

# AVRAHAM EARNED HIS DAYS

*by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner*

This week we read the parsha of Chayai Sarah: "And the life of Sarah was one hundred and twenty seven years.[23:1]" The parsha begins with Sarah's death and Avrohom's subsequent acquisition of Ma'aras Hamachpelah [the Tomb of the Patriarchs] for her burial.

Immediately afterwards, the Torah tells of Avrohom sending his servant, Eliezer, to find the proper wife for his son, Yitzchok. Avrohom wanted to ensure an appropriate partner with whom Yitzchok could continue the world-shaping path that he had begun. He therefore had his servant, Eliezer, swear not to take a Canaanite girl as a wife for Yitzchok. "Rather, to my land and birthplace you shall go.[24:4]"

Juxtaposed between these two episodes is the following passuk [verse]: "And Avrohom was old, 'ba ba'yamim' [having come in days], and Hashem had blessed Avrohom with 'kol' [all].[24:1]"

The Ramban explains that this passuk supplies the reason why Avrohom felt compelled to have Eliezer swear. He saw himself advancing in years and he was concerned that he might leave this world before Eliezer would return. He therefore had Eliezer swear in order to 'lock in' his choice of Yitzchok's future wife's nationality.

However, this term of 'ba ba'yamim', meaning, having come or advanced in days seems a bit strange. The passuk had already said that Avrohom was old. Isn't every old person 'ba ba'yamim'? Furthermore, we only find this expression by Avrohom. Although it says that Yitzchok became old, it doesn't say that he was 'ba ba'yamim'.

What is the meaning and significance of this term as it relates specifically to Avrohom?

We know that the attribute which Avrohom exemplified and perfected was that of chessed [acts of kindness]. The Shla"h writes that a Jew must perform at least one act of chessed each day in order for it to be considered a day. Without at least one chessed, it's as if that day didn't exist.

With that, the Nesivos Sholom explains, we can understand why specifically Avrohom was 'ba ba'yamim', advanced in days. He, with his incredible devotion to chessed, had every day standing proudly behind him as he approached his old age. He literally came with his days. Not a single one was absent.

However, we need to understand why only chessed, as opposed to any other commandment, is the deciding factor if a day is to be considered existent and worthwhile.

The Nesivos Sholom explains that it was Hashem's chessed which brought Him to create the world. Hashem needed nothing but wanted to share His goodness with others. Furthermore, the world, having been created 'yesh ma'ayin' [something from nothing] is in the constant, perilous state of being unable to continue to exist on its own. It is only through a constant re-creation, every single second of time, through which Hashem's chessed enables this world to continue to exist.

Dovid HaMelech [King David] refers to Hashem as our shadow [T'hilim 121:5]. The Baal Shem Tov explains that a person's actions can be discerned by watching his shadow. So too, Hashem's actions and dealings mirror our own. When we treat each other with chessed, Hashem in turn showers chessed down upon us.

Being that the entire world is based on chessed and only continues to exist through Hashem's constant chessed, we can only 'earn' our day if our actions of chessed prompt and stimulate Hashem to give forth His chessed. If we do our part, we have earned that day. It exists and is worthwhile as something which we had a hand in. Otherwise, in the absence of any chessed-provoking chessed on our part, the day was a 'free-bee'. A gift which we played no part in. Not something that can be considered ours and not something which will stand behind us as we reach our old age.

All of our actions result from many different motives--some lofty and some a bit less lofty. Most of our mitzvos [fulfillment of commandments] are tainted by some of the less than lofty motives. Where the mitzvah is focused onto ourselves, inconsistencies within ourselves will tarnish the mitzvah. Chessed, however, is very different. Since the focus is outward and the other person has in fact received the act of kindness intended for him, it will therefore not be sullied by less than altruistic motives.

Avrohom was 'ba ba'yamim'. He had earned every one of his days. As a result of that, as the passuk continues, "Hashem had blessed Avrohom with 'kol' [all]."

We know that what we work hard at and earn has a special place in our hearts.

When my wife and I first moved to Israel we were shocked to find that the apartment had no closets whatsoever. For weeks we were living out of suitcases until our lift finally arrived. At that point we began to live out of suitcases and boxes until I was able to build some sort of an 'aron' [closet] from the lift wood. Proving to my wife that I now could and would be painfully 'punny' in two languages, I proudly told her that we now have something that we can call 'aron' (closet in Hebrew, pronounced 'our own'-sorry). The morning after I built it, I woke up early and ran to the kitchen to make sure that it was still standing. It was an incredibly amateur job but it was functional and being the first thing that I had ever built, I was fiercely proud of it.

Everything that Hashem blessed Avrohom with came as a result of Hashem mirroring Avrohom's actions. They were his actions. His days. His chessed. His. He had everything. "Hashem had blessed Avrohom with 'kol' [all]."

May we, the descendants of Avrohom, continue in his way.

Good Shabbos,  
Yisroel Ciner

This week's parsha-insights is dedicated in mazel tov to Howie Hershkovich and Martha Vays in honor of their upcoming wedding. May they be zocheh to much happiness together and to build a bayis ne'eman b'Yisroel.

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