

Appendix A:

Is Yaakov Avinu Alive?

B'reishis 49:33:

And Yaakov ended his charge to his sons, drew up his feet into the bed, breathed his last breath, and was gathered to his people.

ויכל יעקב לצות את בניו
ויאסף רגליו אל המטה ויגוע
ויאסף אל עמיו.

Taanis 5b

Rav Nachman and R' Yitzchak were sitting at a meal. Rav Nachman said to R' Yitzchak: May the master say something... After they finished eating, [R' Yitzchak] said: So said Rabbi Yochanan: Yaakov Avinu did not die. [Rav Nachman] said: Was it then for nothing that they eulogized,

רב נחמן ור' יצחק הוו יתבי
בסעודתא, אמר ליה רב נחמן
לר' יצחק לימא מר מילתא...
בתר דסעוד אמר ליה הכי אמר
רבי יוחנן יעקב אבינו לא מת.
אמר ליה וכי בכדי ספדו ספדינא
וחנטו חנטייא וקברו קברייא.
אמר ליה מקרא אני דורש

embalmed, and buried him? [Rav Yitzchak] said: I expound from the Bible as it says "But as for you, do not fear, My servant Yaakov, the word of G-d, and do not be afraid, Israel; for behold, I am saving you from distant places, and your descendants from the land of captivity" (Yirmiyahu 47:27). Just like his descendants are living so he is too.

שנאמר ואתה אל תירא עבדי
יעקב נאם ה' ואל תחת ישראל
כי הנני מושיעך מרחוק ואת
זרעך מארץ שבים, מקיש הוא
לזרעו מה זרעו בחיים אף הוא
בחיים.

In chapter three we addressed the question of whether Yaakov Avinu is still alive. For the sake of clarity, we tried to keep the presentation brief. In this section we will bring many more sources that either imply or state outright that Yaakov Avinu is dead.

1. Bava Basra 121b

It is taught: Seven people spanned all of history – Mesushelach saw Adam, Shem saw Mesushelach, Yaakov saw Shem, Amram saw Yaakov, Achiyah HaShiloni saw Amram, Eliyahu saw Achiyah HaShiloni and is still alive.

תנו רבנן: שבעה קפלו את כל
העולם כולו: מתושלח ראה
אדם, שם ראה מתושלח,
יעקב ראה את שם, עמרם ראה
את יעקב, אחיה השילוני ראה
את עמרם, אליהו ראה את אחיה
השילוני ועדיין קיים.

This passages lists the people whose combined lives span all of history. Adam was the first person, of course, and Eliyahu never died. From the life of Adam until the life of

Eliyahu there are five people whose overlapping lives connect Adam to Eliyahu. Mesushelach was born before Adam died; Shem was born before Mesushelach died; Yaakov was born before Shem died; Amram was born before Yaakov died; Achiyah HaShiloni was born before Amram died; Eliyahu was born before Achiyah HaShiloni died. Combined, these people lived throughout history. From the fact that the list does not stop at Yaakov but continues until Eliyahu, we can see that it assumes that Yaakov died and Eliyahu did not. Furthermore, Rashbam in his commentary to this passage notes that there are two opinions whether Chanoch died and two opinions whether Pinchas is Eliyahu. He does not cite any opinion that Yaakov never died, implying that he did not read the passage that “Yaakov Avinu never died” literally. Presumably, he assumed that these two passages are consistent because when the Gemara says that Yaakov did not die it did not mean it literally.

2. The following passages discuss the idea that, until Yaakov Avinu, people would just die quickly without any warning. Yaakov requested that he be given a warning that his death was imminent via illness. This request was granted and, from that time on, people became sick before dying.

The fourth item is that from the day the world was created a person would not become sick. Rather, wherever he was – whether on a journey or in the market – he would faint, his soul would leave him, and

המופת הרביעי מיום שנברא
העולם לא היה אדם חולה
אלא בכל מקום שהיה אדם
אם בדרך אם בשוק ועטש
היתה נפשו יוצאה מנחיריו

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he would die. Until Yaakov Avinu came and requested mercy on this. He said, “Master of the World, do not take my soul from me until I command my sons and family” and it was granted to him.

ומת, עד שבא יעקב אבינו
ובקש רחמים על זאת ואמר
לפני ה"ה רבונו של עולם
אל תקח את נפשי ממני עד
אשר אני מצוה את בני ובני
ביתי ונעתר לו.

(Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer ch. 51, in some editions ch. 52)

Similar to this is what we find in the Gemara in Bava Metzia 87a:

Until Yaakov there was no sickness. Yaakov came, requested mercy, and there was sickness. As it says (B'reishis 48:1) “After this Joseph was told, ‘Your father is ill.’”

עד יעקב לא הוה חולשא,
אתא יעקב בעא רחמי והוה
חולשא, שנאמר ויאמר
ליוסף הנה אביך חלה.

Rashi: He requested mercy and there was sickness – that a person should become sick before his death so he can command his family.

רש"י: בעא רחמי והוה
חולשא – שיחלה אדם
מפני מותו ויצוה לביתו.

Yaakov was concerned that he would not have time to command his sons – give over his last will and testament – if he died suddenly. He therefore requested that he be given a warning before he died (via illness) so that he could prepare for his death by commanding his children. And thus it was granted to him. Before he died he became ill and commanded his sons. Then he died.

Tosfos (Bava Basra 16b sv shekol) make it clear that the sickness we are discussing that Yaakov brought into the world is a fatal sickness.

Rabbeinu Tam and Ri explain that until Yaakov there was no one who became ill, meaning a fatal illness. From then on, there were those who became ill with a fatal illness.

ור"ת ור"י מפרשים דעד יעקב לא הוה דאחליש היינו חולי של מיתה מכאן ואילך הוה דאחליש חולי של מיתה.

3. The following passage in Ksuvos 111a explains about Yaakov Avinu's request of his sons that they take him and bury him in his ancestral burial place in Israel.

Rabbi Elazar said: The dead outside of Israel are not resurrected... According to Rabbi Elazar the righteous outside of Israel are not resurrected? Rabbi Ilai said: By rolling [to Israel]. Rabbi Abba Sala Rabbah argued: The rolling of the righteous will be painful for them. Abaye said: Tunnels will be made under the ground [for the righteous to walk through]. "Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place" (B'reishis 49:30) – Karna said: These words are difficult. Yaakov Avinu knew that he was righteous. If the dead outside of Israel are resurrected [via tunnels], why did he bother his sons [to bury him in Israel]? In case he did not merit having tunnels.

א"ר אלעזר מתים שבחוץ לארץ אינם חיים... ולר' אלעזר צדיקים שבחוץ לארץ אינם חיים אמר רבי אילעא ע"י גלגול. מתקיף לה ר' אבא סלא רבא גלגול צדיקים צער הוא. אמר אביי מחילות נעשות להם בקרקע. ונשאתני ממצרים וקברתני בקבורתם – אמר קרנא דברים בגו יודע היה יעקב אבינו שצדיק גמור היה ואם מתים שבחוצה לארץ חיים למה הטריח את בניו שמא לא יזכה למחילות.

In preparation for his place in the resurrection of the dead, Yaakov wanted to be buried in Israel. Otherwise, he was concerned that he would not merit being resurrected along with the other righteous people. Clearly, Yaakov truly believed that he would die. Those who believe that he did not literally die must say that he was mistaken. This prophet, who saw the events of the messianic era and would have revealed them to his sons except that G-d did not allow him (see Rashi on B'reishis 47:28), did not know that he would live throughout history and have no need for resurrection.

4. The following is from B'reishis Rabbah 79:1:

R' Yudan said: Our father Yaakov did not leave this world until he saw 600,000 of his descendants.	אמר ר' יודן לא נפטר אבינו יעקב מן העולם עד שראה ששים רבוא מבני בניו.
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This seems to make it clear that Yaakov died. The Hebrew word used is “niftar” which is a common euphemism for death. R' Yudan is telling us that when Yaakov died his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren had propagated so much that there were already 600,000 descendants of Yaakov alive at his time of death.

5. This can be found in B'reishis Rabbah 96:4.

Anyone about whom it is written “approaching” death did not reach the lifespan of his ancestors. About	כל מי שנאמר בו קריבה למות לא הגיע לימי אבותיו. דוד כתיב בו קריבה ויקרבו
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David it says (1 Melachim 2:1) “When David’s death drew near...” and he did not reach his ancestors’ lifespan... About Yaakov it says (B’reishis 47:29) “approaching” and he did not reach his ancestors’ lifespan. Avraham lived 175 years, Yitzchak 180, and Yaakov 147.

ימי דוד לא הגיע לימי
אבותיו... ויעקב כתיב בו
קריבה שלא הגיע לימי
אבותיו. אברהם חיה קע"ה
שנה יצחק ק"פ ויעקב קמ"ז.

We see clearly from this midrash that Yaakov died after living 147 years. If he had not died then he certainly outlived Avraham and Yitzchak. Rather, he died when he was 147 years old and lived a shorter life than his father and grandfather.

6. Ralbag on B’reishis 49:33

After this he lay down on the bed and therefore gathered his legs, as Ibn Ezra explains. He remained in this second state until he passed on and died.

ואחר כך שכב על המטה
ולזה אסף רגליו אליה כמו
שפירש החכם אבן עזרא.
והנה עמד בזה המצב השני
עד שגוע ומת.

Here we see a rishon explicitly say that Yaakov died.

7. Rashba in Chiddushei Haggados to Taanis 5b

Keep in mind that first R’ Yitzchak quoted R’ Yochanan as saying that Yaakov did not die. Rav Nachman took this literally and asked how it could be. R’ Yitzchak answered that just like his descendants are alive, so he is too.

When R' Yitzchak replied "I expound from the Bible" he was not trying to uphold Rav Nachman's interpretation of R' Yochanan's words and saying that he expounds from this verse that Yaakov did not actually die. He did not do this because Rav Nachman was certainly correct. Yaakov was truly eulogized, embalmed, carried in Egypt, and buried in his ancestral grave. How could R' Yochanan or R' Yitzchak rely on a hint in a verse more than on explicit verses that make it clear that he died and was eulogized, embalmed, and buried? This is without question illogical. Rather, R' Yitzchak answered that we are not speaking of his physical death but expounding on a verse that just like his descendants are alive, he is too. Rav Nachman then understood the hinted mystery, accepted it, and was silent.

ודע כי מה שהשיב ר' יצחק מקרא אני דורש לא להעמיד דבריו של ר' יוחנן על כוונת רב נחמן השיב כן ולומר שעל המקרא היה סומך לדרוש ממנו כי יעקב בעצמו לא מת שהרי בודאי נתאמת מאמר רב נחמן כי באמת נספד ונחנט ונשאווה מצרים וקברוהו בקברי אבותיו והיאך אפשר שסמך ר' יוחנן או ר' יצחק על מדרש רמז אחד נעלם שבמקרא יותר ממה שהיה סומך על מקראות גלויים מבוארים שמת ושנספד ושנחנט זה ממה שהשכל דוחה ומרחיק בלי ספק. רק ר' יצחק כך השיבו לא על מיתת גופו אני אומר אך מקרא אני דורש מה זרעו בחיים אף הוא בחיים ואז הבין רב נחמן רמזי סודו וקיבל ממנו ושתק.

According to the Rashba, neither R' Yitzchak nor R' Yochanan meant that Yaakov Avinu did not literally die because that is illogical and contradicts explicit verses. Rather, there is a mystery, presumably a kabbalistic secret,

that explains this. Rashba's teacher the Ramban and his student Rabbeinu Bachya explain what this mystery is.

8. Ramban on B'reishis 49:33 explains that Yaakov is not literally still alive.

The meaning of this midrash is that the souls of the righteous are bound in the bind of life with the Eternal, and his soul covers him all the day, "wearing a scarlet garment" so it not be stripped naked, as Yaakov's [soul was privileged to do continually], or which it dons at certain occasions [as do the souls of lesser righteous individuals]. This matter will be understood in light of what is told in tractates Shabbos and Ksuvos.

ענין המדרש זה כי נפשות הצדיקים צרורות בצרור החיים, וזו תחופף עליו כל היום, לובשת לבושה השני שלא יפשטנה ערומה, כיעקב, או תתלבש לעתים מזומנות. ויובן דבר הזה במסכת שבת ובמסכת כתובות.

9. Rabbeinu Bachya on B'reishis 49:33 expands on the Ramban's statements.

Yaakov's soul would constantly hover over his body due to the strength of his holiness. The souls of other righteous people who are not on the same level of righteousness as he return to their source and once they rise do not descend. However, Yaakov, in the holiness of his body and his high status, his soul rose and descended. This ability is found only in the

נפשו של יעקב היה מרחפת על גופו תמיד לתוקף קדושתו כי שאר נפשות הצדיקים שאינם במדריגת הקדושה כמוהו חוזרות לשרשן ולעקרן וכיון שעלו לא ירדו. אבל יעקב לקדושת גופו ומעלתו היתה נפשו עולה ויורדת, והכח

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holiest of the land, the unique individuals of history – like Rabbeinu HaKadosh.

הזה אינו נמצא רק לקדושים אשר בארץ יחידי הדורות כגון רבינו הקדוש.

According to both Ramban and Rabbeinu Bachya, Yaakov died but his soul is able to return to this world any time he wants to.

Similarly, the Gemara in Shabbos 152b-153a says:

It is taught: For twelve months the body is extant and the soul goes up and comes down. After twelve months the body is gone and the soul rises and does not come down.

תניא כל שנים עשר חדש גופו קיים, ונשמתו עולה ויורדת. לאחר שנים עשר חדש הגוף בטל, ונשמתו עולה, ושוב אינה יורדת.

On this, Tosfos 153a sv venishmaso say:

Nevertheless, when the soul wishes it may come down... even though his soul is placed under the Seat of Glory.

אף על פי כן כשהיא רוצה היא יורדת... אע"פ שנשמתו היתה גנוזה מתחת כסא הכבוד.

The souls of the righteous are placed under the Seat of Glory but may still come back to this world to temporarily visit. What the Gemara means when it says that Yaakov Avinu did not die is that he died but can still return to this world. That is how the Ramban and Rabbeinu Bachya explain this passage.

10. R' Yitzchak Arama in Akedas Yitzchak, Vayechi 33 offers a different approach. He differentiates between three stages of death. There is *geviyah* which is generally translated as “breathing the last breath”, *missah* which is translated as “death”, and *assifah* which is translated as “being gathered”. Yaakov skipped the second stage because of his righteousness. While he did not suffer the technical stage of death, he is no longer alive.

We have explained when Avraham died that *geviyah* is the failure of one's faculties to function. *Missah* (death) is the decay of one's forces that is like the destruction of the body's whole structure and the separation of its parts. *Assifah* is the return of the soul to its hidden origin. Regarding the earlier fathers it says *missah* but about Yaakov it does not. We must say that Yaakov Avinu did not die in one of the senses in which it is possible to say so.

הנה אצל אברהם אבינו פירשנו שהגיעה ענינה אפיסת הכח הטבעי והמסתו. והמיתה ביטול הכחות שהוא כענין נתיצת הבנין והריסתו ופירוד חלקיו. והאסיפה היא הכנס הנפש אל בית גניזתה. והנה באבות הראשונים נזכרה המיתה אמנם ביעקב לא נזכרה וצריכים אנו לומר כי יעקב אבינו לא מת בצד מה מהצדדים שאפשר לומר כן.

11. R' Moshe Alshich on B'reishis 49:33 follows along a similar line as R' Yitzchak Arama.

It is the way of outer forces to gain control of a corpse and this is the source of a corpse's impurity. On one whom the forces cannot control, they circle around his bed... On Yaakov's bed the forces could not

הנה דרך כחות החצונים לשלוט במת כי הוא טעם טומאתו. ובמי שאין יכולים לשלוט במיתתו ילכו סביב למתו... כי יעקב במתו

gain control so “he drew his feet up into the bed” in order that they not cling to him. His body was pure so no impure force could cling to him after his death. There was also nothing barring his soul from immediately entering its place, as opposed to those who must first be cleansed of their sins. But a holy man such as he “He drew his feet up into the bed...” and immediately he “was gathered to his people.”

לא שלט ויאסף רגליו אל המטה בל ידבקו בו כי שם לא ישלטו. הנה כי הגוף היה טהור ולא דבק במותו מאומה כח טומאה וגם נפשו לא עיכב בה דבר מהדבק מיד במחיצתה מה שאין כן לזולתו כי תחלה ימרקו איזה עון אשר חטא. אך קדוש כמוהו ויאסף רגליו וכו' ומיד ויאסוף אל עמיו.

12. R' David Pardo, Maskil LeDavid, Vayechi

We find by other righteous people these words [of *geviyah* and *assifah*] and another – *missah*... Kabbalists know that *geviyah* is on the lower soul that separates and goes to the lower Garden of Eden. *Assifah* is on the upper soul that rises to the upper Garden of Eden. *Missah* is on the filth of the active foundations that decompose in the grave. Every normal righteous person has a little filth... “Yaakov Avinu did not die” means that he had no traces of filth at all.

מצינו בשאר צדיקים שיש ב' לשונות הללו ועוד אחרת דהיינו מיתה... וכן בדין כידוע ליי"ח בסוד הפירוד דגביעה היא דגויעה על הנפש התחתונה שבו הנפרדת והולכת לגי"ע התחתון ואסיפה היא על נשמתו העליונה היא העולה לגי"ע העליון ומיתה היא זוהמא דיסודות דעשיה שבו המתעכלת בקבר וכל צדיק דעלמא יש בו קצת זוהמא... יעקב אבינו לא מת פי' שלא היה בו שום שמץ זוהמא כלל.

13. Sifsei Chachamim on B'reishis 49:33 has a very simple understanding of what it means that Yaakov Avinu did not die.

He did not taste death, meaning his death was painless. י"ל לא טעם טעם מיתה היינו שלא היה לו צער מיתה.

14. Maharsha on Taanis 5b explains that by "Yaakov did not die" the Gemara means that his soul lived on after his body died, just like with all other righteous people.

It can be explained in two ways that Yaakov Avinu did not die. Either he did not physically die at all or he died physically but not spiritually, like other righteous people... If it meant that he did not die physically, was it for nothing that they eulogized him, etc. He answered that it certainly meant that he did not die spiritually. And in regard to why Yaakov was used and not someone else, I expound from the Bible... Because only with Yaakov could he be compared to his descendants. Avraham and Yitzchak could not because of their descendants Yishmael and Eisav.

איכא לפרש הא דיעקב אבינו לא מת בשני פנים אם שלא מת כלל גם בגוף אם שלא מת בנפש כשאר צדיקים אבל בגוף היה מת... ואי שלא מת אף בגוף קאמרת וכי בכדי ספדו ספדיא כו' ומשני ליה דודאי בנפש קאמרי דלא מת ודתקשי אמאי נקטי יעקב טפי מאינך דמקרא אני דורש כו' מקיש הוא לזרעו ומש"ה נקטי יעקב... דלא אלא ביעקב להקישו לזרעו משא"כ באברהם ויצחק משום זרעו ישמעאל ועשו.

15. Maharal in his Gur Aryeh on B'reishis 49:33 suggests an explanation similar to that of Maharsha's. Yaakov lives forever spiritually, not physically.

Yaakov is separated from his body and has the eternal life and connection with G-d.

יעקב נפרד מן הגוף ויש לו החיים והדביקות עם הש"י.

16. In addition to the kabbalistic explanation to which the Rashba alludes (see paragraphs 7-9), he also offers a simple one. Yaakov figuratively lives on because his offspring remain connected to Torah, the tree of life.

A revealed explanation is that the other forefathers had those who are unworthy among their descendants like Avraham had Yishmael. The offspring were not refined until Yaakov and not all the descendants were worthy of clinging to life and receiving the Torah, which is the source of life, until Yaakov... It is proper to cling to truth and life, which is Torah, because all who cling to it live... Following this line of thought it is said that Yaakov did not die and not that the forefathers did not die because some of their descendants died.

גם נגלה כי שאר האבות היה פסולת בזרעם כאברהם שיצא ממנו ישמעאל ולא נזקקו התולדות עד יעקב ולא היה זרעם כולו ראוי לידבק בחיים ולקבל את התורה שהיא מקור החיים עד יעקב... ועל כן היה ראוי להדבק באמת ובחיים והיא התורה האמת והחיים וכל הדבק בה חיים... ועל הכוונה הזאת אמר החכם יעקב לא מת ולא אמר האבות לא מתו כי מקצת זרעם מתו.

17. The Maharal in his Gur Aryeh offers another explanation that is similar to the Rashba's.

A father who has a relationship and a connection with his son, as long as that son is alive the father is as well.

האב אשר יש לו יחוס אל הבן וצירוף אליו כמו שהבן בחיים כך הוא ג"כ בחיים.

18. The Chasam Sofer offers a similar explanation in his commentary on the Torah. We will print here, however, what the Chasam Sofer's son writes in his Ksav Sofer commentary to Vayechi because it is more succinct.

“The time of Yisroel's death drew near” It seems to me based on what our sages said “Yaakov Avinu did not die” we can explain that Yaakov did not die because his son Yosef was like his father...

ויקרבו ימי ישראל למות נ"ל
עפ"י דברי חז"ל יעקב אבינו
לא מת וי"ל יעקב לא מת כי
בנו יוסף היה כאביו...

Since Yaakov's legacy continued with his son Yosef it is as if Yaakov did not die.

19. Abarbanel offers a highly allegorical explanation of the statement that Yaakov did not die. He suggests that Yaakov refers to the nation of Israel. The people of Israel remain alive forever.

It says “And he breathed his last breath” and not “And he died” to hint that the nation is not called Avraham, Yitzchak, or Moshe but is called Yaakov and Yisroel. About this it is said “Yaakov did not die” meaning the nation in general. When it says “I expound from the Bible...” it means that we are promised that the names Yaakov and Yisroel will also exist. He exists because his descendant will always be called Yaakov and Yisroel.

מה שלא כתוב בו לשון וימת
אלא ויגוע לרמז דלא נקראת
האומה עצמה בשם אברהם
ולא בשם יצחק ולא בשם משה
אבל נקראת האומה בשם יעקב
וישראל וע"ז יעקב לא מת והיא
האומה בכללה וע"ז אמר לו
מקרא אני דורש כו"שהבטיחו
ששם יעקב וכן שם ישראל יהיו
חיים וקיימים לעד כמו שהוא

This is what is meant by “Yaakov did not die.”

הי וקיים כי זרעו יקראו תמיד
בשם יעקב וישראל זה הדבר
אמרו שיעקב לא מת.

20. The Baal Shem Tov is quoted in the Baal Shem Tov on the Torah (Vayechi) by his grandson as saying a different allegorical explanation of this passage. According to the Besht, Yaakov refers to the Torah. When the sages say that Yaakov did not die they are allegorically saying that the Torah lasts forever and will never be nullified.

“He breathed his last breath and was gathered to his people” Rashi notes that it does not say death for him and our sages said that Yaakov Avinu did not die. It is known that my grandfather [the Baal Shem Tov] said that the Torah is called Yaakov. When it says that Yaakov Avinu did not die it means that the Torah is eternal and will never be nullified.

ויגוע ויאסף אל עמיו וברש"י
ומיתה לא נאמר בו ואמרו
רבותינו ז"ל יעקב אבינו לא
מת הנה ידוע מאדוני אבי זקני
[הבעל שם טוב] זל"ה
שהתורה נקרא יעקב כמו
שאמר על יעקב אבינו לא מת
היינו שהתורה נצחיית ואינה
בטלה לעולם.

What we have attempted to show is that there is an overwhelming amount of material that points to the conclusion that when the Talmud says that Yaakov Avinu did not die it did not mean it literally. There are midrashim that either imply or state that Yaakov actually died. Furthermore, there are many different explanations offered by the commentators of exactly what happened to Yaakov but they agree that he is no longer alive. Whether he passed away and can come back to this world temporarily, due to

his righteousness he skipped the step of *missah*, or he is only figuratively alive, all of these sources indicate that Yaakov Avinu is no longer physically alive.