

So Yaakov worked seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him a few days because of his love for her. (29:20)

For some people life is far from a bed of roses. Yet, they persevere and forge ahead, often joyfully. Why? They believe that achieving their intended goal far outweighs any form of hardship they have been forced to endure. Pain is relative. If the goal means enough to the person, the pain, discomfort, anxiety are all worth it. Yaakov *Avinu* was an extraordinary *masmid*, diligent student of Torah. He did not waste a minute from Torah learning. During the fourteen years that he studied in the *yeshivah* of Shem and Ever, he did not lay down to sleep, so great was his desire to study Torah. Yet, he was prepared to accept backbreaking labor upon himself so that he could earn the right to marry Rachel *Imeinu*. He himself described the labor the burning sun beating down on him; the biting cold slicing through him for seven long years. Certainly, this took a toll on his Torah study. What justified his experiencing seven years removed from Torah learning, seven years of pain and deprivation? Could he assure himself that, when he would return to his *Gemorah*, he would be the same person? Could he be certain that the seven years would not take their toll on him?

The *Riva* (*Baalei Tosfos*, as cited by *Horav A. Henschel Leibowitz, zl*,) explains that Yaakov's every minute was filled with joy, in the knowledge that his efforts would catalyze his marriage to Rachel. He was overwhelmed with joy at the opportunity to marry such a unique, righteous, selfless woman, whose virtue was without peer, a woman with whom he would be able to establish the foundation for the future of *Klal Yisrael*. While it was true that he was sacrificing much for this unprecedented opportunity, it would be well worth it to him.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* derives from here that we must serve Hashem with abiding love and effusive joy, even when we are experiencing extreme pain and are compelled to toil incessantly. We do not realize the incredible spiritual plateau that we achieve and the outstanding and spiritual treasures that we unlock when we merit to overcome and triumph over our challenges. We suffer -- and some of us suffer so much -- but when we realize the phenomenal spiritual benefits which we accrue, it is well worth it.

Rabbi Akiva suffered a most brutal and painful death. Moshe *Rabbeinu* and the ministering angels had difficulty coping with Rabbi Akiva's horrible murder at the hands of the Romans. Rabbi Akiva, however, was filled with joy at having the opportunity for which he waited a "lifetime" to experience. Giving up his life to sanctify Hashem's Name amid such excruciating pain was an unparalleled experience for him for which the spiritual reward and benefits far outweighed anything that he had yet experienced.

There is a cliché in the secular world, "No pain, no gain." This means that one must put forth effort in order to see noticeable results. Perhaps the spiritual cliché should be, "With gain, there is no pain."