

Some say all human behavior can be explained by economics. With apologies to Esther Taus, let me repeat for you the three basic laws of economics once published in the Wall Street Journal:

1. There's no free lunch.
2. Them's that has, gets.
3. The consumer always pays.

Some say that all human behavior can be explained by economics. If so, these three laws should also apply to Torah because Torah directs Jewish behavior. Let's see if they do, indeed, apply to the relationship between God and each one of us.

First, **there's no free lunch.**

The Torah tells us we are in a covenantal relationship with God. A covenant is a contract. Traditionally, Jews are bound to God by a contract requiring our performance of some 613 Mitzvot.

A Mitzvah is not simply a good deed. A Mitzvah is an act commanded by God. The Torah tells us that God redeemed us from slavery to DO as commanded.

So, what's this about “no free lunch”? Law students learn that a contract consists of a promise given -- in exchange for a promise received --and that each such promise must be supported by “consideration” given by each party to the other. But, what is “consideration”? Consideration is simply some form of payment. Each party to the contract must pay for the benefit promised by the other. Simply, there is no “free lunch.”

And, the contract between God and the Jews is the same. God promises that we will be rewarded if we DO as commanded.

Traditionally, Jews are obliged to study the Mitzvot and to “DO” them. Sometimes we forget that is so. In fact, on July 4th this year, while at services, I was chagrined to read the English prose in our service handout

following the V'Ahavta prayer. Something bothered me terribly about it, but I couldn't put my finger on it.

Then, upon comparing the English prose to the Hebrew text, my heart sank. Although the prose was beautiful, reminding us to teach God's laws to our children, to speak of them while at home and out and about, the poetic offering omitted the most traditional concept of our covenantal relationship with God.

The prose included no mention of "and DO them." It omitted the traditional requirement that as Jews we must give consideration, payment, to God for the gifts given to us. We must "do" God's commandments.

We must not keep a tradesman waiting for payment.

We must not gossip.

We must not seek personal gain on the backs of others.

The actual V'Ahavata prayer derives directly from the Torah. It tells us to teach God's laws to our children, to speak of them in our houses and when we are out and about. But, more importantly, it tell us to do so for a purpose. We should talk about the Mitzvot in order to "do" them because "There's No Free Lunch!"

"Doing" is our payment for the beneficence God has bestowed upon us. And, that brings us to another of the three basic laws of economics. **Them's That has – Gets!**

When God offered us the Torah, we accepted it. We "have" it. Them's That has – Gets! But, what do we "get"? Well, God promised that if we did as commanded, we would be rewarded in many ways.

But, is that true? We know that bad things do, indeed, happen to good people. Will remembering the Sabbath day make us prosperous? Will honoring our mothers and fathers make us happy? Will refraining from stealing, lying, and coveting the "goodies" of others cause Ed McMann to ring our doorbells with the Reader's Digest \$1,000,000 prize?

Maybe not. But, doing Mitzvot predictably brings a different type of riches – one which is of incomparable value. Doing Mitzvot brings self-esteem, the trust of others, and peace of mind – states of being far more valuable than riches. "Them's that have Mitzvot, Get." Those who Do the acts commanded by God are rewarded daily with self-respect and by the smiles they receive from others when they walk into a room.

And, that brings us to the last of the three purported laws of economics – **“the consumer always pays.”** In short, when God’s cost of production rises, that cost is passed on to us. If we harm the Earth, it is we who suffer. If we harm others or fail to give aid when the need therefore is apparent, our souls suffer -- whether at the hands of others or by the workings of our own conscience.

Happily, we will soon begin to use the new prayerbook published for the Reform community. In it, we will find passages redeemed from traditional Judaic theology urging us not only to speak of Mitzvot, but to do them. As we study these traditional commandments and ponder their meaning, we would do well to remember that,

1. There is no free lunch,
2. Them’s that has, gets, and
3. The consumer always pays.