

"You shall observe My decrees and My laws which man shall carry out and by which he shall live." (18:5)

From the words, *ovc hju*, "and by which he shall live," *Chazal* have derived that *mitzvos* are not to be performed in a way that would endanger someone's life. Literally, the *pasuk* is read to mean that *mitzvah* performance enables one to achieve physical well-being and often longevity. This is in addition to a spiritually healthy moral life replete with the joy and peace of mind inherent when one acts in accordance with the dictates of Hashem.

Rashi, however, interprets these words as referring to spiritual longevity in the World to Come, since everyone in this world must eventually die. *Rashi's* interpretation does seem consistent with *Chazal*. In *Sanhedrin 74a*, *Chazal* cite this *pasuk* as a basis for the *halacha* that if *mitzvah* performance endangers life, one negates the observance of the *mitzvah*. The need to preserve life supercedes the observance of *mitzvos* except in the cases of the three cardinal sins: idolatry, illicit relationships such as adultery, and murder. This indicates that the *pasuk* is referring to "life" in this world. How are we to reconcile these two interpretations ?

Horav Shimon Schwab, z.l., illuminates this *pasuk* by first explaining the essence of life. When one thinks about it, the disparity between life in this temporal world and the eternal world is not that great. They both come from the same source. Man is obligated to cling to Hashem to the point that he literally transforms himself into a veritable sanctuary in which every limb and organ is dedicated to the service of Hashem. If man realizes such a goal in life then basically the only difference between the two worlds is that in *Olam Haba*, the World to Come, there is no corporeality. Man is able to achieve boundless pleasure by basking in the glory of the *Shechinah*.

Essentially, death is a physiological change in which the person's existence in this world is terminated only to be reinstated in the eternal world. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, z.l.*, applies this idea in explaining the *pasuk* in *Bereishis 2:17*, "for on the day that you eat thereof (the *Eitz Ha'daas*, Tree of Knowledge) you must die." Adam *Ha'rishon* ate of the fruit, but he did not die. Does this not contradict the *pasuk*? *Horav Hirsch* explains that banishment from one's home is imposed in lieu of the death penalty, as we find in the case of unpremeditated manslaughter. To be exiled from one's home is death on a lesser scale. Death is not a termination of existence, but rather a termination of existence **here**. Being banished from *Gan Eden* was a form of death for Adam, since death is a transition from one place/world to another.

Horav Schwab writes that as a young man he was questioned by the *Chofetz Chaim, z.l.*, as to his intention when he recites the phrase *ubfu,c gyb okug hhju* "and (He) implanted eternal life within us." Before he could respond, the *Chofetz Chaim* asked him, "Where will you be in five hundred years ?" In response, the *Chofetz Chaim* murmured to himself, "*Mitten Ribono Shel Olam*, with Hashem." And in five thousand years? And in five million years? Once again the *Chofetz Chaim* responded saying, "With Hashem." This is the meaning of having eternal life being

implanted within you. By clinging to Hashem we are availed the opportunity for boundless eternal life! Death is only a physiological transition which does not affect a Jew's eternal life bond with Hashem.

Consequently, the meaning of the *pasuk* ovc hju, "by which he shall live," refers to life in general, be it in this world or in the World to Come. This reflects the reality that Hashem has implanted eternal life within each of us.