

I have placed life and death before you, blessing and curse; and you shall choose life. (30:19)

One would think that choosing life is a decision that requires little to no mental effort. Why would the Torah exhort us to choose life? This question has inspired much commentary. Obviously, the meaning of “life” in Torah-speak is different than the mundane, physical existence to which many have become accustomed. Furthermore, as *Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl*, observes, the Torah implores us to choose life, so that our children will live. The message is clear: the decision we make for ourselves affects our families. What our children will be in twenty years, their demeanor – moral, ethical and spiritual – will be on us. Our decision to live properly determines whether they will live.

After reading an inspiring article by *Rav Yehudah Adler, zl*, I was very moved. He penned this article while he was a patient in the oncology department. He was in tremendous pain, suffering from the effects of his rapidly progressing disease. He was a *kollel* fellow who took great satisfaction from his *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty. He spent the day learning, after arising early in the morning to *daven k'vasikin*, at sunrise.

Rav Adler writes that, at first, when he confronted his dread diagnosis, he was emotionally broken. A young man with a young family, the last thing on his mind was his mortality. Hashem, however, has a way of reminding us of our transitoriness. *Rav Yehudah* was emotionally devastated. Why did he deserve this? He was trying so hard to arise early to *daven* with exceptional *kavanah*, devotion. He did not waste time from his learning. His spiritual life was soaring, and now this. Suddenly he came upon a revelation which changed his outlook and gave him the strength to confront his pain and mortality.

The answer to his questions was simple. He was not doing Hashem a favor. It was quite the other way around. He wondered why Hashem made it so difficult for him to learn, to *daven*, to think clearly. It was because Hashem does not need us to serve Him at our convenience. He wants us to serve Him the way He decides. One might counter, “I could do much better and much more, if I were not in pain.” Well, Hashem wants you to serve Him as you are – now! He has enough members of *Klal Yisrael* who serve Him amid good health, wealth and satisfaction, etc. He wants to see how you *daven* when you are in pain, with an IV in your arm. How can you manage to go to *shul* when it is hard to walk, to breathe, to stand. He knows that you are unable to rise from your bed, go to *kollel* and learn all day. He wants to see how you will learn in bed, hooked up to all the monitors. This is the meaning of fulfilling *ratzon Hashem*, the will of G-d. We serve Him on His terms.

Many of us think that, after we have had a good day – *davened*, learned, gave *tzedakah*, reached out to our fellow –we deserve a big thank you; Hashem is in our debt. After all, we extended ourselves. Wrong! Hashem has many people who serve Him. He wants you to serve Him – not as

a favor, but because it is His will. If He makes it easy for you, i.e. great health, economics, no family issues, life is going your way, then you owe Him for allowing you to serve Him in comfort.

Hashem is exceedingly kind to us. When we survive troubles, we should express our gratitude with boundless joy. *Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl*, said the following to his *talmidim*, students: “Let us open the *siddur* to see how we are supposed to *daven*. We begin with *Mah Tovu*, ‘How goodly are Your tents,’ and continue with *Vaani b’rov Chasdecha*, ‘As for me, with Your abundant kindness.’ Is this correct? Hashem’s kindness? Go to the dormitory and see how many are still sleeping. ‘But I came to *Shacharis* early, you claim. ‘I deserve a big thank you.’ It should say, *b’rov chasdi*, ‘with my kindness’!” *Rav Abramsky* stopped for a moment to allow his question to sink in, and then he said, “Go to the hospital and pass between the beds and see how many would give their last penny away just to get up from their bed. How many cannot go to *shul*? This is why we say, *b’rov Chasdecha*, ‘with Your abundant kindness.’”

We owe Him everything, and as soon as we realize and acknowledge this verity, our plea of *Zachreinu l’chaim*, “Remember us for life,” will have so much more meaning.