



FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER

OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



The Choices We Make, The Life We Live

Bechira, free choice, is a core dimension of our humanity and a foundation of our belief system. As Rambam articulated repeatedly (see *Hilchos Teshuva* Chapter 5, *Shemona Perakim* Chapter 8), if we are not free to choose our course of action there is no meaning to and no accountability for *Mitzvot*. It is because we are free to choose our path in life that we must work to identify and follow the mission and actions that Hashem seeks from us, as we read in our Parsha (30:19), *u'vacharta vachaim*, “choose life.” Rabbeinu Yonah in his classic *Shaarei Teshuva* (3:17) understood this verse as dictating a mitzvah to properly exercise our free choice, and notes that the Torah presents its highest values – such as

choosing life, studying Torah, and emulating Hashem in our refinement of character - as positive Mitzvot.

In describing Choice as a mitzvah, there is an implication that we can live life without making choices. This idea was elaborated upon by Rav Eliyahu Dessler in his oft-quoted thesis regarding what he called *nekudat habechirah*, the Choice Point, where he noted that much of the time we are not making active choices but rather living on established patterns that we, our parents, or our social circle established for us by choices made long before. Each of us has good things that have become built into our routine that we do without even thinking. It is only at the Choice Point that we have the opportunity to move the line of scrimmage, shifting our life's pattern by making a choice to move things forward, to take our lives and assumed behaviors to the next level.

It is in this dynamic space of Choice that life really happens. It is there where we live today as today, not as a simple replay of yesterday.

Every morning, we make two *brachot* before we recite the *Shema*. The first notes Hashem's creation of the routine of nature as seen in the cycling of day and night, sun and moon. The second *bracha* recalls when Hashem interrupted that routine by exercising His *bechira*, His free choice, choosing the Jewish people from all the nations, *habocher b'amo Yisrael b'ahava*. That choice

May the Torah learned
from this issue be לעילוי נשמת
our much missed father,
grandfather and great-grandfather

BENJAMIN SPIGELMAN z"l
בן-ציון בן נחום דוב ויהודית ז"ל

on his 37th yearzeit - כא אלול

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was made – as noted in the *bracha* that follows the *Shema* – by the disruption of nature and routine through the miracles of the Exodus. Indeed, Pesach is the time when Hashem made a choice that completely changed the direction of our lives.

Rosh Hashana, on the other hand, is the anniversary of when Hashem created the routine of nature, and when He looks **to us** to defy our nature and routine and make change by our own choices. This is the season where we reflect and consider our future direction, shifting that Choice Point in our own lives and in how we will define our field of service and accomplishment.


It is our task during this precious time to make those choices that will ensure that we live today as today, not as a replay of yesterday, even as we envision and build a far better tomorrow, moving things forward for ourselves and for *Klal Yisrael*. ■

**May the Torah learned
 from this issue of Torah Tidbits
 לעילוי נשמת
 and in loving memory of
 our dear parents**
VICTOR COHEN z"l
 ועלוול שמחה בן אריה ברוך הכהן ז"ל
 and
BARBARA COHEN a"h
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