

“For it (the Torah) is not an empty thing for you, for it is your life.” (32:47)

When the Torah tells us that the Torah is our life, it means just that – it is our source of living. Without the Torah we are not alive. A parent may say to his child, “You are my life,” but despite the overwhelming affection the parent is trying to convey, his very life and existence are not dependent upon his child. The Torah, however, is meticulous in everything it says. Therefore, if the Torah asserts that it is our life, it is certainly no exaggeration.

Horav Mordechai Gifter, z.l., cites the Rambam who states that all physical matter falls into five categories. They are: A) domeim – inorganic objects, such as stones and rocks; B) tzomeiach – plant life; C) chai – living animals; D) medaber – man, who has the power of speech; and E) ben Yisrael – the Jew. The Rambam is teaching us that the Jew is in a category all of his own – distinct in kind and degree.

Plant life is not just a stone with an added feature – the ability to grow. It is an entirely different form of existence. This is true of each of these five categories. They are all unique and exclusive of one another. The ben Yisrael is distinct from the human being, despite the fact that the two seem to possess a greater commonality with each other than all the rest. Moreover, just as each category is distinctive in its individual level of life, so, too, is each category unique in its source of life.

While a ben Yisroel has a physical body, his essence is actually spiritual. Thus, his source of sustenance is primarily of a spiritual nature, not a physical one. He needs physical sustenance to maintain his physical existence, but his spiritual essence must receive spiritual nutrients. Hence, even when the ben Yisrael is physically removed from his earthly abode, he lives on in the spiritual arena. Torah fulfillment is his source of life through which he connects with his spiritual dimension. If he fails to spiritually nurture himself, he may remain alive from a physical perspective, but his true essence and being are totally abrogated.

Our Chazal teach us in Pirkei Avos 4:21, “This World is compared to a vestibule before the World to Come; prepare yourself in the anteroom so that you may enter the palace.” When one enters the lobby of the king’s palace, he is already in the king’s domain. Although the lobby only leads to the main room, the mere fact that it connects to it gives it special status. Conversely, if it would not be leading into the main room, it would be insignificant in its own right. With this idea in mind, Rav Gifter explains the Mishnah’s statement regarding the relationship between This World and Olam Haba. This world has significance only in its connection with Olam Haba. In other words, a Jew must maintain his bond with Torah and mitzvos, his source of life, in order to give This World “vestibule status” to the World to Come. However, if a Jew severs his bond with Torah and rejects its mitzvos, he cuts himself off from his true source of life. Hence, he divorces the vestibule from the palace, and the vestibule simply has no value of its own. We now understand that when the

Torah refers to itself as “our life,” it is, indeed, a reality.