

See – I have placed before you today the life and the good, and the death and the evil... and you shall choose life. (30:15,19)

The *pasuk* teaches us that Hashem wants us to choose life. By not choosing the path of life, we, by default, choose evil. This is something that everyone understands. When two options contrast one another, choosing one means negating the other. The *pasuk*, however, is teaching us something else. **Horav Michel Feinstein, zl**, understands that there exists the entity of good and the entity of evil. The fact that the Torah refers to each entity individually compels us to acknowledge that *ra*, evil, is much more than a lack of good. It is a separate free-standing entity which exists as an adversary to good. One must choose between good and evil. It is a choice, a decision to support one in contradistinction to the other. Just as the kingdom of Hashem is represented by holiness, purity, good and life, we must battle the *malchus ha'zadon*, evil kingdom, or it will vanquish us.

What is the difference whether evil is the absence of good, or if it is a new creation? Bad is bad!

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that the difference lies in our perspective on evil. If evil is defined as the absence of good, all one has to do is follow the path of good, the path toward life. If evil is a new creation, a unique entity, then it must be expunged, eradicated. We must wage war with the forces of evil; otherwise, we are not properly choosing good/life. As long as evil stands powerful, glaring at us, seeking every which way to take us down, then we are not secure in our decision. Every action, every endeavor, must be introspected, checked and rechecked, to make certain that no evil has penetrated it. In other words, choosing good does not guarantee that evil has been expunged. It is still waiting for us to slip up, so that we fall into its net of deceit.

From the very cradle of our nationhood, we have been fighting against evil. Yaakov *Avinu* and Eisav fought in the womb. Hashem battles Amalek *midor dor*, from generation to generation. Good is not guaranteed. One must want it so bad that he is willing to fight to get it – and keep it.

As an aside, the meaning of *u'bacharta ba'chaim*, “and you shall choose life,” does not simply enjoin us to maintain an observant lifestyle. **Horav Dov Zuchowski, zl**, *Mashgiach* in Lomza, explains that the *mitzvah* to choose life requires one to feel that serving Hashem and maintaining an observant lifestyle constitute living! Performing *mitzvos*, even with all of the *hiddurim*, adornments, to beautify the *mitzvah*, the *chumros*, stringencies, does not yet define choosing life. One must feel exhilarated, excited, enthused that he has chosen life – a life of service to Hashem.

To serve Hashem, but think it is a drag, or to do so out of a sense of complacency is to undermine the foundation of the *mitzvah*. He must acknowledge and manifest the feeling that he has chosen life – and this is the meaning of true living.