

TODAY!

by Rabbi Label Lam

And these are the days of the years of the life of Avraham which he lived; a hundred years and seventy years and five years. And Avraham expired and he died in a good age, mature and satiated and was gathered to his people. (Breishis 25:7-8)

In the summary of his life, Avraham is described as having lived an accomplished and satisfying life. How did he do it? What's the secret? It's no secret! It's clearly stated. About Yishmael it is written, "These are the years of the life of Yishmael..." How are living "the days of years of the life" different than living just the "years of the life"? What is the great advantage of living in units of days? It's a nice aphorism, "One day a time!" but how does that translate into daily life? What does it mean to live each day as if it was the only day? We might want to ask ourselves, "How would I behave today if I knew that this was not only my last day but my only day?"

Reb Avraham, the son of the Vilna Gaon, testifies about his father: ***"For over fifty years he never slept more than half an hour at a time...Even when his health began to fail, he did not set aside his holy learning. Immediately, he would rise like a lion, in fear and dread of his Creator, wash his hands, and recite his morning blessings with a joy and awe which is beyond description. Afterwards, he would stand on his feet from before midnight until the first light of dawn learning Gemora and Poskim in a beautiful and awesome voice...Whoever heard it was moved with deep feelings of holiness."***

Arriving in Jerusalem, one summer, I immediately made contact with my good friend and study partner, Reb Reuven, and we agreed to get busy the next morning studying an hour or more before Davening. The next morning I made it on time but I was suffering from jet lag, sleeplessness, and exhaustion. I commented to my friend that I don't know how the Vilna Gaon did it. I can't imagine what it means to only sleep at half hour intervals four times per day for the course of a lifetime. He told me, "It's not true!" I insisted I had read an authenticated biography of the Gaon and that it was certainly true that he only slept two hours in total each day. He told me again that it was not true and so I argued my case again only to be countered with the "not true" claim. Eventually Reuven explained and I realized how right he was. He told me, "It's not true that the Vilna Gaon only slept two hours each day! He learned Torah twenty-two hours each day!" I understood that he was not into sleep deprivation as we imagine but rather the sublime joy of learning Torah.

If we want a fuller appreciation of what it means to live "a day at a time" we might look retrospectively at the actions of Avraham Avinu at both the beginning and end of last week's Torah

Portion. We meet Avraham at the entrance of the tent surveying the horizon for any sight of a guest on the hottest day in history. He acts as-if he had never hosted a soul in all his ninety-nine years. Let's not forget that Avraham was reeling from the surgery of his circumcision, and was reveling in a Divine visitation at that very moment. If anyone ever had an excuse to rest on his laurels it was Avraham. He had already accomplished so much in his life and yet he acted as if yesterday's achievements did not exist. Only today!

At the end of that Parsha Avraham demonstrated his willingness to relinquish all future promises of historical greatness embodied in Yitzchok, proving that his focus was not "tomorrow". That can distract a man from what HASHEM wants from him **today**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).