
PARASHAT VAYECHI

The Garment of Days

The Zohar offers a meditation on what happens as we approach death — and on the meaning of life itself.



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This week's [Torah portion](#) opens with Jacob on his deathbed. “The days of Israel drew near to die,” reads the verse in [Genesis 47:29](#).

On its face, this verse seems simply to report that Jacob ([renamed Israel after wrestling with the angel](#)) was nearing the end of his life. But the Zohar reads this verse in a very unusual way, what I would call hyperliterally, and in doing so fashions a profound meditation on the meaning of life.



We have learned: When a human being is created, on the day he issues into the world, all his days arise in their existence. They come flying through the world, descending, alerting the human — day by day, individually. When a day comes to alert him, if a person commits a sin on that day before his Lord, that day ascends in shame, bears witness, and stands alone outside.

Come and see: After standing alone, it sits until the person repents from what he has done. If he succeeds, that day returns to its place. If he does

not, that day descends and joins the outside spirit¹, then returns to his house, molding itself into the image of that person in order to torment him, dwelling with him in the house.

Sometimes its stay is for the good, if he proves virtuous. If not, its stay is evil. In either case, those days are counted as lacking, missing from the ones that remain. Woe to the human being who has diminished his days before the Holy King, and has not bequeathed days above — in which to be adorned in that world, in which to approach the Holy King!

[Zohar I: 224a](#)



At the moment a person is born, all the days of their life emerge in heaven. As each day of life unfolds, the corresponding celestial day descends, alerting the person to live that day virtuously. If they fail to do so, the day returns to heaven in shame. If they subsequently make up for that lost day, the celestial day returns to its place among the other fulfilled days. But if not, the unfulfilled day joins forces with a demonic spirit.

Sometimes, the feeling of being haunted in this way can motivate a person to improve their behavior. But even so, that day has been ruined and is missing from the total of fulfilled days.

Next, the Zohar makes a striking claim about what happens to the virtuous person at the end of their life:



Come and see: When those days draw near the Holy King, if the person departing from the world is virtuous, he ascends and enters those days,

¹ Outside spirit – A demonic spirit lurking outside a person's house. The unfulfilled day now joins forces with the spirit and haunts the person.

which become garments of glory in which his soul is arrayed. Those are days on which he proved himself worthy, not on which he sinned.



Each worthy day of a person's life is a thread, and together those threads are woven into a splendid garment. When a virtuous person dies, his soul is clothed in this garment, enabling him to enter and experience higher dimensions. This is then what is meant by the verse quoted above: "The days of Israel drew near to die." The wording is no longer just an idiom, but is literal (or hyperliteral): Jacob's many virtuous days have drawn near to be woven into a garment for his soul.

The Zohar next moves to root this notion of the garment of days in other biblical traditions, beginning with the story of Adam and Eve.



Why is it written "They knew they were naked" ([Genesis 3:7](#))? They knew precisely that the garment of glory made from those days had been withdrawn from them and no day remained in which to be clothed. Until Adam strove to turn back [in teshuvah], and the blessed Holy One accepted him and made him other garments — not from his days — as is written: "And God made coats of skin for Adam and his wife, and He clothed them." ([Genesis 3:21](#))



After Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, they suddenly became aware of their own nakedness. One rabbinic tradition understands this to mean that the couple were stripped of the beauty of the commandment they had just violated. The Zohar links this tradition with the image of the garment of days. By violating the divine command, Adam and Eve ruined the first day of their lives and were left spiritually naked.

When Adam repented, God fashioned new garments for the human couple. The verse describes these as *kotnot or*, or coats of skin. The simple meaning of this verse

is that Adam and Eve were given animal skins to wear. But another reading of that phrase is “coats of light,” the implication being that as a result of eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, Adam and Eve lost their primordial luster, identified with the garment of days. From now on, they would be clothed only in coats of human skin.

The Zohar next makes a similar interpretive gesture with the Torah’s description of Abraham coming to the end of his life:



Come and see: Of Abraham, who was virtuous, what is written? “Coming into days.” ([Genesis 24:1](#)) When he departed from this world, he entered his very own days, clothing himself in them. Nothing was lacking from that garment of glory, as is written: Coming into days....”



Matching the verse that describes Jacob nearing death, the simple meaning of [Genesis 24:1](#) is that Abraham was “advanced in days.” But the Zohar again reads this hyperliterally: Abraham’s soul “came into days” — that is, it entered the garment fashioned for him from the many virtuous days he had lived.

Taken together, the Zohar here is teaching that each day of our lives is a sacred opportunity to act humanely, mend what is broken and experience wonder — thereby weaving a fabric of meaningfulness and splendor.