

# congregation bet haverim



Grit and Grace: A Jewish Spiritual Framework for Growing Older  
Congregation Shearith Israel and Congregation Bet Haverim

Rabbi Dayle Friedman

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**Answering the Call: Becoming True Elders** Midrash Rabbah-Leviticus 19:8  
AND THE ELDERS OF ISRAEL... (IX, 1). Rabbi Akiba said: Israel may be compared to a bird: even as a bird is unable to fly without wings, so, too, are Israel unable to do anything without their elders.

## **Roles of an Elder-Dr. Bill Thomas**

1. Peacemaker (change maker)
2. Wisdom Giver
3. Legacy Creator

## **Becoming an Elder**

Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovski, *Netivot Shalom*, trans. Rabbi Dayle Friedman

וְאַבְרָהָם זָמַן בָּא בְּיָמֵים אֵלֶּיהָ בֶּרֶךְ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם בְּכָל־

“Abraham was old, come of days, and God blessed Abraham in everything.”

In the holy book, *Avodat Yisrael* (on Avot 6:5) teaches that every Jew has a portion in Torah from birth, and every day a spark from that portion is illumined for us, based on what it is that we need to repair (letaken) that day. Every day has its own agenda...

And it is written, given this, that it is fitting for a Jew to beware lest a single day be passed in vain, lest we think that we could put off for another day what needs to be repaired, for that which is not repaired today cannot be repaired another day. *Yesod ha-Olam* (4:1-2) teaches in the name of Rabbi Isaac Luria that no day and hour is identical to another, and thus no person since creation is identical to another, and one person cannot repair what another can repair, thus every day has a purpose and a role for each individual.

Based on this we can interpret Hille's saying, “if not now, when?” for every day is unique, and what is ours to repair on this day cannot be accomplished on another day. And Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (Reeh) wrote on the verse, “See, I place before you today (*hayom*) blessing...” about the word *hayom* (today): as the Holy One of Blessing continually renews in goodness each day the work of creation in

Rabbi Dayle A. Friedman • [rabbidayle@cbhatlanta.org](mailto:rabbidayle@cbhatlanta.org) • [www.growingolder.net](http://www.growingolder.net)

a special renewal for each day, so **the Holy One gives every day its own new luminosity in Torah and divine service.**

The person who exerts themselves in serving God earns each day a luminosity and a new insight that they did not have yesterday. This is [the meaning of] “See, I place before you today...” that is, the new and renewing luminosity in *each day’s* Torah. Thus the sages say, “every day should be as new in your eyes” (TB Ber. 63b)....

This is the meaning of “Abraham was old, come of days” that every day Abraham accomplished what was particular for that day, and accomplished all of the special purposes and roles of that day.

The explanation for “God blessed Abraham with everything,” which demonstrates the matter of abundance (*shefa*) descending to this world from the worlds above, that the abundance descends only when someone is available to receive it; when there isn’t someone to receive it, the abundance is halted and does not descend. This is the explanation for “Abraham was old, come of days,” that our father Abraham prepared a vessel to receive the abundance, and through this, God blessed him with everything, for he received the abundance each day.

### Questions for discussion

- What does the Slonimer teach us about the meaning of time in general? In later life?
- How might this text speak to someone who is physically or cognitively frail?
- What is the measure of a good life, according to the Slonimer?
- What might it mean to “prepare a vessel” for the *shefa* (abundance) awaiting us?

### Practice

#### Morning

- May I be open to the Torah/wisdom that is mine to learn today.
- May I seek opportunities to perform acts of *tikkun*/repair today.

#### Evening

- What did I learn today?
- What *tikkun* did I accomplish today?