



HOW TO LIVE FOREVER

Was Yosef confused when he asked, "Is my father still alive"?

The Most Influential Rabbi

In 2007, one of Israel's newspapers printed a list of the top ten most influential rabbis in Israel. One of them was the Rebbe.

The article stated that although it had been 13 years since his passing, he remained a strong influence on thousands of Chasidim who continued in his ways, and continued to influence Israeli life far more than many living rabbis.

In this week's Torah portion, we read about the dramatic encounter between Yosef and his brothers. After Yosef drove them crazy, trying to take Binyomin away from them as a slave and straining their nerves to the furthest extreme, he suddenly said to them the famous words: "I am Yosef! Is my father still alive?"

All the commentators ask: What exactly was Yosef asking when he asked, "Is my father still alive?"

When the brothers arrived in Egypt with Binyomin, the first words Yosef said to them at their first meeting was: "How is your elderly father, whom you said still lives?"—to which the brothers responded, "Your servant, our father, is well; he still lives."

Why was Yosef asking the same question again? After all, the entire long speech by Yehuda in our Parshah, in which he tries to convince

the ruler of Egypt to not take his brother Binyomin as a slave, was built on the fact that if he, Yehudah, returns to his father “and he sees that that lad is not there, he will die”—Yaakov could perish of grief!

Thus, it was clear throughout that Yaakov was alive—so why was Yosef asking, “Is my father still alive?”

The Library

The Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe was a major book collector. He acquired numerous ancient and valuable books, amassing a very valuable library at Lubavitcher World Headquarters at 770.

After his passing in 1950, the library remained in the same location, and all kinds of researchers would visit from time to time to examine its holdings. That’s how things remained for 35 years.

One day in the mid-80s, a family member of the Previous Rebbe began laying claims to the books. He claimed that since the books had belonged to the Rebbe, he had the right to them as an inheritor—at least to some of them.

But the Rebbe himself, the Previous Rebbe’s son-in-law, argued that his father-in-law was “still alive.” True, the body had become weak and so there had been a funeral— but the neshama of the Previous Rebbe was very much alive, the Rebbe said. Therefore, the distribution of an inheritance was inherently inappropriate.

Was the Rebbe just being poetic? What did this mean? The Rebbe quoted from the Tanya, saying, “the life of a tzadik is not physical but spiritual, faith, awe and love of G-d.”

Now, people would come to see the Rebbe. But what was it about him that drew them? What was so special about him? What made him different than anyone else?

The answer is that his spirituality made him different than everyone else—the happiness that he would give others, the love he had for everyone, and, above all, his way of life that inspired everyone how to live a deeper life, a way of life to which he dedicated his entire life.

In other words, the essence of a tzadik is his spirituality.

Thus, as long as the tzadik's life work and influence continue to inspire people to walk in his footsteps, to study his teachings, then “the Rebbe himself still lives”—everything goes on just like it did in his lifetime.

As long as there are Chasidim who continue his legacy, the Rebbe himself lives on. As the Sages tell us, “Just as his children are alive, so too is he alive.”

His Father's Image

In the Torah portion of Vayeshev, we find an example of this concept—we learn about the story of Yosef, the manager of Potiphar's household.

Yosef was doing well until Potiphar's wife came along and started making trouble. She began making unwelcome advances to him—until one day, when everyone had gone to their idol worship, and no one was home except him and her, she grabbed him by his clothing and tried to seduce him. She had almost succeeded—when Yosef suddenly pulled off the garment she was tightly grabbing, left it in her hand and ran.

Now, what suddenly happened that gave him the inner strength to overpower his urges? Rashi says: “His father's image appeared to him”—in his mind's eye, he suddenly saw his father standing over him. This gave him the strength to drop everything and flee outside.

It's like a bereaved son whose father lives on in his heart, strongly

influencing him as if he was still physically standing there.

In Yosef's case, he was so far removed from his father, yet Yaakov still had such a strong influence on him. The same thing can happen even when the Tzaddik is no longer with us. As long as he influences a person to change his ways and give him the strength to overcome all his obstacles—in that manner, just like he influenced a person when he was alive, so too “he is alive.”

Yosef's Real Question

This, my friends, is the reason Yosef asked, “Is my father still alive?”

Yosef knew good and well that his father was physically alive and well. What Yosef was really asking was, “Does our father live in your lifestyles? Does he live within you? Are you continuing his legacy?”

Anyone who influences another to live a more Jewish life and a more spiritual life is the spiritual parent of that person—and if that person continues in his ways, then he himself lives on in them and through them: “Just as his seed are alive, so too is he alive.”