

CHOOSING LIFE

by Rabbi Label Lam

Zocher Nishgachos B'Yom Din... Remembers the forgotten on the day of judgment. (Machzor)

On Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur HASHEM is described as remembering the forgotten. How awesome is that notion!? We may lose track of things but HASHEM does not! One person described it like a bank statement with a list of checks and charges. Try to remember who spent \$35 at that stationary store and why. There is an itemized account of all of our deeds, words, and thoughts that exists forever. The good news is that just in case you thought your life was going unnoticed, and you suspected it was meaningless, you need not worry. Everything we do is forever. The bad news is that everything we do is forever. Oy! What's to be done!?

The Talmud (Chagigah) says, "Who is a fool? One who destroys what in his hands!" In another place in the Talmud (Tamid) the question is asked, "Who is the wise person? The one who sees the future!" The fool destroys the opportunities of life. He wastes time and the resources of his life. In doing so he squanders the most valuable ingredient in the universe, his life.

The wise one who sees the future is not just one who can pick a good stock or see the local results of his actions. No, foresees the ultimate consequence of how he spends his life here in this world and that impacts his behavior and attitude in all that he does.

The Zohar says that there really is only one giant Mitzvah and that is "CHOOSE LIFE" all the rest of the Mitzvos are Etzos- advice on how to achieve CHOOSING LIFE! Life is ultimately cleaving to HASHEM Who is eternal. Death is capitulating to the temptations of the temporal.

At any one moment a person holds his entire life in his hands. He has both the past and the future. About the past he can do Teshuvah. About the future he can choose to exercise his options more wisely or not. Stated otherwise, the Talmud (Brochos) says, "The ultimate purpose of wisdom (being able to transcend our immediate circumstance) is Teshuvah and Maasim Tovim – repentance and good deeds. Repentance does not mean psychoanalysis and indulgence in grief. No it means editing. At any given moment while we are writing "the story of our life" we can go back and edit or type further.

The computer gives us a more perfect analogy. Nothing is solid yet until the print button is pressed. Everything can be rearranged and deleted or understood and reframed differently until the day of death or till the print button is pressed. At any given moment everything is our hands to type and live wisely forward or to go into the archives and edit.

The Kotzker Rebbe detected a powerful strategy in the words of the Machzor, "Zocher Nishgachos B'Yom Din... Remembers the forgotten on the day of judgment." The implication is that the reverse is also true. HASHEM forgets what is remembered (or mentioned). Armed with this inference, an approach to editing and doing Teshuvah emerges. If whatever we remember is forgotten and whatever we forget is remembered by HASHEM, then it is best to mention and remember, without having to be reminded, whatever wrongdoings we can recall. That will cause them to be forgotten.

Whatever good deeds we do should be forgotten by us. Let them remain in the private realm between us and HASHEM. They need not be cashed in during this lifetime. Then will ultimately be remembered. These two criteria can be helpful in the business of choosing life.