

Pardes Yehuda

Weekly Torah Journal By Yehuda Z. Klitnick

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שבת מליחות

פרשת נצבים וילך תשפ"ז

What is the meaning of the commandment "Choose life"?

ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת המוות..... ובחרת בחיים: (ל טו)

"See, I have set before you today life and good..." and "choose life." What difference is there between "life" and "good"? Furthermore, it is difficult to understand what logic is needed for urging to "choose life." Even a foolish child would choose life!

This can be understood based on what is stated in (Midrash Tehillim 27): *"One thing I asked of Hashem, that I will seek."* Hashem said to Dovid, "You asked for one thing, and afterward you state two?" Dovid replied, "I learned this from You, for You said: ועתה ישראל: 'What does Hashem ask of you, except to fear...' and afterward You stated: ללכת בכל דרכיו ולאהבה אותו *'to love and to cling to Him.'*" This Midrash is puzzling, for the original difficulty still stands in its place! It can be explained based on what I heard from my Rebbe, Harav Mendel of Rimanov, regarding the verse: "Because you did not serve Hashem with joy and goodness of heart..." Standard practice commands that whoever enjoys greater earthly desires, rules over their fellow, as the rich over the poor, or the wise over the foolish. Now, physical pleasures belong to the nations of the world; and it is impossible for a Yid to fulfill their desires in the way a Gentile does. Therefore, the nations of the world would rule over Israel.

Because of this, Hashem gave us the Torah and Mitzvos so that if we fulfill them with joy and goodness of heart, we will derive far greater pleasure from them than from all the desires of this world. As it is written: *"You shall see your world in your lifetime,"* and *"One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the life of the World to Come."* The nations of the world cannot reach this spiritual pleasure; therefore, we remain dominant over them. However, when we do not perform the Mitzvos with spiritual delight, the nations experience greater pleasure than we do, and consequently, they rule over us. This is what is meant by: "Because you did not serve Hashem with joy and goodness of heart..." meaning,

since the nations have greater pleasure, "therefore you shall serve your enemies."

The Gemarra (Berachos 35b) says "Many acted like Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and did not succeed." The reason they did not succeed is that they did so merely because it is truly comfortable for a person to sit in the Yeshiva and learn, rather than engaging in business, and endangering themselves across seas and rivers where all roads are presumed dangerous. However, a person is not permitted to act solely for that self-serving comfort.

This is the meaning of "One thing I asked of Hashem"—namely, to dwell in the House of Hashem. But I did not ask this merely to have personal rest and peace by sitting in the study hall. Rather, "that I will seek"—I ask it for another purpose entirely: לַחֲנוּת בְּנֶעֱמָה ה' to gaze upon the pleasantness of Hashem and to serve Him.

This also explains the Psukim that state "to fear Hashem." This refers to a lower level of fear, fearing punishment, where one acts for their own sake. Therefore, the Torah continues: ללכת בכל דרכיו ולאהבה אותו *'to walk in all His ways and to cling to Him.'* One's fear should be for the sake of walking in His ways. For if one strays from the good path, they will no longer walk in Hashem's ways, cause no gratification, and fail to cling to Him.

Now, serving Hashem is called חַיִּים "life," as it is written: *"In the light of the King's countenance is life."* טוב "Good," on the other hand, refers to the comfort of this world, as it is written: אֵךְ טוֹב וְחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי *"Only good and kindness should run after me."*

This explains our Posuk: "See, I have set before you life and good." That is, even by serving Hashem, there are two levels: "life" and "good." Serving for the sake of one's own comfort, this world, rather than serving purely for the Creator's sake, rather than one's own. And to this, I say to you: ובחרת בחיים "Choose life". Serve Hashem, not yourself! (Mar'eh Yechezkel Daish on the Torah)

STORY OF THE WEEK (By Yehuda Z. Klitnick) *The Chafetz Chaim showed his Ruach Hakodesh to heal a Yid!*

This story was told by Hagaon Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin, Rav of Lutsk. A young Jewish man from a respectable family in the city of Lutsk wanted to move to Israel. He decided to learn the profession of driving. The young man purchased a taxi. However, he had not yet obtained a immigration permit necessary to move to Eretz Yisrael, so

he began working as a driver, transporting passengers to and from the train station.

Little by little, he began to desecrate Shabbos. He would drive passengers on Shabbos. Rabbi Sorotzkin sent for him. The young man promised to stop, but he did not keep his promise. The young man's father was a respected

member of the community. He became partially paralyzed and spent a long time in hospitals.

One day, a large gathering of Rabbonim took place in Vilna. The conference was held under the leadership of the Chofetz Chaim and Rav Chaim Ozer Grozensky. After several days of meetings, everyone returned to his city. The train carrying the Chofetz Chaim, and Rabbi Sorotzkin was scheduled to leave at 8:00. The Chofetz Chaim began preparing for Shacharis.

Rabbi Sorotzkin, suddenly encountered the sick father of that young taxi driver who was desecrating Shabbos. The man was walking with the aid of a cane, and was approaching the train. Rabbi Sorotzkin asked about his health and whether the doctors had finally permitted him to leave the hospitals and return home. The man answered: "I am going to Radin, to the Chofetz Chaim." He then told Rabbi Sorotzkin about a dream he had experienced that night. His grandmother, appeared before him and said: "You are searching in vain for a cure for your illness, go to the Chofetz Chaim. I immediately decided to travel to the Chofetz Chaim to receive his blessing. Rabbi Sorotzkin was astonished to hear this and said to him: "You don't even need to travel to Radin. The Chofetz Chaim is traveling on this very train and is sitting in the car in front of us." The man became extremely excited. He saw this as a sign from Heaven that his dream was true. He hurried into the train car where the Chofetz Chaim was sitting.

They found the Chofetz Chaim standing in prayer. Suddenly, an idea occurred to Rabbi Sorotzkin. He would tell the Chofetz Chaim about the breach in Shabbos observance caused by the man's son, so that perhaps the Chofetz Chaim could influence the father to make sure his son would observe Shabbos. Rabbi Sorotzkin called the Chofetz Chaim's grandson, the gaon Rabbi Hillel Ginsburg, and told him the entire story. Rabbi Sorotzkin proposed that Rabbi Hillel tell the Chofetz Chaim what they wanted—to influence the man regarding Shabbos.

Rabbi Hillel agreed. But when they returned to the train car, they discovered that the Chofetz Chaim had already finished praying, and the sick man had gotten there first and was approaching the Chofetz Chaim to request a blessing. They began listening to the conversation between the great tzaddik and the man who was asking for his blessing. The man said "Rebbe! I have been desperately ill for more than a year. I have been in hospitals in Warsaw and Vilna, and there is no cure for my illness. Last night, while I was lying in the hospital in

Vilna, my grandmother came to me in my dream and said: 'Go to the Chofetz Chaim. He will give you a blessing and you will be healed!'" When the Chofetz Chaim heard that the man considered him a miracle-worker, he immediately exclaimed: "Who can give you a blessing? Yisrael Meir? Blessings are not in my hands!" As was his holy custom, he repeated each statement three times. Then he continued, "Do you know whose hands blessings are entrusted to? Shabbos Kodesh! "As the Posuk in Parshas Bereishis says: 'And Hashem blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.' "And we say in Kabbalas Shabbos: 'Come, let us go toward Shabbos, for it is the source of blessing.' The Chofetz Chaim continued: "If you observe Shabbos properly and receive the blessing of Shabbos, then I will also give you a blessing. I do not have the power to bless you without the blessing of Shabbos!" "Perhaps you will say, 'But I do observe Shabbos, so I deserve a blessing!' "But look at what the Torah says regarding Shabbos:

'Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it... It does not say regarding other prohibitions, 'you and your son and your daughter.' Each person is responsible for himself. "But regarding Shabbos, the father is also responsible for the children under his authority—even if they are already grown. "Even if "you" observe Shabbos, if "your son travels on Shabbos", you cannot receive a blessing from the Source of all blessings, from Shabbos Kodesh—and the blessing of Yisrael Meir will also not reach you or help you!" Only Rabbi Hillel, Rabbi Sorotzkin, and the father knew who was desecrating Shabbos. The sick man could no longer contain himself. He cried out: "Rebbe! I accept upon myself that this will no longer happen in my home as it has until now! I will do everything in my power. I will plead with my son and give him from the best of my money and possessions, on one condition: that he no longer desecrate Shabbos Kodesh!" The Chofetz Chaim then responded and showered the trembling, deeply moved man with sincere blessings, promising him a complete recovery soon, "in the merit of Shabbos Kodesh".

After enormous effort, he succeeded to convince his son to fulfill his promise to the Chofetz Chaim. He stopped driving on Shabbos, and helped his father's health gradually improve. Not long afterward, the driver, once again approached the British authorities and requested an immigration certificate to the Land of Israel. His great desire was fulfilled. He received the permit, merited to immigrate to Eretz Yisrael, and remained there alive and well as an observant Jew, keeping Torah and mitzvos.

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