

Pharaoh said to Yaakov, “How many are the days of the years of your life?” Yaakov answered Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my sojourns... few and bad have been the days of the years of my life.” (47:8,9)

Yaakov *Avinu* comes across as issuing a subtle complaint, as he, with a hint of bitterness, was telling Pharaoh that he had had a rough life. Clearly, the Patriarch was not complaining about his life, but rather, explaining why his appearance bespoke a life of hardship: “Yes Pharaoh, I appear old and haggard, because life has not been easy for me. I am not complaining, but I am not able to conceal the truth.” Yaakov was punished for this. Heaven views our actions with a Heavenly measuring stick. Therefore, the “few” and the “bad” caused him to lose thirty-three years of his life. His father, Yitzchak *Avinu*, lived to be one hundred and eighty. Yaakov died at the age of one hundred and forty-seven. The severity of this punishment is unusual. Imagine, had Yaakov lived another thirty-three years. As it was, he still achieved the appellation of *b’chir she’b’Avos*, greatest of the Patriarchs. We have no idea what the Patriarch could have achieved during those thirty-three years. The greater one is, the more exacting the measuring stick and, consequently, the more severe the punishment.

The *Daas Zekeinim m’Baalei Tosfos* makes this statement. The number thirty-three is not arbitrary, but rather, corresponds with the number of words in the two *pesukim* describing Yaakov’s meeting with Pharaoh. They add that, while it is true that Yaakov did experience much adversity in his life, in the end, Hashem came to his rescue. This is something he should have taken to heart. What does this teach us concerning our perspective on life?

In his volume of *shmuessen*, ethical discourses, from **Horav Avraham Pam, zl**, by Rabbi Sholom Smith, the author points out an important lesson to be gleaned from the *Daas Zekeinim*. Yaakov *Avinu* had experienced much hardship in his life. Yet, he was able to overcome each and every one of the situations which plagued him. He had been threatened by Eisav and was subjected to twenty years of living with his evil father-in-law, Lavan. Did these experiences take a toll on him? Apparently not, since it is written, *Va’yavo Yaakov shaleim ir Shechem*, “Yaakov arrived intact at the city of Shechem” (Ibid. 33:18). “Intact” means both physically and spiritually complete. Next, we find Dinah abducted and violated, but she was later returned to him. According to the *Midrash*, she was the mother of Yosef’s wife, Osnas. It does not seem like a bad ending. His favorite son Yosef was sold into slavery. Yaakov was inconsolable for twenty-two years. Now, however, he was being reunited with him, and, lo and behold, Yosef is the viceroy of Egypt and provider to an entire world. When we look back at the culminations of each of his periods of adversity, we wonder if Yaakov had reason to complain.

It happens all of the time. We are confronted with a challenge; we go through a serious crisis and later we realize that these moments of life’s complexities were essentially a blessing in disguise.

Hashem's kindnesses come in varied forms, some overt, others subtle and not so obvious. It may take decades, even a lifetime, to discern the hidden gift, the silver lining, within each crisis.

There are instances when one's wheel of fortune appears to be directed at him, and his stock is rising rapidly. Everything seems to be going his way, as blessing is focusing on him. One does not know for sure what is truly good – and what is bad. Things are not always what they appear to be. Hashem has His ways, and we can only survive if we maintain a strong sense of faith in Him. The *Rosh Yeshivah* notes this idea in the *tefillah*, prayer, we recite as we *bentch Rosh Chodesh*, bless the New Moon. We ask the Almighty, among other things, *she'yimalei mishalos libeinu l'tovah*, "to fulfill our heartfelt requests for the good." The word "good" is underscored, because we do not always know what is really good – and what is really good for us. It might be good, but, for "us" it would be harmful, and vice versa.

In the footnote of the *sefer*, there is a story related by *Rav Pam's* grandfather, the **Shedlitzer Rav, zl**, concerning a Jew in his town, *Reb Moshe Rieger*. This *Yid*, although he was a great *talmid chacham*, who had received *semichah*, ordination, on all four sections of the *Shulchan Aruch*, never took a rabbinical position. Instead, he chose to engage in commerce, which earned him a small fortune. Everything seemed to be going along well until, one day, he received the calamitous news that one of his ships, carrying a fortune in goods, had sunk on the high seas. *Reb Moshe* was suddenly facing financial ruin. Overnight, he went from being a successful businessman to becoming a member of the ranks of the destitute, the downtrodden and the depressed. Upon hearing the news, the members of his immediate family burst into tears. *Reb Moshe's* face, however, was filled with a smile from one end to the other. His wife was concerned that he had snapped from the pressure. "Why are you smiling?" she asked him. "I just received my *k'sav rabbanus*, rabbinical contract," he replied. "This telegram (with the news of the lost ship) is a sign from Heaven that I should leave the world of commerce and engage in the pursuit of Torah scholarship." What seemed to be a curse was actually a Heavenly directive that he needed to change his life.