****To Live A Long Life: A Tribute To Avraham Avinu and Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

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**Avraham’s Old Age**

1. **Bereishit 24:1 (JPS Tanakh 1985 Translation)**

וְאַבְרָהָ֣ם זָקֵ֔ן בָּ֖א בַּיָּמִ֑ים וַֽיהוָ֛ה בֵּרַ֥ךְ אֶת־אַבְרָהָ֖ם בַּכֹּֽל׃

Abraham was now old, advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.

1. **Seforno on Bereishit ibid.**

(א) ואברהם זקן. וה' ברך. באר הסבות שהכריחו את אברהם לשלוח את עבדו [עתה] אל ארץ אחרת בעד אשה לבנו ושהוצרך להשביעו עליו שהרי לסבת הזקנה דאג שימות ולא יראה בחופת בנו והסכים שלא לאחר עוד ומבלי אין בארצו אשה הגונה לבנו הוצרך לשלוח אל ארץ אחרת. ומפני עשרו דאג שמא איזה אדם בלתי הגון ירבה שוחד לעבדו כדי שיבחר בבתו ולא ישתדל להשיג אשה הגונה לבנו. ולכן הוצרך להשביע את עבדו על כל אלה:

1. **Talmud, Bava Metzia 87a (Davidson Edition Translation**

עד אברהם לא היה זקנה מאן דהוה בעי למשתעי בהדי אברהם משתעי בהדי יצחק בהדי יצחק משתעי בהדי אברהם אתא אברהם בעא רחמי והוה זקנה שנאמר (בראשית כד, א) ואברהם זקן בא בימים

Until Abraham, there was no aging, i.e., old age was not physically recognizable. Consequently, one who wanted to speak to Abraham would mistakenly speak to Isaac, and vice versa: An individual who wanted to speak to Isaac would speak to Abraham, as they were indistinguishable. Abraham came and prayed for mercy, and aging was at last noticeable, as it is stated: “And Abraham was old, well stricken in age” (Genesis 24:1),

1. **Hadar Zikeinim Bereishit 24:1**

ואברהם זקן בא בימים. לפי שיש בני אדם שדומין לזקן ואינו בא בימים ויש שבא בימים ואינו זקן. בא הכתוב והעיד על אברהם שהוא זקן בא בימים

For some people seem elderly but haven’t “advanced in days” and some have” advanced in days but aren’t old. The Torah testifies about Avraham that he was both old and “advanced in days”

1. **Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Lubavitch, Likutei Sichot Volume 35 Chayei Sarah Sichah 2**

הפירוש ד"בא בימים" הוא — כפשטות התיבות — שהגיע ובא (נכנס) בתוך הימים, כמו בא בבית וכיו"ב. זאת אומרת, שאין זה תיאור מספר שנות האדם (אם רב או מעט), אלא אופן חיי האדם בימים אלו.

כלומר: הימים שעברו על האדם וה­מאורעות שבהם, אינם כמו דבר העובר וחולף שלא נשאר ממנו רושם, כי אם הם באופן שהאדם "הכניס" את מהותו ונפשו בתוך כל יום ויום ומאורעותיו והר­פתקאותיו, שאז כל יום ויום וכל מאורע ומאורע (הן דבר המשמח, והן הפכו ח"ו) פועל ומשפיע עליו, עד שניכר בגלוי בתווי פניו

The meaning of "coming in the days" is - as the simple meaning of the words - that he came and entered within the days, as came in the house, etc. **This means that it is not a description of the number of human years whether many or few, but the way of life during these days.**

That is: the days that have passed over man and the events in them, are not like a passing thing that leaves no impression on him, but if they are in a way that man "inserted" his essence and soul within each day and his events and adventures, then every day and every event and event are joyful, and they became G-d forbid he acts and influences him, until he is clearly visible in his features

1. **R’ Avraham Ibn Ezra Bereishit ibid.**

**וה' ברך את אברהם בכל** — באורך ימים ועושר וכבוד ובנים, מכל חמדת האדם

With a long life, wealth, honour, and children, from all of man’s desires

1. **Talmud, Bava Batra 17a-b (Davidson Edition Translation)**

תנו רבנן שלשה הטעימן הקב"ה בעולם הזה מעין העולם הבא אלו הן אברהם יצחק ויעקב אברהם דכתיב ביה [בראשית כד, א](/Genesis.24.1) בכל יצחק דכתיב ביה [בראשית כז, לג](/Genesis.27.33) מכל יעקב דכתיב ביה [בראשית לג, יא](/Genesis.33.11) כל

The Sages taught: There were three people to whom the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave already in this world a taste of the World-to-Come. They are: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham, as it is written with regard to him: “And the Lord blessed Abraham with everything” ([Genesis 24:1](/Genesis.24.1)). Isaac, as it is written with regard to him: “And I have eaten from everything” ([Genesis 27:33](/Genesis.27.33)). Jacob, as it is written with regard to him: “Because I have everything

1. Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch on Bereishit ibid.

הקדמה זו כוללת את סיכום חיי אברהם: הוא היה זקן, בא בימים, וה' ברך אותו בכל. חייו היו גמורים וחתומים, ולא נותרו לו שאיפות ומאויים לעצמו. מעתה, דאגתו היחידה היתה מכוונת לבנו ולביתו אחריו...

זקן… מציין "זקן" את הרכוש, שנרכש אחרי עבודת החיים, את הבשלת האישיות. מכאן גם דברי חז"ל: "זקן - זה שקנה חכמה" (קידושין לב ע"ב); או המאמר הכולל עוד יותר: "זה שקנה שני עולמות" (בראשית רבה נט, ט). החכמה היהודית יודעת בכל מקום את מלוא הערך של העולם הזה בצד ערכו של העולם הבא, ותמיד היא נותנת לו את הביטוי ההולם. חכמה יהודית היא האומרת: "יפה שעה אחת בתשובה ומעשים טובים בעוה"ז מכל חיי העוה"ב", אם גם היא מוסיפה: "ויפה שעה אחת של קורת רוח בעוה"ב מכל חיי העוה"ז" (אבות ד, כב). לדידה, זקן הוא זה שבחייו עלי אדמות כבש את שני העולמות, את הזה בשביל הבא, ע"י שהטביע את חותם האלקות על העולם הגשמי. "צדיקים ישכינו שכינה בארץ" (ילק"ש בראשית רמז כג).

כך, לפי השקפה זו, יש להבין גם את "בא בימים": "בא בדופלין" (בראשית רבה, שם), זכה לשני העולמות, לגשמי ואלקי, …הימים לא התגברו עליו, כי אם הוא בא בהם, והם היו לו לציונים ותמרורים בדרכו לנצח:

אם מבינים אנו דברים אלה לאשורם, הרי אושרו של אברהם מתבטא בכך, שהוא נתברך בכל. יש הרואה ברכה בכל אשר יעשה, נכסיו מצליחים בידיו, אך הוא עצמו נשאר אומלל בתוך כל אותה ברכה

This introduction includes the conclusion of Abraham's life: he was old, coming of age, and G-d blessed him in everything. His life was finished and sealed, and he had no ambitions and fears left for himself. From now on, his only concern was directed at his son and his home after him ...

"זקן" indicates the property, acquired after the work of life, the maturation of the personality. Hence also the words of Chazal: "An old man - the one who acquired wisdom" (Kiddushin 32b); Or the even more comprehensive description: "He who acquired two worlds" (Genesis Rabbah 59:9). Jewish wisdom everywhere knows the full value of this world alongside the value of the next world, and it always gives it its proper expression. It is Jewish wisdom that says: "It is more beautiful to have one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than all the life of the Next World", but it also adds: "And beautiful is one hour of contentment in the next world than all the life of this world" (Avot 4:22). [In Jewish Thought], an old person is one who in his life on earth conquered the two worlds, this one for the next, by imprinting the seal of G-d on the material world. "The righteous shall dwell in the land" (Yalkut Shimoni on Genesis 23).

Thus, according to this view, one should also understand "Coming in the Days": "Coming into Two Planes" (Genesis Rabbah, ibid.), Conquered both worlds, material and divine…The days did not overcome him, because he came in them, and they were for him accomplishments and signposts on his way to eternity:

If we understand these things correctly, then Abraham's happiness is expressed in the fact that he is blessed in everything. There are some who sees a blessing in whatever they do, his assets succeed in his hands, but he himself remains miserable in the midst of all that blessing…

1. **Bereishit 25:8**

וַיִּגְוַע וַיָּמָת אַבְרָהָם בְּשֵׂיבָה טוֹבָה זָקֵן וְשָׂבֵעַ וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל עַמָּיו

And Avraham expired and dies at a good age, elderly and satisfied. He was gathered to his nation.

1. **Ktav ViHakabbalah on Bereishit 25:8**

ואין לנפש הצדיק תענוג יותר גדול ממה שיש לו בעת מיתתו ככתוב ותשמח ליום אחרון, בהיותו אז קרוב לבוא אל מחיצות קדושים עליונים להתענג תענוגים רוחניים, לכן קראו חכמים יום מיתת אנשי מעלה יום הלולא. ואמרו כאן ב"ר בשעת סילוקן של צדיקים הקדוש ברוך הוא מראה להם מתן שכרן ושבעה נפשם והם ישנים, ותענוג זה הרוחני הוא באמת שביעה נפשית

And the soul of the righteous has no greater pleasure than it has at the time of his death as it is written and “rejoice for the last day”, being then close to coming to the partitions of the holy to relish in spiritual pleasures, therefore the sages called the day of death of the people of Ma'aleh the day of rejoicing. And they said here in the Bereishit Rabbah at the time of the removal of the righteous, the Holy One, Blessed be He, shows them the giving of reward and the satisfaction of their souls and they sleep, and this spiritual pleasure is truly mental satisfaction.

1. **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, Covenant and Conversation, Faith in the Future- Chayei Sarah- 5776**

<https://rabbisacks.org/faith-in-the-future-chayei-sarah-5776/>

What does a man of 137 do – the Torah calls him “old and advanced in years” – after such a trauma and such a bereavement? We would not be surprised to find that he spent the rest of his days in sadness and memory. He had done what G-d had asked of him. Yet he could hardly say that G-d’s promises had been fulfilled. Seven times he had been promised the land of Canaan, yet when Sarah died he owned not one square-inch of it, not even a place in which to bury his wife. G-d had promised him many children, a great nation, many nations, as many as the grains of sand in the sea shore and the stars in the sky. Yet he had only one son of the covenant, Isaac, whom he had almost lost, and who was still unmarried at the age of thirty-seven. Abraham had every reason to sit and grieve.

Yet he did not. In one of the most extraordinary sequences of words in the Torah, his grief is described in a mere five Hebrew words: in English, “Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.” Then immediately we read, “And Abraham rose from his grief.” From then on, he engaged in a flurry of activity with two aims in mind: first to buy a plot of land in which to bury Sarah, second to find a wife for his son. Note that these correspond precisely to the two Divine blessings: of land and descendants. Abraham did not wait for G-d to act. He understood one of the profoundest truths of Judaism: that G-d is waiting for us to act….

**Abraham heard the future calling to him**. Sarah had died. Isaac was unmarried. Abraham had neither land nor grandchildren. He did not cry out, in anger or anguish, to G-d. Instead, he heard the still, small voice saying: The next step depends on you. You must create a future that I will fill with My spirit. That is how Abraham survived the shock and grief. G-d forbid that we experience any of this, but if we do, this is how to survive.

G-d enters our lives as a call from the future. It is as if we hear him beckoning to us from the far horizon of time, urging us to take a journey and undertake a task that, in ways we cannot fully understand, we were created for. That is the meaning of the word vocation, literally “a calling”, a mission, a task to which we are summoned.

We are not here by accident. We are here because G-d wanted us to be, and because there is a task we were meant to fulfill. Discovering what that is, is not easy, and often takes many years and false starts. But for each of us there is something G-d is calling on us to do, a future not yet made that awaits our making.

1. **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, Covenant and Conversation, Faith in the Future- Chayei Sarah- 5776**

For a variety of reasons, neither Abraham nor Sarah had an easy life. Theirs were lives of trial, in which their faith was tested at many points. How can Rashi say that all of Sarah’s years were equal in goodness? How can the Torah say that Abraham had been blessed with everything?...

That, however, is precisely the meaning and message of Chayei Sarah. In it Abraham does two things: he buys the first plot in the land of Canaan, and he arranges for the marriage of Isaac. One field and a cave was, for Abraham, enough for the text to say that “G-d had blessed Abraham with everything.” One child, Isaac, by then married and with children (Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born; Isaac was sixty when the twins, Jacob and Esau, were born; and Abraham was 175 when he died) was enough for Abraham to die in peace.

Lao-Tzu, the Chinese sage, said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. To that Judaism adds, “It is not for you to complete the work but neither are you free to desist from it” ([Avot 2:16](https://www.sefaria.org/Pirkei_Avot.2.16?lang=he-en&utm_source=rabbisacks.org&utm_medium=sefaria_linker" \t "_blank)). G-d Himself said of Abraham, “For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him” ([Gen. 18:19](https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.18.19?lang=he-en&utm_source=rabbisacks.org&utm_medium=sefaria_linker)).

The meaning of this is clear. If you ensure that your children will continue to live for what you have lived for, then you can have faith that they will continue your journey until eventually they reach the destination. Abraham did not need to see all the land in Jewish hands, nor did he need to see the Jewish people become numerous. He had taken the first step. He had begun the task, and he knew that his descendants would continue it. He was able to die serenely because he had faith in G-d and faith that others would complete what he had begun. The same was surely true of Sarah.

To place your life in G-d’s hands, to have faith that whatever happens to you happens for a reason, to know that you are part of a larger narrative, and to believe that others will continue what you began, is to achieve a satisfaction in life that cannot be destroyed by circumstance. Abraham and Sarah had that faith, and they were able to die with a sense of fulfilment.

To be happy does not mean that you have everything you want or everything you were promised. It means, simply, to have done what you were called on to do, to have made a beginning, and then to have passed on the baton to the next generation. “The righteous, even in death, are regarded as though they were still alive” ([Berakhot 18a](https://www.sefaria.org/Berakhot.18a?lang=he-en&utm_source=rabbisacks.org&utm_medium=sefaria_linker" \t "_blank)) because the righteous leave a living trace in those who come after them.

That was enough for Abraham and Sarah, and it must be enough for us.

1. **Yair Rosenberg, After 22 Years as Chief Rabbi of the U.K., Jonathan Sacks Wants To Go Global, Tablet 11-13-2013**

*https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/jonathan-sacks-goes-global*

“Now, my late father, *alav ha-shalom*, didn’t have much Jewish education, but he had enormous *emunah*[faith],” Sacks continued. “I used to watch him saying *Tehillim*in the hospital, and I could see him getting stronger. It seemed to me that his mental attitude was ‘I’m leaving this to Hashem. If he sees that it’s time for me to go, then it’s time for me to go. And if he still needs me to do things here, he’ll look after me.’”

“And I adopted exactly that attitude. So on both occasions I felt, if this is the time Hashem needs me up there, thank you very much indeed for my time down here; I’ve enjoyed every day and feel very blessed. And if he wants me to stay and there’s still work for me to do, then he is going to be part of the *refu’ah*[healing] and I put my trust in him. So there was no test of faith at any point—just these simple moments at which to say, ‘*b’yado afkid ruchi*’ [‘In his hand, I place my soul’]. That was my thought. And since we say that every day in *[Adon Olam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adon_Olam)*, I didn’t feel the need to write a book about it. It was for me not a theological dilemma at all.”

“I had faith,” said Sacks, “full stop.”