

"And Pharaoh said to Yaakov, how many are the days of your life? And Yaakov said to Pharaoh... few and evil have been the days of my life." (47:8-9)

The *Midrash* comments that Hashem reprimanded Yaakov for complaining about the evil that had befallen him during his lifetime. Indeed, he had suffered harshly, but Hashem's "intervention" always catalyzed a favorable outcome. Hashem therefore, punished Yaakov by shortening his life span thirty-three years, coinciding with the thirty-three words of complaint which he had uttered. Instead of living to the age of one hundred and eighty years like his father Yitzchak, he died at the age of one hundred and forty-seven. If one looks at the text, it is obvious that the thirty-three words also include Pharaoh's inquiry regarding Yaakov's age. Why should Yaakov be reprimanded for Pharaoh's innocuous question? We may suggest that it was Yaakov's appearance that prompted Pharaoh to inquire his age. Indeed, Yaakov suffered greatly throughout his life. There was hardly a moment that was not filled with strife and anguish. Undoubtedly, traumatic situations take their physical toll on a person. These crises however, affect a person only as long as he becomes emotionally involved in them. The great Patriarch Yaakov, who had reached a sublime level of spiritual devotion, should not have allowed these circumstances to affect his physical appearance. Inasmuch as his appearance prompted Pharaoh's inquiry, he was punished.