Jewish Tribune – Chayei Sarah

**Soroh Imeinu’s Thank You**

One of my all-time favourite stories involves Rabbi Chananya Cholak, the legendary head of Ezer Mizion, one of Israel’s largest chesed organisations which assists hundreds of thousands of ill, handicapped and elderly people in Eretz Yisroel together with their families.

But the story is best served with an introduction by way of a fantastic dvar Torah I heard from Rabbi Yisroel Besser based on the first Rashi in this week’s parsha.

The possuk says:

וַיִּהְיוּ חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנִים שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה

And the life of Sarah was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years; (these were) the years of the life of Sarah.

Rashi famously comments on the repetition of the wordשָׁנָה as follows:

**לכך נכתב שנה בכל כלל וכלל, לומר לך שכל אחד נדרש לעצמו, בת מאה כבת עשרים לחטא, מה בת עשרים לא חטאה, שהרי אינה בת עונשין, אף בת מאה בלא חטא, ובת עשרים כבת שבע ליופי.**

The reason that the word “years” was written after every digit is to tell you that every digit is to be expounded upon individually: when she was one hundred years old, she was like a twenty-year-old regarding sin. Just as a twenty-year-old has not sinned, because she is not liable to punishment, so too when she was one hundred years old, she was without sin. And when she was twenty, she was like a seven-year-old as regards to beauty.

Rabbi Besser was told the following insight into this well know Rashi by a sweet Yerushalmi meshulech collecting at his door.

Which perek in Tehillim do people say when they need a yeshua, salvation?

The answer is kappitel כ, perek 20, which begins יַעַנְךָ ה' בְּיוֹם צָרָה.

Which perek of Tehillim expresses thanks for Hashem’s kindness?

The answer is kappitel ק, perek 100, which begins מִזְמוֹר לְתוֹדָה

But there is a difference in the way people say these two chapters. When they are desperate, they cry and scream יַעַנְךָ ה' בְּיוֹם צָרָה – please Hashem, answer us!

But after HKBH helps them, their appreciation doesn’t have the same passion. Yes, they give thanks to Hashem, but not with the same intensity as the original tefilla.

But not Soroh Imeinu.

Rashi tells us, she was “Bas kuf”, k’ bas chof” when she was 100 years old, she was like 20.

Her kappitel kuf – perek 100 in Tehillim- was ‘k’vas chof, just like her kapitel chof, perek 20 in Tehillim.

She cried out מִזְמוֹר לְתוֹדָה with the same intensity and passion as she had originally said יַעַנְךָ ה' בְּיוֹם צָרָה. It was all the same.

It was nearly 1am when Rabbi Chananya Cholak and his American finished their meeting. The American philanthropist had come all the way from America to meet the head of Ezer Mitzion and be involved in his remarkable chesed enterprise.

The ba’al tzedaka told Rabbi Cholak that he was flying back to New York in a few hours’ time.

“Have you been to the Kosel yet?” asked Rav Cholak?

“No” replied the American, “I only landed a few hours ago!”

“So let’s go!” said Rav Cholak.

When they arrived at the Kosel plaza, it was 1.30am and serenely quiet. The two men approached the holy wall but both were stopped in their strides by the powerful and enchanting sight of someone davening like they had never seen before. The tears were tangible and the passion palpable.

Rav Cholak looked at his American friend and said “Look, I don’t know this yid and I don’t know what he is davening for, but if there is a medical problem, I am happy to do what I can to help him. If it’s a financial matter, would you be willing to help?”

“With pleasure” came the instant reply.

They waited until the man finished davening. He kissed the Kosel, lingered a little longer and slowly walked away from the wall, towards where Rav Cholak and his friend were standing.

Rav Cholak stretched out his hand and said “Sholom Aleichem Reb Yid!”

“We were just watching you daven and were mesmerised by your tefilla. We would like to help you.”

“Thank you. But help with what?”

“Well, if there is a medical issue, I run a medical chesed organisation and have many contacts and will do what I can to help you” said Rav Cholak. “And my good friend here is a generous ba’al tzedoko. He too will do what he can to help if you need financial assistance.”

“You are both very kind,” the man said, “but there is no problem.”

“But you were davening with such passion and intensity at such a late hour! Why else are you here?” asked Rav Cholak.

The man smiled and said: “Tonight my wife and I were fortunate enough to marry off our tenth and youngest child.”

“We just came to say thank you.”

Wow. A lesson for us all. We all have so much to be grateful for, but we don’t always say מִזְמוֹר לְתוֹדָה with the same intensity and passion as we say יַעַנְךָ ה' בְּיוֹם צָרָה.

Let us emulate Soroh Imeinu who was “bas kuf, k’ bas chof” and who taught us how to say thank you.

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