

Get a Life!

written by Yossi Katz
November 8, 2023



What is life? Most of us would probably say life means living day after day. But is that true? Aren't there unfortunate souls attached to life-support machines who, while being technically alive (and hoping to be healed), cannot at the present time be considered to have serious quality of life? What about those who, while "living" an existence dictated by their daily schedule and usual habits, don't have the presence of mind to realize joy or meaning in any of it?

King Solomon, the wisest of all men, declared, "Wisdom gives life" (Ecclesiastes 7:12). Though life in this world is limited to one who is blessed with physical health, a person who has no purpose in life cannot truly be called "living." The Torah gives meaning and significance to everything we experience. Only the person who knows how to access this deep wisdom can truly enjoy and live life to the fullest.

One of the major vehicles that deliver this life-giving wisdom is tefillin. Every morning, when a man dons his tefillin, his spiritual conscience is endowed with this wisdom. Like antennae, tefillin receive spiritual awareness and knowledge from Above. Our *parashah* hints at the connection between living a life of spiritual awareness and tefillin in this verse: "Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years, the years of Sarah's life" (Genesis 23:1). The word "years" appears four times in this verse, alluding to the four compartments in the box of the tefillin. It is through the power of the tefillin that one lives a true life.

We praise God every morning with the words "He who in His great kindness renews the Act of Creation." Every single day is an entirely new creation, not at all comparable to any other. Not only this, but every hour is also created independently. Why does God create the world this way? Because when a person is properly attuned, every minute is a new opportunity to come close to God. It doesn't matter what someone has done until now; God has created this brand-new moment for him to connect to Him in an entirely new and fresh way.

Although we might feel like we already "know" God, we should realize that there is still so much more to learn, and be willing to look at life with new eyes. On the other hand, even when we feel like we've failed too many times and are too old to try again, we must realize that this moment is independent from all those previous experiences. To live a good life, begin again, as if you were born today.

This is what Rashi hints at in his explanation of the above

verse enumerating the years of Sarah's life: "The word *years* was written after every number to tell you that every number is to be explained individually. When she was one hundred years old, she was like a twenty-year-old..." Sarah was constantly renewing her life by living each day as if she were born right then. Thus, it was as if she never grew old. Rashi concludes, "'the years of Sarah's life' – they were all equally good."

Rebbe Nachman once said, "It is not good to be 'old,' whether an 'old' chassid or an 'old' tzaddik" (*Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom* #51). As long as we are alive, no matter how "old" we may feel, we can strengthen ourselves with the knowledge that God recreates the world at all times. Accordingly, we can also recreate ourselves, knowing that this moment was created specifically for us to be able to start again. Right now, I can begin again and again to live a new life of meaning and joy, so that all the years of "my life" will be equally good. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Tefillin 5