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## A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

### פרשת ואתחנן

וַעֲתָה יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁמַע אֶל הַחֲקִים וְאֶל הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְלַמֵּד אֶתְכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת לְמַעַן תִּחְי�וּ וּבִאתֶם וִירְשֶׁתֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם נָתַן לָכֶם. (דברים ד, א)

*Now, Yisroel, listen to the decrees and to the ordinances that I teach you to perform, so that you may live, and you will come and possess the Land that Hashem, the G-d of your forefathers, gives you. (Devarim 4:1)*

In this week's *Sidrah*, Moshe exhorted the people to follow the entire Torah. He reviewed some of the *mitzvos* and taught others that had not been previously recorded in the Torah. Moshe began his address to Klal Yisroel by stating that observing the *mitzvos* is essential for achieving life and for possessing Eretz Yisroel.

The Ibn Ezra offers a puzzling interpretation of the phrase תִּחְי�וּ, *so that you may live*. He comments: עֹבְדֵי פְעֹר נִשְׁמְדוּ, *for those who served the Pe'or were destroyed*. The Netziv raises two questions regarding this explanation. Firstly, if this *possuk* is specifically instructing a person not to serve idols, then the Ibn Ezra's comment can be understood as a caution against facing the death penalty for those who served the idol Pe'or. However, the *possuk* is addressing a general command to adhere to all of the *mitzvos*, decrees, and laws, and many of those are not punishable by death. Therefore, what is the intention of the *possuk* in conditioning life on adhering to the ideals of the Torah? Secondly, did all those who ever served the Pe'or actually receive justice and face death as a result?

The Netziv provides a profound insight regarding the concept of חַיִּים, *life*, in the Torah. Often, when the Torah refers to life, it does not mean physical existence. Instead, it signifies the elation of the soul and the profound pleasure that comes from fulfilling one's purpose. The principle here is that every spiritual sensation enhances one חַיִּוּת, *vitality*. The existence of animals is fundamentally different from that of humans. While animals find pleasure solely in physical experiences, such as eating and drinking, humans have the potential for much deeper satisfaction. People can derive joy from intellectual pursuits, personal achievements, and recognition – experiences that are far more elevated than those of mere creatures.

Therefore, if a person indulges entirely in materialistic pleasures, neglecting his higher and refined faculties, he diminishes his humanity and can be compared to an animal. In doing so, he risks losing the enriched existence that is uniquely human. Such a person is no longer considered a "living" human being, as they have squandered their potential for a fulfilled and elevated life.

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* explains that every *aveirah* leads to a form of "death" because sin causes a person to forfeit the highest possible quality of life. With this understanding, we can reinterpret the *possuk* in light of the Ibn Ezra's explanation. Just as those who committed the serious sin of serving *avodah zarah* were punished with real death, every sin contains an element of death. To achieve the ultimate and complete חַיִּוּת, one must adhere to all the *mitzvos* of the Torah. This true vitality is

attained through toiling in the study of Torah and a deep understanding of its teachings. Such a person enjoys a level of life where anything less is considered a loss of true life.

R' Elyah Lopian *zatzal* once shared an interesting anecdote from his childhood. When he was young, he accidentally broke a valuable glass utensil and was punished by his mother. Later, a chicken from their courtyard entered the house and broke several expensive glass containers. Little (R') Elyah was eager to see what harsh punishment the chicken would receive for this serious offence, but to his surprise, none was given! Initially, he thought how fortunate the chicken was compared to him. However, after some reflection, he realised that being human is well worthwhile, even if it comes with the possibility of punishment for mistakes. Human existence is incomparable to that of an animal and is worth the occasional sacrifice.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 155b) teaches *לִית דַּעְתִּיר מַחְזִירָא*, *there is no creature wealthier than the pig*. Since any type of food is suitable for a pig, it always has an abundance of food, which keeps it satisfied. However, everyone recognises that a pig's existence lacks so much compared to that of a human, who has countless opportunities for a more meaningful life. (Unfortunately, if one's sole purpose in life is to chase material desires through indulgence in food, drink, and physical pleasures, one might argue that the life of a *חזיר* could be more enjoyable.)

The concept of *חַיִּים*, which refers to an elevated and fulfilling state of being, is emphasised multiple times in the teachings of Chazal. For example, the Gemara (*Nedarim* 64b) states that certain individuals are considered to be "dead". Among those mentioned are the blind person, the *metzora*, and the pauper. The Rosh Yeshiva explains that, considering the above, this comparison can be understood. The quality of existence experienced by these individuals, who cannot fulfil the yearnings of their souls, is so deficient that it cannot be truly regarded as life. The contrast between someone who can see and appreciate their beautiful surroundings and the unfortunate blind man is immense - it's akin to the difference between life and death. Similarly, the impoverished individual who lacks even the basic necessities for survival is comparable to a dead person when viewed alongside someone whose needs are met and able to live with dignity. The *metzora*, who is forced into isolation, also experiences a severely compromised existence.

The Midrash further highlights this concept, teaching that *רָשָׁעִים בְּחַיֵּיהֶם קָרוּיִים מֵתִים*, *the wicked, even when alive, are considered dead*. The existence of the wicked who are consumed by earthly desires and live in a state of ignorance regarding Hashem's *hashgachah* is fundamentally lacking, and even when physically alive, they are regarded as "dead". Acknowledging one's elevated purpose and status in life is crucial; without this awareness, one cannot be truly considered alive.

May we *zoche* a true and meaningful life by committing ourselves to learning Torah and faithfully observing Hashem's *mitzvos*. By embracing a lifestyle aligned with our elevated purpose, we ensure that we are genuinely "living" the most fulfilling life possible.

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