

Torah Portion: Ki Tavo
(Book of Deuteronomy)

“You have affirmed this day that the Lord is your God, that you will walk in His ways, that you will observe His laws and commandments and rules, and that you will obey [God].” (Deut. 26:17)

In the space of one simple verse, we learn the efficacy of religion is not in the word but in the deed.

What does it mean to “*walk in His ways*”? In the Talmudic tractate *Sotah*, the ancient rabbis taught, “Just as God clothes the naked, you shall cloth the naked. The Holy One visited the sick; you should visit the sick. The Holy One comforted those who mourned; you should comfort those who mourn. The Holy One buried the dead; you should bury the dead.”

Rabbi Bradley Artson notes, “As it unfolds in the Torah and in rabbinic writings, Torah insists on the fusion of the ritual and the ethical. That blend of moral sensitivity and ritual profundity meets in the *mitzvah*, the commanded deed.” Words of prayer that lie stillborn on one’s lips and ritual devoid of meaning are hardly an expression of God’s will. However, prayer and ritual that evoke ethical action are religion at its finest.

Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel summed up this discussion by writing, “A Jew is asked to take a leap of action rather than a leap of thought. He is asked to surpass his needs, to do more than he understands in order to understand more than he does. In carrying out the word of the Torah he is ushered into the presence of spiritual meaning. Through the ecstasy of deeds he learns to be certain of the hereness of God. Right living is a way to right thinking.”

Religion is a divine discipline to remind one of his/her responsibilities to humankind. It is the spark to ignite the latent spiritual presence of God within each human being; to move one beyond self-imposed limitations; to cause our actions to reflect the pathways of God.

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