

Blessed shall you be when you come in and blessed shall you be when you go out. (28:6)

Chazal (*Devarim Rabbah* 7:5) interpret this *pasuk* as a guide to Jewish living. One should strive to leave this world (after 120) as pure and free of sin as when he entered this world as an infant. It is seemingly a tall order. Life is filled with challenges which can be viewed as impenetrable obstacles or as speedbumps which only slow us down. In any event, if one works at it, he can maintain the spiritual integrity of his life, thereby giving it meaning. The *Ksav Sofer* explains that this *pasuk* is based upon a well-known debate among the *Tannaim*, Hillel and Shammai (*Eiruv* 13b). *Chazal* discuss the benefits and disadvantages of being born into this world. Until the moment of birth, the holy, pure *neshamah*, soul, is ensconced in a world which is spiritual, a world that is perfect and one from which, as a spiritual entity, it can derive much growth and pleasure. The world into which the soul must “visit” is counterintuitive to the world it is leaving. At the end of the day, is it better to have been born, so that the *neshamah* can perform *mitzvos* and achieve even greater spiritual elevation than it would have otherwise experienced; or would it have been better to leave well enough alone and not have been born? The *Gemorah* concludes that, indeed, it would have been better had man not been created. Now that he is here, however, he must make the most of it.

If this is the case, if, in fact, we have a question concerning the value and benefit of entering this world, how can the Torah say, “Blessed shall you be when you come (into this world), and blessed shall you be when you go out”? The *Ksav Sofer* cites the commentary of *Tosfos*, who maintain that the schools of Hillel and Shammai agree that *tzaddikim*, righteous men, who bring meaning to their lives and make the world a better place, enhance their souls. Indeed, it would be beneficial for the soul of a *tzaddik* to be born.

Having said this, the Torah is teaching us that blessed shall you be when you come in – if you leave this world with your *neshamah* pure and intact. With such a “finale” to life, it is evident that you are among those whose arrival in this world was advantageous to yourself and a blessing to the world.

How does one define a meaningful life? Engaged in Torah study, because, without study, one’s knowledge of *halachah* and one’s attitude toward *mitzvah* observance will be limited. *Davening* with a *minyan* three times a day will allow one to connect with Hashem and reinforce his spiritual discipline. Obviously, *mitzvah* observance in the full sense of the word, in accordance with *halachah*, is a requisite for a meaningful life. *Middos tovos*, positive character traits, acting ethically and morally, engaging in acts of lovingkindness, and contributing to the welfare of the Jewish community in particular and to *Klal Yisrael* in general round out one’s life. Living a meaningful life is an ongoing journey of learning, observance and personal growth. Such growth can occur only when one regularly engages in self-reflection (through the study of *mussar*, ethical refinement discourses). A spiritually stagnant life is not meaningful. In the area of spirituality, when one maintains the status quo, he is at risk for digression. One must always grow, or he falls backwards.

Continuous spiritual growth is a foundation. The journey of a Jew is one of perpetual learning, continued self-improvement, thus deepening his connection with Hashem. This is what gives life meaning.