

RADIO PROGRAM - HOW TO CHOOSE
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Shalom. Today we are confronted with many, many problems. Probably the biggest problem is how to choose. There are so many things to choose from. When we go to the store there is a multiplicity of products. Which one should we choose, and how should we choose? We are a judging animal, man, because we are able to make choices. We are not in thrall of different instincts as animals are. Instincts, of course, are important to man, but we have the capacity to choose where many other animals have no capacity to choose. We can choose. Every man is, so to speak, a judge. But how can we choose? What are the criteria we should use when we choose, when we judge? How and what should be the criteria that a man should use when he is judging a way of life, when he is judging different ideas that occur today in the world? What philosophy should he employ? What standards should he use?

It seems to me that a good set of standards were given to us by Abraham, the first active monotheist in the world, Abraham, the great personage of the Bible, the founder of all monotheistic religions, the founder of Judaism, who is revered, of course, by Christianity and Mohammedism as well. When G-d instructs Abraham, what does He say? He says, "And G-d said to Abraham, 'Go you from your land, from your birthplace and from the house of your father, to the land which I shall show you.'" In effect, G-d tells Abraham to do three things: to leave his land, his birthplace and the house of his father and go to the land which He will show you. This, of course, has a physical meaning, has a simple meaning of leaving a person's birthplace, his home, the house of his father, and going to a land, but it also has another level as well, a philosophical level as well. It is this level of choosing a philosophy, of choosing a way of life that I would like to talk to you about today.

First of all, I think that the most important thing Abraham was told here

and what we should all use in choosing a philosophy, is the "Lech Lecha - the going". We all have to remember that we have a role in this world. If man is stripped of his role, then man is a nothing. If this world is just cyclical, if just the sun rises and sets, whether we live or die does not make any difference to the world or to anything or anybody, then it is not worth any effort to do anything. When we choose a philosophy, a way of life, when we judge any idea, we should say, "Does this idea give man a role? Does it allow him to act? Does it say that man's existence is good, that man can achieve, that man can do? Does it?" If it does, then it has perhaps fulfilled the first requirement.

What is the second thing? It says you should go from your birthplace. There are peculiar ideas in the world today, ideas which seem to put everything in a black and white category, a good and bad category. We do not realize that life, itself, is ambiguous. We have wars on this and wars on that. These types of terms are really bad terms. Poverty, of course, should be eradicated. All these social ills should be cured, but we use bad terminology when we talk about total war on this and total war on that, because life, itself, is ambiguous. What is Abraham really instructed here to do by this term "from your birthplace"? You know, the very same organs that produce life also produce filth. There is an ambiguity to life itself. The finest steak comes from a stinking animal. Our vegetables come from an insect ridden ground. The way we look at all things can be determining in what we do and how we do it. I think in America today we have a very bad philosophy. We either take one aspect of life and either run it into the ground and say it is no good and is terrible, or we exalt it to the heavens and say it is salvation. For example, sex. Sex has now become the greatest salvation in the world, but, of course, it really isn't. It is very important to life. It is also not the work of the devil either, but it is not certainly the salvation to life. Everything in life is ambiguous. It can be good, it can be bad. It depends on how we use it. The same knife we use to cut

It food can be a terribly destructive weapon in a person's hand. The same fire we cook with can be terribly destructive. Everything in life that you look at is really ambiguous. It can be good, and it can be bad. It depends on how we use it. The rule of the majority can even be oppressive if it takes away the rights of the minority. The rule of minority, of course, can be terribly oppressive if it does not give the majority an opportunity to express its will. Everything is ambiguous in life, and we must be careful how we use it and look at the particular circumstances. So, in judging any type of philosophy we must consider the birthplace, our own birthplace, so to speak, because the same organs which produce filth also produce life. This is true with every power in life. It can produce good and bad, and we have to recognize it. Any philosophy which exalts one power in life and does not recognize its ambiguity, something is the matter, or if it downgrades the power in life and does not give it its full due, something is the matter with that philosophy.

Then it says, "Go to the land which I will show you." G-d gives Abraham hope, and hope is an essential ingredient in any philosophy.

self-pity and self-hate and guilt and he will destroy himself, and by destroying himself he will destroy others and the whole world. Yes, my friends, the most important thing in judging any philosophy of life is to recognize, does it give man a role? Does it recognize the ambiguity of the forces in life, of the powers in life? Does it give man hope? If it does these things, then it is a creative philosophy which will enable man to recognize and to exploit to the full his own potential and will make him a happy person. If it does not, then, unfortunately, no matter how many material goods he has, it will cause him to disintegrate, to degenerate, and to finally give up on life entirely.