

## Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years and seven years. (23:1)

*Rashi* explains that the repetition of the word “years” divides the life of Sarah *Imeinu* into three periods, each with its own uniqueness. Each period, however, also shares a particular characteristic with its predecessor. Thus, at one hundred, she was as free of sin as a twenty-year old (a person does not suffer Heavenly punishment until age twenty), and at twenty she maintained the innocent, wholesome beauty of a seven-year-old. *Rashi* concludes, *Kulan shavin l'tovah*; “All of her years were equal in goodness.” Our Matriarch had a good life, in which each of her superior character traits synchronized with one another to achieve the ultimate goodness that one can experience in this world. (While at age one hundred she maintained a sublime level of perfection as she manifest at age twenty, and at age twenty she was as capable of greatness as at age one hundred, however, to have been on a level of achievement as at age twenty seems to be a bit of a stretch.) What impact could Sarah have had at such a young age?

I came across a story that seems tailor-made to address this question. It relates the impact that a young boy had on the life of another boy that catapulted the beneficiary to such spiritual elevation that otherwise could have ended in infamy.

A *Rosh Yeshivah* was lecturing to a class (either upper elementary or early high school) that was comprised of a mixture of students of various ages. (Quite often, students could be a few years apart, based upon level of proficiency and availability of instructors.) Every class has its one or two boys who – due to age, lack of parental discipline, or personal factors which have yet to be addressed – do not fit into the same discipline mode as the rest of the class. Thus, if something out of the ordinary occurs in the room, one of the students is usually the “address” to which the *rebbe* turns. Sometimes, what takes place is so out of character (of class discipline) that it is difficult to pinpoint the perpetrator. Today was that day. During the *Rosh Yeshivah's shiur*, lecture, on a particularly difficult passage in the *Gemorah*, a paper plane came in for a landing right on top of the *Rosh Yeshivah's Gemorah*. Someone in the back of the room had made a paper plane and tried his wings at the expense of the *Rosh Yeshivah's shiur*.

This was unmitigated *chutzpah*, audacity. Perhaps it might take place in a primary school class, but during the *Rosh Yeshivah's shiur*? Absolutely unheard of. The *Rosh Yeshivah* took a few minutes to settle his nerves. He attempted to restart the *shiur*, but was unable to do so. Finally, he said, “The student who did this should stand up and leave this room!” Nothing. The room was still. No one rose from his seat. No one moved. The *Rosh Yeshivah* was known for his patience, but, this time, it had worn thin: “I repeat. The student who committed this act should immediately leave the room!” This was serious business. The *Rosh Yeshivah* rarely raised his voice, and, even when he did, it was to emphasize a Torah-related thought/concept. This was too much for him to handle. Boys did not fly paper airplanes in his classroom. He tried a third time, with “feeling”: “Whoever committed this act must leave the room immediately!” This time, the *Rosh Yeshivah's* voice was

almost a shout. A few moments passed in silence – until someone stood up and began shuffling toward the door. Thirty pairs of eyes turned to look at the source of the noise. It was none other than young Nachman, a bright boy who was one of the youngest in the class. Although this act was out of character for him, perhaps his youth had gotten the better of him. Shame was written all over his face. He clearly felt bad, as did his friends and the *Rosh Yeshivah*, who had regarded young Nachman with special affection.

A few days passed. Nachman apologized; the *Rosh Yeshivah* understood that boys will be boys, especially if they are much younger than the others, and Nachman rejoined the class. End of story? No, there is more.

Fast forward thirty years. After visiting various doctors and taking a number of tests, a husband and father received the dread news that he had feared from the very onset: He was gravely ill. He had some measure of hope. A therapy had been recently discovered and used successfully by a few physicians. There was, however, one problem: It was extremely expensive, and this family was barely able to make ends meet on a good day. Now, with their father and primary wage-earner bedridden, the required funds were not simply a hurdle; it was an impossibility.

When situations appear hopeless, however, the askanim, community workers/brokers, who are guided by the chesed lodestar, kick in and literally move heaven and earth to provide solutions for the predicament confronting their Jewish brothers and sisters. From full-time learners to part-time learners, from hourly workers to business owners, everyone took to the streets and knocked on doors in search of funds to help the young father who lay deathly ill: *Mi k'amcha Yisrael*; "Who is like Your people, *Yisrael*?" Doors and hearts opened; pocketbooks opened; money slowly started pouring in to help this family.

One of the family members, a brother-in-law, took it upon himself to visit an entire neighborhood. Apartment to apartment, door to door he went, explaining the reason that he (a distinguished lay leader) was collecting money. A young father lay bedridden, his family starving. Does one need a better reason? As he walked through the *shechunah*, neighborhood, a door opened, and standing before him was a prominent young *Rosh Yeshivah*, a charismatic educator who had literally impacted the lives of hundreds of young men. He was a well-respected and admired *Rosh Yeshivah*. "How can I help you?" he asked. The brother-in-law explained that he was on a mission to raise sufficient funds, so that his brother-in-law could receive treatment for the illness that was ravaging his body. "My brother-in-law, *Reb* Nachman Galinsky, is in dire straits. Without the money, he has no chance of receiving treatment."

"What did you say his name was? *Reb* Nachman! *Oy, Reb* Nachman!" The *Rosh Yeshivah* began to raise his voice, "*Oy, Reb* Nachman is ill! *Oy*. I owe my life to *Reb* Nachman! Every bit of *ruchniyos*, spirituality, that I have achieved, every bit of Torah that I have studied, every *talmid*, student, that I have taught, is all due to *Reb* Nachman. If not for him, I would probably not be *frum*, observant. He gave me back my life. I owe him everything."

The *Rosh Yeshivah* began the story with which he had lived (and probably had haunted him) for so many years. "I was a little '*shticky*' (liked to fool around, did not always follow the rules, usually as a result of immaturity), and, one day, in the middle of the *Rosh Yeshivah's shiur*, I let fly a paper airplane. I did not expect the *Rosh Yeshivah* to react with hurt and then anger, but he did, and he would not budge until the perpetrator announced himself and left the classroom. It was different in those days. If a boy was not ensconced in the protective environment of a *yeshivah*, he was a ripe candidate for the secular Zionist movement that was captivating the country. *Kefirah*, heresy, filled the streets, the cafes, the meeting places. Everywhere, it was about living a life divorced from Torah. The new deity was Nationalism/ Zionism/Communism/Socialism. I was not a spiritually strong student. If I left the *yeshivah*, it would mean the end of my *Yiddishkeit*. So, I remained still, quiet, ignoring the *Rosh Yeshivah's* three calls for the perpetrator to leave the *shiur*. At the very last moment, as I was about to give myself up and say goodbye to my religious commitment, little Nachman Galinsky arose from his seat and left the room. He accepted the onus of guilt for what I had done. My *Yiddishkeit* could now remain intact.

"It was at this moment that I realized that I had been granted a new lease on my spiritual life. I began to learn with greater passion and *daven* with more fervor; my acts of *chesed* and caring for others meant much more to me now, because they were personal. All of this was due to Nachman Galinsky. Do you know the *z'chusim* that he has? Every bit of Torah that I or my students have learned is because of him. *Oy*, do I owe him!"

We now see how the actions of a young boy can resonate, be remembered, and have an effect for decades