

Parshat Tzav 5770
by Rabbi Aharon Ziegelr

Life is beautiful. Life is precious. Life is desirable.

Our parsha introduces the Korban Todah (7:12). Rashi writes (based on Gemara Berachot 54b) that in days of Beit HaMikdash someone who was in mortal danger of dying, but, through the help of G-d, managed to survive, brought this Korban. In his feeling of gratefulness to HaShem, he now brings a Korban Todah in appreciation. Rashi mentions four specific circumstances that would require such a Korban; Yordei HaYam (sailing the dangerous ocean waters), Holchei Midbar (traveling through dangerous deserts), Chivushei Beit Ha'asurim (released from barbaric prison), and Choleh Shenit'rapei (recovered from life threatening illness).

In all four cases one develops a keen sense of appreciation for life. Interestingly, the first letter of each of the four above illustrations has the Life in Hebrew. Yordeh – the Yud, Midbar - the Mem, Chivushei - the Chet, Yesurim (illness) - again the Yud, giving us a Chet, a Yud, a Yud and a Mem = the word Chayim - Life.

Yet the Gemara Eirubin (13b) records a dispute between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, whether or not a person is better off being born and having life, or perhaps he would have been better off not being born at all. Considering that life is so beautiful, precious, and desirable, it seems strange that there should be dispute on the matter.

But it could be understood from a perspective of a person evaluating his life in terms of accomplishments and failures, Mitzvot and Aveirot. Looking at life from perspective of birth of an infant who causes pain and sometimes even permanent harm to his mother at childbirth. The child, growing up, will wonder, “was my life worth all the pain and harm I caused my mother? Perhaps it would have been better if I had not been

born”. Although the mother will contend and console her grieving child who feel responsible for her illness, that it was all worthwhile. She is happy to accept the hardship, knowing that her child has a life. Yet that child will always have guilt feelings and doubts about his life, was it worthwhile or not.

We are that entire child. Kohelet (7:20) states: “Ki Adam Ein Tzaddik Ba’aretz, Asher Ya’aseh Tov V’lo Yecheta,” no one is perfect in this world, there is no one that does not sin. When we sin, we cause grief and pain to our Creator who gave us life. Although He is a forgiving G-d who loves us, He is our Father in Heaven (Avinu Sheh’bashamayim). We, however, harbor guilt feelings about our shortcomings and hurting we have caused to Him. That is what the dispute in Gemara Eirubin is all about.

The Gemara resolves the dispute by concluding, now that you are born, just do your best, even if not perfect. HaShem does not expect you to be perfect. He only wants you to do the best you are capable of doing.

Let us resolve, on this the Shabbat HaGadol, to do our best at all times.