



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

KI TAVO

## Life, that We May Live

A strange command: "Choose life, that you may live!" (D'varim 30:19).

A choice between life and not-life, that we can understand. But to add, "that you may live" - that seems the height of superfluity.

If we choose life, of course we shall live.

Rashbam has this to say: "God did not exhort them to choose life like one who serves for a reward; He meant that they should choose what really is life."

Choose life? Of course we will choose life. But what sort of life? That is the question.

Someone said, "Only God can add years to your life. Only you can add life to your years."

The quantity of our life is up to God; we can want many years, but that choice is God's. Our choice is about quality, putting excitement, meaning and purpose into every single day.

I remember someone saying to me, "I have all I want. Why do I need to live any longer?"

I think I gave the right answer: "Life is not about accumulating assets - it's about being an asset."

Someone else told me, "I'm in pain every day. Every night I ask God to make sure I don't wake up again."

Here too I hope I gave the right answer when I said, "Pain is unbearable, and I hope that God and the doctors can bring you some relief. But don't pray to die. By being your own sweet self you give your life meaning and enhance the life of those around you."

## Truth Stands Firm

The Kotzker Rebbe had a shrewd interpretation of the opening phrase of the sidra, "You (ATEM) are standing this day, all of you, before the Lord your God" (D'varim 29:9).

The Rebbe pointed out that the letters of ATEM, you, are the same as those of EMET, truth.

Truth, he said, is what gives human beings the capacity for standing and stability.

Even the shape of the letters indicates this; the ALEF stands on two legs, the MEM has a firm

horizontal base and the TAV has two legs. The word as a whole, and each of its letters, has staying power.

By way of contrast, the opposite, SHEKER (falsehood), EIN LO RAGLAYIM - "has no legs to stand on", as the rabbis remarked.

The SHIN of SHEKER, in Torah script, swivels on a narrow base, and the KUF and REISH each have only one leg.

SHEKER is bound to topple over, whilst EMET stands firm.

A comforting thought at a very difficult moment in world history when people and nations tell lies without compunction and the injudicious media peddle half-truths without conscience.

It is hard to live at such a time, and hard to keep constantly vigilant to expose the falsehoods and argue for the truth, but in the end nothing can withstand the power of truth, and SHEKER is bound to collapse. -OZ

*Ed. note - In addition to Rabbi Apple's description of the letters of EMET being sturdy and stable, as opposed to SHEKER's letters being easily toppled, it can be noted that by looking at the whole Alef-Bet, we can also see the stability of EMET and the opposite for SHEKER.*

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## Rosh HaShana...

## Life's not a Fraud

All that praying for life: "Remember us for life... Write us in the Book of Life"...

Whatever for?

Shakespeare says, "Life's but a walking shadow... a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing".

Chai Ga'on said, "Life is a terrible disease cured only by death".

Sholem Aleichem said, "Life is a blister on top of a tumour, and a boil on top of that".

If you have that belief, life's just a

fraud, hardly worth praying for.

Longfellow had a different view: "Life is real, life is earnest." So did God, who said, "I give you a choice - choose life!"

Nobody asks to be born (Avot 4:22). Some people have one tragedy after another.

Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai debated (Eruvin 13b) whether it was good for Man to have been created; whatever the philosophical answer the practical outcome was simple: "Since Man has been created, let him use life wisely."

So when we pray for life, let's choose three goals - to live, celebrating life's good things; to live well, investing every moment with wisdom; and to live better still, to make the most of ourselves and enrich the world.

The Kotzker Rebbe asked, "Why do people weep when they say, 'Man comes from dust and ends in dust'?"

"We could understand if the book said, 'Man comes from gold and ends in dust', but if we come from dust and never rise any higher, that's indeed good reason to weep."

## Finding Oneself

Rosh HaShana appeals to countless people who find their way back from the Jewish periphery, even if only for a few days.

It's characteristic of Jewish history to have estrangement and rediscovery. It is part of the drama of the covenant between God and Israel, with times of closeness and times of distance.

In Shir HaShirim, read six months ago on Pesach as well as regularly on Friday nights in some communities, the story is played out in miniature. Its two main characters, the boy and the girl, constantly seek one another, sometimes coming close, sometimes separated, never ceasing to dream of being together for good.

In Biblical language, Israel says to God, HASHIVENU HASHEM EILECHA, "Bring us back to You", and God replies, "Return to Me, and I will return to You."

## They Kicked Me Out

The second of the three sections of the Rosh HaShana Musaf says that on this day, sentence is pronounced upon countries.

When I say these words, I think of Germany and my teacher, Professor Samuel Billigheimer, who influenced much of my life and thinking.

His expositions were sometimes over my head, but nothing could prevent me coming to him and trying to understand. Even now, many decades later, I still remember and quote what

I heard from him, though I puzzle over some of his sayings.

He was one of the products of pre-war German Jewry, a poet, philosopher and teacher whose life changed forever with the advent of Nazism. Released from a concentration camp, he left Germany with his wife and sons (and his library) and recommenced life in Australia.

After the war he decided to accept an honour from the German government, but he would not travel to Europe to be invested with his award. He said, "They kicked me out. I'll never go back."

I still often think of those words, "They kicked me out." It happened to so many German Jews. Their dedication to Germany - even fighting in the German army - was brushed aside. German Jewry was systematically destroyed. So much was owed to the Jews by German culture, science, philosophy, law, commerce and even sport - but they kicked the Jews out.

Hermann Cohen, who knew that German Jews had political problems, thought the Jewish and the German spirit were companions. But as Nahum Glatzer pointed out, "The layer of humanity in Central Europe must have been pretty thin if the Holocaust could have taken place."

Yes, the financial, political and social aftermath of the Great War encour-

aged antisemitism. But how could a nation stigmatise, sacrifice and expel some of its best citizens? If it can happen in Germany, can it happen elsewhere?

Professor Billigheimer never found the answer. I fear that I have. -OZ

**Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH**