



Sicha Summary

Chelek 19 | Nitzavim | Sichah 3

The Verse:

This day, I call upon Heaven and Earth to bear witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. You shall choose life, so that you and your offspring will live. (*Devarim* 30:19)

The Rashi:

You shall choose life — G-d says: “Even though you have free choice, nevertheless, I instruct you to choose the portion of life.” It is like a man who says to his son, “Choose for yourself a fine portion of my estate,” and then directs his son to the best portion, saying to him, “This [is the portion that] you should choose for yourself!” And regarding this, the verse says, “G-d is my allotted portion and my cup; You guide my destiny” (*Tehillim* 16:5). [The last clause of that verse, אָתָּה תּוֹמֵךְ גּוֹרְלִי, literally means, “You laid upon my lot.” That is to say:] “You laid my hand upon the good lot, saying, ‘Take this for yourself!’”

The Questions:

- 1) What is unclear about the instruction, “choose life,” that requires Rashi to offer such a lengthy explanation?
- 2) How does the parable add to our understanding to the verse?
- 3) At the end of the parable, the father directs his son to the best portion and then tells him, “This is the portion you should choose.” Why does he have to repeat that this is the best portion after he has already shown it to him?

The Explanation:

Rashi is bothered by the apparent repetitiveness of this verse. Just prior to this, the Torah says, “Behold, I have set before you today life and good, and

death and evil... I command you this day to love G-d, your L-rd, to walk in His ways... so that you will live and increase....” (*Devarim* 30:15-16)

Why, then, does the Torah need to repeat the message that following G-d’s ways is synonymous with life?

The new detail in our verse is the direct instruction: “Choose life.” Rashi, therefore, understands that the explicit verse indicating that Torah is associated with life is not enough. People still must be told unequivocally to “choose life.”

The parable illustrates this through a scenario where a father directs his son to a portion of his estate that is not clearly superior. The father, therefore, not only directs his son to the correct portion, but explicitly tells him, “choose this portion,” to underscore that even though it seems inferior, the father knows what is most valuable.

Similarly, even though the Torah has declared that the Torah is the path to life, this is not abundantly clear in this world, in which the “path of those who are sinful is successful.” Therefore, G-d must reiterate and tell His children to trust Him: “Choose life.”

The parable still falls short, however. The son has no sense of moral direction of his own, and so he must implicitly trust his father about which field is best. But we live in the world, and we see for ourselves how a path of physical indulgence is enjoyable, while the virtues of following G-d are merely understood theoretically.

Rashi, therefore, adds that G-d “lays our hand upon the good lot, saying, ‘Take this for yourself!’” G-d makes sure that, occasionally, we tangibly experience the good of following in G-d’s ways so that it is real to us.

This explains a difference in wording between the parable and the analogue. In the parable, the father tells his son, “This you should choose

for yourself.” But G-d isn’t content to merely tell us; rather, He “**laid my hand** upon the good lot.”

In the parable, the father’s speech is sufficient to convince his son. In the analogue, G-d already has paired the portion of Torah with the Jewish people, and all that is left is for us to reach out and take it.

The Deeper Dimension:

Rashi alludes to two paths to choosing G-d.

- 1) “Choose for yourself a fine portion” refers to the rational selection of G-d over material pursuits. There are two legitimate paths, and a person chooses the path of G-d because of his rational understanding that physical pleasure is temporary while spirituality is eternal.
- 2) “G-d is my allotted portion” refers to the innate connection that a Jew has with G-d that precludes any rational justification. Like a lottery, the path of G-d has been selected for the Jewish people; there is no other option. All that is asked of a Jew is for him to “take it for yourself.”

Yet, the Torah still presents it as a choice: “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. You shall choose life,” because in our conscious experience of reality, we see two paths and we must choose one. But Rashi reveals the underlying truth — that we are innately wedded to the path of G-d; that the choice has already been made; and that our conscious choice only reveals a subconscious truth.

This is why we are given this life lesson in the Torah reading preceding Rosh Hashanah. On Rosh Hashanah, G-d chooses the Jewish people because of our essential bond with Him, because He cannot be with anyone else. (*Ruth Rabbah, introduction, 3*) But He also selects us rationally, from among other nations, because of our superiority.

But our dual choice of G-d — with our conscious mind and with our innate soul-bond — we inspire the same response from G-d: He reveals His essential choice in us.

