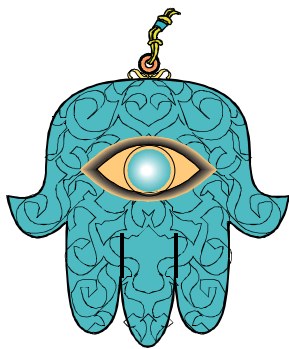
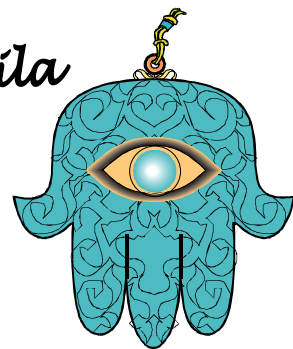


Spiritual Thought for the Week

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Quality of Life

(Parashat Vayigash – Genesis 44:18- 47:27)

It was a very brief meeting, and a seemingly peculiar exchange of words. For the first time, the head of the Israelite household -- Jacob -- meets Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. The only thing they shared in common was Joseph. To Jacob, Joseph was his son, and to Pharaoh, Joseph was the economic wizard who saved his empire's economy from total disaster.

What was the brief exchange between these two men? "Joseph brought his father and presented him to Pharaoh. Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 'How many are the days of your life?' asked Pharaoh of Jacob. Jacob replied to Pharaoh: 'The days of the years of my sojourning are a hundred and thirty years; few and unhappy have the days of my life been. I did not attain the days of the years of life that my fathers did during their sojourn through life.' With that, Jacob blessed Pharaoh and left his presence."

Pharaoh was shocked when he saw Jacob -- a thin, frail, weakened old man -- approaching him, barely able to walk. Pharaoh poses a wise, carefully worded, personal question: "How many are the days of your life?" Why did Pharaoh simply not ask, "How old are you?" Jacob's response reflects a deep understanding of Pharaoh's carefully worded question: "The days of the years of my sojourning are 130, [but] *few and unhappy have been the days of my life.*"

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch remarks that Jacob differentiates between living and existing: "You ask how many are the days of my life? I have not lived much. I have sojourned on this earth for 130 years. The days of the years that I can really call my life were in reality only few -- and were themselves bitter and full of worry." The Netziv commentary further remarks: "My years of success in life were few and bitter, for *even when I had actually achieved material wealth and financial security*, my life was still filled with woe and sorrow, such as the death of my wife Rachel and the rape of my daughter Dinah."

Jacob's answer is filled with perspective on life's big question: How do we measure and define a "happy life"? Is it by living to a ripe old age? Is it through material wealth and success? In the waning days of a 130-year-old life that included receiving his father's blessing by way of deceit, a terrible relationship with his brother, an unfulfilled married life, the rape of his daughter, constant strife between his children, and a lot of money and property, Jacob teaches Pharaoh -- and all of us -- that *happiness is not about reaching old age or amassing wealth; rather, it's about the quality and richness of day-to-day life.* In this regard, Jacob's brief but deep encounter with Pharaoh is arguably his greatest and wisest moment as a patriarch.