

The years of my dwelling are 130; few and terrible were the years of my life. (47:9)

Our Patriarch, Yaakov Avinu, stood before Pharaoh, and, when asked his age, Yaakov replied, "The years of my dwelling are 130; few and terrible were the years of my life." What provoked Yaakov to add that his life was short and miserable? Why not just answer the question? How old are you? 130 – end of conversation. Obviously, Yaakov felt that simply stating his age was insufficient. It was necessary to explain the kind of life he had endured. Why?

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, distinguishes between "dwelling" in the world and "living" in it – or between mere existing and living life to its fullest, maximizing the potential of one's life. If Pharaoh wanted to know the Patriarch's age, how long he had been existing/dwelling in this world, then the answer was 130. Yaakov intimated that this period could not be defined as living, however, because these years were few and terrible. How does Yaakov define "terrible"?

The Patriarch added, "And they did not attain the years of life of my ancestors in the days of their dwelling. And these are the days of life of Avraham that he lived" (Ibid 25:7). Avraham Avinu's 175 years on this world were filled with "life." Yaakov implied that while he spent 130 years on this world, he could not say that all of these years were filled with "life."

How did Yaakov define life? Apparently, he lived differently than we do. To him, living meant living with *Ruach HaKodesh*, Divine Inspiration, and with *hashroas ha'Shechinah*, the Divine Presence, hovering over him. There were years during which he was deprived of *Ruach HaKodesh*, due to the sadness that enveloped him. Being alienated from Hashem, despite good physical health, does not define life. Life without Hashem is just not living. True life means utilizing our given time on this world to living it to the fullest spiritually. A material, physical good time does not mean that one has "lived." He has existed.

The story is told of a man who visited a certain town and was shown its cemetery. As he walked from grave to grave reading the tombstones, he was shocked to see that everyone in the town had died at a young age. On one tombstone, he read that the deceased had been a mere twelve years old when he passed. Next to him was someone who barely lived ten years, and soon the man was baffled because he had met a number of people and most of them were in their twilight years. Had there been a major epidemic of which he was unaware? When he asked his guide to explain this anomaly, the man replied that, in this town, age was calculated on a different scale. The duration of a person's life was not measured by how many years the man had actually "breathed," but by how many days of his life were used productively. Many of the people buried in the cemetery had lived well into their senior years, eighty, ninety – even one hundred years old, but they had not made the most of their lives. Much of their time was wasted on frivolity and foolishness, futility after futility, sitting around doing little to nothing, talking for no purpose, living lives devoid of spirituality, value and meaning. They were recipients of G-d's greatest gift – life – and they had wasted it.

It goes without saying that, for a Torah Jew, the definition of life is a life of Torah. Each and every day of our lives must be spent productively. Thus, Torah study must be the primary focus of our existence. It is our life-force. Our goal must be Torah learning per se, not necessarily its mastery and accumulation of knowledge, but just simple learning and more learning for the sake of learning.

A poignant analogy of the meaning of Torah study as our life force may be gleaned from the *hesped*, eulogy, given by *Horav Shmuel Auerbach, zl*, for his saintly father, *Horav Shlomo Zalmen, zl*. "When the doctors told us that blood was spurting from my father's lungs," *Rav Shmuel* said, "I reflected, this is the blood of Torah, the blood of *ahavas*, love, of Torah.

"When one learns Torah in his youth, its words become ingrained in his blood. This is especially true when one has no food, for then the Torah becomes his food. In my father's home, they had no food, and, instead, he consumed *divrei Torah*, subsisting on it. These *divrei Torah* became the components of his blood during his childhood." This is the meaning of a "lived" life.