



הרב הראשי עיה"ק אלעד **מרדכי מלכא שליט"א**
נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
ישיבה קטנה ארחות יהודה, ביהמ"ד גבוה לרבנים ודיינים "לקח טוב" קופת "מפעל החסד" אלעד
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Parashat Vayigash

To Be Alive

Our *parasha* states (45:26-28), "And they told him, saying, 'Yosef is still alive,' and that he is ruler over all the land of Egypt; but his heart rejected it, for he could not believe them. However, when they related to him all the words that Yosef had spoken to them, and he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to transport him, then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived."

Questions

Why did Yaakov lose heart when he was informed that Yosef was still alive and was the ruler over Egypt? He surely noted Yosef's dreams and now, according to what he was told, they were being actualized. And why, despite being unmoved by Yosef's position in Egypt, did Yaakov's spirits revive when he saw the cows that Yaakov sent?

The Thoughts of Earth-Bound Men

When we think about the average person's system of values, we will notice that since a person is constantly pre-occupied with his body-its maintenance, its health, its wants, its desires - he evaluates and values everything in life based on how it can help him meet his body's needs and desires. This will lead him to define death as to no longer have a functioning body. Conversely, anyone who's body is vibrant and healthy is fully alive. There are still different levels of quality of life: There are those who have prominent positions and those who have no position; those that are rich and those that are poor; those that are healthy and those that are sick. A person's success in the aforementioned areas will be the sole factor in determining his quality of life. This is how the average person looks at life and certainly the non-Jews of the world – life revolves around the body and its needs, and the greater a person's success in satisfying his body, the better his life will be. However, our holy Torah teaches us that there are two types of life and death in the world; there is the life of the body and the life of the *neshamah*, the soul, and the Torah attaches a greater value to the life of the *neshamah*. According to the Torah, a person can be walking and talking but still be considered dead. Someone who doesn't value his *neshamah* and has no place for it in his daily life is considered dead by our Sages, as they have said, "The wicked are considered dead in their lifetimes."

The Wicked Are Considered Dead in Their Lifetimes

The *Sages* in *Berachot* says that the righteous, even posthumously, are considered alive. The *Sages* learn this from the *pasuk*, "*Ben Yohayada ben ish chai rav poalim, Ben Yohayada, the son of the living man, great in deeds.*" Our Sages ask, why do we describe Benayahu Ben Yohayada as the "son of the living man"- do we consider the rest of the world dead? The Sages answer that he is called "son of the living man" because even after he has physically died, he is still considered alive. On the other hand, the Sages say that the wicked are considered dead during their lifetimes. This is learned from the *pasuk*, "According to ... witnesses you will execute the dead man." The Torah is discussing the law regarding a false witness and says that the *Beit Din* is commanded to "execute the



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dead man." The Sages ask how we can call the false witness a dead man when he is still alive. They answer that since he is a wicked person he is considered dead, despite being physically alive.

An Explanation of the Words of the Sages

It seems that the explanation of the words of the Sages is as follows: There are two types of life and two types of death in this world. There is the life and death of the body and the life and death of the *neshamah*. The Sages are teaching us that the life of the body is not true life, as the life of the body is limited and from the moment a person is born, he starts making his way to the end of the time prescribed for him. For example, someone who is terminally ill, everyone understands that his end is at hand, and he is already considered dead, although it might take a few more hours or a few more days for him to pass away. The same is really true for every single person, as every second he is getting closer to his prescribed end. Some people have their prescribed end, *rachmana litzlan*, while they are still young and some when they are older, but everyone has the time prescribed for him. Therefore, with every passing day, a person has "died" one more day; after 10 years he has suffered 10 years of death and when he has reached 50 years of age he has already died and lost 50 years of his life. This is why the Sages are telling us that physical life, the life of our body, is not true life. However, the life of the soul is an eternal life. Even the most non-religious Jew understands that there is a continuation after death and wants somebody to say *Kaddish* for him. Since the life of the *neshamah* is eternal, the Sages call this true life. Therefore, if a person, *chas ve'shalom*, does not observe Torah and mitzvot, he is considered wicked. Although he may be physically alive, in reality he is a dead man walking. If, on the other hand, a person observes Torah and mitzvot, then he is considered very much alive even after his body stops functioning; for though he is physically dead, his *neshamah* continues to live eternally.

The Words of R' Chaim Vital

R' Chaim Vital gives us a clearer understanding as to the exact nature of a person's body. These are the words he writes in his *sefer, Shaarei Kedushah*: "It is known to those with knowledge of the world, that a person's body is not the actual person and is only called the flesh of the person [and not the actual person himself], as the *pasuk* states (*Iyov* 10:11), "With skin and flesh you have clothed me" ... It emerges that the actual person is the essence inside the body and the body is just one of the sets of clothing worn by the soul, which is the essence of the person while he is in this world. After a person passes away, this layer of clothing is removed and in its place he is given a pure and clean spiritual garment, which is called *chaluka de'rabbanan* [the garment of the scholars].

Yaakov's Concern that Yosef had been Corrupted

With this appreciation of life and death we can understand our *parashah*. Rashi writes (47:27), "[Yaakov heard] the words of Yosef - He [Yosef] gave them [the brothers] a sign to give over to their father. The sign was the last thing that he had learned with his father - the *parashah* of *eglah arufah* [the calf brought to atone for an unpunished murder]. This is why in the Torah it says, 'And he saw what Yosef sent,' and does not say, 'What Pharaoh sent.'" It seems that the reason that Yaakov was not overjoyed to hear that Yosef was alive and ruler of Egypt was precisely because he was told that Yosef was ruler over Egypt. Therefore Yaakov feared that Yosef had left the ways of his father's house and was no longer careful about observing Torah and mitzvot. Yaakov knew



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that it was impossible to be a proper Jew and rule over an assimilated country; the great likelihood was that Yosef had become absorbed in Egyptian culture, became one of them, and given up the ways of his father. That being the case, there was no reason for Yaakov to feel any joy that Yosef was still alive - for the wicked in their lifetimes are considered dead. After he saw the calves and understood the hint that Yosef had sent to his father - he was reminding his father of the last topic of Torah that he had learned with him, as Rashi explains - did his spirits revive. If Yosef was still holding on to the last topic he learned with his father, he must have taken care to protect himself and remain faithful to the teachings of his father.

True Story: What it Means to be Alive and Not Dead

The book *Emes Haychidah (chelek bet)* records a story told by R' Yitzchak Peretz *shlita*. He relates a story that was told to him by his dear friend, whom he knew from the days that they were students in yeshiva together. His friend described to him what he experienced when he was clinically dead and the after effects of his experience. This is what his friend told him:

I was on a revolving bed which was spinning furiously. While the bed was spinning, I was beaten severely and suffered tremendously. I cried out in great pain and heard a Voice. The Voice said, "You are in the Heavenly Court." I said, "I want to live. I don't want to die. I'm still young. I still have what to do in life." The Voice responded, "Why do you want to live?" I answered, "I have a wife. I have children. I want to live for them." The Voice said, "That is not a good enough reason to be given life - many people have a wife, many people have children." I tried again, "I am involved in educating Jewish children; for the sake of Jewish children, give me life." The Voice said, "It's true that you're involved in educating children, but have you ever followed up to see if your labor has produced fruit? Have you ever checked your students and seen if they are learning to fear Heaven, if they are keeping the Torah, if they are absorbing what you teach them?" I answered, "I have never checked, but I put in a lot of effort into my job and have already been working 20 years." The Voice responded, "It's true that you once worked very hard, but for many years already you have been lax and are not doing your work faithfully." At this time, I saw every one of my sins in front of my eyes, and I had to give an account and a reckoning for all my deeds. The Voice asked me, "How could you do this? How could you not be afraid? Where was your fear of Heaven?" I was seized with fright and said, "But so many people are praying to give me life. *Yeshivot* are praying on my behalf. Synagogues are praying on my behalf." The Voice responded, "That is good reason for you not to die - but it still is not a good enough reason to be granted life. It's possible to live in a way that's not life and yet not death." I didn't understand what it meant to be neither dead nor alive, but I felt that the bed that I was lying on was being tilted and I found myself hanging between Heaven and a vast chasm below. A terrible fear seized me and I wanted to ask for death. Suddenly, from my mouth escaped the words that would save me. "But give me a chance to repent. Give me an opportunity to change my ways." The Voice cried out, "You truly want to repent? You truly want to change your ways? We will give you the opportunity, and we will see if you will correct all that needs correcting." I felt the bed slowing down until it stopped completely. The next thing I knew, I was opening up my eyes and I heard people around me whisper, "He's alive, he's alive, what a miracle!" The doctors and nurses came running and were shocked and amazed. When I was eventually released from the hospital, walking on my own two feet to the surprise of the doctors, I went home and began to change my ways. The first thing I did was to tell my wife to throw out the television, that abomination, from the house. Afterwards, I began fixing



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whatever what was in my power. I remembered that I had books that I took from a *shul* and sent my brother to return them. I found books that I had borrowed from friends and rushed to return them as well. I checked my financial records and found many debts which I had neglected to pay back. This too, I hurried to correct. I'm in charge of a group of educational professionals and every day I ask them what they're doing, what results they have achieved and what new things we can implement to help the children. I give them no time to rest and I'm constantly on top of them to make sure that all that can be done is done. That is why I wanted to come back into the world, not to live as somebody who is dead but as somebody who is alive; as somebody who praises the deeds of Hashem and fulfills his mission in the world.

Words of Mussar

We have learned that there are different degrees of life. There are different levels of life in the physical sense, as it is obvious to all that there is no comparison between one who is sick and one who is healthy, or between an ordinary sick person and his counterpart in the critical-care ward of the hospital. Although all these people carry the title "alive," there is a great difference in the quality of their lives. Just as this is true for the life of the body, it is true for the life of the soul as well. One whose life is full of Torah and mitzvot has a *neshamah* which is truly alive, while one who dedicates his time and energy to his body is considered dead; he may be physically here but since only the life of the *neshamah* is true life, he is in actuality more dead than alive. Even amongst those who keep Torah and mitzvot there are different degrees of life. If one learns Torah and does mitzvot but still devotes the majority of his time and energy to his body and its needs, he is comparable to someone who is in critical care - he is alive, but just barely. Therefore, one should try as much as possible to pursue Torah and mitzvot and strengthen the life of his *neshamah*, the true and eternal life.

Shabbat Shalom

Rav Mordechai Malka



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