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# The Jewish Case for Talking About Death & Dying March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Source Sheet by Rabbi Melanie Levay, https://www.shomercollective.org/

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel,
"Death As a Homecoming" in Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity

Our first question is to what end and upon what right do we think about the strange and totally inaccessible subject of death? The answer is because of the supreme certainty we have about the existence of man: that it cannot endure without a sense of meaning. But existence embraces both life and death, and in a way death is the test of the meaning of life. ...Life's ultimate meaning remains obscure unless it is reflected upon in the face of death.

https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/what-death-should-teach-us-about-life-and-living/

#### Genesis 23:1-4

(1) Sarah's lifetime—the span of Sarah's life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years. (2) Sarah died in Kiriatharba—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan; and Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to bewail her. (3) Then Abraham rose from beside his dead, and spoke to the Hittites, saying, (4) "I am a resident alien among you; sell me a burial site among you, that I may remove my dead for burial."

#### בראשית כ"ג:א'-ד'

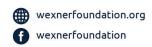
(א) וַיִּהִיוֹּ חַיֵּיִ שָׂלָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנֵה וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנִה וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנִה וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה שְׁנָה חַיֵּי שָׁנָה וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה וְשָׁבַע שָׁנָה בְּקרַוֹן בְּבְעֹה: (ג) וַיָּקְמֹּ בְּבְּרָהָם לְסָפָּד לְשְׂרָה וְלְבְכֹּתֵה: (ג) וַיָּקְמֹ אַבְרָהָם מַעַל פְּנֵי מֵתוֹ וַיְדבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי־חַת לֵאמְר: (ד) גַּר־ אַבְרָהָם מַעַל פְּנֵי עִמָּכֶם תְּנֹוּ לִי אֲחַזַּת־קֶּבֶר עִמֶּכֶם וְאֵקְבְּרָה מַתֹי מִלְּכָנִי:
 מַתִי מִלְּכָנֵי:

#### Genesis 47:28-30

(28) Jacob lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt, so that the span of Jacob's life came to one hundred and forty-seven years. (29) And when the time approached for Israel to die, he summoned his son Joseph and said to him, "Do me this favor, place your hand under my thigh as a pledge of your steadfast loyalty: please do not bury me in Egypt. (30) When I lie down with my ancestors, take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial-place." He replied, "I will do as you have spoken."

### <u>בראשית מ״ז:כ״ח-ל׳</u>

(כח) וַיְחָי יַצְּלְבֹ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרִׁים שְׁבֵע עֲשְׁרָה שָׁנָה וַיְהִי יְמֵי־יַצְלְבֹ שְׁנֵי שֶׁבָע שָׁנִים וְאַרְבָּעִים וּמְאַת שָׁנָה: (כט) וַיִּקְרְבִּוּ יְמֵי־ יִשְּׂרָאֵל ֹלְמוּת נַיִּקְרָא וּ לְבְנָוֹ לְיוֹטָף נַיָּאמֶר לוֹ אִם־נָּא מָצָאתי חַּן בְּעִינִיךְ שְׁים־נָא יָדְּךָ תַּחַת יְרַכֵי וְעָשִׁיתָ עִפְּדִי חָסֶד וְאֵמֶּת אַל־נָא וּקבַרתוּנִי בָּמְצְרֵיִם: (ל) וְשֶׁכַבְתִּי עִם־אֲבֹמִי וּנְשָׁאמַנִּי מִמְּצְרִיִם וּקבַרתוּנִי בָּקבַרְתַם וִיּאמֶר אַנֹכִי אֵעֲשֵׁה כִּדְבַרֶּך:



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#### Deuteronomy 30:15

(15) See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity.

#### דברים ל':ט"ו

(טו) רָאָה נַתַתִּי לְפַנֵיךּ הַיּוֹם אַת־הַחַיֵים וְאֵת־הַטְוֹב וְאֵת־ הַמַּוַת וִאַת־הַרַע:

#### Deuteronomy 30:19

(19) I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life—if you and your offspring would live—

#### דברים ל':י"ט

(יט) הַעִּדְּתִי בָבֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת־הַשָּׁמֵיִם וְאֶת־הָאֶּרֵץ בּׁ ַם הַיָּים וְהַפָּוֹנֶת נָתַתִּי לְפָּנֶּידְ הַבְּּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלֶה וּבָחַרְתָּ בַּחַיִּים לִמַעַן מָחָיָה אַתָּה וְזַרְעֶךְ:

### Psalms 90:12

תהילים צ':י״ב (12) Teach us to count our days rightly, (יב) לִמְנָוֹת יָמֵינוּ כֵּן הוֹדֻע וְנַבָּא לָבַב חָכִמַה: that we may obtain a wise heart.

#### Shabbat 153a

We learned there in a mishna that Rabbi Eliezer says: Repent one day before your death. Rabbi Eliezer's students asked him: But does a person know the day on which he will die? He said to them: All the more so this is a good piece of advice, and one should repent today lest he die tomorrow; and by following this advice one will spend his entire life in a state of repentance. And King Solomon also said in his wisdom: "At all times your clothes should be white, and oil shall not be absent from upon your head" (Ecclesiastes 9:8), meaning that a person always needs to be prepared.

#### שבת קנ"ג א

ּתְּנַן הָתָם, רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר: שׁוּב יוֹם אֶחָד לִפְנֵי מִיתָתֶּד. שָׁאַלוּ תַּלְמִידִיו אֶת רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר: וְכִי אָדָם יוֹדֵעַ אַיזֶהוּ יוֹם יָמוּת? אָמַר לָהֶן: וְכָל שֶׁכֵּן, יָשׁוּב הַיּוֹם, שֶׁמְּא יַמוּת לְמַחַר, וְנִמְצֵא כָּל יַמֵיו בִּתְשׁוּבַה. וְאַף שׁלמה אַמַר בְּחָכְמָתוֹ: ״בְּכֶל עֵת יִהְיוּ בְגָדֶידְ לְבָנִים וְשֶׁמֶן עַל רֹאשִׁדְ אַל יֵחָסַר״.

#### Moed Katan 28a

Rava said to Rav Naḥman: Master, appear to me in a dream after your death. And he appeared to him. Rava said to him: Master, did you have pain in death? Rav Nahman said to him: Like the removal of hair from milk, which is a most gentle process. But nevertheless, were the Holy One, Blessed be He, to say to me: Go back to that world, the physical world, as you were, I would not want to go, for the fear of the Angel of Death is great. And I would not want to go through such a terrifying experience a second time.

#### מועד קטן כ״ח א

אָמַר לֵיה: לִיתְחֲזֵי לִי מָר. אִיתְחֲזִי לֵיה. אֲמַר לֵיה: הָוָה לֵיה לְמֶר צַעֲרָא? אֲמַר לֵיה: כִּי רִיכְדָּא דְכוּסִילְתָּא. רָבָא הֲוָה יָתֵיב קַמֵּיה דְּרַב נַחַמַן, חַזְיֵיה דָקָא מָנַמָנָם. אַמַר לֵיה: לֵימַא לֵיה מַר דְּלָא לְצַעַרן. אַמַר לֵיה: מַר לָאו אַדָם חַשׁוּב הוּא? אַמַר לֵיהּ: מַאן חַשִּׁיב, מַאן סִפִּין, מַאן ַרְקִיעַ! אֲמַר לֵיה: לִיתְחָזֵי לִי מֶר. אִתְחָזִי לֵיה. אֲמַר לֵיה: הָנָה לֵיה לְמֶר צַעַרַא? אָמַר לִיה: כִּמִישְׁחַל בִּנִיתַא מֶחַלַבַא, וָאָי אַמַר לִי הַקּדוֹשׁ בַּרוּך הוא זיל בָּהַהוּא עַלְמַא כָּד הָוֵית — לַא בַּעִינַא, דְּנָפִישׁ בִּיעַתוּתֵיה.

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