

“BLESSED WITH “ALL””

“God blessed Abraham with all things” (Gen. 24:1). The Torah states this after the death of Sarah, concerning a man who undertook perilous journeys, faced famine, fought a war, saw cities destroyed, endured strife with his wife and children -- a man who, the Rabbis teach, endured ten separate trials. Abraham endured continuous testing.

As commentators point out, however, this seeming paradox is the point. Abraham was blessed with everything -- the whole panoply of life's offerings. It is natural to associate blessing with goodness alone. But the Talmud enjoins us to bless the bad along with the good (M. Berachot 9:5), teaching that all of life's experiences offer possibilities for a soul to flourish. We may not wish them all, but is there not the seed of growth in every experience?

I once heard a recovering alcoholic say that he began drinking at 18 and when he stopped at 35 he still had the maturity of an 18 year old. For pain forces us to grow and he had anesthetized himself and for 17 years felt no pain.

Abraham felt pain -- and joy, and anguish, and loss and love. He was blessed with everything. That is why Jews do not raise their glasses to good times, but *l'chaim* -- to life, all of it, in its wondrous fullness.