**ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים שבע עשרה שנה**(מז:כח)   *And Yaakov lived in the land of Mitzrayim for seventeen years (47:28)*

If one would analyze Yaakov’s life, one would conclude that Yaakov’s best years were the seventeen years that he spent in Mitzrayim. Those last years of his life were years of tranquility. All of the difficulties of his life had already passed, and most recently, he had already seen Yosef returned to him. He was now able to watch Yosef rule Mitzrayim whilst remaining steadfast to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Yosef now supported his family as well as the entire world, keeping Yaakov and his children in Goshen giving them a life of honor and glory. All the difficult days were truly behind him, and now it was just bliss.

Yet, the Torah spends just a few pesukim on these last *bashaynte yuhrin.*Most of the pesukim that deal with Yaakov’s life, discuss the episodes of Eisav, Lavan, Dinah and Yosef.

By placing the emphasis on the trials and tribulations of Yaakov, the Torah is teaching us an important lesson for life. If one wants to understand where the most growth can be gained, one must focus on the hard times. It is precisely during those moments when things seem like they can’t possibly get any worse that a person has an opportunity to experience the most growth. While Yaakov was facing every hardship and challenge, he was growing as a result. These hard times were what defined Yaakov, making him who he was. Although it is true that in Mitzrayim there were no more *nisyonos*, but the downside to this was that there was also no more opportunity to grow.

The retirement years might be known as the “golden years”, but it is actually the years preceding those, when the vicissitudes of life are still at large, with so much more left to accomplish; those are truly the golden years!

Rabbi Dr. Twerski once related in a lecture, that he was reading all about how a lobster grows, otherwise known as molting. The lobster is actually a soft mushy animal that lives inside of a rigid shell that does not expand, leaving no room for growth. So how does the lobster grow? The lobster must struggle out of its old shell while absorbing water, which expands its body size. After shedding the old shell, a new shell is formed. This extremely uncomfortable molting or shell shedding cycle repeats itself at each stage of growth for the lobster.

The stimulus for the lobster that enables it to grow is that it feels uncomfortable. If lobsters had doctors, they would never grow. They would take a couple of aspirins and they would ignore the discomfort, never shedding off the shell. It is through the discomfort that they are able to grow. “Times of stress are also times that are signals for growth. If we use adversity properly, we can actually grow through it.”

The Yalkut Shimoni writes on the possuk in Yeshaya (49) ותאמר ציון עזבני ה' וה' שכחני- Zion complains that *HaShem has forsaken me and HaShem has forgotten me,*that HaShem told Klal Yisroel that they are “complainers, the children of complainers”. The Midrash cites four examples of complaints: HaShem prepared a wife for Adam, but Adam complained about her. HaShem prepared Yosef to be the leader of Mitzrayim, but Yaakov complained over the twenty two years of Yosef’s absence. In the dessert, HaShem gave the heavenly manna, yet Klal Yisroel complained about it. During the *galus-*exile, Zion does the same thing. HaShem is busy removing all the oppressing nations from its midst, yet Zion complains and says that HaShem has forsaken it.

At first glance, this Midrash is difficult to comprehend. The example of Adam is understood, because in actuality, having a wife was a very good thing for Adam, yet he complained. The example of the manna is also understood because HaShem was providing the most heavenly food and yet, they were complaining. But how do we understand HaShem’s complaint on Yaakov and Klal Yisroel? Did Yaakov not suffer for twenty two years resulting in the *shechina*leaving him? Was/is Klal Yisroel not justified in crying out in anguish and complaining about the bitter bitter *galus?* Can these examples really be equated?

I heard from Rav Yitzchok Isbee z’l an explanation in the name of Rav Mishkovski of Bnei Brak. The Midrash is pointing out that both the wife of Adam and the manna of the dessert were the same goodness as was the absence of Yosef and the bitter *galus*that we still find ourselves in. Yaakov was meant to realize that although things were tough; this was how he would grow. Ultimately, those years would be considered good years. As difficult as it may be to comprehend, this *galus*is also meant to be seen in a good light, and if used appropriately, one can grow greatly from it. Although we feel at times that HaShem has forsaken us, this is never the case. “*Der Aibishter hut unz kainmol nisht fahrluzt!”*Every hardship can be looked at positively and במהרה בימינו, this *galus*will come to an end and we will indeed understand the good in everything that HaShem does for us.

Good Shabbos, **מרדכי אפפעל**