

# TREASURE THE MOMENT

*by Rabbi Moshe Peretz Gilden*

In the closing days of his life, our Patriarch Yaakov (Jacob) commanded Yosef (Joseph) not to inter him in Egypt. He made Yosef swear that he will be buried in the Cave of the Patriarchs in Chevron. He then offered Yosef's two sons and all of his own sons blessings that guide and define the future of each of the Twelve Tribes. After the blessings and Yaakov's subsequent demise, there was a 70 day mourning period, followed by a huge procession that brought Yaakov to his final resting place in the Holy Land.

At the time of Yaakov's death, "when Yaakov finished instructing his sons, he drew his feet onto the bed, he expired and was gathered to his people." (Beraishis/Genesis 49:33) What is the significance of Yaakov drawing his feet?

Three weeks ago we read, "Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojourning." (37:1) Rashi quoted the Midrash which contrasted the settling of Yaakov - which implies permanence - and the sojourn of his father Yitzchak (Isaac) - which appears to be temporary. The Midrash inferred that after his long exile and struggles with Lavan, "Yaakov wished to finally settle down in tranquility, but the anguish of Yosef's kidnapping pounced upon him."

Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr (1910-1979; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivta Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn, New York; described as the first American trained gadol) expounded that Yaakov was being taught the preciousness of life. Every moment of life has its purpose, granted for the sake of accomplishment. Yaakov thought he had done so much in his life - and he had - and he could now "relax" and focus his time on his relationship with the Creator. But G-d had other plans; there was still much to accomplish. Yaakov, as long as he lived, needed to serve as the Father of the Jewish nation, preparing his children to lead the future generations. Yaakov was being taught how a servant of G-d must continue to "plant the seeds" throughout all the days of his life.

The Talmud (Eruvin 65a) related a similar anecdote. Rav Chisda was asked by his daughter, "You look exhausted, why don't you sleep a little?" to which he responded, "The day will come when I have plenty of opportunity to sleep (after my passing)." We were put in this world to accomplish, not to relax.

Our Father, Yaakov, had already inculcated this lesson. Homiletically, we understand he reemphasized it in his final mortal act. Only at that last moment in life did Yaakov "draw his feet onto the bed." Only then, the moment before death, did he lift his feet off the ground and recline.

Rest and relaxation are tools used toward an end, not ends in themselves. Life is the opportunity to bring oneself and others closer to G-d and every moment must be utilized toward achieving that goal.

Have a good Shabbos!

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