

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

By Ozer Bergman

"See, I am placing before you today, blessing and curse. The blessing: that you obey God's commandments...and the curse: if you won't obey God's commandments..." (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

To obey or not to obey, that is the question. Simple, rote performance of the *mitzvot*, is, of course, not a Jew's ultimate goal, but it's a good place to start. However, choosing to do (or say or think) the right thing instead of the opposite can be trying. As Rebbe Nachman once told Reb Noson, "Everything you see in the world—everything that exists—is for the sake of free will, in order to test people" (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #300, *Tzaddik* #519).

Life is not static, so we need to be alert to the changes and flexible enough to adjust accordingly. For example, God forbid we should drive to the beach on Shabbat. But "God forbid!" also to *not* drive a critically ill person to the hospital on Shabbat.

Drinking four cups of wine is quite appropriate at the Seder and on Purim. But to get close to God on an ordinary weekday afternoon, drinking wine is not a good strategy (*Avot* 3:14). And sometimes a lesser mitzvah that benefits the many trumps a greater mitzvah that benefits the few.

It works the other way around, too. A person facing two temptations may choose the lesser, but be worse off than if he had chosen the greater. How so? Rebbe Nachman explains that one may be so deeply sunk in a desire—addicted—that it totally overshadows even a major desire, for example, the desire for wealth. Because he has become so addicted that he is oblivious to other temptations, he is in a very bad state (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #56).

Is it possible to fully control our free will so that we—and we alone—can always choose correctly? Well, yes, but it's going

to take some time to get there. The Rebbe writes that there are two types/levels of *teshuvah* (return to God). There's the weekday *teshuvah*, the kind that flickers on and off, so that one moment you're certain that you'll be the next Moshe Rabbeinu and the next moment you have sympathy for your "friend," the devil (God forbid!).

The other *teshuvah* is like Shabbat—totally restful. Evil is rejected and you no longer have to struggle when faced with a choice between good and evil. There are (at least) two ways to achieve a Shabbat-*teshuvah*. One way is to become a disciple of a tzaddik who has Shabbat-*teshuvah*. Rebbe Nachman teaches that when Moshe Rabbeinu said, "God's staff is in my hand" (Exodus 17:9), he was letting us know that he had total mastery of his free will. The teachings and prayers of such a tzaddik can save a person from sin and Hell, and gain him entry into the Garden of Eden (*The Aleph-Bet Book*, *Tzaddik* A:54, A:100). By being in proximity to such a tzaddik, one can gain by osmosis a measure of his awareness and attitude. Rejection of evil begins to come naturally.

However, one does have to carry his share of the load. So the other way to reach Shabbat-*teshuvah* is by the regular practice of *hitbodedut*: talking to God, in one's own words, about whatever one feels is appropriate. The fears and desires that bully a person can only be dispelled when one can think clearly. That, says Rebbe Nachman, only happens when a person is dead. With nowhere to go and nothing to do, one can see that neither people nor temptations can force him to do what he doesn't want to do.

Similarly, Shabbat and *hitbodedut* are "nowhere to go and nothing to do" situations which afford us time to honestly self-reflect. Because we have free will, we can train our minds to discard the corrupt influences that hijack our choices. Then we can choose to obey, and choose blessing. Amen.

agutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!

(Based on *Likutey Moharan* I, 79:3)

SIDEPATH

Reb Noson: Whoever falls into the lust for money will never possess wealth, for he remains forever a slave to his craving. The more he possesses, the more he lacks, exactly as the Mishnah states: "The more possessions, the more worry" (*Avot* 2:7). One can never be truly wealthy until he overcomes his craving for money. When one can sincerely believe that God will provide him with sufficient livelihood, with minimal effort on his part, he can then rejoice in his lot. This is the essence of wealth, as our Sages observe: Who is wealthy? He who rejoices in his lot" (*ibid.*, 4:1) (*Likutey Halakhot*, *Tefillah* 4:16).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

11:26 See, I am placing before you today blessing and curse

We Must Make The Vessel With Which To Receive God's Blessing

When God sends bounty, it descends as an undifferentiated light. It is up to the individual to form a vessel to receive that bounty. If he does so properly, he can attain God's blessing. However, if his vessel is faulty, then although the light of blessing comes to him, he has no means of receiving it.

Therefore the verse states only that God "places before you." It is up to the individual to receive the blessing (LM I, 36:6)

13:5 Serve Him and attach yourself to Him

Two Constants

A person must do both, to the best of his ability: He must perform the *mitzvot* and thereby attach himself to God, and he must attach himself to God in all circumstances and devotions (LH III, p. 230a).

13:18 He will show you compassion and have compassion upon you

Prayer Draws Down God's Compassion

Through our prayers, we draw God's compassion to the world.

And when God bestows His compassion upon people, they will extend that compassion to each other (LM I, 14:11).

14:25 Bind up the money in your hand

We Should Control Our Money, Not The Other Way Around

A person's money is like his soul. One should take care to keep his money "together," "bound in his hand"—meaning, he should not let his livelihood or wealth control him. Rather, he should control his money and not spread himself too thin (LH IV, p. 125a).

15:2 Remit the debt

Be Silent In The Face Of Humiliation

A debtor generally feels humiliated in the presence of his creditor.

When a person is humiliated, he should remain silent, for that constitutes his principal means of repentance (LM I, 6:6).

15:8 Open your hand generously

Giving Charity Opens The Channels Of Spiritual Bounty

When a person opens the channels of bounty by giving charity, that causes the unification of the *sefirot* Yesod and Malkhut. These correspond, respectively, to the tzaddik and the common folk. The tzaddik gives spiritual bounty to the common man (LM I, 54:2).

Before Beginning Anything, Give Charity

When a person begins something new, he faces many obstacles. This is because "All beginnings are difficult (*Mechilta, Bachodesh* 2). At the beginning, one must break through and open a new entrance.

Charity has the remarkable power to widen and open the doors of any new venture. This is because charity is the beginning of all beginnings, for it opens and widens all the entrances so one may pass through. Therefore the Torah advises, "Open your hand generously," which may be translated more literally as "Open, you should open your hand." By giving charity, you will be able to

open your own doors to personal success (LM II, 4:2).

15:18 God your Lord will bless you in everything you do

Even If You Do A Little, God Will Bless You

When a person engages in work or a trade, he creates a vessel with which to invoke and receive God's blessing. He need not extend himself entirely, working many long and hard hours to receive that blessing. All blessing and bounty descend from on high. The closer one draws himself to God, the closer he will be to the Source of blessing. In contrast, the more he engages in material pursuits, the more he distances himself from the Source of blessing, and the harder he will have to work (LH IV, p. 190a).

16:14 Rejoice on your festival

The Festivals Put A Person In Touch With His Teacher

Our Sages relate that Rabbi Eliezer praised those men who stay home on the Festival with their families. Rabbi Yitzchak, on the other hand, taught that a man must visit his rabbi on the Festival. Our Sages reconcile these rulings by stating that a person should go to his rabbi if he can do so, and return home on the same day (*Sukkah* 27b).

But even when one is distant from his teacher, he can see him on the Festivals in a spiritual sense. The rabbis determine the day on which the Festivals will fall (*Rosh HaShanah* 24a). Therefore, when a person accepts and honors the Festivals, it is as if he honored the sages and, by extension, as if he spiritually sees his own sage on the Festival (LM I, 135).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

4 — "I am God, your Lord" (Exodus 20:2) *(continued)*

5, A person who wishes to go in the way of holiness must break all the negative character traits that derive from the four elements, as it is taught. He should also express his whole heart before the Torah scholar—that is, he should confess to him—and the Torah scholar will explain and clarify

for him the path he should follow according to the root of his soul.

6. There are three stages in attachment to tzaddikim, and by means of these three stages, everything is rectified. The first stage is when the person sees the tzaddik. In doing so, he nullifies the negative character traits that derive from the two elements of "mineral" and "vegetables"—namely, sadness, indolence and their related traits, and negative [bodily] desires. Then he attains joy, zeal and diligence.

7. The second stage is the charity that the person gives to the Torah scholar. This rescues him from the negative character traits associated with the two elements of "animal" and "human"—which are idle speech, slander, haughtiness and their related traits.

8. The third stage is when the person confesses before the Torah scholar. Through this, the Torah scholar directs him on the right path according to the root of his soul. This is the most important thing, because it saves him from everything.



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