Jewish Tribune – Chayei Sarah

**Don’t Waste Time!!**

Rabbi Akiva was once giving a shiur when he noticed his talmidim were struggling to stay awake (some things never change!). In order to re-engage and revitalise them, he asked them a question: Why did Esther Hamalka merit to rule over 127 kingdoms? Rabbi Akiva answered that it was because Soroh Imeinu lived for 127 years. So says the Midrash at the beginning of this week’s sedrah.

The Midrash is clearly puzzling. What do Soroh’s 127 years have to do with the number of kingdoms Queen Esther ruled over?

The Chiddushei Harim gives a wonderful explanation. Rabbi Akiva was trying to teach his students the importance of time.

Imagine, said Rabbi Akiva, if each year of your life was like a whole country. A month would be like a huge city. A week like a big town. A day like a large village. An hour like a whole street. And a minute like a house. If we truly appreciated that we were being rewarded with vast wealth for every moment of avodas Hashem, we wouldn’t waste time.

Rabbi Akiva therefore used a comparison of material value to convey to his talmidim the tragedy of wasting time. Soroh’s 127 years were lived to the full and every moment reaped eternal benefit.

Rabbi Isaac Bernstein ztl quoted the above medrash and added a beautiful insight of the Maggid of Mezritch. In Sefer Tehillim, Dovid Hamelech says “*lo amus ki echye*”. This does not mean “Let me not die, for I will live”. Everyone has to die at some time.

Rather, it means “Let me not die while I am still alive”! There are some people who are technically alive but spiritually dead. Dovid Hamelech pleaded with Hashem that he should live life to the full and be truly alive while still on this world.

The Ralbag says that is why in Nach there is an expression “ko’es chaya” “as this time lives”. Because there is living time and there is dead time.

I once heard a marvellous idea which reiterates this theme regarding the mitzvah of Orlah. For the first 3 years of a tree’s life, the farmer cannot reap any benefit from his new tree. To compensate the farmer, the Torah gives a special blessing that he will reap much benefit to make up for the loss of 3 years produce.

But surely there are other instances where the farmer loses out. He has to give terumah and ma’aser and many other donations from his yield!

The difference is that with other contributions, the farmer is dealing with a material loss. However, with Orlah, the farmer has to deal with a loss of time. That is more painful as he knows the loss can never be made up.

As the saying goes: “*Odom doeg al ibud domov, v’ayno doeg al ibud yomov*. Man worries about losing his money and does not worry about the loss of his days.” How crazy! “Domov chozrin, yomov eynon chozrim. His money can return but his days will not come back”.

That is the lesson of Soroh Imeinu and a life well lived.

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