

## The King, the Peasant and the Nightingale

By: Rabbi Yanki Tauber

The story is told of a king who once decided to reward a peasant who had done him a great service. "Shall I give him a sack of gold? a bag of pearls?" thought the king. "But these mean virtually nothing to me. I want, for once, to truly *give* something -- something that I will miss, a gift that constitutes a sacrifice for me."

Now this king had a nightingale who sang the sweetest songs a human ear had ever heard. He treasured the nightingale over all else, and literally found life unbearable without it. So he summoned the peasant to his palace and gave him the bird. "This," said the king, "is in appreciation for your loyalty and devotion." "Thank you, Your Majesty," said the peasant, and took the royal gift to his humble home.

A while later, the king was passing through the peasant's village and commanded his coachman to halt at the peasant's door. "How are you enjoying my gift?" he inquired of his beloved subject.

"The truth to tell, Your Majesty," said the peasant, "the bird's meat was quite tough -- all but inedible, in fact. But I cooked it with lots of potatoes, and it gave the stew an interesting flavor."

Throughout the Torah, we find descriptions of the material rewards which G-d promises for those who adhere to His commandments. A case in point is the opening chapter of the Torah reading of Bechukotai (Leviticus 26:3-27:34): "If you walk in my statutes, and keep My commandments and do them; I will give your rain in due season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit..." And on and on, about blessings in the field and blessings in the home, fertile cattle, good health and peace in the land.

Many scholars and sages ponder this emphasis on material reward for the observance of the mitzvot. If G-d finds it necessary to reward a righteous life, wouldn't spiritual blessings, awarded to the soul after it is freed from the confines and limitations of the body, more aptly reciprocate a G-dly life?

But the Chassidic masters say: Physical life is the most G-dly gift of all. Depending, of course, on what we do with it.

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**Bechukotai**

Shabbat Begins: 8:39 pm

Shabbat Ends: 9:54 pm