

Prepare To Die

written by Ozer Bergman
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“There was no water for the people...The people contended with Moshe. ‘If only we had died when our brothers had died, before God! Why did you bring God’s congregation to this desert? So that we...should die?’” (Numbers 20:2–4).

Death runs throughout this week’s Torah reading. The ashes of the Red Heifer. Miriam’s death. The people’s death wish when they had no water. The sentence against Moshe and Aharon. Aharon’s death. The confrontations with Edom, Canaan, and Sichon and Og. The snakes.

Make no mistake about it. The day will come when you and I will be dead, excuse me, will have “passed on.” We won’t be living on Planet Earth. This is an unpleasant fact to confront, but ignoring it won’t make it go away. Preparing for it will prove beneficial because we *will* be alive somewhere else. Our quality of life “there” depends on what we do here.

Rebbe Nachman was, in a manner of speaking, a time/space traveler. He visited dimensions of reality that we have heard about but are not familiar with. He once reported the following:

In Jerusalem there is a synagogue to which all the dead people on earth are brought. As soon as someone dies, he is brought there to be judged as to where his place should be...In this

synagogue, this court sits in judgment and determines a person's place. Some unfortunates are found to have no place at all. They are destroyed and cast into the hollow sling.

When the dead are brought there, they are brought in clothing. Sometimes a dead person's clothes are defective. His garment may be missing a sleeve or a hem. Everything depends on his actions while alive, because his postmortem clothing corresponds to his deeds. His verdict—and his place—depend on the clothes in which he is judged.

One dead person was brought there completely naked, with no clothes at all. His verdict was the hollow sling and destruction, may God spare us. However, a tzaddik came and threw one of his garments over the deceased. The court took exception, because why should a dead man be saved by being given clothing that is not his? The court asked the tzaddik to justify himself.

The tzaddik replied, "I have a mission for this man, so I am entitled to outfit him. A nobleman may send his servant to another nobleman. The servant has not gone and he asks, 'Why haven't you left?' 'I don't have the right clothes for going to the nobleman in question. He is very great and it is impossible to go there in clothes that are not respectable.' The master answers, 'Wear an outfit of mine and hurry to do the job.' Similarly, I need to send this dead man on a mission. That's why I gave him one of my garments." Thus, the tzaddik saved the dead man from the bitter punishment of the hollow sling.

The Rebbe also said that we all recognize the awful pity of being poor, to be without shoes and clothing or food or drink. So we pursue worldly things. But, he said, one who has foresight sees the pity on naked souls in the afterlife. Pity won't help them there. In this world, we can take up a collection and buy clothing for someone who lacks it. But not there. There the clothing one needs is Torah and good deeds.

No pity can provide that there. “But a person worthy of connecting to a genuine tzaddik can run to him and take from him some.”

So one way to prepare ourselves is to have a proper attachment to a great tzaddik. Another way the Rebbe suggested is this:

“In the World to Come, many are on the outside. They wail, ‘Give us something to eat!’ Others answer, ‘Here is food and drink. Eat! Drink!’ ‘No! We can’t use such food. We need the food of Torah and devotion.’

“Other outsiders are naked. ‘Give us something to cover ourselves with!’ Again, others approach. ‘Here is clothing.’ ‘No! Such clothing is absolutely useless to us. We need *mitzvot* and good deeds to cover ourselves with.’”

The Rebbe then said, “Happy is the one who is worthy of eating many chapters of Mishnah, drinking a number of Psalms, and clothing himself with some *mitzvot*.”

a gutn Shabbos!

Shabbat Shalom!

– Based on *Chayei Moharan* #102 (*Tzaddik* #228) and *Sichot HaRan* (*Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom*) #23