

Sarah died in Kiryas Arba... and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah. (23:2)

Rashi explains the juxtaposition of the passing of Sarah *Imeinu* upon the *Akeidas Yitzchak*, because it was as a result of the *Akeidah* that her “sudden” passing came about. The *Satan* told her that Avraham *Avinu* was about to slaughter her one and only child, Yitzchak *Avinu*, and she died from the shock. Before we continue, it must be made clear that Sarah *Imeinu* died when she was supposed to die. Hashem creates the circumstances. With our limited minds, we unfortunately only see what occurs: an elderly woman succumbs to the news that her son is being slaughtered. It may appear to be that, but any intelligent, believing Jew with a modicum of intelligence understands that what appears before our eyes and essential reality do not always coincide.

Having said this, we address a question posed by *Horav Chaim Kanievesky, Shlita*. We have a rule that *shluchei mitzvah einan nizokin*, “Agents involved in the performance of a *mitzvah* will not be injured (during the course of their *mitzvah* observance).” The *Akeidah* was certainly one of the most seminal *mitzvos* given to man – one from which we derive reward and stands as an enduring merit until this very day. How is it possible that, after performing such an outstanding *mitzvah*, Avraham lost his beloved wife – as a result of that *mitzvah*?! What happened to *shluchei mitzvah*? Truthfully, as pointed out by *Rav Kanievesky*, this question applies in other cases as well.

A while ago a tragedy occurred in Petach Tikvah. A Jew asked his friend to help him with a flat tire. The second Jew was hit by a car and killed in the course of assisting his friend with an act of *chesed*, kindness. The question is reiterated: How does such a tragedy occur to a person whilst in the midst of carrying out a *mitzvah*? [I am certain that if the reader thinks back and introspects his/her own life, anomalies such as this have occurred – either personally or to others of which he is aware]. *Rav Kanievesky* explains that everything is decided on *Rosh Hashanah*. If, on *Rosh Hashanah*, it was decreed that a person should live out the following year without injury – and he is in the midst of performing a *mitzvah* – even one that involves danger – nothing will happen to him. He will emerge unscathed. If, however, the decree on *Rosh Hashanah* was for him to endure troubles, pain, even death, it is possible that these hardships – or even his eventual death – will occur during the execution of a *mitzvah*. What greater merit can there be than having one’s death occur during his *mitzvah* performance?

Let me explain. Hashem decrees on *Rosh Hashanah* that “Reuven” should break his leg. Understandably, there are many ways that one can break a leg. It could happen while playing football, or some other sport; or, he can fall off the ladder and break his leg while he is putting up the *schach* on his *Succah*. Likewise, the decree which we all hope will never come, the *mi yamus*, “Who will die?” is passed, and a person is destined to leave this world during the following year. It can happen in a number of ways, but, if it takes place over a *Gemarah* or while carrying out a *mitzvah*, it is obviously more meritorious. So, how can one be injured or *chas v’shalom*, Heaven forbid, die during the course of performing a *mitzvah*? It was decreed on *Rosh Hashanah* that in

the coming year he would sustain an injury, or die – Hashem does him a favor and makes it happen in an “honorable,” meritorious manner.

We could cite a number of such instances in which holy, righteous individuals lost their lives in the most gruesome manner in the midst of performing a *mitzvah*. We have questions; we do not understand, but now we understand that what seems to be an anomaly which shakes the core faith of some, is, in fact, Hashem’s way of carrying out an existing decree in a manner from which the injured party or the deceased derives the greatest honor and everlasting merit. A wonderful man who lived in Bnei Brak earned his livelihood by driving a bus. One day, he suddenly had a heart attack. Although he survived the event, he was, nonetheless, compelled to retire from his job. At first, he sat at home, until one day he decided he might as well make the most of his early retirement. He began attending classes given in his *shul*. He spent more time learning after *davening*, until the *shul* became his second home. He started giving out tea and cookies to the participants of the *shiurim*, classes, and, without being asked, he volunteered to become the *shul*’s *shamash*, sexton. One morning, in middle of handing out a tray of cookies, he sustained a second, and final, heart-attack. His funeral cortege left from the *shul* which was so beloved to him. He was eulogized by a number of *rabbanim* as if he had been himself a leading *rosh yeshivah*. This was not the type of funeral tendered for the average Jew, but, because he merited to die in the *shul* in the midst of performing a *mitzvah*, he was accorded the honor reserved for Torah leaders.