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Vayechi | Maintain Your Purity at All Times





# MESILOT Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha of Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l

From the weekly lessons of his son Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

פרשת ויחי | אנגלית

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Parshat Vayechi - David, the King of Israel, is Alive and Well



#### David, the King of Israel, is Alive and Well

The moon in the night sky shone with its pale light and illuminated the faces of the congregants outside the neighborhood synagogue.

They were all aware and cognizant of the meaningful ceremony that they all took part in, as our sages have taught that through Blessing the Moon, one merits to draw upon himself an illumination of the Divine Presence.<sup>1</sup>

The Blessing of the Moon concluded, not before the congregation exclaimed all together the words: "David, the King of Israel, is alive and well," followed by a short dance in

honor of the opportunity to fulfill this unique commandment.

Yonatan stood there and pondered.

"Today I am 35 years old, and from the age of 13 until now, nearly three hundred months have passed, and I have consequently had the opportunity to recite the Blessing of the Moon hundreds of times. Yet, I have never paid too much attention to these words that we have all just recited: 'David, the King of Israel, is alive and well'."

This is all quite interesting - is King David the only one who merited to be referred to as 'alive and well,' or are there other

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**1.** To quote the words of the Talmud (Sanhedrin 42a):

"Rabbi Acha bar Chanina said in the name of Rabbi Assi, who said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "Whoever blesses the new month at its proper time it is as if he welcomed the Divine Presence."

It was taught in the school of Rabbi Yishmael: "If the Jewish people had only the merit to greet their Father in Heaven once every month, it would have been sufficient."

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righteous individuals who have achieved this as well?"

Yonatan figured that his best chances of understanding this phrase would be by searching for it in a vast Jewish library, and turned to enter the study hall and began to search for an answer that would satisfy him.

Books were piled up on the table one atop of another, and Yonatan reached out for the book 'Gal Shel Egozim', authored by Rabbi Menachem Egozi, one of the rabbis of Constantinople many centuries ago.

In this thick tome, he found the following idea relating to his query:<sup>2</sup>

In the entire Tanach, we find only three individuals regarding whom the expression "And his days drew near" (...יְבָּרְבֹּר יְמֵי (...) is used: Yaakov, Moshe, and David:

Regarding Yaakov, it says (in our Parsha): "And the days of Israel's death drew near" (Genesis 47:29); Regarding Moshe, it says:

"And the L-rd said to Moshe: Behold, the days of your death are approaching" (Deuteronomy 31:14); and regarding David, it says (in this week's Haftarah): "And the days of David's death drew near" (1 Kings 2:1).

We also find an additional commonality among these three righteous individuals who were all called "the chosen of G-d": Yaakov was the choicest of the patriarchs, as it says: "For the L-rd has chosen Yaakov for Himself" (Psalms 135:4); Moshe was the choicest of the prophets, as it says: "Had not Moshe His chosen one..." (Psalms 106:23); and David was the choicest of the kings, as it says: "David My servant whom I chose" (1 Kings 11:34).

Furthermore, our Sages said about these three righteous ones that their body was preserved together with their soul: About Yaakov, they said (Taanit 5b): "Our forefather Yaakov did not die"; regarding Moshe, they said (Sotah 13b): "Moshe did not die... just as he stood and served before, so too does

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he stand and serve now"; and about King David as well, our Sages said (Rosh Hashanah 25a): "David, the King of Israel, is alive and well."

This is the reason that this expression regarding their final days is used ("And his days drew near"), to teach us that it was not they who were about to die, but rather the days in which the Jewish merited to have them in their midst were about to end.

Yonatan was excited with what he had just learned; according to the "Gal Shel Egozim," there were indeed three righteous individuals who merited to be "alive and well" as well.

"Wait," Yonatan was now getting confused, "so why do we only explicitly mention that King David is alive and well?"

Again, he began to peruse through the many volumes he found in the synagogue in search of some explanation that might rest his mind.

A short time later, he found a dust-covered volume called 'Shuta D'Yenuka' by Rabbi Hezekiah Shmuel Tarika, from the great Torah sages of Rhodes, Greece, and opened it and began to study (page 10a):

"In the Talmud, the phrase used is "David, the King of Israel, is alive and well." We must understand why he isn't called here "David son of Jesse," as in Psalms: "The prayers of David son of Jesse are completed" (Psalms 72:20).

Rather, our Sages wanted to allude in this phrase to all of the righteous individuals who did not die in the regular sense, namely:

Yaakov, Moshe, and David.

In the phrase: "David, the King of Israel, is alive and well" - the word "King" refers to Moshe Rabbeinu (as in the verse: "And He was King in Jeshurun" (Deuteronomy 33:5)); the word "Israel" refers to Yaakov our forefather (as in the verse: "And the days of Israel drew near"). Thus, when we say "David, the King of Israel," we essentially are mentioning the three eternal righteous leaders:

David, Moshe, and Yaakov."

Yonatan was quite satisfied with the answer he discovered, and after closing the book, he rose from his place and went home.

Parshat Vayechi - Holiness in Eating

#### **Holiness in Eating**

Yonatan knocked on the door and entered his house. On the table, a covered plate awaited him, and next to it lay a small note that read: "I had to go do some errands; enjoy the lunch I prepared for you."

Yonatan sat down to eat and suddenly recalled a memory from ten years before:

He had been sitting in the class of Rabbi Yoram Abargel, listening to the words that the Rabbi shared from the depth of his soul, words that stir the heart and give the mind much food for thought.

That Torah lesson, Rabbi Yoram said: "The divine service of eating properly is such a difficult task that many righteous individuals had preferred to simply fast."

Yonatan returned to reality and looked again at the plate. "Well, for now, I can do my best and try to eat for the sake of Heaven, and have the intention to serve G-d more wholesomely with the energy it will give me."

These thoughts continued to swirl in his mind, and he decided

to study some Torah words before he began to eat. He pulled out a volume of Talmud from the shelf and began to learn:

The Talmud relates (Taanit 5b) that once Rav Nachman and Rabbi Yitzchak sat together at a meal. Rav Nachman turned to Rabbi Yitzchak and requested, "Share some words of Torah please."

Rabbi Yitzchak replied, "One should not converse during a meal, lest the windpipe precede to swallow the food before the esophagus and one would be endangered" (if one talks and eats simultaneously, he might choke).

#### The Talmud continues:

After they finished eating, Rabbi Yitzchak shared, "Thus said Rabbi Yochanan: Our forefather Yaakov did not die," and the Talmud goes on to explain from which Torah passage Rabbi

Yochanan derived this.

Yonatan's thoughts raced in his mind. "I don't understand. What is the connection between

Parshat Vayechi - The Shechinah, Even in the Land of Egypt

the beginning of this tale and the end? Is there some link between the ruling that one must not converse during a meal and the teaching that our forefather Yaakov did not die?"

After a few minutes of thought, he realized that if he wanted to benefit from the food, he would do best to eat it now, while it was still warm, rather than to wait until it turned cold.

After finishing to eat, Yonatan sat down to delve into the Talmudic subject, in search of a clue or even better yet, an answer. He couldn't find the deeper answer he was looking for by perusing the usual commentary on the page of the Talmud, and he decided to visit the nearby study hall; perhaps there he would find the answer.

#### The Shechinah, Even in the Land of Egypt

Yonatan entered the study hall and looked around. He decided he would approach the Rabbi and share with him the questions that bothered him in the above passage of the Talmud.

The Rabbi heard the question and remarked, "Yonatan, that's indeed a great question, and to answer it, I'll need to preface:

In the year 2108 to the creation of the world, the lofty soul of our forefather Yaakov descended into the world, and from that time and on, began to serve the Creator in truth and with self-sacrifice.

All the days of his life, Yaakov served his Creator with perfect, wholehearted service, with truth and all of his might.

When our forefather Yaakov was 84 years old, his divine service took on a new, luminous hue.

Yaakov married Rachel and Leah and lived in true peace with them, in unity of the heart thereby meriting the complete dwelling of the Shechinah amongst them.

He merited further, by virtue of the harmony in his home and the consequent dwelling of Parshat Vayechi - Days of Life - An Accumulative Reality

the Shechinah, to draw from the upper divine Sefirot, the twelve holy and pure souls of his children - the Twelve Tribes of G-d. These twelve sons became a chariot and throne for the Holy Shechinah, and the Holy Shechinah was enthroned in them.

When our forefather Yaakov was 130 years old, he went with all his family down to Egypt. Even there, in Egypt, Yaakov and his sons continued to serve their Creator with all their might.

Through their holy efforts, they merited to draw down a great light - of the Infinite Light of G-d - to be somehow found, even within the land of Egypt.

With constant devotion, the Jewish people continued in their divine service, through which the Infinite Light was revealed to an even greater intensity.

On one clear day in this blissful era, when our forefather Yaakov was 147 years of age, the day of his passing arrived.

#### **Days of Life - An Accumulative Reality**

Our forefather Yaakov, at the age of 147 years, on a clear Autumn day, felt the springs of hidden wisdom being revealed to him and the gates of concealed understanding opening before him.

Spiritual lights and illuminations and an expanded consciousness descended and shone upon him from the highest heavens. Supreme delight and sublime tranquility enveloped everything in his vicinity.

Yaakov understood that his day had arrived - the day he had longed and yearned for all of his life: the day of his passing.

He called for Joseph, as it is stated: "And the days of Israel's death drew near, and he summoned his son Joseph and said to him" (Genesis 47:29).

When Rabbi Yossi studied this verse, he wondered aloud:<sup>3</sup> The moment of death is a single instant

Parshat Vayechi - Days of Life - An Accumulative Reality

that occurs on one day. So why
then does the verse say, "And
the days of Israel's death drew
near" - "days" in the plural?
Can a person experience the
moment of death over several
days?

He answered:

"All the days that a person lives do not vanish but remain and exist in actual reality. While a person is still alive, the full measure of his days is not completed; but are rather hidden.

But when the moment of one's passing arrives, all those days in which that person lived, fully emerge from their concealment and connect and bond together, and the days of the person are revealed in their entirety. These days then appear before the Holy One, blessed be He, and at that very moment, the person dies."

To explain:

When a person is born, it is decreed above, how many days

he will live in the world. Each and every day is an entity unto itself - a spiritual reality that exists forever, and the entirety and totality of one's days are called in Kabbalah the "Configuration of the Days."

Every day that passes does not fade away into oblivion but is preserved and hidden until one's time comes. Upon departing this world, all his days are woven together and called the "Configuration of the Days," and with this configuration, composed of the sum of all his days, the person stands before

This then, is the reason that the verse states in the plural tense: "And the days of Israel's death drew near" - on that day when the moment of passing arrived, all of the days of our forefather Yaakov emerged from their concealment (in the over 147 years of Yaakov's life, there were over 53,655 days) and appeared proudly and wholly before the Creator with great joy.

Parshat Vayechi - Days of Life - An Accumulative Reality

As the Zohar ends off this teaching:

"This is what is written, "And the days of Israel's death drew near" - "for all of his days appeared before the Holy One, blessed be He, being that he was a completely righteous man."<sup>4</sup>

"Please allow me," the Rabbi said to Yonatan, "to offer yet another introduction before we discuss the eternal life of Yaakov."

#### 

**4.** To illustrate the level of purity that Yaakov our forefather achieved before his Creator, we recount the following tale:

Rabbi Yoel Sirkis, author of the "Bayit Chadash" (BaCh), arrived in the World Above, but they found no fault or trace of sin that would warrant his punishment in Gehinnom - not even to pass through its entrance.

The souls tormented in Gehinnom came before the Blessed Holy One with a complaint saying that if the BaCh were to pass through the entrance of Gehinnom, he would have surely been able to rescue them from there.

Immediately, the heavenly Accuser came before the Heavenly Court and exclaimed:

"I have found a transgression that the BaCh committed."

"What have you found?" they asked in astonishment.

"Once, the BaCh was passing through the market, and there was a wagon harnessed with an ox and a donkey together, which is a forbidden form of mixing (kilayim). As he passed by, he sneezed, and due to the sneeze, the ox and donkey began to move as one. Thus, the BaCh stumbled upon the prohibition of 'You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together' (Deuteronomy 22:10), and because of this sin, it was decreed that he must pass through the entrance of Gehinnom."

With this, Rabbi Yisrael of Ruzhin, may his merit protect us, explained the liturgical poem: "To purify the impure, to impurify the pure, by uttering 'Holy'."

"To purify the impure" - meaning that it is often the will of G-d to purify the impure - the wicked - and to rescue them from Gehinnom. To do so - "to impurify the pure" - He seeks some transgression and impurity in the pure ones, the righteous; and this is "by uttering 'Holy" - even a minor sin committed by the righteous, and even just through speech (in our case,

even without speech, merely a sneeze).

However, with Yaakov our forefather, even such a minor sin was not found, all his days were complete!

Parshat Vayechi - The Garments of Days Utilized

#### The Garments of Days Utilized

The holy Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Schneersohn, of blessed memory, wrote the following:<sup>5</sup>

Our sages have said<sup>6</sup> that when a person studies Torah and fulfills its commandments, he draws upon his divine soul a Divine light. This light enclothes all ten aspects of his soul and all its 613 limbs, from head to foot.

Through this garment, one's soul is bound to G-d Himself, and the light of G-d surrounds and clothes him entirely. After one's passing, these garments form one garment that he is then clothed in. This garment gives

him the power to enter Gan Eden (the Garden of Eden) and behold the pleasantness of G-d.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, these garments of one's commandments are called "days," because the completion and rectification of these garments of man, depend specifically on one's days - through fulfilling each day its respective commandments of reciting Shema, prayer, wearing tzitzit and tefillin, giving charity, and studying Torah.

Each and every individual receives days of life according to what he requires to prepare his unique spiritual garment.8

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- **5.** 'Magen Avot' (Part 7, page 102).
- **6.** Refer to the 'Tanya' (Likutei Amarim, Chapters 4–5).
- 7. To quote the 'Magen Avot' (ibid.):

"The matter is that truly, from all the commandments a person performs throughout his life, only one complete garment for the soul is formed."

**8.** Rabbi Aaron Leib of Premishlan recounted:

"During one of my soul's ascents, I saw that they brought to the Upper World a young man, and after him, an old man full of days.

I asked, "Here, in the World of Truth, are the younger men honored before their elders?"

They replied to me: "This is all in accordance with the truth. The young man achieved so much in his few years that each day is considered a year for

Parshat Vayechi - The Garments of Days Utilized

Generally speaking, a person's lifespan is seventy years, as it is said: "The days of our years are seventy years" (Psalms 90:10).

Over the span of seventy years, there are 613,000 hours, and by utilizing one's hours properly, a person merits to rectify the garment of the 613

limbs of their divine soul, which is further subdivided to 613 thousand parts.<sup>9</sup>

Rarely does a person merit that all of his days are complete and wholesome; this rare virtue we find by the Patriarchs, who were the 'divine chariot': Abraham, Isaac, and Yaakov.

#### 

him. But the old man, in all of his eighty years, accomplished almost nothing in comparison, and he is therefore to be treated no more than like a simple youth."

This explains the verse: "'And it came to pass at the end of two full years' (Genesis 41:1)":

The word "Vayechi" - "And it came to pass", indicates distress, and a person is in great trouble if he lived a full life of say, eighty years, but upon arriving at the Heavenly Court, it is revealed that he lived only the content and accomplishments of two years.

This is the fundamental difference between this world and the World to Come: in this world, we speak in measures of years, such as "so and so lived a hundred years." But there, in the World of Truth, they speak of days - "so and so lived forty thousand and one hundred fifty-six days," etc.

Thus, according to the number of complete days one had, so is his true age estimated.

This is the mystery of "I will fulfill the number of your days" - that you

merit that all of your days will be complete.

We similarly find that the Torah praised Abraham our forefather, that all his days were filled with holiness, kindness, and service to the Creator, as it is said: "And Abraham was old, advanced in days' (Genesis 24:1)." Seemingly, the Torah should have said, "And Abraham was old, advanced in years"? But. like abovementioned, the Torah wishes to emphasize that Avraham was advanced with years of days upon days of divine service, kindness, and cleaving to

G-d ('Divrei Meir', Parshat Miketz).

**9.** Twenty-four hours in a day, multiplied by 365 days and six hours a year, multiplied by 70 years, equals 613,620 hours. This corresponds to the 613 commandments and the 620 letters we have in the Ten Commandments of Parshat Yitro.

The 620 letters of the Ten Commandments encompass all of the 613 biblical commandments and seven rabbinic ones, as is known.

Parshat Vayechi - Focused Intent When Eating

Similarly, King David merited this great attainment, and he was the fourth leg of the 'divine chariot', and therefore, it is said about him as well: "Now King David was old, advanced in years" and "The days of David drew near" (ibid).

However, other righteous individuals, even the great ones, did not have all of their days appear before G-d without blemish.

"And now," continued the Rabbi,
"after these introductions, we will
proceed to answer the insightful
questions you asked earlier."

#### **Focused Intent When Eating**

"As you mentioned earlier, in the Talmud (Taanit 5b), it is recounted that on one occasion, Rav Nachman and Rabbi Yitzchak sat together for a meal. During the course of the meal, Rav Nachman turned to Rabbi Yitzchak and requested, "please share a few words of Torah."

Rabbi Yitzchak replied, "I cannot speak at this time, even to share words of Torah, because one does not engage in conversation during a meal, lest the windpipe open before the esophagus, and cause one to choke over their food, and be harmed."

After they finished their meal, Rabbi Yitzchak shared, "Thus said Rabbi Yochanan: Yaakov our forefather did not die."

"Now, you asked, what is the connection between the beginning of the passage and its conclusion.

Rabbi Mordechai Horowitz, explained as follows:10

Following their meal, Rabbi Yitzchak turned to Rav Nachman and said: One might mistakenly understand that the main reason that one shouldn't converse during a meal is due to the physical danger - that when consuming the food, perhaps the windpipe will open before the esophagus, and he might choke.

Parshat Vayechi - Focused Intent When Eating

But that was not my intention. I was not merely referring to physical danger but to spiritual danger as well.

To explain:

As you know, Yaakov, our forefather, did not die. The reason for this is that Yaakov did all of his actions for the sake of Heaven, thereby transforming the materiality of his body into spiritual form until his body itself became spiritual, "and a body that is entirely spiritual does not die."

From Yaakov, we must learn how to serve the Creator and how to sanctify the body and transform it into spirituality.

All those who wish to sanctify themselves must know that one of the greatest challenges is the "challenge of consumption" because "through proper conduct and intention with food, a person can merit all virtues,<sup>11</sup> but on the other hand, if improperly approached, one can, heaven forbid, fall into all unholy desires, G-d forbid."

Rabbi Yitzchak did not want to say words of Torah during the meal, so as not to become distracted from the proper spiritual intentions necessary when eating; and when one is engaged in words of Torah, their mind is unavailable to focus on other intentions.

Therefore Rabbi Yitzchak said: "one must not engage in conversation during a meal, lest the windpipe open before the esophagus, "The windpipe (קנה) here, represents the words of Torah one recites, while the esophagus (שט) serves for the purpose of eating.

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**11.** In the words of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov ('Likutei Moharan' Part I, 62:1): "Know that through the eating of the Jewish people, a unification of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Divine Presence in an internal manner occurs, as alluded to in the verse: 'And Boaz said to

her at mealtime, "Come here" (Ruth 2:14):
'At mealtime' - that is, through eating, 'come here,' which is the unification of the Holy One and His Divine Presence, as in 'And Judah approached him' (Genesis 44:18) - which is the closeness to the King..."

Parshat Vayechi - Feeling Defeated and Depleted

He taught that we must be concerned that perhaps the windpipe - engagement in words of Torah - will cause the person to neglect the proper intentions when eating and bring harm, and if one does not have the proper intent, the holy sparks within the food will not ascend to the higher realms and can instead harm the person.

The Rabbi finished his words and to his surprise, noticed that tears were streaming down Yonatan's face.

"Yonatan. What happened?" he asked, quite surprised.

Yonatan responded in between sobs: "You explained how every day has significance and how every hour of one's lifetime is of critical importance, but as for me - where do I stand?

Thousands of days and tens of thousands of hours have gone by in vanity and emptiness - what will become of me? How will I be

will become of me? How will I be able to repair all the lost days that have passed upon me in darkness?

#### **Feeling Defeated and Depleted**

"As you surely know," the Rabbi began, "the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded us 613 commandments, which are divided into 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments; it is incumbent upon every Jew, in his lifetime, to strive and fulfill the positive commandments and avoid violating the negative commandments.

However, even a person who has stumbled and transgressed one

of the negative commandments thereby deeply blemishing their soul, is able to repent with true remorse from the depth of the heart. True regret and deep remorse have the power to erase one's past misdeeds, as it is said: 'I have erased your transgressions like mist, and your sins like a cloud; return to Me, for I have redeemed you' (Isaiah 44:22).

To quote Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler:12

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"A healthy person climbs a ladder on his own, while the weak and the sick must be assisted and supported; a child may successfully climb several steps, but one who is immobile will not be able to ascend at all.

Similarly, the ladder to divine service is not experienced by all in the same manner: the righteous ascend on their own and successfully conquer their evil inclination at every step along the way, while many others may struggle mightily or entirely fail to ascend.

Furthermore, there are some who cannot muster the power to overcome their evil inclination because their heart is dulled by great powers of impurity; they cannot ascend even the smallest step.

What are such individuals supposed to do?

They call upon G-d in their sorry plight, and He has mercy upon them and lifts them up. If they have regret in their heart and truly regret their transgressions and sins, and they pray with sincerity and devotion to G-d, they will find themselves raised and elevated, as the verse states: 'I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will place within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your corpse and give you a heart of flesh' (Ezekiel 36:26).

Whereas the righteous may labor many years to embed a spirit of holiness into his heart, about the penitent it is said: 'And a new spirit I will place within you.'

This teaches and inspires the sinner, who must not say, 'How can I return to G-d, I am so distant, full of unwanted desires, and so dull of heart.

One only needs to gaze truthfully at their sorry state, and regret and ask from G-d, blessed be He, to assist and save them; the rest will be done by Him, G-d will raise them out of their intractable predicament.

Further in his words, Rabbi Dessler writes: 13

#### Parshat Vayechi - Feeling Defeated and Depleted

How does one, in fact, 'acquire an entire spiritual world in but one hour of true repentance'? Repentance is a daunting and very difficult task!

Rather, in truth, it is not distant, not unattainable. It is within one's reach and accessible.

If we only commit to not being fools and simpletons and we contemplate the reality of the world a bit, we will immediately discover the terrible emptiness and absolute nothingness that is at the heart of all worldly matters.

People chase and run after money and desires, thinking that when they will obtain them, they will experience happiness and true bliss. However, when they do achieve their desires, they very soon discover that they don't actually have anything of substance. No happiness and satisfaction resulted from their most diligent efforts. No joy or true inner peace came from any of it.

There is no power that exists in any of the worldly pleasures to cause and bring one to a state of happiness.

Upon this realization, one's heart is greatly pained: On what have I wasted and expended the many days of my life?

In such a state of inner turmoil, where a person has despaired of attaining happiness and meaning from worldly matters, <sup>14</sup> it is well within one's reach to return to G-d; it is very much within one's

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**14.** The renowned speaker, Rabbi Shalom Schwadron, once delivered the following lesson to a young man ('Kol Chotzev', page 88):

One of the disciples of Rabbi 'Aaron the Great' from Karlin came to learn under his tutelage and once beheld the Rabbi reciting the blessing "Borei Peri Ha'etz" before eating an apple. A defiant thought crossed his mind: "I too, eat apples and

recite this same blessing; we are not so different, my master and I."

Rabbi Aaron, sensing this thought, turned to him and said: "You're wondering what about the difference between your blessing and mine?

I'll share with you: When I contemplate the works of the Blessed Holy One, my heart fills with endless wonder, and a

#### Parshat Vayechi - Feeling Defeated and Depleted

burning love gives birth to a great desire within me to bless and praise G-d.

But what can I do? It's forbidden to utter G-d's name in vain, and I therefore take a fruit and recite a blessing. But you may have had a desire to eat an apple, and being that it is forbidden to eat without first reciting a blessing, you obediently did so.

Thus, while I eat merely in order to bless and praise G-d, you recite the blessing in order that you might be able to eat," the righteous Rabbi Aaron concluded.

"Do you understand?" Rabbi Shalom asked the young man. "Many people live for worldly pleasures and financial gain; they consume and hoard wealth because, without it, they cannot live, and so the cycle continues until a ripe old age. Work and great effort are expended in order to live, and life is wasted on earning more and more money until ultimately, life ends and the money vanishes.

However, there are, on the other hand, unique people, who gain both this world and the World to Come."

Rabbi Shalom continued: "Rabbi Shlomo of Zvhill once remarked on a certain occasion, 'Believe me, in my youth, when I donned tefillin, I experienced such great pleasure - as would the greatest hedonist at the moment of fulfilling his desires.' A person can reach such heights.

Rabbi Shalom added, "I'm not a righteous person or a saint; I'm just like everyone else. But I recall, as a young man on Shabbat mornings in the morning prayer - I would wrap myself in

a tallit and pray, and when I began to say, 'The soul of every living being shall bless Your Name, G-d our L-rd, and the spirit of all flesh shall glorify and exalt Your remembrance, our King, constantly, from the world to the world' - I would each and every time become emotional, and my eyes would overflow with tears of joy; my heart would expand and rejoice in delight."

Rabbi Shalom raised his voice with emotion, "Those moments - I wouldn't trade for anything in the world, not for all the wealth and riches of the world."

"Let me explain something additional," Rabbi Shalom thoughtfully added:

"Once, I received from an acquaintance a bank check for the sum of five thousand dollars, that was meant to go to charity that I managed. Initially, my joy was immense - five thousand dollars is no small amount, and I hadn't held such a large sum in a long time.

A few hours passed, and I got used to it; the joy diminished. After a day or two, I no longer felt any special pleasure from the thousands of dollars under my auspices.

Know, that a wealthy person who holds fifty thousand dollars, is even more accustomed to it and feels even less happiness than I felt holding those five thousand dollars. However this joy diminished over time until it was no longer existent at all.

"Do you understand? Worldly joys and temporal and fleeting.

On the other hand, spiritual joy, the joy of the Torah, the love and awe of G-d,

Parshat Vayechi - The Purpose of Creation - To Recognize G-d

grasp to reach a state of inner thirst for closeness to G-d.

Let us describe this a bit more.

#### The Purpose of Creation - To Recognize G-d

An individual ascended alone to the pinnacle of the mountain, and a breathtaking unfolded sunset before his eyes.

Magnificent fields of nature and vibrant colors untouched by mankind expanded his mind, and the sun dipping into the azure sea on the horizon elevated his heart. He felt a yearning to merge with nature, to live the peaceful hum of existence, to disconnect from the familiar noise forever.

Here, facing primordial nature, he felt a certain tranquility, an inner peace that caressed him, a cheerful melody of songbirds interrupted the flow of his thoughts, but soon his thoughts continued to wander onward.

"This happened to me several times," he thought. "I aspired with every fiber of my being to reach something unique. At first, I longed for a new and shiny car, but after I obtained it, I began to dream of a road trip with my friends in South America. I was sure that when I achieved that, I would be the happiest person alive. But in vain, I achieved all of my desires, but the feeling of happiness has eluded me.

The daily feeling that accompanies me is one of unclear

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is as in the words of King David: 'I rejoice over Your word like one who finds great spoil' (Psalms 119:162).

As one of the great Torah scholars once explained, King David here shares that he constantly feels and experiences the same intensity of joy when studying the Torah, as one would feel at the initial moment of finding a great treasure."

Rabbi Shalom concluded: "When Rabbi Aaron of Karlin and other righteous leaders and great Torah scholars like him would recite the blessing 'Borei Peri Ha'etz,' not only did they gain an enormous portion in the World to Come? They also physically enjoyed the bliss of G-d's presence, here in this world."

Parshat Vayechi - The Purpose of Creation - To Recognize G-d

unspecified emptiness, along with a whisper, an inner whisper that demands of me: "Is this all there is to life?"15

It has become clear to me over the years that there is a riddle here to uncover, but will I ever know its solution?" The lone individual continued pondering the mysteries of life upon the hilltop.

We however know clearly that Man was not created to fill his days with temporary pleasures of eating and drinking and other pleasantries. 16

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- **15.** Introduction to 'Life After Life' by Rabbi Zamir Cohen
- **16.** Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, the Ramchal, wrote the following:

"You can clearly see that no person of understanding would believe that the purpose of man's creation is merely his physical existence in this world.

What indeed are the days of man's life in this world, and who truly rejoices and is content in this world? 'The days of our lives are seventy years, and if with strength, eighty years; but their pride is toil and trouble' (Psalms 90:10), and it is fraught with suffering, illnesses, pains, and burdens, and ultimately - death.

Even one in a thousand will not be granted abundant pleasure and true tranquility. And even if such an individual were to be found, once he reaches a hundred years, he will have already passed and vanished from the world.

Moreover, if the purpose of man's creation were merely this world, there would be no need to endow him with such a lofty and

exalted soul, which is loftier than the angels themselves, especially since it finds no satisfaction in any of the worldly pleasures.

As our our sages taught in Kohelet Rabbah (6:7):

"And the soul is not filled' - to what can this be compared?

To a commoner who married the king's daughter. Even if he brings her all the delights that the world contains, it means nothing to her because she is the daughter of the king. So too with the soul: if you were to bring it all the world's delights, they are meaningless to it because it originates from the upper realms."

Similarly, our sages have said (Pirkei Avot 4:22): 'Against your will, you are formed; against your will, you are born' - for the soul does not truly desire this world at all but rather despises it.

Certainly, the Creator would not have created man for a purpose contrary to his nature and is, in fact, detested by him.

Parshat Vayechi - Deficiencies That Cannot be Replaced

Man was created to know and recognize G-d, and as is recorded in the holy Zohar:<sup>17</sup>

"The Holy One, blessed be He, created the worlds "so that they may know Him" - meaning that the reason why the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world was so

that we may know that He is the one who brings into existence and gives life and vitality to all reality, and there is none besides for Him.

The Rabbi turned to Yonatan, "let us continue with our discussion regarding returning to G-d in repentance."

#### **Deficiencies That Cannot be Replaced**

My father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel, of blessed memory, once said the following in a lecture he delivered:<sup>18</sup>

In the Talmud (Yoma 86a), it is stated that there are three categories of sin and corresponding to them are three types of atonement:

1. If one transgressed a positive commandment and repented - he is forgiven immediately.

- 2. If one transgressed a negative commandment and repented repentance suspends punishment, but the sin is not fully atoned until Yom Kippur. 19
- 3. If one transgressed sins punishable by divine excision or the death penalty and repented repentance alone does not suffice; in addition they must also experience the purification of Yom

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Rather, man's creation is for his blissful state in the World to Come, and for this reason, he was given such a lofty soul, for which it is worthwhile to serve G-d, and through it, man can receive the ultimate reward in the proper place and time."

- 17. Ra'aya Meheimna, Bo, page 42b.
- **18.** 'BeTzur Yerum', Iggeret HaTeshuvah (First Edition, Part I, page 6).

**19.** In the words of my father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel (Iggeret HaTeshuvah, ibid., page 7):

"The relatively easiest category to rectify is when one transgresses a positive commandment, such as neglecting the Grace after the mitzvah of tzitzit or tefillin, or not praying the morning service, and repents.

#### Parshat Vayechi - Deficiencies That Cannot be Replaced

Kippur and endure afflictions (for one who causes a desecration of G-d's Name, additional correction is required as explained there in the Talmud).

From this Talmud passage, it appear that positive may commandments are less severe than the negative ones, and therefore, one who transgresses a positive requires commandment only repentance (unlike the transgression of a negative commandment, which also requires the atonement of Yom Kippur).

However, in the Talmud (Yevamot 3b), it is also said: "A positive commandment comes and overrides negative а commandment," which means that when a positive and a negative commandment conflict, we fulfill the positive commandment despite the violation of the negative one.20

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If he genuinely feels pain for neglecting the mitzyah and decides that from now on, he will be meticulous in this mitzvah - for example, if he neglected putting on tefillin, he accepts upon himself not to go to work without putting on tefillin and praying the morning service first -

If his regret and acceptance are sincere, he is immediately forgiven. He doesn't need to wait until Yom Kippur; from the very moment he decides to do so, his repentance is accepted.

The second category is when one transgresses a sin and negative commandment that is liable merely for lashes, and repents.

For example, he ate something non-kosher or did something he shouldn't have done - from the lighter prohibitions.

In this case, repentance suspends punishment, but there isn't complete atonement yet (unlike positive commandments, in which the moment a person commits to reciting the Grace after Meals or putting on tefillin, his repentance is accepted, here however); repentance is the initial step, and Yom Kippur completes the atonement.

In this case, the repentance itself is not a sufficient measure of atonement as required. Instead, repentance influences and protects them to not be punished until the time for atonement

That is, repentance saves a person from punishment, but the final atonement is received only on Yom Kippur. If Yom Kippur arrives, and this person passes through it properly, with G-d's help, the verse said to Moses is fulfilled "I have forgiven according to your word" (Numbers 14:20), and this category of sin is rectified.

**20.** For example: One of the negative commandments is the prohibition against cutting off tzara'at (a leprous affliction).

Parshat Vayechi - Deficiencies That Cannot be Replaced

We must understand: are the positive commandments greater, or do we give precedence to the negative commandments?

The Baal HaTanya, of saintly memory, resolves this contradiction as follows:

Positive and negative commandments serve different purposes, spiritually speaking.

The role of the positive Commandments is to draw divine light and abundance into the higher worlds from the radiance of the Infinite Light, of G-d, as well as upon one's divine soul.

Transgressing the negative Commandments causes evil to cling

to one's soul and creates a blemish above in the soul's spiritual root and source, and therefore, to remove this evil requires an even greater repentance, and a longer process.

Thus, in terms of atonement, it's 'harder' to atone for negative commandments.

However, neglecting a positive commandment diminishes and causes a lack of the light upon one's soul, which is far more severe and cannot be 'atoned for' or replicated.

The spiritual light of the commandments is the garment in which one will be clothed in the World to Come, without which, one will be sorely lacking in the afterlife.<sup>21</sup>

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If someone has tzara'at on his skin, he is forbidden to remove it, as it is stated: "Take heed regarding the plague of tzara'at" (Deuteronomy 24:8).

At the same time, as we know, we have the positive commandment to circumcise a male child on the eighth day.

What would be the law in the case of a child who has tzara'at in the place of circumcision? Do we circumcise him regardless of the prohibition?

The answer is: Yes, we do circumcise the child, being that as above, a positive commandment overrides the negative one.

**21.** To quote my father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel (Iggeret HaTeshuvah, ibid., page 8):

"Positive commandments have a greater potency compared to negative commandments - the light of the positive commandments is much stronger.

Every time a Jew fulfills a positive commandment, such as counting the Omer,

Parshat Vayechi - Deficiencies That Cannot be Replaced

Thus, with regard to the deficiency that is caused to the soul, the spiritual lack caused by neglecting positive commandments is greater...

Let us quote from the words of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov:<sup>22</sup>

"The compassion in this world is visible to all, and therefore everyone chases after worldly matters. When people see someone hungry and thirsty, it's very difficult, and there's great compassion upon him.

Similarly, someone who walks naked and barefoot elicits great pity.

But one who has eyes to see the immense compassion upon the souls in the World to Come realizes that there are people there who walk utterly naked, and it is not possible to pity them and assist them at all.

In this world, if someone is naked without clothing, one can collect alms for him and make him a coat. But in the World to Come, one who walks naked cannot be

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reciting the Grace after Meals, putting on tefillin, etc., he draws immense spiritual light and abundance in the upper worlds and upon his soul from the illumination of the Infinite Light of G-d, blessed be He.

As Rabbi Chaim Vital wrote in Sha'arei Kedusha (Part III, Gate V), 'our soul is not entirely here in this world but only a branch of it, while the source of the soul remains attached to the Throne of Glory. Through that branch present within a person, he draws immense light in the upper worlds, elevating and bringing down 'masculine waters' of G-d's spiritual vitality.'

Positive commandments have much more influence on the soul than negative commandments.

When a person transgresses a negative commandment, he "gives defects in the powers of holiness" - he diminishes the light of G-d; he causes damage and desecration which is severely forbidden. Thus, a violation of a negative commandment disrupts the flow of divine abundance even to the upper worlds, and no good comes from it.

However, by fulfilling positive commandments, immense and awe-inspiring light is drawn into all the worlds and upon one's soul.

Thus, in essence, the difference between positive and negative commandments is that fulfilling positive commandments draws down divine abundance, whereas negative commandments prevent a person from accessing this upper abundance."

22. 'Sichot HaRan', Section 23.

Parshat Vayechi - Serving G-d with Zeal, Desire, and Enthusiasm

pitied at all. Pity doesn't help there because the kind of garment he needs is only the garments of Torah and its commandments, and for that, pity and charity doesn't help.

However, one who merits to draw close to the truly righteous, can run to them and receive some garment with which to clothe themselves."

On another occasion, Rabbi Nachman said:

In the World to Come, people lie outside, crying bitterly: "Give us something to eat." They are offered food and drink, but they respond: "No, we don't need this kind of food; we need the nourishment of Torah and the divine service."

Similarly, some lie naked outside, crying: "Give us something to wear." They are offered clothes, but they reply: "No, these clothes are of no use to us; we need the clothes of the commandments and good deeds with which to clothe ourselves."

He then concluded and said:

"Happy is the one who merits to "eat" some chapters of Mishnah and then "drink" some chapters of Psalms, and to clothe themselves with the many commandments."

Now, what we still must explain, is how to complete and rectify years of misdeeds and consequently, the missing spiritual lights.

#### Serving G-d with Zeal, Desire, and Enthusiasm

In Likutei Moharan the following is written:<sup>23</sup>

"The verse states, "He rejoices like a strong man to run his course" (Psalms 19:6) - one needs great strength to run this path that may have been walked when the Jewish people were estranged, and now they must run this way with great speed."

Rabbi Natan of Breslov, of blessed memory, continued to explain:

Parshat Vayechi - Serving G-d with Zeal, Desire, and Enthusiasm

"When Rabbi Nachman taught this lesson, I heard from his holy mouth explicitly regarding those who merit to repent for their past misdeeds.

He said that although they correct their past wrongs, there's still the matter of the period of time that they were distant from G-d - time they could have been serving Him.

They need to correct this by completing the divine service they could have performed during the period they were estranged, and therefore, upon awakening to repentance, they need great zeal in serving G-d and must act exceedingly quickly so that, through their diligent service, they can also rectify the deficiency of the days that have passed.

Thus, they need to run swiftly along the path they could have walked when they were distant from G-d.

He then turned and told his followers: "You need to act very

hastily so that you can still grab something additional."

Rabbi Eliezer Shlomo Shick, explained as follows:<sup>24</sup>

"A person who has neglected much in serving G-d must now, upon returning in repentance, exceedingly diligent make up for what he has Although missed. repentance immensely powerful and is significant before G-d, to complete what was lacking, one must run with great speed to compensate for the time when he was estranged.

As Rabbi Natan told his followers: "You need to be very diligent so that you can still grab something" - meaning that it is not advisable for a penitent to get involved in anything else but to be occupied with repentance, persist in prayer and personal connection with his Creator, and to immerse himself in the study of the holy Torah.

He should avoid entanglements with others, and instead through

Parshat Vayechi - Serving G-d with Zeal, Desire, and Enthusiasm

zealous service, correct and complete the deficiencies of past days when he didn't lay tefillin, didn't observe Shabbat, and ate non-kosher foods, etc.

Certainly, he must be cautious not to get involved in disputes. Instead, he should stay in place, and engage in repentance before G-d all his life to complete what he has missed.

This is the fundamentals of the service of G-d:

To engage in Torah, prayer, and practical actionable

commandments, and also to involve oneself in bringing closer those who are distant.

One who knows his own tainted past should work to bring others who were previously distant closer by speaking to them about faith and Divine providence, and thereby connect themselves to the Infinite, blessed be He."

Yonatan looked up hopefully at the Rabbi and exclaimed, "Rabbi, So, I do have a chance to once again be spiritually alive and exist peacefully with myself!"



Parshat Vayechi - Summary and Practical Conclusions

### **Summary and Practical Conclusions**

1. When a person studies Torah and fulfills its commandments, he draws a divine light onto his soul. This light enclothes all of the ten aspects of the soul and all of its 613 components. Through this encompassing light, one's soul is bound to G-d, and G-d's light surrounds and enclothes him entirely.

This same light also forms a spiritual garment that enables the soul to enter Gan Eden and behold the pleasant countenance of G-d.

**2.** G-d commanded us in the holy regarding Torah the commandments, which are further divided into 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments. Every should strive during his life to fulfill the positive commandments and stay clear from the negative ones, and one who fails to observe one of the 613 commandments needs an atonement.

The Talmud outlines three types of sins and their corresponding atonements:

- 1. Transgression of a positive commandment followed by repentance leads to immediate forgiveness.
- 2. After violating a negative commandment, repentance is required and suspends punishment, but full atonement is attained only on Yom Kippur.
- 3. Following the commission of severe sins which are liable to karet and the death penalty, repentance and the holy day of Yom Kippur alone does not suffice; the purification of affliction is also required.
- 3. If a person stumbles and transgresses a negative commandment, evil energy clings to his soul, creating a blemish in its root and source above. One must therefore repent sincerely from the depths of his heart, and true regret has the power to erase the misdeeds of the past.

If one's heart is genuinely contrite and they pray to G-d with sincerity, they will find the way back to G-d.

#### Parshat Vayechi - Summary and Practical Conclusions

- 4. Neglecting a positive commandment diminishes the divine light from shining upon one's soul, and this "light", which is the garment for a person in the World to Come is lacking, and without it, one cannot properly appear in the afterlife.
- 5. The remedy for one who caused the divine light to be lacking, is to dedicate themselves to the service of G-d with zeal. Someone who had previously neglected service to G-d, must now, upon repenting, be exceedingly diligent to make up for past deficiencies.

Therefore, someone seeking to rectify his soul must avoid distractions, and continuously engage in repentance, persist in prayer and invest in personal connection with the Creator, and immerse himself entirely in Torah study.

**6.** Additionally, a returnee to Judaism must be extremely cautious not to become involved in disagreements and disputes, and instead, should rededicate themselves to lifelong repentance and completion of what he lacks spiritually.

This is the foundational principle of the service of G-d: to engage and be involved in Torah study, prayer, and the performance of the commandments, and to diligently bring closer those who are distant.

Knowing one's tainted past, they must help others who were distant and inspire them with faith in Divine providence, connecting them to the Infinite G-d, blessed be He.

#### **Shabbat Shalom!**



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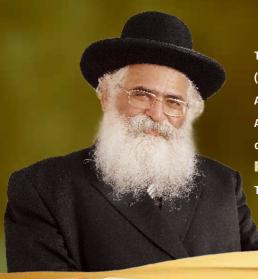
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### **Shabbat Times** Vayechi 11th of Tevet, 5785

	Candle	Shabbat	Rabbeim
City	Lighting	Ends	Tam
New York	4:30 pm	5:34 pm	6:01 pm
Miami	5:30 pm	6:25 pm	7:01 pm
Los Angeles	4:45 pm	5:44 pm	6:16 pm
Montreal	4:13 pm	5:22 pm	5:45 pm
Toronto	4:43 pm	5:49 pm	6:14 pm
London	3:56 pm	5:12 pm	5:27 pm
Jerusalem	4:38 pm	5:30 pm	6:02 pm
Tel Aviv	4:34 pm	5:26 pm	5:57 pm
Haifa	4:32 pm	5:27 pm	5:57 pm
Be'er Sheva	4:36 pm	5:30 pm	6:02 pm

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#### From the Words of

HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l

I've met many individuals who returned to practice Judaism after having been quite distant, and they have all shared that they were careful from eating nonkosher meat.

No matter where they traveled, they would refrain from touching meat that wasn't kosher, notwithstanding the fact that they weren't religious at the time. They felt that this protected them; and no matter how far they roamed, the spark of their soul was still in effect and was eventually able to be revealed and come to the fore.

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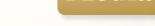
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