

## Chaye Sara, Rabbi James Proops

The opening of this week's parasha states:

וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה נְשָׂה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעֵי שָׁנִים וְשְׁנַיִם חֳדָיִם שָׂרָה,

Sarah's lifetime—the span of Sarah's life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years. It is noted that this is not the only time the number 127 is mentioned in *Tanach*, but in *Megillat Esther* we learn that Achashveirosh ruled over 127 countries. Unsurprisingly, an insightful link is made between the appearances of the two numbers.. The *Medrash* in *Esther Rabbah* and similarly in *Bereishit Rabba* reports that Rabbi Akiva was once giving a *shiur* and several students were dozing off. The *Medrash* comments that in order to wake them up a Rabbi Akiva exclaimed “In the merit of Sara Imeinu's 127 years, the Jewish People in the 127 countries in the story of Purim were saved!” Suddenly the students woke up and began concentrating fully on the *shiur*.

What was it about this teaching of Rabbi Akiva that woke them up? What is the connection between Sara and Esther?

An answer given is that Rabbi Akiva's remarks caused the students to suddenly realize and internalize the value of time. Sara's spiritually wholesome 127 years, saved the Jews of the 127 provinces, which means that for every year that Sara used her time productively by performing *Mitzvot* and growing closer to Hashem, she saved another country. Each month she saved a town, each week another neighbourhood, each day another block, each minute a street, each second a family. Thus, the students of Rabbi Akiva instantly realized what their Rebbe was teaching them - the importance of fully utilizing every second.

To rule over time is one of the great challenges we all face. To rule over time means that we imbue every moment of our existence with eternal life. Time is ours to be filled with *Torah*, *Mitzvot*, with *Chesed* and positive relationships. Rav Pinchas Sheinberg zt'l notes that when David HaMelech said “מִי־הָאִישׁ הַחֹפֵץ תַּיִם? - Who is the man who desires life? One who loves days to do good” he was referring to someone who realizes the value of time and the importance of making the most of all the time available to him in this world.

Throughout the past week much has been written and said in the wake of the passing of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt'l. Whether reflecting on his immense intellect, his impeccable oratory skills, his ability to inspire and captivate or his phenomenal writing his impact was felt throughout the globe. I do not remember ever seeing such a breadth of tributes, eulogies, dedications and comments for anyone else. It is clear from the vast amount that he was able to achieve in his life time that he imbued the lesson אִשׁ הַחֹפֵץ תַּיִם לְרְאוֹת טוֹב one who loves days to do good. It was noted by The Office of Rabbi Sacks, that he “had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book 'Lessons in Leadership’” and they will continue to publish them throughout the year. What a demonstration of utilizing time efficiently! He had already prepared a full year’s worth of material before we even started *Bereishit!*

Sarah and I had the great privilege to know Rabbi Sacks zt'l personally and meet with him privately on a small number of occasions. At one meeting he relayed to us how he had struggled in the early years of his position as Chief Rabbi to garner the support and respect of the UK Jewish community. The notion now seems unthinkable, but nonetheless it is true. Born out of some diplomatic errors and some unpopular philosophical suggestions he found himself isolated from the

community on all sides. However, rather than turn inward and give up, he turned to the secular world through radio and television appearances and writing a regular column in a newspaper and began to build his reputation as a relevant voice on ethics, morality and society. It was not long before the Jewish community began to take pride in him again and he continued to scale the heights of worldwide acclaim.

Upon hearing him describe his experience I recalled a story that I had heard him say in one of his speeches and has since featured in his writing, about Alfred Nobel, the man who created the world famous prize for peace. “It happened in 1888. Nobel, the man who invented dynamite, was reading his morning papers when, with a shock, he found himself reading his own obituary. It turned out that a journalist had made a simple mistake. It was Nobel’s brother who had died, and the paper just got it wrong. What horrified Nobel was what he read. It spoke about the dynamite king who’d made a fortune from explosives. Nobel suddenly realized that if he didn’t change his life that was all he’d be remembered for. That was when he decided to dedicate his fortune to creating five annual prizes for those who’d made outstanding contributions in physics, chemistry, medicine, literature and peace. Nobel chose to be remembered for peace.” Rabbi Sacks zt’l was not someone who would allow his story to be dictated by anyone other than himself. He worked tirelessly writing, travelling, teaching and inspiring, recognizing that he had vital messages to share with the world.

Rabbi Sacks zt’l had a deep appreciation of the value of time. In his own words, “Time is short. Down here on earth we only have one life to live; and unlike money, time lost can never be regained. Judaism is the world’s oldest and most elaborately refined time management system, designed to ensure that we live for the things that matter, that bring meaning and value and joy”. He truly lived this

lesson and made the very most of his time ‘down here’ and we are the great beneficiaries. Let us pay attention to his message and more importantly his example to make every moment count towards achieving our true potential.

Shabbat Shalom