

THE CHOOSING PEOPLE

by Rabbi Label Lam

Oddly, the name for Election Day in Israel is Yom Bechirah, the same term we use to describe that uniquely human quality that sets us apart from the animal kingdom, namely, free will. It reminds me of a phenomenon I like to call the "Mother's Day Syndrome". By singling out one day for celebration that day becomes the focal point for celebration as if exempting all other calendar days. Thanks Giving may become the only day for feeling and expressing gratitude. I'm afraid that Yom Bechirah is always in danger of becoming the sole sacred moment for the average citizen, when free will is consciously exercised doing grand injustice to the rest of times.

There was an elderly couple I knew very well who made it their business to vote in every election. One year in a presidential election, they both bundled up to brave the rugged wind and rain. With great effort they arrived at the gym of the local school waited patiently to sign their names and express their American muscle, which is a wonderful thing and I feel grateful to have the opportunity to do myself. I have no intention of belittling here the democratic process.

Later in discussion it became apparent that one had voted for the Democratic candidate and the other for the Republican candidate, effectively canceling out each other's vote. Perhaps it would have been time better spent if having discussed their intentions before they would have then decided not to participate in the tiring exercise of futility and just stay home. From a pragmatic point of view it seems so.

The Mishne in Pirkei Avos tells us, "According to the pain is the gain!" If an act is difficult to do it is more rewarding. The means is an end in itself. Not just the practical result counts but the effort involved is a powerful factor in determining success. This hidden ingredient in life makes it hard if not impossible for us to judge another's accomplishments not knowing how much and how hard the person really struggled.

When Avraham stepped on to the stage of history he acquired the reward of the twenty previous generations, says the mishne in the fifth chapter of Pirkei Avos. Why did he deserve the grand prize of reaping the reward of all the other generations? The answer is he had to counter the corrupt influences of the world around him. Not only did he innovate a novel and more penetrating way of viewing reality but he did it in the face of great opposition and contrary to the trend of twenty generations.

In the end of his life he is credited with the one hundred and seventy five years "which he lived". He

lived all of his years, even the years he researched and found wanting three thousand known religions until the time he declared his unified field theory of physics and spirits. The early days spent searching was what he was meant to do at that time, to struggle in pursuit of truth. Failing his way to success. This was his chosen profession, the search for truth. He didn't vote once or once a year. He was devoted constantly every day.

It's like the story of the wealthy father that presented a difficult Talmudic puzzle to the yeshiva students and the prize of marriage to his beautiful daughter to anyone who could deliver the answer. When everyone was sufficiently stumped the father left abruptly on his horse and carriage and at the edge of town a weary yeshiva student finally caught up with the wealthy man's carriage and said, "So what's the answer!" To which the father answered, "You're the one I want for my daughter!"

Avraham achieved a glorious future and all the election promises not because of what he knew but because of what he wanted to know. More important than being "the chosen people" is the prerequisite of being the choosing people.

Good Shabbos!

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