

A Person Must Choose the Path of Life Even When He Is Not Yet Able to Fulfill Its Requirements

"I call upon the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you today: I have placed before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore, choose life, so that you may live—you and your descendants." (Devarim 30:19)

Everyone asks: Why did Moshe Rabbeinu tell them, "choose life," if this is obvious? Surely every person would choose life rather than death!

My revered father, *zatza"l*, answered this question by explaining that the main novelty of the verse is that Moshe Rabbeinu reveals to us that it is sufficient for a person to choose to follow the path of life—which entails observing the Torah and all the *mitzvot*—in order to receive special assistance from *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. In this way, a person can turn the concept he has in mind into reality; that is, whatever he wishes to do in order to fulfill the requirement of following the path of life, he will be able to accomplish with special assistance from Heaven.

And so the *Gemara* says (*Tractate Makkot* 10b): "Along the path a person wishes to go, he is led."

On this basis, this is what the verse means by using the specific expression, "therefore, choose life": "Decide to choose to follow the path of life, which requires you to fulfill many *mitzvot*, even though you are not yet able to fulfill them properly. For once you have chosen life, you will receive special assistance from *Hashem Yitbarach*, through which He will lead you along the path you desire."

(*Zera Shimshon*, in *Kinot*, art. 6)

Parashat Vayelech

The Fact That Hashem Completed the Days of Moshe Rabbeinu So That He Died on the Same Date He Was Born Demonstrates That He Did Not Die as a Result of His Own Curse

"[Moshe] said to them: 'I am one hundred and twenty years old today; I can no longer go out and come in. Moreover, Hashem has said to me, "You shall not cross this Jordan."'" (Devarim 31:2)

A *Midrash Peliah*, cited in the book *Emek Halachah*, says that with the words "I am one hundred and twenty years old today," Moshe Rabbeinu meant: "On this very date I was born, and on this very date I am to die." Therefore, the Torah says: "Never again did there arise a

prophet in Israel like Moshe, whom Hashem knew face to face."

We must understand the intention of this *Midrash*: Why did Moshe Rabbeinu make known to them that he had been born on that very date and that he was going to die on that date?

We can answer based on what we find in the *Zohar HaKadosh*, in *Parashat Behaalotecha* (155b), which says that Moshe Rabbeinu had placed his life in danger several times on behalf of Israel, yet his words had not been accepted. On one occasion, in the midst of his anger, he expressed his willingness to die, thereby causing a decree of death to be issued against himself. This occurred in the episode of those who complained because they wanted meat, when Moshe Rabbeinu said before *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* (*Bamidbar* 11:15): "Kill me, please..."

Immediately afterward, Hashem commanded Moshe to gather seventy elders, to whom Hashem would distribute some of the prophetic power of Moshe. As a result, Eldad and Medad, two of the seventy elders, began prophesying in the camp that Moshe Rabbeinu was going to die.

Based on this, one might mistakenly argue—*chas veshalom*—that Moshe Rabbeinu died because of the curse he had pronounced upon himself, thereby surrendering himself to death. But this would be a denigration of Moshe Rabbeinu.

Therefore, the *Midrash* comes to reject this notion by elucidating what Moshe Rabbeinu meant when he declared: "I am one hundred and twenty years old today." Moshe meant: "On this very date I was born, and on this very date I am to die. This is the number of days I was decreed to live from the moment I was born, and *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* completes the years of the *tzadikim*. Thus, it is demonstrated that the reason for my death is not the curse I pronounced upon myself in a moment of anger; it did not cause my years of life to be shortened. For if that were the case, why would *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* have completed the days of my life? If I had indeed been deserving of having my years shortened, would not my days, all the more so, have been shortened, preventing me from reaching the very date of my birth? Rather, it is certainly the case that my death is because my allotted time upon the earth has come to an end; it is not because of the curse I pronounced upon myself."

(See further on this subject in the words of Rabbeinu, who also elucidates the final part of the *Midrash*, in which he proves this explanation from the verse, "Never again did there arise a prophet in Israel like Moshe.")

(*Zera Shimshon*, *Parashat Vayelech*, art. 1)

Published and distributed by The International Organization to Disseminate the Works of The Zera Shimshon
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