

Dear Chavraya,

Aging is not about being old. Aging is a journey that begins at birth. It is a journey that begins even before birth and continues even after death. The *Ba'al Shem Tov*, the trunk in the tree of Chassidism, thought of a person's life as many journeys that in the gathering of days come to form one great journey of life, "From the day of one's birth and coming forth from her or his mother's womb..., a person travels from journey to journey until coming to the land of the living above." Aging is the path of life itself that allows us to move through life, that we not remain static in one place and time. Aging is the process by which we make our mark in the sands of time, and leave our foot print on the shore of eternity in the manner of our walking through the here and now of everyday.

In this week's Torah portion, *parashat Chayei Sarah*, "The Life of Sarah," the years that form our mother Sarah's life are carefully delineated according to the stages of her life, woven then together to form a complete tapestry. And of our father Abraham we are told, *Avraham zaken ba bayamim*, "Abraham was old, he came through the days." We do not simply become old. Old age is the culmination of years, the hearth at journey's end.

Playfully, the rabbis present the common word for elder/old person, *zaken*, as an almost acronym, *zeh kanah chochmah*, "this one has acquired wisdom," emphasizing that in coming through the years every old person has necessarily acquired wisdom. Though tender in years, an elder can also be one who has acquired wisdom before his or her time. A nineteenth century commentator, Rabbi Boruch HaLevi Epshtein, known as the *Torah Temimah*, sensitive and insightful in his embrace of all, assures us that "every old person, both great and small, according to their ways and values, has gathered wisdom and knowledge according to the trials and events of many days." As much as we yearn for length of days, for ourselves and for our dear ones, the measure of a life is not in length, but in wisdom acquired.

May we all be blessed with many days through which to acquire much wisdom.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor