

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter V: Chavei Sarah (Gen. 23:1-25:18)

Essay 2: The lifespan of a righteous person.

מדרש ונהיו חגי שרה, הָדָא הוּא דְכִתִּיב יוֹדֵעַ ה' יְמֵי תְּמִימִים. כָּשֶׁם שָׁהִם תְּמִימִים כִּד שְׁנוֹתֵיהֶם תְּמִימִים עכ"ל. כִּהְיָא דְפָרְק קמָא דְסוּטָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם בְּרִמָּא וְעֲשָׂרִים שָׁנָה אָנֹכִי הַיּוֹם, שָׁאִין תִּלְמוּד לֹא מֵר הַיּוֹם. וְמָה תִּלְמוּד לֹא מֵר הַיּוֹם, הַיּוֹם מִלְּאוּ יְמֵי וְשְׁנוֹתַי, לְלַמֶּדֶד שֶׁהִקְב"ה מְשַׁלֵּם שְׁנוֹתֵיהֶם שֶׁל צְדִיקִים מִיּוֹם לַיּוֹם וּמֵחֵדֶשׁ לְחֵדֶשׁ.

Regarding the opening words of the parsha, **“and the life of Sarah”** (Gen. 23:1), **it is written in a Midrash: “ ‘The L-rd knows the days of the pure’** (Ps. 37:18). **Just as they are pure, thus their years are pure.**” (Gen. Rabbah 58:1). The Midrash interprets this to mean that a 20-year-old woman will have the beauty of a 7-year-old, and that a 100-year-old will have the same (low level of) sin as a 20-year-old. However, Rabbi Nachmani interprets “pure” as “complete,” and applies it not to the quality of the years but the quantity: that the righteous person’s lifespan will be measured in whole years, without any leftover months or days. **Similarly, in the first chapter in Sotah** (13b, and also in Kiddushin 38a), in analyzing the verse **“[Moses] said to them, ‘I am 120 years old today’ ”** (Deut. 31:2), it is noted **that it was not necessary to say “today.” What Moses meant by saying “today,” is that “today fills my days and my years,”** i.e., it was his 120th birthday, **to teach you that the Holy One, Blessed be He, completes the years of the righteous from day to day and from month to month.**

וְקִשָּׁה דְהָא רוּבָם שֶׁל צְדִיקִים נְחֻסִידִים לֹא מְתוּ בְיוֹם לִידְתָם. וְלָמָּה לֹא הִשְׁלִים לָהֶם? וְיֵשׁ לְדַקְדָק הַלְשׁוֹן שֶׁל מִיּוֹם לַיּוֹם וּמֵחֵדֶשׁ לְחֵדֶשׁ. דְּאִיתָא בְּפָרְק ט' דְעֲרַכְיָן פְּלוּגְתָא בֵּין רַבִּי וּרְבִנָּה בְּהַאי קָרָא דְכִתִּיב עַד־מְלֵאת לֹא שָׁנָה תְּמִימָה. דְּרַבִּי סָבַר בֵּין שָׁנָה פְּשׁוּטָה בֵּין שָׁנָה מְעוּבָרָת, מוֹנָה שֶׁס"ה יוֹם. וְנִחְכְּמִים סוּבְרִים דְבִשְׁנָה פְּשׁוּטָה גְּחֵלַט הַבַּיִת לְסוּף י"ב חֵדֶשׁ מִיּוֹם לַיּוֹם דְּהֵינּוּ שֶׁנ"ד יוֹם, וּבְמְעוּבָרָת נוֹתְנִים לוֹ כֹּל חֵדֶשׁ הָעֵיבוּר עכ"ל.

But there is a difficulty in that the majority of righteous and pious people do not die on their birthdays. Why doesn't He complete those years for them? It is worthwhile to scrutinize the language “from day to day and from month to month.” It is brought in the ninth chapter of Arachin (31a) **that there was a dispute between Rabbi¹ and the other rabbis regarding the fact that a person who sells a house within a walled city has a right to redeem it, but**

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¹ Judah ha-Nasi, who lived in the 2nd Century of the Common Era, was the chief redactor and editor of the Mishnah, and was known simply as “Rabbi.” He was a key leader of the Jewish community during the Roman occupation of Judea.

if he doesn't redeem it “until a complete year has passed for him” (Lev. 25:30), it becomes too late to do so. **Rabbi's interpretation is that regardless of whether one is discussing a regular year or a leap year,² one counts 365 days to attain “a complete year.” The rabbis interpret that in a regular year, the house is fixed as being the irredeemable property of the new owner at the end of the 12-month anniversary, that is after 354 days, and in a leap year they give [the original owner] the additional month as well, in which to redeem the property.**

נמצא דבין לרבי ובין לרבנן איפא קולא וחומרא. דלרבי בשנה פשוטה איפא י"א יום יתירים. ולרבנן בשנה מעופרת איפא חדש יומא.

There is found within both the opinions of Rabbi and the other rabbis a degree of both leniency and strictness. As according to Rabbi, in an ordinary year of 12 lunar months, or 354 days, the rabbis would view him as being lenient in allowing a total of 365 days, i.e., 11 extra days more than they would have allowed, for the original owner to exercise his redemption option. But in a leap year of 13 lunar months, or 384 days, the rabbis would view Rabbi as being stricter than they would have been, in still allowing only 365 days, i.e., 19 fewer days than they would have allowed for the original owner to exercise his redemption option. According to the rabbis, in a regular year of 12 lunar months, they would allow only 354 days for the owner's option, so Rabbi would consider that to be strict, being 11 days fewer than he would allow. But in a leap year of 13 lunar months, the rabbis would allow an extra lunar month, i.e., 384 days for the term of the owner's option, which Rabbi would consider as lenient, as being 19 days more than he would have allowed.

ולכן אמרו בגמרא שהקב"ה נותן לצדיקים בתשלום שנותיהם. למר כדאית ליה ולמר כדאית ליה. דהיינו מיום ליום, מונה להם ימים כספרא דרבי, דאמר מונה ימים. ועוד בשנות מעופרות נותן להם כדברי חכמים הדין יותר. ובכך שנותיהם תמימים, דהיינו שבקצב מדת השנים שנגזרו להם, לא נשלם זה הקצב עד שיעברו עליהם כל הימים והחדשים דשייכי לפשוטות ולמעופרות של כל ימי סיהם. וכשישתלמו אלו הימים נקרא ששנותיהם תמימים לפי שהשלים שנותיהם מיום ליום וכו'.

Therefore, they say in the Gemara (in both Sotah 13b and Kiddushin 38a) “that the Holy One, Blessed be He, completes the years of the righteous from day to day and from month to month, as it is written: ‘The number of your days I will fill’ (Ex. 23:26), indicating that the righteous will live out their years fully.” “He holds according to one sage, and He holds according to another sage” (Sotah 15a). That is, “from day to day” means that in regular years, He counts for them the days following the lenient opinion of Rabbi, who counts the 365 days rather than counting 12 lunar months of 354 days. Furthermore, in leap years He leniently gives

² The Jewish calendar is a solar/lunar calendar. The months are based on the 29.5-day lunar cycle, i.e., some months are 29 days and some are 30 days. Thus, a common year averages 354 days (or could be 353 or 355 days). However, the Jewish calendar is not a pure lunar calendar, as some holidays are supposed to fall within particular seasons. Therefore, in 7 out of 19 years, a leap year is inserted in which a 13th month is added. Leap years average 384 days (or could be 383 or 385 days).

them an extra lunar month, i.e., 13 lunar months of 384 days, in accordance with the words of the rabbis. In this way, their years are complete. That is, in allotting the measure of the years that are ordained for them, the allotment is not complete until all the days and the months have passed that belong to the regular years and to the leap years, of all the days of their lives. When these are completed, the days are called complete years, because their years were completed from day to day, etc.

וְהִשְׁתָּא אֲתֵי שְׁפִיר שְׁמַצִּינוּ בִּיְלֻקוּט יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וּבְמִכְיֻלְתָּא פְּרִישַׁת בְּשַׁלַּח מִתְּלוּקָתָּא עַל יוֹם מִיַּתַּת מֹשֶׁה. שְׁיֵישׁ אוֹמְרִים ז' שְׁבָט וְיֵישׁ אוֹמְרִים א' אָדָר.

Now everything is clear, why we find in the Yalkut Shimoni on the book of Joshua (subject 15, on verse 5:12) and in the Mechilta (16:35) on parshat Beshalach (Ex. 13:17-17:16) a disagreement on the day of death of Moses. We see that there are those (i.e., the Yalkut Shimoni, quoting Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya) who say it was the 7th of Shevat and there are those (i.e., the Mechilta) who say it was the 7th of the following month, Adar I (i.e., Adar I of a leap year).

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