

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



Choose, Don't Settle

Have you ever gone into the voting booth, and felt like you were just choosing the lesser of two (or more) evils? If you can answer 'no' to that question, then, I believe that you're in the distinct minority. There have been very few times that I have voted with sublime confidence that I was really choosing the candidate best suited for the job. So many times, my favorite candidate either lost in the primaries or decided not to run at all. As author and pundit Gore Vidal famously quipped, 'Any American who is prepared to run for President automatically, by definition, should be disqualified from ever doing so.' Or, perhaps, Douglas Adams said it best, 'It is a well-known fact that those people who most want to rule people are, ipso facto, least suited to do it.' Ergo, voting is very difficult. This conundrum seems to even bother God in this week's Torah reading.

We have a very powerful verse describing the relation between God and future generations of the Jewish people: Yet it was to your fathers that HaShem was drawn in His love for them, so that He chose you, their

lineal descendants, from among all peoples - as is now the case (D'varim 10:15). What is Moshe, through prophetic vision, telling us? The first word in the Hebrew is RAK (usually 'only'). This seems to imply that God only had CHESHEK (closeness or desire) and AHAVA (love) for our saintly Patriarchs, and we, the descendants, are just the best option available for God's Covenant.

The Netziv says that B'CHIRA (choosing) is sometimes a result of necessity rather than CHESHEK and AHAVA, which are expressions of true aspirations and yearnings. The TUR suggests that this quote means that we were the best of the Patriarchs' progeny, while the offspring of Yishmael and Eisav were rejected.

Rav Yitzchak Arama (the Akeidat Yitzchak) explains the situation this way: This shows that the love sprang from a strong connection that God had developed towards the Avot, based on their conduct. However, the love for the descendants is due to His choosing them in comparison with other nations who were on a lower level, morally. That this is so, is confirmed in SHIR HaSHIRIM, where we read that Israel is "like a lily among thorns, so is My partner among the daughters" (2:2). The terms CHASHAK, love, and choice, are used in descending order of

preference. The first one is natural, unreasoning; the second one is deliberate, planned, but based on sound reason for the attraction. The third one is something forced upon the chooser, in which one makes the best of a given situation.

At first glance, this situation should, perhaps, disappoint us. No one wants to feel that they got an appointment only because of the merits of one's forebears. Should our special status as AM HaNIVCHAR (the Chosen People) or AM SEGULA (the treasured or precious people), therefore not excite us, because we only got it through PROTEKZIA? No, of course not!

The Ohr HaChayim strongly proposed that we also have earned merit. He declares that the continued special position of the Jewish nation was already explained in last week's parsha, 'Only you, the ones who remained attached (DAVEK, 'cleaved') to HaShem your G-d, are all alive today' (4:4). In other words, the Jewish nation has fought and struggled to remain connected to God, Torah, and our Patriarchs' legacy throughout the many generations, and that's why we have survived and remain God's chosen representatives on earth.

But, I strongly believe that it gets better. Look again at the beginning of

the parsha: If only you listen to these laws, safeguarding and keeping them carefully, then HaShem your G-d will faithfully maintain the Covenant, and the kindness which was sworn to your ancestors. And He will love you, bless you and increase you, and (as a result) He will bless your offspring (7:12-13). In other words, we can achieve that loving, cherishing relationship which God had with the AVOT. We just have to sincerely demonstrate our loyalty to the BRIT (covenant) and the Torah.

Now I'm beginning to feel like a late-night infomercial, 'And that's not all! You also get...' And it's true, there is more. If we exhibit this fealty, then we have renewed the original covenant. Because then our progeny will get blessed, not just because of the Avot, but because of us. That's the sweetest treasure of all. We can be our descendants' source of blessing and connection to God. When we commit, we renew the process. My progeny will benefit from my dedication, just like I've enjoyed the merit bequeathed by my ancestors.

At first glance, our verse may seem to present a less than glorious role for us. We're just some conduit for a spiritual credit line, arranged by others. However, further scrutiny into the parsha reminds us of a more exalted role: We can become our

ancestors. As it says in Tana d'Vei Eliyahu (25): Each person should say, 'When will my deeds approach those of my ancestors?' Indeed, when will they? So, as our parsha promises, I, too, can take my proper place amongst those cherished and loved by God. 🙏