

Dvar Torah for Parshat VaYigash

written by breslov.org

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Based on Hilkhos Basar b'Chalav 4:1

“Pharaoh asked Yaakov, ‘How many are the days of the years of your life?!’ Yaakov answered Pharaoh, ‘The days of my years of sojourning are 130 years. [They have been] few and hard, and fewer than my fathers’ days of the years, the days of their sojourns.” (Genesis 47:8–9)

Let me ask you a question. When did Yaakov Avinu (our Patriarch) start being YaAKoV Avinu? The answer is, no later than when he came out of the womb holding on to the AKeV (heel) of his brother, maybe even before. (Long story; not our topic for today.)

Let me ask you another question. When did Yaakov Avinu stop being Yaakov Avinu? The answer is, of course, never, not even when he died, which he didn’t. (Also not our topic for today.) Throughout his life Yaakov Avinu kept working on his serving Hashem. When he was growing up in his parents’ home, when he went to yeshiva, when he went to work for his father-in-law, and in his role as husband, father and progenitor. If you’ve been paying attention to the Torah portions of the last month and a half or so, you know that in each of these situations and functions Yaakov Avinu faced challenges. How did he succeed in the face of all the challenges? How did he succeed in the face of all the EVERYDAY challenges? (By the way, do you know how many everydays there are in 130 years? Over 46,000.)

Well, he couldn’t have succeeded if he perceived himself as Pharaoh did, as an ancient, worn-out human being (Ramban and

Sforno on v. 8).

Someone who gives up on himself, can't grow. And he couldn't have succeeded if he perceived himself as a different type of ancient, an old-timer who had already become all the tzaddik he was able to come.

Someone who thinks that he is "full," can no longer receive and grow.

Yaakov Avinu wasn't complaining when he said that the days and years of his sojourn had been "few and hard." He thought them "few" because each day was unlike any that preceded it, and who could know what he might achieve today that he had never achieved before. So despite the various hardships he faced, Yaakov Avinu kept trying to achieve more.

As much as he did though, he felt that his days were "fewer," less full of accomplishment, than those of his (our) fathers, Avraham and Yitzchak. He was going to try to live up to their example. So should we.

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