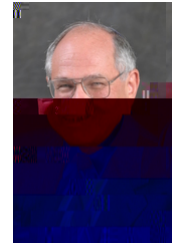




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“Jacob answered Pharaoh: ‘The years of my sojourn [on earth] are one hundred and thirty. Few and hard have been the years of my life, nor do they come up to the life spans of my fathers during their sojourns.’” (Genesis 47:9)

The Torah has made abundantly clear that Jacob was not exaggerating when he describes his life as “hard.” His troubled relationships with his father, brother, wives, and sons have all made that description of his life undoubtedly accurate. His own actions caused some of that difficulty, but there is no second-guessing his claim that his life was hard, lacking the warm and supportive family relationships that we all crave.

It is a bit ironic, then, that Jacob also complains that his life span has not reached that of his fathers. One would think that if his life were hard, he would not want to continue it much longer. The number of 130 years that he claims to have lived is clearly based on a different mode of calculating years than we use today, but however long that was did not

compare, he grumbles, to the life span of his fathers, and that too is a source of displeasure.

Some older people in our day are exactly like Jacob. They complain a lot, and sometimes there are good reasons for their complaints. Ill health, together with its accompanying pain and suffering, the death of family members and friends, and the sense that they cannot do what they used to be able to do combine to make them ornery. That is not only

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