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**Understanding Life Settings**  
**(Shmuz #24)**  
**Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

The Gemara in Taanis says a story of Rav Elazar ben Pedas. He lived a very hard life. He was poor and sick, lived a very hard life. He went to let out blood, when he came back to his house, he had nothing to eat. He took a piece of garlic, put in his mouth and he passed out. He was one of the gedolim of the generation. So the rabbonim came to visit him. They saw him crying, laughing and then a beam of light emanated from his forehead. When he got up they asked him why were you crying and laughing? Hashem was sitting with me, I asked him how much will I suffer in this world. Hashem answered is it good for you that I should turn over the world into new and maybe you will be born in a time that you will have food? Have I lived most of my life yet? He said yes, you passed the halfway point. Ok, then I don't want you to do it. In the world to come, I will give you an estate with 13 rivers. The Maharsha says there is no physical reward in the world to come, its just to give us some sort of idea. Rav Elazar says that's all? Hashem says what will I have to give your friends? Rav Elazar says I wish to receive a portion of Olam Haba that someone else did not receive. Hashem then touched him on his forehead and that's why his head was glowing. The question is that Hashem was sitting with this man and he promised him a huge reward in the world to come and Rav Elazar says that's all? What kind of behavior is this? Rav Elazar really suffers in this world. He asks G-d to help him and G-d offers to turn the world around. What about a little bit of food? G-d says also, if I turn the world around, maybe you will have a better lot. Maybe?

Harrison Ford gets a call from his agent. Listen, I have a great deal, a great script, a guaranteed Oscar. Harrison doesn't want to do it because the guy they want him to play is a fool. "Everyone will see me as a pauper, I cant stand the embarrassment when people will see me." Obviously, this never happened. Because as every actor and person in the audience knows is that the actor plays a part and is judged on how well he played the part. If he played the part of the fool and he does it well, he gets an Oscar. He is judged

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by how well he did in his part. He's not judged by how wealthy he is in the movie, how good looking he is, how tall he is. You and I are on this planet playing a part. We have a very exact role. At the end of the day, we will be judged how well we played our part. We get caught up so much on the stage settings. You were born in a wonderful world, not by your choice, but the simple fact that Hashem put you there. There were people born in Poland in the times of the Holocaust. Many of our stage settings are things that we were born into. The Chazon Ish, when he would see a mentally retarded person, he would stand up. When they asked him why, he said if Hashem put a neshama into a guf that's damaged, that means that that person has been here before, and had to come back for a tikkun. Who says that you and I are on their madreiga?

My temperament, a big part of my inner nature, is not something that I selected or choose. It was given to me as the ideal life setting to match me so that I could use it, grow and accomplish what I was put into this planet for. Before I was put in this world, Hashem prepared the life that I need to accomplish my tikkun. Rav Elazar ben Pedat asked until when will I suffer? Hashem says do you think this is just by happenstance your life setting? Poverty and wealth are difficult life setting. Hashem told him, this is what you need, this is not by accident. Hashem put you in this body and life because this is exactly what you need. Hashem says who says that I could find a life setting for you that will fit what you need and you won't be poor. We human beings tend to judge people with exterior criteria. If a person is rich, Hashem loves him. If he's poor, Hashem hates him. If he's smart, he's a great guy. If he's dumb, I don't want to have anything to do with him. At the end of our days, we are judged how well we played out part given our talents and life settings. Each human being is judged by who we could have become.

Every Jew has a heavy package, a hard life, whether we see it or not. That package was custom made and hand designed for us, it's what we needed. When you find the person with the perfect life, if he has money, he is fighting with his wife or his kids misbehave, or his health is bad. You were given this setting because this is what you need. Life's tests are ultimately what helps a person grow. There was once a novel written about a football player that trained for the Superbowl. He rode his bike into a tunnel and was about to hit a car. The angel of death took him out of his body right before he hit the

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car. But the problem was that since he was such a great football player, he had such great instincts that he would have moved out of the way at the last moment. So there was a tumult up in shamayim what to do. So they found someone that was about to die, they put the football player into a rich snobs body who is overweight. He has to work to get back to the same position he was before. Could you see yourself in another person's body or life? Before you were born, Hashem selected a particular generation, in a particular country, a particular family, and the siblings as well. Most people never get this, they never understand this. We are not judged on what we were given, but what we do with it. Most people don't have enough depth to deal with the basic question: What are you doing here? Whats the purpose in life? Is there a G-d? I don't know.

Hashem put us into this planet to gain for eternity the level of which I will enjoy in Olam Haba. Two brothers in the same family, one is a success and one is a failure. They were given different roles to play. If Hashem created us for a small amount of time, there is no way to know exactly why we are here, why we are in our situation. But this is not easy to accept. If a person looks at the world that we live in, and he thinks that this world is all there is, he will say that G-d blew it. Look at the animal kingdom, there are many features and benefits that animals have that man doesn't. If Hashem would create us for this world only, then he would give us all the strengths of different animals. Why didn't G-d make us as strong as a lion or bear? Why didn't he give us the fur that polar bear's have? What about the teeth of a shark? Why is there disease in this world? The African clawed frog never gets a disease, even when put in a germ infested pond. No bacteria will kill this frog. Why doesn't man have this type of immune system? Why did G-d create disease in the first place? Hashem made this whole complicated immune system but left holes in the system. Why? Scientists say that much of our moods are dependent on our brain chemistry. When you work out, this is excreted from our brains and we feel euphoria. Why couldn't G-d make us have high all the time? Why is there such a thing as bad moods and depression and anger? Why couldn't G-d make man perfect? We don't know the answer to this question. It is impossible for anyone to believe that G-d created us only for our station in this world. We are here to grow and accomplish, we are here for a very particular and exact reason which is planned. The

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constant conflict and turmoil is what makes us grow. We are given all the settings and props we need to do this.

Rav Elazar Pedat needed poverty because that is his ideal setting. Hashem says I don't know if I could find you the perfect opportunity for growth that will not include poverty. This is not the way we or our society thinks about. But this is the type of thing we should be thinking about. We have to look at other peoples life. There's a lot of suffering and hardships, when you study others life, you begin to understand life. Isn't Rav Elazar ben Pedas greedy for asking for me? There is major distinction between greed and ambition. Greed is taking something for me that I shouldn't have. Ambition is a part of life, Hashem created us to be great, not to be satisfied with a little bit, but to never be satisfied with their avodas hashem. True ambition is understanding that G-d created me for greatness. Hashem created me to accomplish. The problem is that a lot of people are satisfied with what they are in this world and they don't want to grow. When it comes to their share in Olam Haba, they say, it's ok, I won't have a front seat, I'll sit in the back row. But this is the same guy who sleeps under his desk in the office, he would kill to make another dollar. When it comes to making money, he's never satisfied, he gives it his all. But when it comes to Olam Haba, he's satisfied. Why? Because he doesn't believe that it is him that will be going there. He thinks it's his distant cousin, his alter ego, some other part of him. Ambition is a great midda if you focus it properly. Greatness means self-perfection, accomplishing, doing what we were put on this planet to do.

Why did Rav Elazar cry? Rashi says he cried because he passed the halfway mark in this world. He realized he had little time left. This is a man who is being tortured! He is crying because he's halfway done? Why? When you understand life and why you are here, then you walk up in the morning with a lust for life, you love life, every minute is precious. Why is there depression in this world? Because people don't have a clue why they are here. We have more time now than ever, people have more to think, but they don't know what life is about. They try to run away from the question. If you want to enjoy life, you have to take on the world, but you know who the world is? The world is me. I have to grow, I have to accomplish. That's why Rav Elazar ben Pedat cried.

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