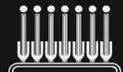




# Good Shabbos SYDENHAM!

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## Live—for Life! by: Rabbi Yossy Goldman

A title usually reflects the theme of the subject matter. “Genesis” is about the beginning of the world, and “Exodus” is about the Jews leaving Egypt. Whether it is a book or a film, the title should convey some idea of the content under discussion.

Which is why the title of this week’s parsha seems highly inappropriate. “Vayechi – *And Jacob lived*” (in the land of Egypt seventeen years) is the opening line of the very parsha which goes on to tell us, not about Jacob’s life, but rather about his death. And his last will and testament, and his funeral and subsequent interment in Hebron in the Holy Land.

Why would a parsha that focuses on a person’s last days on earth, his deathbed instructions, and his burial be entitled “*Vayechi* – and he *lived?*”

The answer, say our sages, is that we are not discussing biological organisms, but Jews. And the test of true life for a Jew is whether he lived an authentic, consistent Jewish life – for life. Did he falter before the finish line, or was he faithful to his value system until the end? How do we know that Jacob did indeed *live* in the fullest sense of the word? That his was a genuine, dedicated G-dly life? When he remains true to those cherished ideals until his dying day. Only then can we say with certainty that his life was really alive; that his was a *Vayechi* existence as it was meant to be. So the fact that Jacob died a righteous man validated his entire being and endowed his life with its richest blessing

- true life, alive and real from beginning to end.

There are individuals who have their eight minutes of fame, who shine briefly and impress the world; only to fade away and leave us disappointed watching so much unfulfilled potential dissipate into thin air. Others are longer lasting but don’t quite go all the way. Like the Kohen Gadol Yochonon who served as high priest for 80 years and then went off the rails. Very scary stuff! No wonder Hillel, in Pirkei Avot, warns us not to trust ourselves morally until the day we die.

Complacency is dangerous. There are no guarantees. One must constantly “live” i.e., grow and attempt to improve oneself lest we falter before we finish the game.

I will never forget my experience with a very fine man who was remarkably loyal to the company he worked for. For 45 years he was with the same group, totally and absolutely dedicated. Then he reached the age of compulsory retirement. Suddenly he took ill. The doctors had no real diagnosis. But he got sicker and sicker until he became incapacitated and eventually died. To this day, nobody knows what he died from. But those who knew him well understood that once he left the workplace to which he had devoted his entire adult life, he had nothing left to live for. Sadly, he had no other interests. His work was his life and without work there was no life left.

It is psychologically sound to take up a hobby, learn to play golf or develop other interests outside of work. A Jew, though, should ideally start studying Torah. Go to classes, read a stimulating book. Studying and sharpening the mind is good

of Jacob's death and then Joseph's: incongruously it is called *Vayechi*—the Parsha of life. Actually, not so incongruously.

Death is a window to a world that the survivors cannot look through. It is a window to the soul of the dying that blinds us with veracity: why else do we affirm the deathbed confession and honor the dying wish? In the face of finality the charades of life stop.

Death is the moment of truth that only the starkness of separation can elicit. And this moment of truth connects people and worlds. Death is the ultimate divide—leaving us abandoned from those crossing over—that brings us together. At death, people are their most truthful, their most alive, both the dying and the ones they are leaving. Suddenly, (often painfully but ultimately comfortingly) everyone stands exposed. The father dies and (suddenly!) the sixty year old left behind is no longer a child, just an orphan, confused by sudden adulthood. And in this void, this most living moment, a link in the chain is forged.

The process exhausts us. Not for nothing does the Parsha end with *chazak chazak venitchazek*: Be strong, be strong, and be strengthened.

## Is It Heaven or Reincarnation, or Both? By: Rabbi Aron Moss

**Question:**  
If we believe in reincarnation, why do we say that souls go to heaven for their final rest after they pass away? What's the point of praying for a soul if they might be right next to us down here on earth?

**Answer:**  
When I was at school, a friend failed his end-of-year exams and had to repeat a grade. We all moved on but he was held back.

Some think reincarnation is like repeating a year at school: while some souls graduate to the next world, others are sent right back down to rectify things.

But that’s not quite how it works. A better metaphor would be a mobile data rollover plan. The phone company gives you 5GB of data per month. Anything unused at the end of one

month rolls over to the following month. So if you only used 4GB in November, the remaining 1GB is applied to your December allowance, giving you 6GB for that month.

Your soul has multiple gigabytes of spiritual energy and Divine potential. This is the power G-d has invested in you to fulfill your mission in life. You use that potential by doing mitzvahs. Every mitzvah activates another gigabyte of your soul energy. You have been given an allotted number of days in this world to utilize your gigabytes.

At the end of the billing cycle, when your time comes to leave this life, the activated parts of your soul go to a higher place, because that part of you has completed its mission on earth. But if you have unused soul potential, if you didn’t activate all of the energy invested in you, then that unused part of your soul comes back again in another body to finish the job.

So when someone passes away, we pray that their soul find rest in heaven, because that’s where the already-used part of the soul is found. As for the unused part of the soul, it will come back down for another go-round.

## Live & Laugh

I don’t usually brag about my finances, but my credit card company calls me almost every day to tell me my balance is outstanding.

### Calendar

- ◆ Shacharis: 8:45 am (one minyan)
- ◆ Brocha in the Seeff Hall.
- ◆ Mincha: 6:25 pm
- ◆ Shabbos Ends: 7:35 pm

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for the brain. Recent medical research confirms that it can even delay the onset of Alzheimer's. Most importantly, a person must have something to live for. Find new areas of stimulation. Discover, dream, aspire higher. Life must be lived with purpose and vigor.

That's why at the end of this week's parsha, which also concludes the Book of Genesis, the congregation and Torah reader will exclaim "*Chazak, Chazak V'Nischazek* - Be strong, be strong, and we will all be strengthened." Because the tendency when we finish a book is to take a breather before we pick up the next one. Even if it's not War and Peace but a trashy novel, such is human nature. But a book of the Torah is not just any book. G-d's wisdom is not a cheap read. Torah is not just history or biography. Torah is our source of life and we dare not ever take a breather from life. *Chazak* energizes us to carry on immediately. And so we do. The very same afternoon we open the Book of Exodus and continue the learning cycle without interruption.

Truth is consistent, from beginning to end. May our lives be blessed to be truly alive - with authenticity, faithfulness and eternal fulfillment. Amen.

## Parsha Pointers

*Vayechi: Artscroll Chumash pg 268;  
Living Torah pg 241*

Jacob lives the final 17 years of his life in Egypt. Before his passing, he asks Joseph to take an oath that he will bury him in the Holy Land. He blesses Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, elevating them to the status of his own sons as progenitors of tribes within the nation of Israel.

The patriarch desires to reveal the end of days to his children, but is prevented from doing so. Jacob blesses his sons, assigning to each his role as a tribe: Judah will produce leaders, legislators and kings; priests will come from Levi, scholars from Issachar, seafarers from Zebulun, schoolteachers from Shimon, soldiers from Gad, judges from Dan, olive growers from Asher, and so on. Reuben is rebuked for "confusing his father's marriage"; Shimon and Levi for the massacre

of Shechem and the plot against Joseph. Naphtali is granted the swiftness of a deer, Benjamin the ferociousness of a wolf, and Joseph is blessed with beauty and fertility.

Joseph, too, dies in Egypt, at the age of 110. He, too, instructs that his bones be taken out of Egypt and buried in the Holy Land, but this would come to pass only with the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt many years later. Before his passing, Joseph conveys to the Children of Israel the testament from which they will draw

## Above the Fray

*By Rabbi Dovi Scheiner*

Jacob wants out.

The moment Jacob arrives in Egypt, he quickly departs to his gated community in Goshen, where he leads his life at a distance from the corrupt Egyptian society.

Now, as Jacob prepares to die, he summons his son Joseph and pleads: "Please do not bury me in Egypt . . . Take me out of Egypt!"

To ensure that not even his remains will remain in Egypt, Jacob feels he needs more than Joseph's word. "Swear to me," he asks of Joseph. And Joseph does.

Where results are essential, a vow is a powerful tool, as it binds the committed party to fulfill its duties under all circumstances. Still, why was a vow necessary in this story? Was Joseph's word to his dying father insufficient?

The very fray Jacob struggled to remain above, Joseph was very much a part of. Every soul is entrusted with its own mission. Joseph found his calling at the heart of Egyptian society, inside the belly of the beast, where he worked to identify and elevate G-dly sparks wherever they would be found.

Jacob is quick to recognize how Joseph would consider keeping his righteous father close by, even posthumously, as a critical asset in his effort to elevate Egypt. The only way Jacob could rest

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assured of compliance was through adjuring Joseph to take a vow.

If so, why was Jacob so eager to be removed from Egypt? Why not be buried amongst his children, where his presence might help reduce their sense of isolation in exile?

Jacob knew that his children would require help in order to escape the shackles of Egyptian bondage, and felt he would be in the best position to assist them from a distance. To successfully escape from prison, you need someone on the outside pulling for you.

So Jacob was transported to the Promised Land, while Joseph returned to the trenches in Egypt. The vow between them served as a bond—which Jacob would tug on when the time came for his children to come home.

One further lesson may be gleaned from our narrative. While living in Goshen, Jacob had prime pastureland for his flocks and a *yeshiva* on the premises—"the best of the land of Egypt" both materially and spiritually. Still he pleaded with Joseph, "Take me out of Egypt." Even under the best of circumstances, exile is no place for a Jew.

Take it from Jacob, who wouldn't be found dead in Egypt.

## Live with Death; Die with Life

*Rabbi Shimon Posner*

If you want to know what a bureaucracy does, suggests PJ O'Rourke, watch it when it does nothing. If you want to know what people think about life, watch them when death sticks out his calling card.

Many act like it ain't happening. They dress the dead in tuxes and ballroom dresses and do the dead's hair and apply them with make-up. We're here to celebrate a life, they chirp, while the elephant in the room swishes his large head. They exchange stories of (I'm not making this up) the deceased's delicious *flan* and chicken soup (we called them Godzilla balls!) and they solemnly vow to keep the condo in Boca "because Dad loved the water". But this ignoring of death is not simply ignorance; this ignor-

ing speaks of a deep, silent fear: a fear of the unknown.

Death does us apart—and brings us together—like nothing else can: when else does everyone drop everything to get "there" in time, or at least get there for the funeral?

And if we get there in time, into a room often crowded with illness and always with sorrow, if we are lucky, there are also words, glances: exchanges. They remain a lifetime with the sons and daughters. Jacob on his deathbed blessed his children: Rembrandt, captivated by the scene, rendered it on canvas.

Do not bury me in Egypt, Jacob pleads. And they listen. Bury me with my parents. And they listen. I will tell you the end of days. They listen but no words come. I will bless you. They listen and we echo their hearing.

The Baal Shem Tov was five years old when his father and mother died in quick succession. Be afraid of nothing but the Almighty, his father told him, leaving him a legacy of love and sustenance which his son fed to many.

An old woman I knew was diagnosed with cancer and given a few months to live. She was neither alarmed nor distressed. I've lived a good life, said she, and I am old. And I'm happy; my grandchildren didn't speak Yiddish, but my great-grandchildren do. She was no Sholom Aleichem enthusiast: as a girl she read Emile Zola. She spoke a more than serviceable English: communication was never a problem. Nor was there a generation gap: she knew her grandchildren shared her world. But you taste the world with your mother tongue and choosing a language (*langue* means tongue) for your newborn's first taste, shows your love for the culture that bore that language.

It was an intimacy with a particular world that she wanted for her progeny. That her world, destroyed by Hitler and Stalin, should be the *gisa deyankesa*, the primal view, of her grandchildren. Everything we want, we want for our kids. More than a man's vacations, more than a man's portfolio, if you want to know a man's dreams, if you want to know where he lives, look at what he seeks for his children.

Such is the legacy of the Parshah which speaks