

פרשת חיי שרה

This adaptation is dedicated for a
רפואה שלמה
for
העניא בת פריידל

"ויהיו חיי שרה מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ושבע
שנים" (כג, א)

**"And the life of Sarah was one hundred
years and twenty years and seven years"**

R' Avahu said: There were twenty-two righteous women and, of all of them, the Torah only memorializes the years of Sara. Why? Because in her merit, Esther descended from her and ruled over 127 provinces, each province corresponding to one year of Sara's life.¹

"ויהיו חיי שרה מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ושבע
שנים שני חיי שרה" (כג, א)

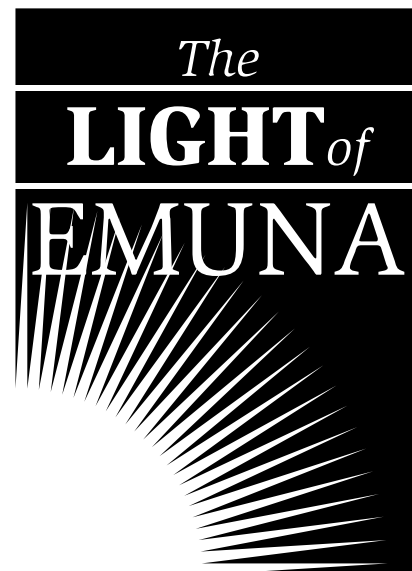
**"And the life of Sarah was one hundred
years and twenty years and seven years,
these were the years of the life of Sara"**

After the *pasuk* counts Sara's years, why was it necessary to repeat the phrase, "these were the years of the life of Sara?" Rashi explains that it was to inform us that all of her years were equally good. All one hundred and twenty-seven years of the *tzaddekes* Sara Imeinu's life were good ones. Is that true? She experienced ninety years of being barren, many of her years were spent wandering, and she stood by her husband's side through his ten difficult trials, the final one literally killing her. Could we possibly label all of her years as truly "good" ones?

Withstanding trials is the essence of a Jew's service of Hashem. This is one's success. Only in this way do we merit ascending spiritual levels and getting closer to Hashem. Therefore, we are told that all of Sara's years were equally good.

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מדרש גדול



Based on Harav Menachem Azolai's "Ohr Ha'Emuna"

When a person withstands challenges, discarding his intellect and doing what Hashem wishes of him, he merits abundant joy. There are situations in life in which we suddenly do not sense Hashem's presence. A person experiences suffering - he becomes depressed, broken, insulted, worried - he does not see Hashem - his eyes are darkened. He is transformed into a different person, he is unable to think, unable to function - all of his actions are motivated by small-mindedness. When everything is dark and we see no solutions to our problems we see an empty space. We cannot find Hashem, G-d forbid. Then, we think a positive thought, we *daven* with concentration, we learn something, we remind ourselves that everything is from Hashem and everything is for the best. If there are difficulties, we turn to Hashem - we, at least, lift our heads - if we cannot speak, we, at least, move our lips a bit - all of this helps us fill the empty space. This attaches us to the place in which Hashem is always found. We are *Ivrim* from the word עובר "to pass" - we pass to the place where we find Hashem - we open our hearts and discover Hashem within. We find that secure point deep inside that connects us to Hashem. Even after we fall, we reconnect anew.

Sara Imeinu guarded her happiness. Chazal tell us that all of Sara Imeinu's years passed in joyfulness. She overcome the most difficult of challenges, she deconstructed herself to fulfill Hashem's will - thereby transforming her from

being a minister for her nation into a minister for the entire world.²

Through the struggle of an ordeal a person builds himself – he extracts the hidden strengths and develops them from mere potential to actualization. Everyone has amazing hidden abilities that are not revealed during the course of normal life, when everything is fine – they are only exhibited when we are tested. Without surmounting obstacles, a person can easily fail. There have been people who have achieved great levels, only to fall completely. Only challenges can assure that we not collapse. When we triumph, we bring to the surface those capabilities that had not yet been forged in the kiln of tribulations – like a vaccination that insures that a person will not be sickened by a later outbreak. When a person overpowers hardships and persists, he immunizes himself. The result is greater satisfaction, things will be better for him, he shows himself as a greater person than he was previously. When a person shatters his will in favor of Hashem's, he creates a void inside himself for a wondrous light to enter – a new light that was hitherto unable to penetrate. Earlier, everything was fine, thank G-d – but there were many lights that could not infiltrate, only when we breach ourselves for Hashem's will, do they infiltrate.³

In essence, our lives are filled with small hurdles that we cope with at every moment, in all areas of life. Every *bracha* that we make must be made with focus, with passion – in every *tefilla* that we *daven* we must endeavor to overcome foreign thoughts and to pay attention to the meanings of the words that we utter. Every time someone says something that hurts us, especially when others hear it, we must quiet our mouths and not answer, not feel the need to have the last word and win. Every time we sit down to eat, we must be satisfied with what is placed before us and not feel the need to run to the kitchen and take more, not because we need it but because it tastes good, because we desire it. We fight the negative

thoughts, our stingy eye. Our efforts to think positively about others – every small positive act is an infinite achievement – with them we build a *Mishkan* for Hashem inside of us – we build our hearts. Rebbe Nachman taught that one who has a heart has no issues of locale, for if he has a heart, wherever he is in the world - he is connected. A heart is above and beyond space – heart means connection, heart is love, heart is joy, heart is something elevated – it makes no difference where you are. Therefore, in the merit of the challenges that we overcome, in the merit of the countless acts of coping that we perform each day, we advance a little. True, we remain with our confusions, with our anger, with our passions – but we have moved a hairsbreadth – and this is beloved by Hashem more than anything.

All of Sara Imeinu's years were equally good. The Rebbe Reb Zushya of Hanipoli explains that because Sara was a true *tzaddekes*, she accepted everything with love – she never uttered a word of complaint, always saying “this too is for the best.” Chazal tell us that *tzaddikim* transmute the attribute of strict justice into compassion by believing that both are equivalently for the best – thereby, it all becomes positive. Just as Nachum Ish Gamzu was renowned for regularly saying, “this too is for the best” regarding every occurrence and thereby converting everything into actual good, so are all *tzaddikim* able to transmute the combinations of letters of an adverse decree into letters of benefit. נגע “affliction” becomes ענג “pleasure.” צרה “sorrow” becomes רצה “will.” When we observe something that appears to be unpleasant, we must remember that everything is good – only our comprehension is limited.

The Gemara⁴ relates that R' Yitzchak ben Eliyashiv once observed his student, R' Mani depressed. The Rebbe asked what was wrong and the student complained, “My wife is unattractive.” “What is her name?” R' Yitzchak asked. R' Mani replied, “Chana.” “May Chana become beautiful,” R' Yitzchak prayed, and so it

² מ-“שרי לאומתה” ל-“שרה לכל העולם כולו” (תנחומה ב וירא כז)
³ באור פני מלך חיים

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תענית כג:

was. A short while later, R' Mani again complained. "She is beautiful now," he cried, "and treats me in an arrogant and offhand way." "If so," R' Yitzchak said, "May she again be unattractive." And so it was. Whatever Hashem gives us for our ultimate best – our attempts to "improve" things may not always lead to desirable outcomes. When we realize this fully, our lives are completely different. We tend to forget, become confused, feel insulted, think of ourselves, our honor – he said this to me, she did that to me – that is all forgetfulness. The more we focus on the concept that there is nothing besides Hashem, and understand it literally – the more our troubles are quashed. "There are certain people who aggravate someone and he would be happy to have never met them. But, Hashem wants him affiliated with them because he requires some "correction" through them. There are places that he must traverse or linger at, involuntarily, without understanding how it came to be – because he has something to correct there. There are all sorts of nuisances – physical, spiritual, monetary – that he must unwillingly handle because they are part of the course that Hashem has set him upon, even if its purpose is not discernible. All of these complications take us by surprise, without consideration to our plans and appear to suddenly disrupt our lives. But, if we fortify our *emuna* that everything is in accordance with Hashem's plan, we will recognize that there are no mistakes or disruptions in life – we are merely facing challenges that will bring us closer to Hashem. The rule of life: there are things that a person must go through, whether he wants to or not, and they are impossible to avoid – his entire choice being how to prevail. If he handles them with *emuna* that everything is for the best – he is praiseworthy and so is his portion – and he will actually witness their transformation to good. But, if, G-d forbid, he does not have such *emuna* he will just become embittered, dissatisfied, broken, full of complaints, blaming himself and others and his entire life will be bitter and dark. There is no worse anguish than being bitter and dissatisfied.⁵

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בגן האמונה

The word for challenge (גסייון) comes from the same root as the word that means both miracle and banner (נס). A banner is elevated. A challenge is meant to elevate a person. One who realizes that a challenge is Heaven sent, deliberate – understands that he has the ability to overcome. It is a descent for the sake of an ascent. Pure olive oil is only created after crushing the olives. We deal with our egos by instilling a bit more humility and modesty.

The angels inquired as to Sara's whereabouts to evoke Avraham's response that she was inside the tent – i.e. that she was modest. He did not commend her for her cooking or for the fact that she had *ruach hakodesh* – his focus was only for her modesty, for that is the beauty and splendor of Jewish women and precisely for that was she remembered.

In the future, Hashem will sprinkle dew on graves to revive the dead. This dew will come from the droplets of sweat of those who learn Torah, those who perform *mitzvos* with excitement and modest women. Yoseph merited that his children would be protected from *ayin hora* because he protected his mother's modesty by guarding her from the eyes of Esau. Rus merited being the progenitor of the Davidic dynasty because Boaz observed the quality of modesty in her.

Eliezer is not identified by name in this week's *parsha* because his modesty would not allow him to let his own identity get in the way of his role as Avraham's servant. He was on a mission as Avraham's servant and that was the only persona that he employed for the duration of his task. This earned his being reclassified as "blessed" instead of "cursed." Despite his tremendous desire for Yitzchak to marry his daughter, despite his questions on his master's unwillingness to allow such a match while knowing that his daughter was righteous and deserving, despite the fact that his very success on his master's behalf meant the demise of his own aspirations – he acted solely as Avraham's servant, out of modesty and reverence.

R' Yisroel Zev Horowitz, zt"l, a contemporary of the Chasam Sofer, related that his mother had begged his father to sell her jewelry to buy himself a Shas. When he hesitated out of worry about her jewelry, she responded, "May Hashem help that in the merit of selling my jewelry for the purchase of a Shas we should have righteous and learned children and they will be my jewelry." That was the manner in which she educated her five sons and instilled a boundless love of Hashem and Torah in them. They were so great that R' Yitzchak Isaac of Calev testified that they were equal to the five books of the Torah.

Humility and modesty are the secret of life.

When a person humbles himself in this world, he will be exalted in the next world. R' Naphtali of Ropschitz would follow his Rebbe, the Chozeh of Lublin, to *tashlich* and "collect" his Rebbe's sins, saying, "My Rebbe's sins are like my *mitzvos*."

R' Eliezer Berland explains that the purpose of talking to Hashem is to reach self-nullification. All day a person thinks how smart he is, how learned he is – egotistical thoughts. While talking to Hashem a person comes to the realization that he has flaws and starts to *daven*, "Hashem, was I created for this? What will become of me? I do not want to be so self-absorbed; I want to keep my eye on the goal."

תפילה

Master of the World!

Help me never to become angry. Do not allow others to incite me. Immediately after they do, I feel like a failure, like I flopped – it is humiliating.

Teach me, father, to speak to those who upset and offend me with patience, without irritation.

Teach me to seek to give the benefit of the doubt, to assume that I don't know the entire story. Almost every time, I learn something new that I was unaware of and it explains everything. For example, when my neighbor's child knocks on his Sukkah door relentlessly for five minutes straight and I know that his father is sitting there and he does nothing to spare us from a headache. What is going on? Only later do I learn that his father was in middle of *shemona esrei* and could not interrupt.

Help me, Father, to master my temper – not to allow it to progress – to be smart rather than right – and if after all that I still get incensed, help me not to say a word or take any measures while I'm still irate. Teach me to always wait quietly and with patience, at times even for days, before I am ready to make some comment or some request.

This is so difficult for me, Father, because at times I ignite so quickly. Help me transform this alien fire of anger into a holy fire that burns for You.

Help me remember that You, Father, administer the world, not me. Everything that happens to me, even that that really infuriates me, is all from Hashem and for the best. Everything is to bring me closer to You, so that I learn to lower my head a bit, to forbear, to refrain, to forgive, to judge favorably, to look with positive eyes – exactly as You, Father, look at us.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

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Notice: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the Parsha Sheet, *Ohr Ha'Emuna*, disseminated by Harav Menachem Azolai *Shlita* and is not a complete or exact adaptation of *Ohr Ha'Emuna* and is not necessarily even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented therein. *Ohr Ha'Emuna* is published in Hebrew; in translation, accuracy is always compromised. Rav Azolai has not reviewed this material - any inaccuracies, omissions or confusion should be attributed exclusively to me. I still hope you enjoy and it provides some *chizuk*.

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