

Parshas Acharei Mos ♦ Rabbi Avi Metchik

In the middle of this weeks Parsha we find a fascinating possuk. The Torah tells us (Vayikra 18:5) "You shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and by which he shall live - I am Hashem". Targum Onkelos is not just a plain translation of the words, but oftentimes is an explanation of the deeper meaning of what the possuk is trying to convey. Here the Targum says on the words "he shall live" that he shall live an everlasting life, the allusion presumably is to a life in the Next World.

Chazal learn from this possuk a fundamental concept in Judaism. They say that the Torah is teaching us here that the Mitzvos are designed to be a way of life. Therefore, if a situation arises where we must choose between Mitzvah observance and a danger to life, we say to guard the life and ignore the mitzvah. This concept is termed by the Gemara as v'chai bahem, literally meaning "to live by them". The well known exceptions to this rule are the three cardinal sins; Idol worship, forbidden relations and murder. What we see from Chazal is that the possuk is referring to life in this world as it is teaching you a halacha regarding life in this world, why would the Targum render it as referring to life in the World to Come?

The Sefer Sifsei Ratzon brings a beautiful answer to this question. He explains that the Halacha is that we are commanded to violate a mitzvah to save a life even if the person in question will only live for a short time after we intervene. Even if the sick person will at best live only for another few days, or even hours, we are still obligated to transgress Shabbos and drive him to the hospital. The Halacha is not only if

the person will be restored to a full life after the intervention.

The Rishonim explain the reasoning behind this is that in the short time that the person will live he can perform Mitzvos or other good deeds which will earn him everlasting reward in the next world. Alternatively, in that short time he can do Teshuva on any sins he may have, thus saving him from punishment in the next world. Either way, we definitely can understand the value of an extra few hours or minutes of life, therefore we are obligated to transgress almost any mitzvah to give that gift of life to another person.

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This is why the Targum says what he does. The reasoning behind the ruling of Chazal is that the person can gain in the next world. The potential gain in the next world is precisely the reason why Chazal teach the halacha about saving a life in this world, therefore the Targum speaks about reward in the next world. The true purpose of life in this world is to gain reward in the next world.

What we can all learn from here is the value of even a small amount of time. We can accomplish tremendous things and gain tremendous reward in the world to come even with an investment of just a small amount of time.

In the beginning of the twentieth century the renowned Chafetz Chaim

founded a Yeshiva in his hometown of Radin. The Rosh Yeshiva he hired was the well known gaon Rabbi Naftoli Tropzt"l. Rav Naftoli tragically contracted an illness and passed away at a very young age. When he was hovering between life and death the yeshiva students took upon themselves an extremely unique pledge. They began to pledge to give away time from their own lives to be placed onto the years that their beloved Rosh Yeshiva was destined to live. This one pledged one month and the next pledged three, and soon enough almost all the bochurim had undertaken the pledge.

With great trepidation one of the bochurim decided to approach the holy Chofetz Chaim and ask if he would participate in their mission. The Chafetz Chaim said "In honor of our exalted and beloved Rosh Yeshiva I will pledge five minutes of my own life to go to his". Understandably the bochur was a little taken aback. All the Chofetz Chaim could give was five minutes? The Chafetz Chaim said to the bewildered bochur "I see that you don't understand the value of five minutes. Don't you know what can be accomplished in just five minutes?" This question of the Chafetz Chaim to the bochur is really a question that we must ask ourselves.

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Good Shabbos!