

D'var Torah - Achrei Mot & Kedoshim

You can live forever!

This is the conclusion of Targum Unkalus, the Aramaic translation of the Torah. In its comment on an important verse in this week's Parshah of Achrei Mot. 'Asher ya'aseh otam adam, vachai bahem' - the mitzvot are given to us so that we 'perform them in order to live through them'. The Targum explains: 'Vachai bahem' - 'and live through them' means 'Vayaichei behon chaye alma' - 'you will enjoy an eternal existence'. The Targum wants us to know that this physical existence on earth is not our only life. If one lives a good and upright life then the neshama, the soul, continues to live on into 'chaye alma' - the world to come.

The Chidushei Harim gives a very different peirush. Says the Chidushei Harim: 'Vachai Bahem' - 'you should live through them' means you will get a life through the mitzvot. Such is the beauty of the performance of the mitzvah, such is the incredible nature of the experience, that through mitzvot, we will have added quality of life, added fulfilment joy and happiness. But the definitive peirush must be that of Chazal, our sages in the Gemara in Yoma Daf 85a explains 'vachai behem v'lo yamut bahem' - 'the mitzvot should not cause any death'. The Talmud wants us to know that, God forbid, the fulfilment of a mitzvah should never cause a threat to human life. We are of course familiar with the three cardinal sins, but apart from them, there is nothing that transcends the importance of the sacred nature of life. Not Shabbat, not Yom Tov, not kashrut and right now in an extraordinary fashion we are finding that just about the entire Jewish world is fulfilling this mitzvah of 'V'chai Bahem'. Our shuls are closed, we're not gathering in numbers to perform the mitzvot that we should within a minyan because we value life, we don't want the carrying out of mitzvot to present a danger to life.

When a group of people gather together in a quorum in order to perform a mitzvah such as the celebration of a marriage or the staging of a Tefillah service in a minyan and it is a breach of law, they are in endangering their lives, they are endangering the lives of others and they are causing a terrible Chillul Hashem - a desecration of God's name. It is indefensible and it is disgraceful.

At this time we pray that the almighty will bless us all, that please God we will benefit from V'chaye alma - eternal life. May Hashem also bless us that we will have fulfilment and happiness always and at this very trying and troubling time, may Hashem bless us so that every human being on earth will enjoy good health, and that this challenging time will be over very soon.

Shabbat Shalom