

# LIVING & STAYING ALIVE

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

In last week's Parsha Yaakov's spirit "came alive" (45:28). In this week's Parsha "Yaakov lived" (47:28). Rashi, on the verse describing Ya'akov's death, "and Yaakov was gathered to his people", references the Talmud in Taanis 5b that states, "Our father Yaakov did not die". What is the meaning of Yaakov's having "come alive," "lived", and "never died?"

The Medresh Tanchumah explains that "Yaakov's spirit came alive" refers to the return of the Divine Spirit. The Divine Spirit is a special sense of G-d's presence and providence that is just short of prophecy. It is the level at which there is a constant awareness of G-d's guiding hand in every aspect of daily life. At times the Divine Spirit manifests itself in creative accomplishments such as teaching Torah, giving advice, problem solving, composing songs, and capturing ideas in word, design or art. However, in general, the Divine Spirit is manifest when a person has the sense of G-d's constant providence in every aspect of life.

In attempting to understand the Divine Spirit, it is important to differentiate between the "feeling" of G-d's providence and the "knowledge" of G-d's providence. Yaakov always had the knowledge of G-d's presence. He always believed that G-d controlled all events in the universe. However, knowledge does not always generate the feeling of G-d's guiding hand. The person who merits receiving the Divine Spirit goes beyond the intellectual understanding of G-d's providence and can feel G-d's presence as the source of his inspiration, creativity and accomplishments.

The Divine Spirit, like prophecy, can only "rest" upon an individual who is B'Simcha - happy/content. The foundation of happiness and contentment is accepting G-d's control over the workings of the universe and our own human limitations. In order to be B-Simcha a person must accept the following principles. 1. G-d has absolute control over everything. Nothing can happen in the universe without G-d's direct involvement. 2. G-d only does good. G-d can not do bad. 3. As humans, our own mortality and intellect limit our understanding of G-d's cosmic plan. Therefore, all doubts and questions about divine justice and fairness are the result of our human limitations.

When a person has attained the level of Simcha - happiness/contentment, most things make sense and all things are believed to be good and necessary. Such a person can merit feeling the Divine Spirit or even attain prophecy.

However, a person who is overwhelmed by anxiety, loss, fear, grief or confusion, does not feel the confidence and contentment that comes with trusting G-d. It does not mean that the person does

not trust G-d. Intellectually he may very well trust G-d. However, emotionally, the pain and depression take their toll.

The emotional and psychological makeup of the human is neither good nor bad, it just is. G-d did not make us as the angels. He made us human and limited. Therefore, Chazal, in their infinite wisdom, granted us permission to be human. They did not mandate that we bless Hashem and thank him for the "good" of perceived tragedy. Instead, they authored a blessing that acknowledges G-d as the "Truthful Judge." Clearly, the Rabbis were telling us that it is OK to be limited and emotional. It is OK to be saddened by loss. It is OK to mourn, and it is OK to question and not understand. It is OK to be human.

Yaakov was human. After seeing Yoseph's bloody coat and concluding that a wild animal had killed him, Yaakov was overwhelmed by pain. The loss of his beloved son and the ensuing depression that enveloped him made it impossible for Yaakov to sense G-d's presence in his daily activities. Not for one second did Yaakov question G-d's loving providence. However, the pain was real and so was the sadness. Therefore, Yaakov could not feel the Divine Spirit so long as he mourned the absence of Yoseph.

Yoseph's presumed death was far more profound and impacting than the death of a beloved son. Yaakov knew that he was supposed to be the "chosen one" from among the Avos. He was supposed to be the Av-Father that would raise 12 sons, all devoted and committed to the mission of their ancestors. Until Yoseph's "death", Yaakov reveled in the nachas of having raised 12 sons worthy of becoming the Bnai Yisroel and having G-d's presence become manifest through them. However, once Yoseph was no longer a part of the equation Yaakov did not understand G-d's plan. Was there to be another Av? Would one of the other brothers merit to be the "chosen one?" On the one hand, the only brother who had ever exhibited the characteristics of an Av had been Yoseph, and Yoseph was gone! On the other hand, if another brother was to rise to the occasion, such as Yehudah, what would be with the other ten? Would they be subsumed beneath the one brother or would they be lost to the entity of the nation and be counted among the 70 nations? If Yoseph had only married and had a child before his tragic demise, there would still be hope. The component that Yoseph was to contribute to the equation of the Jewish people would have lived on in his children but that had not been the case! Yoseph was gone. What would now be with all the rest?

As the story of Yoseph and his brothers unfolded; Yaakov had further cause to wonder about G-d's plan and the destiny of his children. Yoseph had imprisoned Shimon and demanded that Binyamin be brought to Egypt. Yaakov's reaction was, "Shimon is gone, Yoseph is gone, and now you would take away Binyamin. Upon me has it all fallen" (42:36)! As the Akeidah explains, "My pain and loss as a father is much greater than your pain as brothers!" "For you it is the loss of siblings. For me it is the loss of my children and my dreams! As the essential number of 12 is further compromised, I am at a loss to understand what G-d has in mind for me and my family."

In Parshas Vayeitzei (30:1), Rachel demanded of Yaakov, "Give me children, otherwise I am dead!" Rashi references the Medresh and the Talmud in Nidarim 64b that state, "from here we derive that a person who does not have a child is like they are dead." On the one hand, the statement could simply be referring to the extreme feelings of longing that a person has to be a mother or father. It is an emotion that deserves our greatest attention and sensitivity. However, the Talmud is certainly referring to something equally profound and important.

Since we were introduced to Avraham and Sarah, the desire for children has been an on going theme in Sefer Bereishis. Sarah was barren. Rivkah was barren. Rachel was barren. Yet, the promise to Avraham was that his children would be the chosen people and they would one day inherit the land of Israel. Why did G-d make the Imahos barren? If the entire focus of our mission depends on having children who would grow into a nation, why make the beginning so difficult? Why force Rachel to demand a child, "otherwise I am dead?"

The Talmud explains that G-d made it difficult for the forefathers to have children so that they would pray to Him. The essence of prayer is to express dependency upon G-d. Therefore, G-d wanted the progenitors of the Jewish people to know that their development into a nation was not a natural biological progression from Avraham and Sarah. The experience of the Avos and Imahos was to underscore that the existence of the Jews is an ongoing miracle and a direct result of G-d's intervention in the order of nature and history.

When Yaakov concluded that Yoseph had been killed, part of him died. So long as all 12 sons were alive and growing in their commitment to G-d, Yaakov was "whole-complete - Shalaim." Even if Yoseph had died but had left over children, Yaakov could still believe that the prerequisite of 12 was intact and that his understanding of G-d's intent for the future of the Jewish nation was still possible. However, Yoseph did not have children and Yoseph was gone, Yaakov's spirit had died and the Divine Spirit departed.

The brothers returned from Egypt and revealed to Yaakov, "Yoseph is still alive and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt" (45:26). The Torah then tells us, "but his heart rejected it, for he could not believe them." On the one hand, 22 years of mourning and depression made it impossible for Yaakov to immediately accept that Yoseph was alive. Our tendency is to invest in how we feel and to become comfortable, even with our pain. Yaakov was not about to immediately change his emotional status quo without further evidence. On the other hand, even after he accepted the possibility of Yoseph being alive, they had told him that Yoseph was also the ruler of Egypt. Granted that Yoseph might be alive, but what kind of life was he leading? Was he still the pure and precious Yoseph whose love for Torah and truth was unique among the brothers? Was he still a true grandson of Avraham? If he was alive but the ruler of Egypt, how could he have remained the same? He might be alive, but he could not possibly have remained a viable component of the required 12 sons of Yaakov! If so, Yoseph was as good as dead! If so, Yaakov too was dead!

The next Pasuk relates that when Yaakov saw the wagons that Yoseph had sent, "then the spirit of Yaakov came alive?" Rashi references the Medresh that explains that the wagons were a coded message from Yoseph to his father.

The message of the wagons told Yaakov that Yoseph remembered the last topic in Torah that the two of them had studied 22 years earlier. The coded message was far more than the fond memories of a long lost son to his aged father. The wagons testified to Yaakov that Yoseph, the ruler of Egypt, was the very same son of Yaakov that he had been at the innocent age of 17. The wagons meant that Yoseph was truly alive. Only then did Yaakov's spirit come alive. Only then did the Divine Spirit return. (Look at 46:30). This week's Parsha begins with the statement, "And Yaakov Lived..." (47:28).

After settling in Egypt, Yaakov had the time to again revel in the nachas of seeing 12 sons unique in all of history. 12 sons who would birth a nation destined to bring blessing upon all the other nations. During those final 17 years, Yaakov was also able to see the extent of Yoseph's greatness. Yaakov had the time to get to know his two grandsons, Menashe and Ephrayim. Yaakov saw first hand that not only had Yoseph spiritually survived his years of exile but he also had the ability of raise two sons that were no different than their father. They too were true sons of Yaakov destined to carry on the legacy of Avrah, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

Had Yoseph survived his personal ordeal of slavery and royalty, but his children had assimilated into Egyptian society, Yoseph would have been as good as dead. Had Yoseph failed to impart Yaakov's values to his own sons, Yaakov would have been as good as dead. However, for 17 years Yaakov lived with Menashe and Ephrayim and saw with his own eyes that the equation of 12 had not only remained intact, but that the next generation would carry on in the very same way. "And now your two sons...shall be mine like Reuven and Shimon..." (48:5). "By you shall Israel bless...May G-d make you like Ephrayim and Menashe."

So long as we continue to raise our children like Ephrayim and Menashe, the Talmud in Taanis tells us, "Our father Yaakov did not die."

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