

AGING GRACEFULLY

By Ozer Bergman

“[His] sons carried Yaakov their father...”
(Genesis 46:5).

On the verse “The mighty don’t [always] win the war” (Ecclesiastes 9:11), the Midrash says: This refers to Yaakov. Yesterday, “He removed the boulder” (Genesis 29:10), the way a person removes the cork from a bottle. But today, “[His] sons carried Yaakov”—he had to be transported in a special chair (*Kohelet Rabbah* 9:11).

The teachings of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov are so broad and deep, his encouragement so inspiring, that even people who have been studying his works for thirty, forty or more years feel like brand-new beginners. Rebbe Nachman teaches that it’s not good to be old (*Sichot HaRan* #51). Don’t let your Jewishness become rote! Don’t think you know all there is to know or that you’ve accomplished all that you Jewishly can. Stay fresh! Stay excited! Stay young!

Who doesn’t want to stay young and vigorous? Is anyone excited about the prospect of being old? King David prayed: “Don’t throw me away when I get old. Don’t abandon me as my strength runs out” (Psalms 71:9). Our Sages weren’t too keen about it either, interpreting a series of verses (Ecclesiastes 12:1-7) as funereal homage to old age (*Shabbat* 152a). Rebbe Nachman tells us to stay excited about Jewishness, but he passed away before his 39th birthday. What can we learn from his teachings about aging or being old?

Rebbe Nachman teaches:

Life consists of periods of growth, of prime, and of decline. If one lives seventy or eighty years, the first third of life is a period of growth, in which he advances step-by-step, with all his abilities. The next third, the prime of life, is a period of stability, when all one’s powers are at their fullest. The last third is a period of decline. This parallels the phases of the moon. The new moon is very small. It then waxes until it faces the sun, reaching its greatest size. Then it begins to wane.

On one hand, Rebbe Nachman is telling us something obvious. Even if we don’t see it, we know that people get old. But the Rebbe is making a more subtle point. Old age is going to happen to *you*. As surely as you were a child, a teenager and an adult, *you* will be an old person. And as surely as you grew, developed and had a

prime of life, *you* will turn gray, lose a step and forget things.

We fear this. Nobody wants to be the bent-over geezer who complains about his aches and pains. But the Rebbe is telling us: “Accept this. It is an unchangeable fact of life. Prepare for it.”

We all know and appreciate the blessings of youth: the energy, the excitement, the enjoyment, the hopeful anticipation of a beautiful future and a successful life. What is there to look forward to when the body is less responsive and success is either no longer within reach or turns out to have been a mirage?

God is not only the God of the Young. He is also the God of the Old Folks. His care and love for you when you’re 80 is the same as when you were 8 and 18. What changes is its expression. In a related teaching, the Rebbe points out that sick people are untempted, even nauseated, by bodily desires because they are closer to the Next World (*Sichot HaRan* #96). The fact that one’s body is no longer able to perform as it once did is not a betrayal, as some call it.* Youth prepares us for the prime of life, the prime of life for old age, and old age for the move to the next venue.

Consider the reduction in mobility. First, you stop driving. Instead of going where you want, when you want, you must stay close to home. Then you adopt a cane that becomes a walker. The range of your perambulation constantly shrinks until you are housebound. Most lament this, rightfully viewing it as a loss of independence and activity. Yet a huge kindness is hiding here. A sudden shift from the wide spaces of this world to the cramped confines of the grave would be quite traumatic. By gradually reducing our mobility, God is easing the eventual transition.

But don’t wait! Start *now* to use the awareness that *you* will be old. The Chofetz Chaim once commented that most people live life the way they write a postcard. They use up much of the space on the card saying very little. When they realize there’s more to say, but not much space, they try to squeeze it all in. We waste our younger years doing little. When it dawns on us that we won’t live forever, we frantically try to make up for lost time. Don’t get caught napping. The sooner you internalize that your decline will come, the sooner you will make better use of your time. May you have *agutn elter*, a nice old age. Amen.

*On the contrary. When we misbehave, we are betraying our bodies! Remember! Your body is not you. It is a tool. For a long time it helps you

SIDEPATH

Rebbe Nachman stressed: “Never despair!” (LM II, 78). No matter what has happened, no matter how far you’ve strayed, *never despair!*

Reb Noson adds: You can always find ways to return to God. If you have started, continue. If you haven’t yet started to serve God, start now! (LH, *Masa U’Matan* 4:16).

draw closer to God, but eventually it gets in the way. Thus, Rebbe Nachman wanted to “take off his shirt.” He needed to go further (*Sichot HaRan* #179).

a gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!

—Based on *Sichot HaRan*
(*Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom*) #92

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

44:18 Judah came closer to him

To Draw Close To God, We Must Draw Close To The Tzaddik

YeHUDah (יהודה, Judah) represents the *YeHUDim* (יהודים, Jews). Joseph represents the tzaddik. In order to draw close to God, the Jews must first draw close to the tzaddik, who will transform their Torah study into blessing. Otherwise, their efforts will be transformed into toil and wasted effort (LH VII, p. 464).

45:5 Do not be sad

Closeness To The Tzaddik Overcomes Depression

Once a person is close to the tzaddik, he has every reason to rejoice, and he can overcome depression (LH II, p. 156a).

45:12 My mouth is speaking to you

One Who Guards His Covenant Gains Rulership Over His Heart

Joseph guarded his covenant and therefore was a tzaddik. He attained holy Malkhut (Kingship), particularly over his heart and emotions. And he was a ruler over others as well. Because authority is revealed through the mouth (which issues edicts), Joseph said

specifically, “My mouth is speaking to you” (LM I, 34:8).

45:22 But to Benjamin he gave 300 pieces of silver and five changes of clothing

Joseph's Gifts Hint At The Revelation Of Godliness

Joseph's gift of five garments to his brother Benjamin hinted at the future repository of supernal illumination, the Temple, which reflected all the colors of supernal beauty and which would be built in Benjamin's territory. On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol would change his garments five times, moving between his service in the outer courtyard and his ministrations in the Holy of Holies. Through the gift of five garments, Joseph hinted to Benjamin to prepare for a great revelation of Godliness in the future, in which he would have a major portion.

Since Joseph had mastered the ability to bring forth and reveal the supernal illuminations, he merited to ascend above his imagination and attain true intellect. Therefore he also gave Benjamin 300 talents of silver, representing the three areas of intellect—the potential, the actual and the acquired—that transcend the imagination (LH IV, p. 187a).

45:27 The spirit of their father Jacob was revived

When We Are Joyful, We Attain True Life

The spirit of Jacob was revived as a result of his joy. When a person is joyful, he gains life and can attain the Light of the Face—an awesome level of radiating spiritual light that helps subdue the face of darkness, which corresponds to idolatry and the Other Side (LM I, 23:1).

46:4 I will also bring you up

God Is With Us At All Times

God accompanies the Jews in all their descents; He is found with them in all circumstances. In the phrase *A'alcha gam aloh* (אֵלֶיךָ גַּם עִלָּה, I will also bring you up), the word *aloh* (עִלָּה, above) seems redundant. This word teaches that when God begins to elevate us, He does so continually. He elevates us again and again, to ever higher levels (LH III, p. 25a-50).

46:27 All the souls of the house of Jacob who came to Egypt were seventy

When We Recognize Ourselves As Jacob's Descendants, We Connect To The Root of The Torah

The seventy souls of Jacob's household correspond to the "seventy faces of the Torah." These souls were the roots of the Jewish nation. Each one has a corresponding root in the Torah itself and thus can always connect to the Torah.

Countering these seventy souls are “seventy nations” (enumerated in Genesis 10)—i.e., evil characteristics that can distance a person from his Divine root (LM I, 36:1). When a Jew recognizes himself as a descendant of Jacob, he can draw upon the “seventy faces of the Torah” for inspiration. If he does not recognize himself as a descendant of Jacob, then he is alienated from the Torah, and he draws his inspiration from the seventy nations.

47:23 Here is seed for you

Holy Speech And Charity Lead To Peace

Hei (הי, here) may also be read as the letter *hei* (ה). Therefore Joseph was telling the people: “The letter *hei* is seed for you.” The word “seed” can refer more broadly to blessing.

What is the nature of the letter *hei*? *Hei* has the numerical value of 5, representing the five articulations of speech (guttural, palatal, lingual, dental and labial). Therefore this letter refers to speech.

Speech has therapeutic powers that can lead to peace. Thus, Joseph was assisting these people simply by speaking with them. When a person gives charity, he can accomplish a similar effect (LM I, 57:8).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

8 — “I looked, and behold, a golden candelabra” (Zechariah 4:2)

1. The sighing and groaning of a Jew are very precious, because they entail the completion of whatever is lacking. In other words, when a person lacks something and he sighs over what he lacks, he thereby makes up that deficiency.

2. Anything that a person lacks—be it livelihood, health or anything else—cannot be fulfilled except through attachment to the true tzaddik and *Rav*. The reason for this is that deficiencies are made up by sighing, since when a person sighs over what he lacks, he taps into and draws forth the [Divine] breath of life [by which everything was created and which is the vitality of everything] to make up for the deficiency over which he sighs. However, this breath of life which can supply what a person is lacking can be received only from the tzaddik and *Rav* of the generation who is completely attached to the Torah—since the Torah is where the breath of life rests. Therefore, a person needs to be connected to the tzaddik in order to receive this breath.

3. The opponents and wicked people who set themselves against the true tzaddikim receive their breath of life from the *Rav* of the forces of impurity. For there indeed exists a *Rav* of the forces of impurity and of the Other Side, in contraposition to the *Rav* of holiness, since “God created everything with its counterbalancing opposite” (Ecclesiastes 7:14). Therefore, these wicked people are strong in their time, since their breath of life that is drawn from the *Rav* of the forces of impurity is like a “raging storm wind,” which is also powerful in its time. But it is ephemeral. In the end, it perishes and is lost, destroying both physically and spiritually all those who hold onto it. Therefore, the wicked people and those who oppose the tzaddikim are said to be dead even while they are still alive (*Berakhot* 18a). For they do not have the true, holy breath of life which the true tzaddikim alone are able to supply.



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