

THE CHALLENGE OF TODAY

by Rabbi Label Lam

And these are the days of the years of the life of Avraham which he lived: One hundred years and seventy years and five years. And Avraham expired and died at a good old age, mature and content and he was gathered to his people. (Breishis 22:7-8)

There are descriptions given about the conclusion of Avraham's life that are not found by anyone else. Why does the verse mention "the days of the years" of his life? By Yishmael, who is immediately juxtaposed, only the years of his life are counted! Why does the verse tell us "that he lived"? What else does one do with their life? It seems rather redundant.

This quote from the Zohar (Parshas Emor) might help us to focus in: "We learn that when one does a deed down below it arouses a reaction above. If a person behaves in a certain way below a commensurate force is awakened on high. Someone does a deed of kindness in this world, kindness is awakened above. It rests upon that day and crowns it for him. If a person acts mercifully below, mercy is aroused on that day and it is crowned on his account. That day then stands as a shield for him whenever it becomes necessary for him."

It seems from the Zohar that there's a unit of time, which is not arbitrary, it is called a "day". We are told that a given day is titled after the person whose behavior wakes up the heavenly mood of that day. Each day has a unique reason for being and different expression, as it says, "Day after day utters speech and night after night declares knowledge. (Tehillim 19)

I have observed that little children live happily in twenty-four hour cycles. One day everything is good. The next, for whatever reason, it's terrible. It could be something as simple as not liking snack. After we get a little older, we tend to look back at good years and bad, be it in school or business. Later still we begin to talk about the 80's or the 90's. Decades start to take on nostalgic color and meaning. By the end, in the nursing home, there etched on the faces, a lifetime of experiences, we see distinctly drawn expressions of sweetness or bitterness. The whole life is thought of as either good or bad.

As "twelve step" lingo leeks out into daily life it has become popular to talk about "one day at a time". About Avraham too it states in the verse, "And Avraham the elder came with his days.(Breishis 24:1) Each day was accounted for and filled with maximum productivity. In the army, in college and in prison people "do years". We are taught by the life of Avraham to "do days".

It's important to know that this same Avraham spent decades of his early days and years in intensive research. He didn't have a clear path of tradition from birth. At the age of three he posited a theory about the Oneness of the The Creator. Until he had completed the paradigm of his thesis and began his career teaching he was already in his 50's.

Perhaps, one could suggest that those days and years should be deducted from the totality of his productive life. That time, though, was not for naught. He had to begin his search and proceed methodically from wherever he was. Both the time in search of the greatest and clearest picture of reality and the time spent living up to what he came know are all accounted to him as "the days of the years that he lived".

The contentment he achieved at the conclusion of his life was not the product of a last minute lunge for meaning. No! If life is perceived as "good" in the end, it is the cumulative result of moment by moment and daily choices over many years and changing conditions to happily confront the challenge of today.

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