



DOES AGE REALLY MATTER? – PARSHAS LECH LECHA – AVI FRIEDWALD

“And Avraham was 75 years old when he left Charan” (Bereishis 12:4)

The Torah and Chazal discuss Avraham’s age at various events, more frequently than for other people in the Torah. Below are a few examples:

- Avraham was 3 years old, when he realised that Hashem runs the world (Nedarim 32a)
- Avraham was 50 when he recognised Hashem. Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Channina say he was 48 (Pesikta Rabosi 20)
- Avraham was 52 when he and Sarah converted people in Charan (Avoda Zara 9a)
- “And Avraham was 99 when he did Bris Mila” (Bereishis 17:24)

Rav Nebenzahl (the Rav of the Old City) suggests this is because Avraham’s spiritual level increased at each stage and therefore the age at each stage was of importance. The various ages given by Chazal as when Avraham recognised Hashem are therefore not mutually exclusive, but rather different stages of his spiritual growth.

He gives the following example: As a school child, a person may learn about the Rambam and his life work. The person may say that he now understands who the Rambam was. However, when the person goes to Yeshiva, he begins to learn some of the Rambam’s seforim – initially at a basic level. Again, the person may say he understands the Rambam. However, as times goes on, and he learns the Rambam in more depth and the various commentaries on the Rambam – he begins to see another level that he didn’t recognise before. The same is the case with Avraham Avinu – at age three, he recognised that Hashem is the only G-d, in contrast to the idol worshipping people who surrounded him. However, at that point, he didn’t understand what Hashem wants from us, or what are his Midos. At each stage in his life, he reached another level in his understanding of Hashem. This is what Chazal were pointing out with the various ages they gave.

At 52, Avraham felt he understood Hashem sufficiently, to begin bringing other people to the faith, as well. However, he still had to grow further, before he was ready to enter Eretz Yisrael and gain the promise that this land will be given to his descendants as an inheritance. And then, 24 years later, he merited the commandment of Bris Milah.

This is the meaning of the statement in the Amida – “אלוקי אברהם, אלוקי יצחק ואלוקי יעקב...” – each one of the Avos made his own unique spiritual journey – and we need to learn to do the same, each person using his own strengths and unique character traits.

We should learn from this that we should constantly be striving to grow spiritually, but take comfort from the fact that the Avos also had their own journeys to make and had to work on themselves, in order to reach the level that they ultimately reached.

We can also use this lesson whenever we are struggling with a hard Gemara, Halacha or other Jewish text and should not give up hope – because we are not expected to understand everything straight away. The more we learn, the more our knowledge and understanding will increase and the more easily we will be able to study similar topics in future.