

Dear Chavraya,

I had just arrived to visit my dad. Sitting on the edge of his bed as he awoke from an afternoon nap, I asked him, "has it been a good day, dad?" I was startled by his response, one that underscored how much his view of the world and life had changed in his very elder years. Nodding his head thoughtfully, he said, "Any day you wake up is a good day."

I had not expected such "Torah" in that moment, having asked a question meant more to gauge how he was feeling than to elicit philosophical insight. I paused, nodding my own head, sharing with dad how touched I was by his words, affirming them as words of beauty and challenge. I readily acknowledge the challenge I find in taking my dad's words to heart. It is not easy to truly awaken each morning with amazement for having awakened, and in that awareness to know that the day just dawning is already a "good" day.

This is the essential meaning and reminder of the words traditionally said upon waking in the morning, *Modah/Modeh ani l'fanecha melech chai v'ka'aym she'he'che'zarta bi nishmati b'chemla raba emunasecha*/I give thanks before You, living and sustaining Sovereign who has graciously returned my soul within me, great is Your faith. It is an expression of both wonder and gratitude, not so much for the return of life, which in truth has never left us, but for the awareness of being alive. So my father's words on that day of insight shared as a gift are in essence an expression of gratitude, truly of thanksgiving.

The most important words to me in *Modeh/Modah Ani* are the last two words: *raba emunatecha*/great is Your faith. It is God's faith that is acknowledged to be great, specifically God's faith in me as I awake into the day. If God has such faith in me as I rise to encounter all that may occur, all there is to do, then how can I not have faith in myself? That is the beauty of these morning words, to encourage each of us to go forth into the day with confidence that we can meet its challenges. In that way, a day is neither "bad" nor "good," but a context in time for us to fill with meaning in the way of our doing and responding, of giving and receiving. As my dad taught on that day, simply in waking up we are empowered to fill time with meaning.

For all of the pain that can fill certain days, I have nevertheless come to feel that the wish offered to another to "have a good day" is limited. As a teaching to complement that of my father, I learned beautiful Torah from a man I occasionally encounter running or walking around Jamaica Pond in the early morning. A gregarious man who always stops to offer good wishes, to say how good it is to see me, Tannis then blesses me and sends me on my way with the words, "have a blessed day." I am always so touched and try to take his words to heart. Each of us is a source of blessing in the world. We are able to bring blessing to all that we do and to each moment along life's way. More than the passive wish that it be a good day, we are able to make it so, even if it be a hard day, by bring blessing to that day, and so making it a blessed day.

In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Chayyei Sarah*, we learn of life's turning toward fullness through the gathering of each day. In the opening of the portion,

we are told of Sarah's death, though without mention of death, told only of her life and its span. We are not told that she was a hundred and twenty-seven years old, but that she was *a hundred years and twenty years and seven years/me'ah shannah v'esrim shannah v'sheva shannim*. Each of her years as reflected in the stages of her life are emphasized, underscoring that all of the days of our lives are part of the whole of who we are and of our ever becoming. Of Avraham's elder years, we are told, *Avraham zaken ba ba'yamim/Avraham was old, he had come through the days*. It would seem clear, that if someone is old they had come through the days. The emphasis comes to be not simply on getting to be old, but on what it means to truly live all along the way, to give meaning to each of the days through which we pass on our journeys. The rabbis offer a beautiful teaching on *zaken*, taken most simply to refer to an elder person. The word is taken as an acronym for *zeh she'kanah chochmah/one who has acquired wisdom*.

My father was not a particularly optimistic person in his earlier years. My mother had always had the rosier view of life, much more the Pollyanna. As he has come through the days, dad has acquired the wisdom to know that simply waking up has already made that day a good day. It is a wisdom that I received from him as a gift on that blessed day, a wisdom I strive to take to heart and make real. Acknowledging with gratitude the miracle of each day and of our waking into it, may we affirm God's faith in us by filling each day with blessing.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor