; and then, when he discusses the reward the person "takes" for himself, he only mentions "honor and greatness, so that others will call him 'rabbi,' and a *rosh yeshivah*" — and omits "wealth."

In light of the above explanation, this can be understood: The dispensation for a person to use Torah study as a "spade with which to dig" is only granted if he studies Torah in order "**to earn a living**," since a person must provide for his wife and children. However, when it comes to using Torah study to acquire *wealth* (where other **people** make him wealthy because he learns Torah), the dispensation, as mentioned earlier, does not apply.²¹

8.

LIVELIHOOD OR RICHES?

We can now understand Rabbi Abba's behavior:

When Rabbi Abba declared, "Anyone who desires wealth... should come and learn Torah," he referred to wealth that "is given from **Heaven**." He assumed that Rabbi Yossi had this in mind when he approached and said, "I want to toil in Torah study so that I can become wealthy."

However, when Rabbi Yossi returned to Rabbi Abba with the complaint, "Where is the wealth?," he showed that his intent from the beginning was that **Rabbi Abba** {and not Hashem} would provide him with wealth. For this reason, Rabbi Abba wanted him punished — because {Rabbi Yossi had now revealed that} aside from his motive for learning Torah not being for its own sake, his motive was even more egregious. He was "using the crown of the Torah" — an act that warrants the punishment of being "uprooted from the world."²²

This also sheds further light on the *Zohar's* specificity in informing us that Rabbi Yossi was "**an unmarried man**": If he had been married, we would give him the benefit of the doubt that he needed the income to fulfill his obligation to provide {for his wife} — "her food, her clothing... he shall not decrease"²³ (which is permissible, as discussed above).

²¹ See *Rema*, "Yoreh Deah" (sec. 246, par. 21): "All that we stated as permissible refers to... a fixed stipend, but he may not accept gifts... accepting a significant gift {from a questioner} for declaring something permissible is forbidden."

²² Alter Rebbe's *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, *ibid*.

²³ *Shemos* 21:10.

But since he was “an unmarried man” — which shows us that he wanted to be **wealthy** — **no** dispensation is granted for such a mode of study. Therefore, Rabbi Abba rejected this type of study, which was not for its own sake.

However, this strengthens the question asked above regarding the Heavenly voice that declared that “he is destined to be a great man” in the **future**: Does this {future greatness} vindicate a person using the Torah as “a spade with which to dig” to acquire riches?

9.

THE INNER CORE OF A JEW

This will be clarified by elucidating the teaching that “a person should always engage in Torah... because {תורתם} {by performing mitzvos} not for their own sake, he will come to perform them for their own sake.” This teaches us [not only that the person will **eventually** come to {observe Torah and mitzvos} for their own sake, but also] that already **now**, the “inner core {תורתם}” of his observances is for “their own sake,” because the deeper essence of “not for their own sake” is, in fact, “for their own sake.”

{To elaborate:} In his “inner core,” regardless of his current status, every Jew desires and endeavors to fulfill Hashem’s Will. As Rambam famously rules²⁴ regarding a person **coerced** by the court to fulfill the Torah ruling (to give a divorce document to his wife): Rambam rules that at that very **same instant**, the person wants to “perform all the mitzvos.... It is only his evil inclination that forces him.” (This is why the court’s coercion is effective even though a divorce document must be given *willingly* by the husband — it is because the coercion reveals his innermost desire to fulfill Hashem’s command.)

Nevertheless, the person’s “inner core” isn’t always considered. This is seen from the distinction that *Tosafos*²⁵ makes: A person may study Torah not for its own sake only if he “studies so that others respect him.” However, **no** dispensation is granted to study “to vex his friends.” About such an individual, it is written:²⁶ “It would have been preferable for him not to have been created” (even though he, too, has the proper intent subconsciously and in his “inner core”).

This seems puzzling: Even though the motivation “to vex his friend” is much worse than just studying “so that others respect him,” it is still nothing more than an instance of an **intent** to study Torah not for its own sake. —

²⁴ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Geirushin*,” end of ch. 2.

²⁵ *Berachos* 17a, *Tosafos*, s v., “*haoseh*.”

²⁶ *Berachos* 17a.

[Such a person can not be compared to someone who “does not fulfill that which he studies”²⁷ (about whom many authorities maintain that he mustn’t learn Torah) because in such a case, the person’s Torah learning *itself* is lacking. “The objective of {Torah} wisdom is repentance and good deeds.”²⁸ Therefore, when a person studies {and intends} “not to act upon it,” he is lacking (not only is the motive for his study faulty but) in the (objective of the) study itself.]²⁹

— Then why should **this** motive “to vex his friend” make such a fundamental difference to his learning that “it would have been preferable for him not to have been created”?

10.

THE INNER CORE OF THE DEED

We can posit the following explanation:

The {deeper} meaning of the teaching that “through {performing mitzvos} not for their own sake, he comes to perform them for their own sake” is not only that on account of his “inner core,” subconsciously, a **Jew** has the proper intentions. Instead, the inwardness {that is, the “inner core”} of the *motivation* {of an act done} “**not for their own sake**” **itself** is, in fact, “for their own sake”:

The fact that the performance of Torah and mitzvos brings reward — both physical and spiritual good, and not only the reward that Hashem gives as a tangential favor, but even the good that a person who fulfills mitzvos receives as a **natural** outcome³⁰ of fulfilling them [for instance, being honored because he is a wise man, a *rosh yeshivah*, and the like] — does not contradict performing them for their own sake.

We can posit that when a person serves Hashem selflessly, the reward that he receives becomes *part* of his *avodah*.³¹

This is because the true meaning *for their own sake* is that when learning or doing mitzvos, the person does not think of **himself** or what benefit he can derive. Instead, he does so entirely and wholeheartedly for Hashem. The same applies regarding the reward he receives for the Torah he studies and the mitzvos he performs: When he receives wealth,

²⁷ Alter Rebbe’s *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, *ibid*.

²⁸ *Berachos* 17a.

²⁹ See at length Alter Rebbe’s *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, *ibid*, and *Kuntres Acharon*, *ad loc*.

³⁰ See *Sheloh* (*Bayis Acharon* — 12a-b) for a lengthy elucidation of the various opinions regarding the reward for mitzvos.

³¹ {Divine service.}

honor, and the like, he does not feel like **he** deserves the honor and respect (that **he** earned the wealth and honor). Rather, he reflects on the outcome — that through the honor he receives, the honor of **Heaven** is magnified in the eyes of others. It becomes apparent to all that the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvos brings wealth and honor with it.³²

[This reflects the meaning of the verse,³³ “And I will make your name great,” referring to Avraham. There is a well-known question:³⁴ Was Avraham seeking greatness? He was entirely *batel*³⁵ to Hashem: “I am but dust and ash!”³⁶

One of the explanations is that the question answers itself: Since Avraham was entirely *batel* to Hashem — his personal gain was totally inconsequential to him — the “Name” {that would become great} was not his own. Instead, the “Name” was that of “the Craftsman who made me”³⁷ — “the Name of Heaven.” Being told, “Your name will become great in the world”³⁸ didn’t foster within Avraham a personal feeling of importance; it magnified and publicized the Name of Heaven.]

11.

THE INTERPLAY OF BODY AND SOUL

This is the meaning of “through {performing mitzvos} not for their own sake, he will come to perform them for their own sake.” The “inner core” of “not for their own sake” itself is really “for their own sake”:

A Jew may **personally** desire honor, wealth, and the like, but only because of the influence of his physical **body**. However, there is an “inner core” — the soul’s desire to receive a reward to magnify the honor of the Torah and Heaven. This is brought about when people everywhere observe that someone who fulfills Torah and mitzvos is blessed with everything good.

³² Note *Pirkei Avos*, ch. 6, mishnah. 8.

³³ *Bereishis* 12:2.

³⁴ *Alshich* on *Bereishis* 12:2; beginning of *maamar* “*Lech Lecha*” 5667 (in *Hemshech* 5666).

³⁵ {In the original, “*batel bemetzius*.” *Bittul* connotes submission to Hashem, self-nullification, humility, and the negation of ego. *Bittul b’metzius* (“existential nullification”) constitutes the absolute form of *bittul* whereby one loses all sense of independent existence.}

³⁶ *Bereishis* 18:27.

³⁷ *Taanis* 20b.

³⁸ The wording of the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 39, par. 2).

[This is akin to the Baal Shem Tov's teaching³⁹ on the verse,⁴⁰ "Hungry as well as thirsty, their soul enwraps itself in them": The hunger and thirst experienced by the body for food and drink come from the fact that "their **soul** enwraps itself in them" — the soul desires to refine the G-dly sparks within the food and drink.]

For this reason, the mechanism of "through {performing mitzvos} not for their own sake, he comes to perform them for their own sake" can only apply when the ulterior motive can have an "inner core" of "for their own sake." This would exclude a person who studies Torah "to vex" in an entirely **contrarian** manner (his motive has no positive element to it). **This** manner of study, not for its own sake, cannot be described as having an "inner core" of "for their own sake."

12.

HIDDEN DIMENSION

We can now understand the intent of the Heavenly voice saying that Rabbi Yossi is destined to become a "great man":

A person is generally not allowed to use the Torah as a tool to acquire wealth, as discussed above (a dispensation to use the Torah in this way is granted only to earn a living). Nevertheless, when it comes to a person who "the public needs," one of whom it is said "that there is no man wiser than him in the entire country... the community is commanded to provide for him honorably... and even **make him wealthy**... raise him above his brethren... and the same applies to all greatest sages of their generation."⁴¹

The Heavenly voice revealed that Rabbi Yossi's desire to be rewarded with riches for his Torah study was connected with him **presently** possessing the potential that would later materialize in his becoming "a great man" (about whom we are "commanded... to make him wealthy... and raise him above his brethren"). Therefore, although in his present state, his desire for wealth was rooted in a desire for personal gain, within this desire itself lay the "inner core" and **root cause** — his **soul's** desire to rise to the level of "a great man," and for them to "raise him above his brethren."

³⁹ *Kesser Shem Tov*, ch. 194; also see the Previous Rebbe's letter (the general content is printed in *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 1, p. 177). Also see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 19, pp. 295, ff, where it is proposed that this is the deeper reason why the Jewish nation is aroused during the Rosh Hashanah prayers in which they pray for their physical needs more than those in which they pray for their spiritual ones. Because inwardly, this arousal is being triggered by the soul's power that desires physical things in order to transform them into a dwelling place for Hashem in the **lowest** realms.

⁴⁰ *Tehillim* 107:5.

⁴¹ Alter Rebbe's *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 4, par. 16; see *Kesef Mishneh* on *Mishneh Torah*, "Hilchos Talmud Torah," ch. 3, par. 10; *Bach* on *Tur*, "Yoreh Deah," sec. 246, s.v. "u'mah shekasuv kol hameisim."

This is why he was **allowed** to learn Torah to acquire wealth in **this** specific circumstance. It was because, at present, he possessed lofty abilities that would eventually lead him to become the generation's preeminent sage whom we are "commanded... to make him wealthy."

13.

GOLD TRANSFORMED

This also helps us understand why Rabbi Yossi ended up returning the "golden cup" and why he was referred to as "Rabbi Yossi ben Pazi":

The community's obligation to provide for the "great man" of the generation and make him wealthy does not, G-d forbid, cause him to feel haughty or the like. On the contrary, since he is indeed the great man of the generation and completely *batel* to Hashem, he now can "refine" the riches he receives because, in his eyes, these riches are entirely for the honor of Heaven (similar to what was explained above in Section 10).

This clarifies the narrative cited above:

By returning the "golden cup," he was not seeking to rescind the merit that the rich man was granted on account of the Torah studied in his merit (for that would be impossible post facto, as discussed above). Instead, Rabbi Yossi wanted to emphasize the lengths to which Torah must be studied for its own sake.

And this is why he was referred to as "ben Pazi": His name highlights his **positive** qualities. This name (aside from it alluding to him returning the golden cup after it became **his** — Pazi {*my gold*},) emphasizes Rabbi Yossi's greatest virtue — that he was a "great man": "Man, גִּבּוֹרָא" (although etymologically related to "mighty, גִּבּוֹר") does not have the power to transform "gold" — wealth (for the sake of wealth) — into something "for its own sake." Nevertheless, Rabbi Yossi, being a "*great man*," was able to be "ben Pazi" {"a master over my gold"} (the word "*ben*" being understood the same way as in "*ben chorin*" {a free man, "a master of freedom"})⁴² — to transform the "gold" so that he could be in control of it. It became "Pazi" {my gold} — riches transformed to be "for its own sake."

14.

⁴² {Lit., "son of freedom," a term used to describe a free man.}

TRUE GREATNESS

We can posit that this also explains Hashem's response to Avraham that "your reward is very great," even though Avraham was "a person who serves out of love" — as the question answers itself:

Since Avraham was "a person who served out of love" in the most complete sense, in his eyes, the reward he received for his service was (not for him personally, but) to advance his *avodah*.

In fact, Hashem specifically highlighted the true greatness of Avraham's *avodah* by telling him, "Your reward is **very great**." He was so selfless that even after receiving a "very great" reward, it still didn't interfere with him serving Hashem for its own sake. On the contrary, he incorporated this reward into his work.

This is because he saw the "greatness" that came along with receiving a reward for his deeds not as something bolstering his own fame but as something that publicized Hashem's greatness.

— From a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Lech Lecha*, 5741 (1980)