

Vaschanan-Torah is Life Even in this World

By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Devarim 4:4 we read the well known verse, "and you who cleave to Hashem are alive, all of you today." We recite this verse just before we begin every public Torah reading. In its original context, the verse is contrasting the fact that all of those who worshipped Baal Peor perished but those who cleaved to Hashem remained alive to hear Moshe's words. However, the fact that this verse was chosen to be recited immediately before we begin to read from the Torah is telling us a deeper message learned from this verse.

As Jews, we intrinsically understand that our Torah is a Torah of life. We do not get preoccupied with death in an unhealthy manner. Yes, we have laws as well as a system of mourning for close relatives. But ultimately, we rejoin our remaining family and communities. Modern psychologists have lauded our system of mourning for being the best among many such systems to deal with our grief and to be rehabilitated. The Torah tells us very little about the world beyond the grave. Most of what we know comes from our mesorah which Rabbeinu Bachaya explains was given over to the Chachamim of every generation to explain to the masses. It was their job to properly elucidate for us in each generation what was appropriate for the masses to hear.

We say in Maariv every night that the laws of the Torah are our life and length of days. This idea is actually a paraphrase of the verse in Devarim 30:20 that states that listening to Hashem is our life and length of days. Just before this verse we are told that Hashem sets before us life and good and also death and evil. We are not coerced to follow any specific path but we are given an "inside tip" as to which is the better way; if we want to truly live life then we should follow the Torah and then we will really live. We find a similar idea in Vayikra 18:5 where the verse reads, "these are the Mitzvos that a person should do and live with them." Most of us are familiar with the mesorah we have on this verse that *pikuach nefesh*, danger to life overrides all of the Mitzvos in the Torah except for idolatry, adultery/incest and murder. The mesorah is that Hashem gave us the Mitzvos to live with and not die with. However, the simple reading of this verse reinforces the same idea we are discussing. These are the mitzvos that a person should do and live with them, meaning that when we live the life that Hashem wants us to live based on his Torah and mitzvos, it is truly a productive, satisfying and meaningful life.

In truth, The Torah gives us life not only for the next world but for this world as well. True, we understand that the real rewards are in the next world and not in this world. But the Torah gives us a meaningful life in this world in addition to what awaits us in the next world. The yetzer harah wants us to believe that those of us who live a life of Torah are "missing something", i.e. The treife steak is really a better steak. The truth is only through a life of Torah and Mitzvos do we really live life. The more one's life is involved in Torah the more true this idea becomes. Gedolai Torah indeed actually do have more pleasure from this world than the hedonists who devote their entire life to pursuit of pleasure. This was illustrated by Rav Shach, Zt"l. Rav Shach had relationship with a wealthy philanthropist who gave legendary support to his Yeshiva. Rav Shach once commented the following. "As far as Olam Haba is concerned I do not know whose reward is bigger. Whether my reward for teaching and Harbotzas Torah or his reward for supporting Torah the way he does, I cannot say which will command the bigger portion in Olam Haba. But I can say that I have much more of an olam hazeh than he does. Look at his life. He is constantly running to catch planes, trains to make meetings and deadlines. I see he has so much pressure on him. When does he get to really sit back and enjoy what he has in this world? But Me, Baruch Hashem, my olam hazeh is Torah Day and night. I would not trade that for anything."