

BEING ON GUARD FOR THE SATAN BEHIND US

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #656 Getting Paid for Mitzvos. Good Shabbos!

Being On Guard For the Satan Behind Us

Sarah is the only one of our Matriarchs whose age at the time of her passing is documented in the Torah. We are explicitly told the age of each Patriarch at the time of their death, but only Sarah has this distinction among the Matriarchs. The Torah tells us at the beginning of the Parsha that she died at the age of 127. What is the significance of this distinction?

Furthermore, the pasuk [verse] documenting Sarah's age strikes us as being redundant: "Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years; the years of Sarah's life." [Bereishis 23:1] The next pasuk goes on to say that "Avraham came to mourn for Sarah and to cry for her." According to ancient tradition, the letter chaf in the word Livkosa [to cry for her] is written small. The Baal HaTurim explains that the reason the letter is diminished in size is that since Sarah lived to such a ripe old age, Avraham Avinu minimized the amount of crying he did for her. According to the Baal HaTurim, it did not suffice for us to surmise on our own that since Sarah was 127 years old when she died, it was probably not such a tragic funeral that inspired a great deal of crying. For some reason, it was important for the Torah to explicitly make note of this fact (by use of the diminished letter chaf). Why is this so significant for us to know?

The Nesivos Shalom (the Slonimer Rebbe) writes the following idea in his sefer. Every night we say in the Mariv prayer: "Remove the Satan from in front of us and from behind us". It is obvious to all of us what the purpose of the "Satan in front of us" is. Many times, we are on the way to do something positive and we find it becomes very difficult to accomplish the task. This is due to the "Satan in front of us" who tries to prevent us from doing mitzvos. We do not have to search any further than last week's parsha (Vayera) for an example. Chazal tell us that the Satan wanted to get in the way of Avraham Avinu and not let him accomplish the Akeidah [binding] of Yitzchak.

But what is the significance of the prayer to remove the "Satan from behind us"? How can there be a "Satan behind us" if the mitzvah has already been completed? The Nesivos Shalom explains that sometimes after we have already completed a mitzvah, or passed a nisayon [spiritual challenge] things don't work out the way we thought they would and we begin to "second guess" our righteous acts. We wonder whether or not we did the right thing. The Satan never gives up. He may lose battle

after battle, but he does not give up the war so easily.

I have heard more than once cases of highly successful individuals who originally were not observant and decided to become Baalei Teshuva and fully Sabbath observant and then subsequently their business tanked. It creeps up in people's minds: Why is it that when the person was non-religious everything he touched turned to gold and now that he is religious, everything he touches turns to dust?

What does the person think? What do the people around him think? This is the idea of "Remove Satan from behind us." After the good deed is done, the Satan does not want you to be at peace with it. Even if the person was not contemplating going back to where he came from spiritually, nonetheless, it is no longer the same. It is with a regret and remorse that one decided to do the right thing and become religious.

Our parshios, the Nesivos Shalom explains, contain a classic example of Avraham Avinu facing the Satan in front of him in Parshas Vayera and then confronting the Satan in back of him in Parshas Chaye Sarah. The Satan behind him is, as Rashi says (based on the Medrash), that Sarah died suddenly out of the shock of hearing that her son Yitzchak was almost slaughtered. This scenario was an act of the Satan. Sarah was supposed to die in any event, no matter what happened. But the Satan arranged that someone would come to her door and tell her about the Akeida and just at that moment, she would die. Everyone, including Avraham, could come to the false conclusion and say "This is what I get for the Akeida?"

The Satan knows that she would have died at that time regardless of whether or not the Akeida took place. It was not the news of the Akeida that killed her, it was G-d's having said that these are the days of her years. Her time was up. That is why, says the Slonimer Rebbe, the Torah writes "one hundred years and twenty years and seven years." This is why the Torah spells out the age of her death - so that we should not for a minute think that she died prematurely because of the Akeidah. That is why the Torah reiterates "the years of the life of Sarah". When Sarah was born, she was given a certain amount of years and a certain amount of days and on a specific day and in a specific place and a specific time she was destined to die.

Many times we have an elderly parent living with one child and then they decide to move the parent to another child and then the parent dies. There are typically all sorts of guilty feelings. 'If this, if that', etc. No! Everyone has their time and place where they are going to die.

This is the way it was with Sarah. No one appreciated this more than Avraham Avinu. That is why the word Livkosa [to cry for her] has a small chaf. There was not a tremendous amount of crying because this was not the case of a tragic sudden unexpected death, which causes people to cry. The Torah wants to record for us that the crying was muted, because it was part of the natural life cycle destined for Sarah to die at this ripe old age of 127.

This teaches us that we must always be on guard, not only for the Satan in front of us, but for the

Satan behind us as well.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Chaye Sarah are provided below:

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