

Avraham rose up from the presence of his dead. (23:3)

Horav Yechezkel Rabinowitz, zl, author of the *Knesses Yechezkel* and *Admor of Radomsk*, explains this *pasuk* homiletically: He cites the *Talmudic* dictum in *Meseches Shabbos* 153a, and *Pirkei Avos* 2:15, “Repent one day before you die.” The *Talmud* poses the question of whether one knows when he will die – “Therefore, one should repent daily, since he never knows if he will be around the next day. This will generate an entire life filled with *teshuvah*.” The *Radomsker* remarked that this is how a Jew should live: Today is the last day of my life. I was allowed to live today, so that I can leave this world spiritually correct, having repented any indiscretions.

This is the *pasuk*’s message. “Avraham rose up,” every aspect of the Patriarch’s life represented a spiritual “rise,” advance/progress, and was predicated upon the notion that it was “from the presence of his dead.” Avraham *Avinu*’s mortality was a constant presence in his mind. He never forgot for one moment that “today” could be the last day of his life. “Tomorrow” could have him standing before the Heavenly Tribunal. The Patriarch never lost sight of man’s ultimate end. I must add: He neither lived negatively, nor was he a fatalist. He was a realist. Our mortality is quite real.

The *Radomsker* lived his life this way. Even in his youth, he never for one moment lost sight of this verity. Every day had the specter of death looming over it. He left this world on *Shabbos Parashas Chayei Sarah* (1911). That Friday night, he sang *Eishes Chayil*, “Woman of Valor,” with great intensity and fervor, repeating the phrase, *Va’tischak l’yom acharon*, “She joyfully awaits the last day” (*Mishlei* 31:25), many times – until he left this world with those words on his lips. He died in much the same manner that he lived – at peace with himself, because he never lost sight of the *yom acharon*.

Chazal cite Shlomo *Ha’melech*’s exhortation in *Koheles* 9:8, “Let your garments always be white,” as an allegorical message that one should always be in a state of spiritual preparedness. They present a parable of a woman who dressed up in her most impressive finery, as she was anticipating her husband’s arrival from sea. When asked why she was doing it now, when, in fact, her husband was not yet due home, she replied that the ship might pick up a strong headwind, causing it to arrive in port earlier than expected. She wanted to be ready for her husband’s arrival.

Our Sages enjoin us to be ever vigilant of “today,” since we never know what tomorrow will bring – or if it will, in fact, arrive. While *Chazal* are addressing the need to be in spiritual readiness, I think this idea may also be applied to the mundane areas of life and the relationships we have. Whether it be our relationship with our spouse, our children, our parents, our associates and friends, if we were to stop momentarily and think, “What if today is the last day of my life? What if today is the last day of their lives? Is this the way I want to be remembered? Is it worth having the “last” word – when it might really be the **last** word?” If we would approach life with this attitude, the various issues that cause tension in our lives would be quickly ameliorated.