

UNDERSTANDING LIFE SETTINGS

Background

Here we have one of the greatest men of his generation asking a basic question of HASHEM: how long must I suffer? And HASHEM's answer is, "Do you want me to turn the whole world back to the moment of its creation so that perhaps you will be born into a time of sustenance?" Why couldn't HASHEM have just said, "OK, you've suffered enough," and promised to provide him with his needs from then on?

Questions

Isn't Rebbe Elazar Bar Padas acting with greed? HASHEM just promised him that his reward in the World to Come would be the equivalent of an estate with thirteen rivers running through it. Yet his response is, "And no more?"

תלמוד בבלי מסכת תענית דף כה/א

רבי אלעזר בן פדת דחיקא ליה מילתא טובא עבד מלתא ולא הוה ליה מידי למטעם שקל ברא דתומא ושדייה בפומיה חלש לביה ונים אזול רבנן לשולי ביה חזיוהו דקא בכי וחיין ונפק צוציתא דנורא מאפותיה כי אתער אמרו ליה מאי טעמא קבכית וחייכת אמר להו דהוה יתיב עמי הקדוש ברוך הוא ואמרי ליה עד מתי אצטער בהאי עלמא ואמר לי אלעזר בני ניחא לך דאפכיה לעלמא מרישא אפשר דמתילדת בשעתא דמזוני אמרי לקמיה כולי האי ואפשר אמרי ליה דחיי טפי או דחיינא אמר לי דחייית אמרי לקמיה אם כן לא בעינא אמר לי בהאי אגרא דאמרת לא בעינא יהיבנא לך לעלמא דאתי תליסרי נהרוותא דמשחא אפרסמון דכין כפרת ודיגלת דמענגת בהו אמרי לקמיה האי ותו לא אמר לי ולחברך מאי יהיבנא אמרי ליה ואנא מגברא דלית ליה בעינא מחין באסקוטלא אפותאי ואמר לי אלעזר ברי גירי בך גירי

Rebbe Elazar the son of Padas was poor and quite ill. [On one occasion,] he needed to undergo a medical procedure. When he returned to his home, he found nothing to eat except for garlic. He bit into it and was so weak that he fainted. Once word spread that the great Rebbe was unconscious, all of the sages of the generation came to visit. While in this state of unconsciousness, they saw that he cried, and then laughed, and then a beam of light emanated from his forehead.

When he awoke the Sages asked, "What is the meaning of what we witnessed?" He answered, "HASHEM Himself sat with me and I asked him, 'Until what point will I suffer in this world?' HASHEM answered me, 'Elazar, my son, do you wish me to turn back the world to its moment of creation so that perhaps you'll be born into a time of sustenance?' I said to HASHEM, "All of that and only perhaps?"

"I then asked, 'Have I lived my [share of] years or do I have more to live?' HASHEM answered me, 'You are past the halfway mark.' 'If so,' I answered, 'I do not wish to go back.' HASHEM responded to me, 'The reward for you in the World to Come is an estate with thirteen rivers running through it,' to which I said, 'And that is all?' HASHEM responded, 'What will I leave to your friends?' I said, 'Give the portions from those who haven't earned them,' to which HASHEM responded, 'My arrow upon you.'" (as if HASHEM were saying, 'Touché,' as if He was entertained by Rebbe Elazar's response.