

Wholly Holy

The mishna (Avos 3:1) states u'le'an atta hoilach l'makom afar rimah v'tolaiah ("to where are you going? to a place of dust, worms, and maggots.") The Sefas Emes (on Avos 3:1, s.v. u'lan) points out that it doesn't say l'afar rimah v'tolaiah ("to dust, worms, and maggots") rather l'makom afar... ("to a place of dust..."). Why was this extra word l'makom necessary? The presence of this word alludes to the fact not everyone's body disintegrates. It therefore reads that everyone goes to a place in which there is dust, but doesn't necessarily mean that they decompose...

When the Chida passed away in 1806, he was buried in Livorno, Italy. In 1960, his remains were reburied in Eretz Yisrael. It is on record that his body was found intact.

R' Yosef Shaul Nathanson (1808–1875), who was the chief rabbi of Lvov/Lemberg, reported that during his tenure in the rabbinate at Lemberg, the grave of the Taz (1586–1667) was accidentally opened. His body was found intact, and his shrouds had not disintegrated even though 200 years had elapsed since his death!

R' Moshe Wolfson has in his possession a letter from the gabai of the Stoliner Rebbe—R' Yisrael (1868–1921)—with the rebbe's signature. The letter is about 100 years old, so it's no surprise that the ink has faded, as it has been worn out with time. What is a surprise is that the rebbe's signature looks completely fresh!

Every year at the yartzeit seuda for R' Shlomke Zvhiller, who passed away in 1945, R' Moshe Mordechai of Lelov (1903-1987) would say that he was in the room when the tahara ("ritual cleansing before burial") was done for R' Shlomke. Although there is generally a bad odor in the room where tahara is performed, this time it smelled like besamim ("fragrances").

When R' Yochanan Stoliner (1900–1956) died, he was buried in New Jersey. There was a disagreement about whether he wanted to be buried in Eretz Yisrael or not. Eventually, the Beis Din ruled that they should exhume his

body and inter him in Eretz Yisrael (See the Har Tzvi, Yoreh Deah, 274). And so, 16 months after his death, they unearthed his body. His body was pink as if it was a healthy living person (His tachrichim ("burial shrouds") too were immaculately clean, as if he had just been buried.). This is in addition to the fact that he died from diabetes, which makes the body disintegrate faster. The coffin still smelled fresh. However, the following day when they returned they found the coffin was a pile of rotting wood, and it eventually disintegrated (not to mention, now it had a terrible odor).

How are we to understand these stories? R' Gershon Henoch Ridziner (1839–1890) tells us the more something is attached to Hashem, the more alive it is. The more vibrant it is, the less it rots.

Let us cite some examples to help us understand this idea:

1) The lechem hapanim on the shulchan were fresh all week long, as it says (Shemos 25:30): v'nasata al hashulchan lechem panim l'fanai tamid ("you shall put on the table lechem hapanim before Me always").

2) When Moshe died, it says (Devarim 34:7) lo kahasa einu v'lo nas laicho ("his eye had not dimmed, and his vigor had not diminished"). Rashi says there was no rotting on him nor did the appearance of his face change. Even after death, his life fluids remained in him; his body didn't decompose.

3) While Mitzrayim was devastated by a hunger, Yosef had plenty of provisions (Bereishis 41:56-7).

4) This idea is also seen in the pasuk (Tehillim 92:14-15), shesulim b'veis Hashem...od yenuvun b'seiva d'sheinim v'raanim yihyu ("planted in the house of Hashem...they will flourish. They will still be fruitful in old age, vigorous and fresh they will be"). Furthermore, shesulim b'veis Hashem refers to the Beis Hamikdash—the Beis Hashem ("House of Hashem"). In that place it is always fresh.

One way we see this is that there is no

sleeping there, as Yaakov said (Bereishis 28:16, Rashi) "Had I known I wouldn't have slept in such a holy place" (i.e. at the place of the Mikdash). Sleep is 1/60th of death (Berachos 57b), whereas the Beis Hamikdash is the place of Hashem, the place of life. In fact, if it was evident that a Levite was asleep on his mishmar ("watch"), the ish har habayis (official in charge of the night watch) would hit him with his stick (Mishnayos Middos 1:2).

In a place of kedusha ("holiness") like the Beis Hamikdash, there is fire, passion, fervor and not sleep, death and laziness.

Who served in the Beis Hamikdash? The kohanim. How are they described? Kohanim zerizin hein ("kohanim are zealous") [Shabbos 20a, See Pesachim 85a]. It therefore comes as no surprise that d'sheinim v'raanim yihyu shares an identical gematria to Beis Hamikdash (861).

It is no wonder that (Berachos 18a) tzadikim sheb'misanan nikriu chaim (tzadikim are called "living" even after their death"), since the tzadik was attached to the Source—Hashem.

Death, foul-smelling, rotting and the like only occur by that which is connected to the opposite of life. This is why one who is wicked is considered dead, even when he is physically alive (Berachos 18b). Consequently, it is no surprise that the Gemara asserts (Taanis 5b) Yaakov Avinu lo meis ("Yaakov did not die").

R' Tzadok Hakohen (Resisei Layla, 56) says that Yaakov leaving his body behind was like someone simply removing a garment. (The pain one experiences when his body and soul separate upon death is commensurate with how much one is connected to his body during his lifetime.) When one sanctifies himself throughout their life, their body becomes one with the spiritual realm. Since spirituality is eternal, the body also takes on the eternal characteristics and doesn't disintegrate. When one uses his body for physicality, then the body disintegrates because physicality is ephemeral and temporary.

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