THE LONGEST DAY

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

All of you stand here today before God, your God ... (Devarim 29:9-11)

Easily the longest day, but not the "longest day" with which most people are familiar. We are not talking about D-Day, as in the final battle of World War II, but as in D-Day, the day that Moshe Rabbeinu died. The entire sefer of Devarim was our greatest leader's farewell speech, and though it spans 11 parshios, and we usually read it over the course of 10 weeks, it all occurred on the 7th day of Adar, the day on which Moshe Rabbeinu was born and the day on which he died, in his 120th year of life, right to the final moment, an appropriate point to make on this last Shabbos of the year.

There are four known dimensions, although Quantum Mechanics now speaks of 11. The first three are spatial -- height, width, and depth -- and the final one is time. In a sense, the first three represent the reality of man, who is 3-dimensional, and the last one, time, represents the history of which he is apart.

There are different ways to describe the fundamental difference in outlook between the Torah point of view, and the non-Torah point of view, but a novel one is that, according to the Torah, it is the fourth dimension that gives meaning to the first three. However, according to the secular opinion, it is the first three that give meaning to the fourth one, making time less precious than it really ought to be. Hence, the Talmud states:

> *The righteous, even in death are called living...whereas the evil, even while alive, are called dead. (Brochos 18a)*

Figuratively-speaking? Well, yes and no; it all depends upon what you call life. Obviously life is not merely a matter of physical existence, because some people, unfortunately, only have that, and we call that a tragedy. On the other hand, others are lacking body parts, R"L, but go on to live meaningful lives anyhow, sometimes more meaningful than people who are completely healthy.

We also know that quality of life is not measured by the amount of physical pleasure we enjoy. It is also called tragedy when someone takes drugs or drinks alcohol to remain in a constant state of euphoria. Going to an amusement park or a fancy restaurant may be enjoyable, but only for a set period of time. Beyond that, people forced to remain there indefinitely would beg to leave, which begs the question, what does the Torah mean when it says in this week's parshah:

> *See, I have placed before you today the life and the good, and the death and the evil...choose life that you will live...(Devarim 30:15, 19)*

Apparently, what it means is this: choose to use the four dimensions in a meaningful way. You have been blessed with a physical body; use it in a meaningful way. You have been given time to live: use it in a meaningful way. Use both in manner that will result, eventually, in eternal reward in a timeless world, Olam HaBah -- the World-to-Come.

Hence, as Rashi points out, righteous people live out their lives to the very last moment. They tend to "expire," rather than to "die," the former being more a function of time, and the latter, a function of physical limitations. Hence, dying "before one's time" does not mean that a person can die before God wills him to leave this world. Rather, it means that a person can die before having accomplished what he should have in his allotted time to live.

For example, explains the Arizal, the root of one's soul dictates how long a person can "naturally" physically live (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 35). Some people, because of the root of their soul above, will always have short lives below, regardless of how righteous they are in any given incarnation, or how well they take care of their bodies.

However, what determines their portion in the World-to-Come -- where they will never die again --is what they accomplished each time in the short lives. As the Talmud states:

> *Some people earn their portion in the World-to-Come after many years, whereas some earn it in a single moment. (Avodah Zarah 17b)*

The common denominator for both? What each did with the moments they personally had to live out their lives.

It is amazing how much time affects our lives, which is why we spend so much of it trying to manage and gain control over it. Our very heart beat is determined to be "good" or "bad" based upon how many times it beats per minute. Even our bodies have their own clocks -- the circadian cycle -- which we must obey to remain healthy, and which impose themselves upon us, bringing about physical changes at different stages of life, whether we are ready for them or not.

This is another reason why Shabbos is so indispensable to the Jew. We take for granted that opposites exist in Creation -- good and bad, light and dark, pure and impure -- as if it is the most natural thing of all, which it is, once God built it into Creation. And, He did so, so that we can appreciate good by knowing what bad is; light, because we experience darkness; pure, because we are, at times, impure.

And time, because we have the eternity of Shabbos.

Fascinating it is how, even though the sun sets almost the exact same time at the beginning of

Shabbos as it did the day before, and that the stars come out Motzei Shabbos as they did the previous night, that from sunset to nightfall, there is a feeling of eternity. Pity the Jew who has yet to discover the eternal sensation of the 24 hours of Shabbos, for his life exists within a continuous hourglass, seven days a week, giving him little appreciation of time, and therefore, of life.

> *Rabbi Tarfon said, the day is short, the work is great, the workers are lazy, the reward is great, and the Master of the house is insistent. (Pirkei Avos 2:20)*

With everything in life, you can't fully understand something until you have witnessed its opposite. Likewise is it with respect to the finiteness of time: to appreciate it, you have to taste, on some level, its infiniteness. At some point in the week, the temporal must yield to the infinite, and the infinite must step aside for the finite.

In the case of the former, it is like stepping through a portal into another dimension, a fifth one, if you will. Personally, I love the walk down my street to the shul at which I welcome in Shabbos, as the sun sets, beautiful hues of red and orange over the Judean mountains behind me. In the near distance to my right are more beautifully sculpted, beautifully settled hills, that reflect the rays of retreating sunlight through a haze of fresh moisture. The view is Heavenly, befitting the arrival of the Shabbos Queen.

On my right and left are homes that exude Shabbos, with little children adorning the streets, dressed for Shabbos and playing in a Shabbos-like way. The air is sweet, and feels holy, and all of it elevates me and makes me feel as if I do not have a care in the world, even though I had plenty just hours before, and I will have them again after Shabbos goes out.

Even though the color of the sky changes dramatically over the course of the next 24 hours, this Shabbos feeling usually continues up until around Seudos Shlishis, when I usually begin to feel Heaven tugging at Shabbos. It's as if to remind her that the time is fast approaching when she must ascend once again to her Heavenly abode for another six days.

As I walk home from shul Motzei Shabbos, having dovened and after saying "V'yitein lecha," I can feel the clock ticking once again. I do not make Havdalah or do any creative activity until 72 minutes after sundown (as per the opinion of Rabbeinu Tam), but once I walk into the house, I am hit once again with the mundane reality of the weekday. One son is usually playing guitar, while the others are already involved in other weekday activities.

Indeed, my own computer usually beckons me: check your e-mail, complete "Perceptions" or "Connecting the Dots," etc. However, I usually make a point of not running right from Havdalah to my computer, just to allow Shabbos to linger a while longer. A "queen" has been in my midst, and I am not going to savor the moment as long as I can?

But alas, just as time must give way to timelessness, timelessness must also give way to time.

Besides, a Melava Malkah also seems nicer once the house looks more like Erev Shabbos than Motzei Shabbos, which means a serious clean-up job. The fourth dimension has returned once again, not to be ignored, but to be utilized to transform this week's opportunity of life into more eternal reward. This way, by the time the sun sets next Friday afternoon, Shabbos can be proud of our accomplishments, and anxious to reward us with a taste of the world for which we truly strive, Olam HaBah.

Hence, the World-to-Come is called "the day that is completely Shabbos," which is also why it was Moshe Rabbeinu, while the Jewish people were still enslaved in Egypt, who arranged for the Jewish people to keep Shabbos. The tzaddik who had mastered the four dimensions of reality, especially the element of time, was the perfect conduit for the gift that could allow his brothers to rise above the limitations of the three physical dimensions of which the slavery took advantage.

Hence, as 5769 fast approaches its completion, the one thing we become most aware of is time, since so little of it remains before Rosh Hashanah and the judgment on time. We become super conscious of how we spend the final moments of the year, at least we ought to be, and are reminded, by these 11 parshios and the final moments of the life of our greatest teacher, just how much can be accomplished in a single day, let alone over the course of an entire lifetime, when we work with time, not against it. Text

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Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's online book store for more details! www.thirtysix.org