



## WHAT IS LIFE?

**A** KEY FACTOR IN THE WELLBEING OF A PERSON IS THE WILL TO LIVE, AND, one could also say, the feeling that one is truly 'alive'. Sometimes a person feels so gloomy that they think: "I am not alive, I just exist". The goal is joy, and life, which raises the question of where we find life which feels like living, not just existing.

A few words in the first of the double Sedra<sup>1</sup> this week will help us in our quest. G-d tells the Jewish people: "You should keep My laws... and live through them"<sup>2</sup>. The path to life is through keeping the laws of the Torah.

Through the millennia our Sages have given many explanations of these words. One is that through keeping the Commandments we achieve eternal life in the World to Come<sup>3</sup>. However, another important idea based on this phrase in the Sedra is that G-d wants us to live through the Commandments, not, Heaven forbid, to die. To live, *physically*.

From here comes the central principle that "To save a life one breaks the Sabbath", and indeed almost all Commandments<sup>4</sup>. The Sages tell us that when a person is dangerously ill on the Sabbath it is an important Mitzva to break the Sabbath on their behalf<sup>5</sup>.

Is this ruling of the Sages an example of a kind of conflict

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between the spiritual and the physical, in which the physical wins, or does it rather express the *goal* of Jewish spirituality?

The truth is that by understanding a little more of the spiritual teachings of Judaism we discover just how important our physical existence really is.

Chassidic teachings tell us that the goal of Creation is that there should be a physical world where G-dliness is revealed. This is achieved by the fact that we live in the world and keep the Commandments, which come from the Divine. Thus our personal activities in our everyday world create a domain where G-dliness dwells, through the fact that we keep G-d's laws.

Obviously in order to achieve this we must ourselves be dwelling in the world, and hence our physical lives are infinitely significant. The Torah tells us that human life is sacred, warning us not to take life and to do all we can to preserve it. A further point is the opportunity physical life provides to achieve the goal of Creation.

The beginning of the first Sedra refers to the death of the two sons of Aaron, which can be explained as the result of a spiritual yearning to leave the limitations of the physical world<sup>6</sup>. This is not the Jewish path. Instead be in the world, and make it a dwelling for the Divine: through our actions, speech, and even just thought.

A further point emerges from this. The way that we achieve- "life" for ourselves, rather than mere "existence", is through following the path of Torah and by keeping the Commandments. It might sometimes seem that we can gain happiness by a different route. Our wise Sages assure us, this is only temporary. Sooner or later we discover that not only spiritual joy, but also our worldly happiness depends on us following the Torah laws<sup>7</sup>.

The Commandments of the Torah affirm life, and grant life. As we chant in the synagogue, when the Torah scroll is lifted up: "It is a Tree of Life for those who hold it..." So let us hold on tight, and really *live!*

1. Leviticus chs.16-20. 2. Lev.18:5. 3. See Rashi. 4. Sanhedrin 74a. The exceptions are idolatry, committing murder and sexual immorality. 5. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Shabbat, 2:1-3, and *Likkutei Sichot* vol.27 p.133 ff. 6. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Torah Studies*, p.188 ff. 7. See the Rebbe's *Iggrot Kodesh* vol. 15, p.231.

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SEDRA ACHAREI – KEDOSHIM

**THE BEAUTY OF SHABBAT**

The doorbell rang one warm Friday afternoon. Avi Simon went to answer it and found the delivery man holding a big package.

“Good afternoon, mate! Here’s your package you ordered,” the delivery man handed Avi a big box. Avi remembered that his father had ordered a new printer and called him down. Mr Simon took the box, signed the paper and thanked the man.

It was a warm sunny day so Mr Simon asked the delivery man “can I offer you a cold drink?” he asked.

“Oh, you’re so kind. You know, I think I will accept the offer, thank you so much.” Avi offered to bring the drink and returned with a glass of cold apple-juice with ice cubes.

“That was amazing,” said the delivery man after he gulped down the drink, “you know the delivery before this one, I had to carry a couple of really heavy boxes, and at my age, you need a break... But even when you have a break, there are still text messages and emails and phone calls coming in. There’s never a break! Twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, it’s just non-stop! Oh well, anyways, I won’t hold you up any longer and I’ve got to get going. Thank you again and have a good day!”

“Thank *you!* And same to you!” Mr Simon and Avi came back inside and closed the door behind them. *Twenty four hours a day, seven days a week*, the delivery man’s husky voice rang in Avi’s ears. Something seemed wrong about that statement. What was it...? Avi thought to himself.

Of course! It wasn't seven days a week of work. It was six days, really! The seventh day was Shabbat. Oh my, we're so lucky to have Shabbat, Avi thought.

The day passed quickly, and soon Shabbat began. When Mr Simon and the boys returned from the synagogue, the whole family and two guests were sitting around the beautifully set Shabbat table, enjoying Mrs Simon's delicious food. Young Ariella Simon was telling everyone about her week in school.

"...and during Maths, my teacher Mrs Johnson was complaining how her week is just so busy and non-stop. She said she can never have a proper break from anything, even on the weekend. She always has appointments and visits she has to make, and emails to answer and things to write..."

"That's so ironic," Avi said, "The delivery man today was saying the same thing. And afterwards I realized just how lucky we are. As busy as our week is, and as many appointments, meetings, classes and work we have to attend to, as soon as Shabbat arrives, all of that just disappears. It's pretty cool."

"Yes, that also crossed my mind," said Mr Simon. "And interestingly, the second part of this week's Sedra, Kedoshim, mentions many important commandments from G-d, such as honouring one's parents, honesty, no gossiping, respect for others, and so on. Keeping Shabbat is listed as one of the first ones!"

"Well, we definitely won't be able to do that properly if we don't taste Mom's delicious chicken soup!" Ariella exclaimed. Just then her mother walked in holding a tray with steaming hot bowls. Chicken soup with lockshen! Everyone laughed, and continued to enjoy their relaxing meal and the beauty of Shabbat.

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