

Choose Life and Good, not death and evil

¹⁵See, I have *set before you today life and good, and death and evil*. ¹⁶What I am commanding you today is to love Adonai your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His mitzvot, statutes and ordinances. Then you will live and multiply, and Adonai your God will bless you in the land you are going in to possess. (Deut. 30:16)

Moses' time is up. The apostle Paul also spoke about his "finishing" when he said: "⁶For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:6-7). This week's Parasha is Nitzavim (Deut. 29:9-30:20) which means, "You are standing" (TLV) or "All of you stand today before the Lord your God..." (KJV). Moses knows his death is imminent. What would your last message to your family on the earth be? We see our people are all standing in front of him and the Jordan River as they listen. Anticipation is in the camp. What will Moses last words be? Moses' last message is really important? I can imagine the drama of the moment. Would you like to what he said? The Torah records it for us:

⁹"You are standing today, all of you, before Adonai your God – the heads of your tribes, your elders, your officials, all the men of Israel, ¹⁰your children, your wives, and the outsider within your camp (from your woodchopper to your water carrier). ¹¹Each of you is to cross over (enter) into the covenant of Adonai your God that He is cutting with you today, and into His oath. ¹²This is in order to confirm you today as His people. So He will be your God, just as He promised you and just as He swore to your fathers – to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob... ¹³"For this mitzvah that I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it far off. ¹⁴It is not in the heavens, that you should say, 'Who will go up for us to the heavens and get it for us, and have us hear it so we may do it?' ¹⁵Nor is it across the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross over for us to the other side of the sea and get it for us, and have us hear it so we may do it?' ¹⁶No, the word is very near to you—in your mouth and in your heart, to do it. ¹⁷See, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil. ¹⁸What I am commanding you today is to love Adonai your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His mitzvot, statutes and ordinances. Then you will live and multiply, and Adonai your God will bless you in the land you are going in to possess" (Deut. 29:9-12, 30:11-16)

If it were you, would you (we) choose life? We were given free moral agency at creation but we were asked to trade it for fellowship with the Creator by doing what He asked. In Genesis 2 God gave Adam (Eve was not yet created) a command, but gave Adam free moral agency, that is, the ability to choose for himself whether to do right or to do wrong. *This was a sovereign decree, irrevocable and forever binding*. Yes Virginia, you and I are always free to make our own choice when it comes to God, when it comes to life, and when it comes to death. He created human life for fellowship with him (Adam walked with God in the garden in the cool of the evening), and as such He desired to be loved and cherished by choice, not by force. If He is God, He could have chosen differently, but He didn't. Instead we, as humans, make the choice.

David writes: "Behold, I was born in iniquity and in sin when my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:7). The Hebrew word translated *iniquity* is the word *avón* (אָוֹן) and the Hebrew word translated *sin* is the word *chet* (חֵט). These are two different Hebrew words, yet Bible translations, e.g., the NIV, translate them both as sin. Do these two words mean to be sinful? In *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, *avón* is translated as an activity that is crooked or wrong, a *conscious and intentional offense*. But *chet* means to *miss the mark/goal*, i.e., to *sin against God*. The Artscroll TNK uses the word 'fashioned'. How were you and I "fashioned in an activity that is crooked or wrong with a conscious and intentional offense so we might miss the mark?"

Isaiah has the answer: "*each of us has turned to his own way*." Adam and Eve turned their own way – you and I certainly do. It is all about us, all the time. It is 'how I see it,' 'how I interpret it,' 'how I believe it,' and 'what is relevant to me right now.' Our actions are often based on I, I, I, and Me, Me, Me.

⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our *iniquities*: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; *we have turned every one to his own way*; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (KJV) ... ⁵But He was pierced through for our

*transgressions, He was crushed for our **iniquities**; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. ⁶We all like sheep have gone astray. **Each of us turned to his own way**. So Adonai has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (TLV), (Isaiah 53:5-6).*

Our understanding of the word iniquity is clarified in: ²¹ “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but **he who does the will of My Father in heaven**. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in Your name, and drive out demons in Your name, and perform many miracles in Your name?’ ²³ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Get away from Me, you workers of lawlessness (iniquity)!’” (Matthew 7:21-23). We must ask, ‘When is preaching or prophesying iniquity? When is casting out demons iniquity? And when is doing wonderful works iniquity?’ The answer is in the verse: **when we do these activities in our own will instead of the Father's will**. It is the same reason as in the Genesis story and it is **the reason** Yeshua was pierced.

‘**Departing from iniquity**’ (“Get away from me, you workers of iniquity” Matthew 7:23) means to stop doing what we want to do and to begin to do the will of God (which are always good works) acts of faith and righteousness. Only as we depart from the iniquity of works that are initiated and sustained by our own will, we should be able to recognize and achieve the good works that are initiated by the Will of God. Works that are directed by God fit into His bigger picture and His greater plan for the world. Every good deed must be motivated by God's love (not by our own self-will). Paul was motivated by the love of Messiah in his ministry among Believers and not by his own self-will (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Today, on the 28th of *Elul*, there is still time to appropriate the Gift of Repentance. You and I can surely repent. We can turn ourselves around (**t’s’huvah**). How you may ask? We have *Messiah*. We can still repent today and in my opinion we must. You see, *Kol Simcha* is also standing today before the Lord our God (*Adonai* our *Elohim*) and *Kol Simcha* must choose life and good by obeying or death and evil by disobedience. What is your choice? Let us pray...