חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

NADVORNA · ARVEI NACHAL, CHAYEI SARA

A righteous life holds every day at once, not in sequence

Arvei Nachal

In the upper worlds, all days exist simultaneously in a single eternal present, each rooted in holiness above, while in this lower world that same holiness must descend one day at a time, giving rise to the order of time; a tzaddik (righteous person), by fulfilling each day's service, draws down and sanctifies that day's root, so that when his life ends, all his days remain his at once, just as Sarah's hundred, twenty, and seven years were "all equal for good" and stood together in holiness, paralleling Esther's hundred twenty-seven provinces, which she ruled simultaneously rather than in succession. AI SUMMARY

"And the life of Sarah was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah." Rashi of blessed memory commented: "At one hundred, like at twenty," etc. The commentators explained that it would not have been proper to mention the word "years" for each individual unit, for a person first lives a hundred years, and then another twenty, and then another seven; but since the word "years" is mentioned for each number, this implies that the hundred, the twenty, and the seven were all present at once -- see their words there.

One should note that the expression "the years of the life of" is superfluous, and Rashi came to resolve this, explaining that all these periods were equal for good. But this is difficult, since this point is already demonstrated from the beginning of the verse, "at one hundred, like at twenty," etc.

In Midrash Rabbah on this parashah (Torah portion), it is told: Rabbi Akiva was expounding while the congregation was dozing off. He wanted to arouse them, so he said, "What did Esther see that caused her to rule over one hundred twenty-seven provinces? Because she was a granddaughter of Sarah, who lived one hundred twenty-seven years," etc.

This is puzzling: what is the point of saying "he wanted to arouse them" specifically in connection with this derash (homiletical interpretation)? Did he not offer other pleasant derashot, and yet they still dozed off? Furthermore, what is the merit (zechut) involved in her having lived one hundred twenty-seven years? And if the intent is that throughout all those years she was righteous, [note that] he did not mention her righteousness at all -- and in any case, mere length of life is not itself a merit, for that comes from God. Furthermore, the comparison does not hold, for all the provinces belonged to Esther at one and the same time, whereas the years [of Sarah's life] are ordered and come one after another.

Also, in Midrash Rabbah (Bereishit Rabbah 58:1): "The Lord knows the days of the perfect (temimim)" -- just as their deeds are perfect (tamim), so too their days are perfect. One should note: what relevance does "perfection" (temimut) have to days? And one should also note: what is the point of expounding this verse in reference to Sarah?

Now it seems to me that one can explain all this in light of the verse (Proverbs 10:27), "The fear of Hashem adds days, but the years of the wicked shall be shortened." The matter is this: the upper worlds

do not fall under the category of time, as is known from the Rambam's explanation of "Bereishit bara Elohim" (In the beginning God created).

To explain a bit further: it is known that there is no reality in this world that does not have a subtle, spiritual counterpart above, and the more refined any given reality is here below, the more it points to the subtlety and sanctity of its root above. Thus we observe in this world the reality of time, which is ordered and comes day by day, and this is a spiritual reality that is not grasped here except through the intellect. This indicates that its root above is very great and spiritual, and that each and every day has a root above—all the days of the world standing together, all at once, in the heights above, as spiritual, holy matters.

However, according to this, the lower world is not worthy, and cannot bear at one time more than one of these sanctities; therefore no more than the sanctity of a single day is ever drawn down at once. For this reason, this world falls under the category of time: for when the influence (shefa) of one day is finished, the influence and life-force of the next day must come, since it is impossible for both to be drawn down together.

Hence, "the world exists for six thousand years" (Rosh Hashanah 31a)—for this is the total count of the root-days that bestow their life-force day by day. Above, however, all the days stand together, and there is no past, present, or future there—only an eternal present.

This will explain what the Holy One, blessed be He, showed Adam, "generation and generation and its expounders" (Sanhedrin 38b), and likewise to Moshe Rabbeinu (Moses our teacher), peace be upon him. For at first glance, how can one imagine seeing something that has not yet come to be? Rather, the reason is that above, every good thing is already entirely present, and there is no future there at all, as stated.

Now, the Holy One, blessed be He, gave us His Torah, and the smallest level among the tzaddikim (righteous ones) is that each and every day he repairs the holiness of the root of that day, by fulfilling the obligation of that day. And when the days of his life span arrive for him to depart from the world, behold, all those days are his, and he clothes himself in them, each day in the holiness of that day. And when those days are completed, he returns to his beginning, clothing himself anew day by day.

For the neshamah (soul), since it is attached to the body all the days of its life, the occurrences of the body happen to it, and it falls under the dominion of time even after its passing. The proof is from what is stated (Isaiah 66:23), "And it shall come to pass that from new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come," etc.—for this refers to the neshamot (souls). Behold, it falls under the dominion of time, and therefore each day it clothes itself in the holiness of that day, "a day's matter on its day." Nevertheless, its garment will never be lacking, for whereas in this world the day that has passed will never return, there, by contrast, all the days stand in existence together, and this is readily understood.

Through this, one can understand the dispute in Chelek concerning the Ten Tribes, as to whether they are destined to return, as it is said (Deuteronomy 29:27), "And He cast them into another land, as this day," and it is expounded (Sanhedrin 110b) that just as the day that departs does not return, so too they [will not return]. And the other opinion expounds that just as the day darkens and [then] gives light, so too they are destined to return. And on what do they disagree? One may say that this master expounds "as this day" to mean the days that belong to this world, which does not return, while the other master expounds it to mean like the days of the World to Come, as stated above. And this is easily understood.

Indeed, it is known that every root has a root, and so on up to the heights of the heavens, and the worlds unfold in gradation, so that what below is, in the secret of units, is above in tens, and higher still, in the secret of hundreds, and after that thousands, and so on without end. And so it is with this matter: the first root, which is the root of a day — behold, its root and measure above is a year, as the mekubalim (kabbalists) wrote, that "shanah" (year) in gematria (numerical value) equals "sefirah" (counting). And higher still it is the secret of seven years, and higher

yet it will be seven times seven, and there is a place where it will be in the secret of ten or twenty and the like, and so too in the secret of a hundred or a thousand — until you find that the root of all roots is the six days of Creation, in their root, each day encompassing a thousand years.

And therefore "six thousand years shall the world exist."

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5)