

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Avrohom Henich *ben Simchah a"h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

The Parshah of Life

PARSHAS VAYECHI 5776

The single theme around which the bulk of this *parshah* revolves is the passing of Ya'akov Avinu. It describes the preparations he undertook as the end drew near, including the final blessings and charges he delivers to his children and grandchildren, instructions regarding his burial, etc. The Torah expounds in significant detail on his actual death, the embalming period, the communal mourning, the elaborate funeral procession, the internment, etc. It proceeds to discuss the events and issues that arose as a result – and in the aftermath – of his passing (i.e., the resurgence of the brothers' concern that Yosef might now feel at liberty to exact vengeance). And the very end of the *parshah* concludes with the passing of Yosef.

It is thus quite ironic – as pointed out by the *Oznayim Latorah (Bereishis 23:1)* – that the name of this *parshah* is “Vayechi,” connoting “life.”

The same phenomenon occurs in the *parshah* that follows parshas Vayeira. Once again, death is the focal point, as the Torah devotes a full section depicting the death, mourning sentiments, and burial arrangements of our matriarch Sarah. (That *parshah* also concludes with the passing of Avraham.) And, once again, it is “*chayim*” (life) that figures prominently in the title: “**Chayei Sarah.**”

The *Oznayim Latorah* asserts that, far from coincidental, this is a most deliberate arrangement. The message is clear, aimed at driving home a most fundamental principle: that true life actually first begins upon one's departure from this world. This idea is reflected in the classic statement of the Mishnah in Avos (4:16), which states:

העולם הזה דומה לפרוודור בפני העולם הבא, התקן עצמך בפרוודור, כדי שתכנס לטרקלין.

“This World resembles a hallway leading up to the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the hallway, so that you may enter the palatial ballroom (of Olam Haba).”

The Transition

The fact that most people may not often think along these lines does not change the reality that true life is to be found in the Next World. The Zohar (*parshas Terumah*) provides a moving description of the moment of departure from This World from the perspective of the (eternal) soul. It speaks of the physical body in terms of a form of “clothing” for the soul, and reveals, as well, that there is yet another type of “raiment” the soul dons in the World to Come. While the full meaning of this passage may be beyond our ability to comprehend, it still delivers a most eye-opening lesson about where true happiness lies:

“When the earthly sojourn reaches its completion, with the soul readying to return to the spiritual realm... its physical, bodily attire is removed... The *neshamah* then resumes wearing the more pristine, ethereal attire that had been left in Gan Eden upon its original entry into This World.

So long as it is not clothed in its ethereal garments, the *neshamah* cannot experience full contentment. As such, (when the *neshamah* departs from This World) *it is elated to divest itself of its earthly body*, as it dons (once again) its spiritual garb. (These vestments) resemble the earthly ones, but are incomparably more complete.

Thus attired in its spiritual garments, the *neshamah* is able to behold and discover the loftiest of Divine secrets – what it was unable to know and behold... while clothed in its bodily casing of This World. What endless pleasures and delights the *neshamah* can now attain within its garments of the Next World!”

For the denizens of This World, of course, the loss of a loved one is an experience marked by understandable and appropriate sadness. It is edifying, nonetheless, to retain within the consciousness that – as we have seen from the Zohar – the soul itself views the event through a prism of joy.

The Exhilaration of Anticipation

As mentioned, the primacy and imminence of the Next World is a matter that, unfortunately, may not reside in the forefront of the focus of many people. In fact, one of the chief strategies of the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) is to keep a person’s mind so preoccupied that he will lose sight of this great truth; the *yetzer hara* knows that as soon as one is cognizant of the ephemeral nature of this world and the permanent bliss of the World to Come, he will immediately refrain from sin and dedicate himself to serving Hashem (*cf. Mesilas Yesharim, ch. 1*).

It is worthwhile to study the examples of those righteous ones who do live with a constant awareness of the *mishnah*’s portrayal of This World as a vestibule leading to the ballroom of the Next World. One such model was R’ Elazar Menachem Shach, who reported his personal sentiments on this matter to R’ Shlomo Lorincz, a close confidante. The latter recorded the poignant words the sage uttered toward the end of his life:

“Very soon – perhaps in another year, maybe in a month, a few days, or maybe even as we speak – I will depart from This World. When I get to the World of Truth, I will have to account for my deeds before Hashem...

[R’ Shach proceeded to detail some of the “misdeeds” he felt he carried on his record, adding – most likely as a manifestation of his humility – the punishment he would be accorded as a result. He then continued:]

“... After that, however, I will hear Hashem declare... ‘I have forgiven.’ Then I will be able to enter Gan Eden, where I will meet R’ Akiva and his colleagues. Can you imagine the pleasure of meeting R’ Akiva? This image is so vivid that I feel the pleasure of Gan Eden already; and this gives me the energy to overlook my circumstances and make it through difficult times” (*B’mehitzasam, vol. I, p. 293-4*).