

# The Second Level of Choice

By Tali Loewenthal

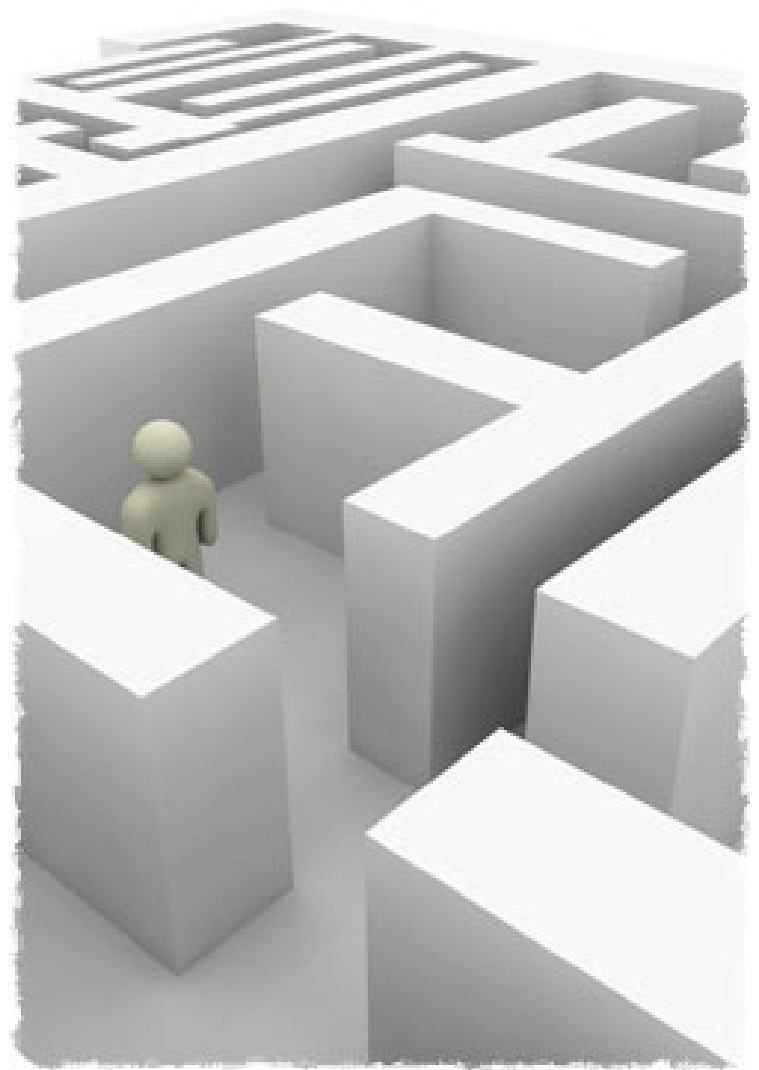
The title of this week's Torah reading<sup>1</sup> is *Nitzavim*, which means "standing," is always read on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah. In this reading, Moses addresses the entire people standing together, whether leaders, elderly sages, or water-carriers. All were gathered to listen to what Moses had to say.

Towards the end of his talk Moses says: "Look, I am putting before you today life and goodness, and death and evil... You should choose life, so that you and your children should live."<sup>2</sup> Moses was saying that the path of Torah brings life and wellbeing.

There are two levels to this idea. One is that a person can see a variety of ways to live. Thinking through the possibilities and probabilities, it seems to him or her that a life guided by Torah teaching is likely to bring a more profound level of happiness, a greater degree of personal fulfillment. So he or she chooses the path of Torah, the path of life. This is one level of choice. It is guided by one's understanding, and by the feeling that Judaism brings harmony and other positive values to one's life.

The second level is when the harmony is not apparent. When there is crisis, opposition and struggle, and one's observance of authentic Jewish teaching – or simply the fact that one is a Jew – seems to lead to extra problems.

In this challenging situation, every Jew still has the power to choose the path of "life" and "goodness." However, it might well seem a choice which is higher than conventional reason and understanding. The person is choosing what they can see as true life and goodness. Other people may not understand this. Apparently well-meaning and reasonable people might advise their Jewish friend: "Why bother? Take the easy way out."



Nonetheless, Moses tells us to choose life, authentic Judaism. His instruction is based on a wider perspective of who we are and where we are going.

Chassidic teachings explain that this choice is the expression of the essence of the soul, which is inseparably united with G-d. It must choose the life of Torah, despite the adverse conditions of the moment. Because from the point of view of one's inner essence, no other road is possible. Why not? Because one's essence is concerned about reality. Not just what seems good at the moment, but what really is good.

Moses' words, telling us to "choose life," include both these levels. And this is a suitable introduction to Rosh Hashanah. For on this festival we express our dedication to G-d as King, and He in turn "chooses" us anew, as His people.

G-d's choice of the Jewish people is not based on our good deeds, the first level of choice. Rather it is a choice of the essence of the Jew within us, the point at which we are united with G-d, independent of our actions at the time: the second level.<sup>3</sup>

Given this deep inner bond with G-d, it is up to us to try to bring consistency to our lives, to make our outward behavior a reflection of the love hidden in the essence of our heart. Then the inner and outer realities merge, both for the individual person and, ultimately, also for the world, and the two levels of choice become one. To choose the path of Jewish teaching means to choose life and goodness and joy.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Deuteronomy 29:9-30:20.
2. *Ibid.* 30:15, 19.
3. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 19, p. 279.

**By Tali Loewenthal**

---

By Dr. Tali Loewenthal, Director of Chabad Research Unit, London, UK, and a frequent contributor to the Chabad.org weekly Torah reading section; based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

© Copyright, all rights reserved. If you enjoyed this article, we encourage you to distribute it further, provided that you comply with Chabad.org's copyright policy.