

A Daily Bread

Date: 3 Tishrei 5780 (September 25, 2025)

Torah Portion: Vayelech

Topic: The Righteous

It is written, “I am one hundred and twenty years old this day” (Deut. 31:2). The sages teach that Moshe lived 120 years, as Hashem said, “And his days shall be one hundred and twenty years” (Gen. 6:3). Moshe was born on this day and died exactly 120 years later, on the anniversary of his birth. He lived his life to the fullest and completed all the tasks set before him by Hashem. Thus, the sages conclude that this is the hallmark of a truly righteous person. According to tradition, the three patriarchs—Abraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov—also died either on the day or in the month of their respective births.

While none of us can compare to Moshe or the patriarchs in faith, beliefs, or deeds, we are nonetheless blessed with many righteous individuals, for they sustain the world. Only a few, however, have passed away on their birthdays. These individuals devote their lives entirely to spirituality, seeking to fulfill their Divine mission. What, then, is the significance of completing one's years perfectly?

It is true that our lives are meant to be oriented toward Divinity, which transcends the boundaries of time and space. Nevertheless, we are called to bring this transcendent consciousness into the physical world. Thus, it is fitting that a righteous person's spiritual perfection be mirrored, at least partially, in physical perfection. The Torah's hint that Moshe's years were “complete” at the time of his death reflects the idea that his life's work had been fulfilled in its entirety. His *avodah* (service) of Hashem permeated every aspect of his life—across both time and space. As it is written, “And Abraham was old, well stricken in age; and YHWH had blessed Abraham in all things” (Gen. 24:1).

When a righteous person's physical life so perfectly mirrors his spiritual life, it indicates that he has successfully overcome the dichotomy between the spiritual and the material. That is, he does not divide his life into separate physical and spiritual realms. Just as the seasons complete their full cycle, so too may the years of a person's life. The Hebrew word for “year,” *shana* (שנה), is related to the words for “change” (*shinui*, שינוי) and “repetition” (*shinun*, שינון), suggesting cyclical transformation and continuity.

The fact that most people, even the very righteous, do not die on their birthdays may simply indicate that they either completed their tasks early or were granted additional time to fulfill further purposes. Nevertheless, when righteous individuals openly reflect this perfection by dying on the day of their birth, it signifies that they truly embodied the idealism of the Torah throughout their lives.

Thus, the lives of such righteous individuals should inspire us to live our own lives to the fullest, with the consciousness of our Divine mission permeating every moment. In doing so, we dissolve the artificial dichotomy between the spiritual and the physical, thereby revealing the innate Divinity that underlies all reality.

Shalom.