

TOLDOT- 5773
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There are no scientific discoveries for stopping the clock on aging. No medical formulas for keeping ourselves physically young or maintaining our youth.

But yes, there are plethora of advertisements and multi-million dollar businesses for products that will aid in “appearing young”. There are creams that remove wrinkles from our skin, coloring or removing white or grey hair, wigs and toupees to cover loss of hair. Many individuals work very hard at exercising and dieting to keep them from “looking old”. All of these solutions are geared to make us “appear youthful”, but none, can turn back or even stop the clock of aging. And anyone unhappy with the aging appearance has Avraham Avinu to thank for it.

In our parasha we find that Avraham actually requested an elderly appearance. The Midrash tells us that Avraham said: “Master of the universe, a father and son will come into a town and people will not know who the father is and who is the son, in order to give proper respect to the elderly of the two”. For until the time of Avraham, people did not show their age. No one had gray hair, no one had arthritis, and no one had to use a cane or walker. The aging factor was just not apparent amongst people. So Avraham complained about the situation. He begged the Ribbono Shel Olam to institute a new phenomenon in the world—that of “aging”. Avraham argued that if an older person was “crowned” with the physical signs of old age, then he would get him the proper Kavod and respect he deserves.

The Ribbono Shel Olam listened and acquiesced to Avraham’s request and told him that this new phenomenon would begin with him. The first place where “ziknah” is mentioned in the Torah is in our parasha, “AND AVRAHAM WAS **ZAKEIN**, [OLD], coming of days” [24:1].

As we get up there in years and we see and feel the signs of old age, we begin to wonder—was this such a great idea that Avraham came up with? Obviously, it was a good idea because HaShem responded to Avraham “DAVAR TOV TA’VATA”, you have asked for something worthwhile”. Why is it so important that old age be recognizable? Why would it not have been sufficient if the world had continued as it were—with no difference between one who was 18 and one who was 81?

The Torah tells us “Sh’al Avicha ve’ya’ged’cha; **zekeinecha** ve’yomru lach” “Ask your father and he will tell you; your elders and they will relate it to you” [Devarim 32:7]. It is a given that certain wisdom comes with old age. According to Gemara Kiddushin [32b] the Mitzvah of “MIP’NEI SAI’VA TAKUM”, “you shall rise before an old person” [VaYikra 19:32] applies to any old person. As a matter of fact, the great Rabbi Yochanan, used to get up even when an elderly Gentile would pass by him. He explained to his students that even such a person has witnessed many events in his lifetime and he has many experiences that inevitably give him a degree of wisdom. The Torah wants us to recognize that wisdom which accrues only through old age.

With all our complaints about old age and all the troubles associated with it, let us remember that the “signs of aging” are badges of honor, of experience and achievement. Let us wear these badges with dignity and pride, after all, the Ribbono Shel HaOlam thought it was indeed good and worthwhile