

The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

CHAYEI SARA 5784

Many of our commentators have attempted to resolve an apparent redundancy in the Torah's description of Avraham's advancing years (24:1). The verse states:

And Avraham was old, [he] came with his days..."

The problem is clear: If we are being told that Avraham was old, why add that he came with his days? Moreover, in last week's Parsha (18:11), we find the same redundancy when the Torah relates that, "Now Avraham and Sarah were old, [they] came with their days... Apparently, the Torah felt the need to describe the aging Avraham and Sarah in two very similar ways. How may we understand this repetition?

Among the many answers Chazal offer, Radak (ad loc) suggests that the phrase BA BAYAMIM teaches us that all of Avraham's days were beautifully complete; Avraham became everything he could have possibly become! The Kli Yakar (ad loc) understands YAMIM to metaphorically mean daylight as opposed to nighttime. As Avraham grew old, his life, as it were, journeyed from place of darkness - a life of challenges and hardships - to a sunniness of glorious and noble standing - a life

distinguished by the brightness of virtuous and righteous deeds, a life filled with goodness and accomplishment.

But it is, however, the comments of the Torah Temima (ad loc) which are particularly interesting and suggestive. Based on the Gemara (Bava Metzia 87a), he argues that while the Talmud states that before Avraham there were no signs of aging, there are nevertheless verses prior to Avraham which do mention ZIKNA, old age. He therefore proposes that Avraham's ZIKNA was defined by his BA BAYAMIM, and until Avraham, such an old age of BA BAYAMIM did not exist. How though can this be explained?

People age in different ways. All too often, a person goes from one day to the next without giving much thought as to how their past days connect to their present and future. Much like a person ripping the day-date off the hanging paper calendar, many treat their past days as just so much garbage. Not so Avraham Avinu. For him, each day was a building block upon which to climb higher in his quest for ethical achievement. He "came with his days" as each day held the potential for new adventures and accomplishments. Avraham's ZIKNA was thus defined by his advancing one day at a time, with each day perched upon the shoulders of the previous day, boosting him, uplifting

him to a place of such sanctity that, quite remarkably, he becomes the close and precious friend of the Almighty Himself. Indeed, Avraham's ZIKNA - his golden years - was filled with the richness of his days which he lovingly and proudly brought them all with him - BA BAYAMIM.

Rabbi Y.Y. Jacobson, in one of his extraordinary essays on the Parsha, offers a further extension of the above answer, one based upon a talk given by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in 1988. He writes: "The Hebrew expression used for 'they came in days' is BA'IM BAYAMIM. A literal translation would read, 'They came into the days.' Perhaps, then, we ought to interpret the words 'they came into the days' in the simplest way possible: that Avraham and Sara entered inside their days, allowing the days and its experiences to encompass them completely and touch the texture of their very being. Avraham and Sara lived an immersive life; they were fully immersed in each and every day.

"Many of us are frightened to enter into our lives and live it fully, with the complete presence of mind, heart, and body, with unbridled passion and zest. We do not trust life enough to let it possess us... Life holds too much pain, too many disappointments, so much shame, anger, and guilt; we would rather let our days pass by us from a distance so that we remain

safe. We observe our days moving along, but we remain emotionally distant; too timid to become one with them, to be fully engulfed by them.

"Yet, Avraham and Sara, the Torah says, personified a different model: "They came into the days"; they fully entered into their days. They allowed themselves to be wrapped by life. All their days were explored, actualized, and lived to the fullest. They valued, celebrated, and maximized every day.

"Avraham and Sara had been through quite a life together! They enjoyed tremendous blessings and victories, as well as profound pain and disappointment... Yet throughout all of it - the positive as well as the challenging, the joyous as well as the painful - they allowed themselves to experience the pulse of life in its totality. They were present throughout and did not retreat into the cocoon of safe detachment. They "entered" inside each day and stared at its existence with an unwavering gaze and mighty courage.

"Sure, it is safer to enter into your life halfway, to create a border between yourself and your experiences. No sorrow, no pain, no tears. But that may come at the cost of living, and deprives you of a life filled with exuberance, laughter, passion, and wholesomeness... Every day brings up a new awareness, a new challenge, a new opportunity, a new task, a new

layer of reality. When I show up fully to live, every day is a new journey, a calling to take on the unique mission of this day, which may be very different than my task yesterday.

"No doubt during this period of time, Avraham experienced the most profound and most turbulent moments of his entire life. After waiting for decades, he was finally blessed with a child, Yitzchak, who would carry on the monotheistic revolution he had begun. And during this period, Avraham watched himself about to slaughter his son. It was only at the last moment that G-d told him to take his hands off the lad and let him live. What does such an event do to a father? [And] finally, during these years, the person who was there with him through thick and thin, his life's partner, passed away... Her death must have been an unimaginable loss to Avraham. One would think that at this point Avraham would have developed some detachment skills to protect himself against any further pain and anguish. We often observe how after years of experiencing life with all its pressures and struggles, people develop a certain indifference and apathy. They have simply been through too much to subject themselves to the vulnerable vicissitudes of life. They detach.

"So, the Torah informs us that Avraham's courage lasted him till the very end. "Avraham was old, he came

into the days." Even as a widower, Avraham did not detach from life. He breathed it in, with all of its majesty, drama, joy, and pain. On the lines of his face and the streaks of his soul, he carried a reminder of every encounter, every relationship, and every experience. That is what we call truly living: acquiring the courage to become one with life, to feel it, love it, and possess it... Till his last breath, the founder of the Jewish faith awoke each morning and said, 'I will live my life today to the fullest; my heart and soul will immerse themselves fully in the journey of life today and I will maximize the unique mission give to me for this day.'"

The message for all of us, as we fight this just war - a MILCHEMET MITZVA - is to live with the deep knowledge and faith that every day - notwithstanding the pain and anguish, the stress and trauma - that each day has within it a special essence of meaning and purpose, an exceptional power that can not only help us endure the battle, but "day on top of day" can bless us with the dignity and courage to ultimately prevail and triumph!

Abraham Lincoln once put it: "In the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years."

Our Torah said it differently: "And Avraham was old and BA BAYAMIM, he came with his days! 🙌"