

Fascinating INSIGHTS

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A Junior Senior

For many, as they reach old age, they wither. Others, however, just get better with age. They fulfill עוד ינובון בשיבה דשנים ורעננים יהיו, they will still be fruitful in old age, vigorous and fresh they will be.¹ It has been said, "You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream."² In this way we can interpret לעת זקנה אלא תשליכני לעת זקנה, do not cast me off in old age.³

If you keep an active life, you stay vernal and young. Someone once said, "Staying young means being willing to learn, evolve and be open to life."

After Rosh Hashanah in 1988, at the age of 86, the Lubavitcher Rebbe launched another major initiative. Noting his advanced age,⁴ the Rebbe quipped, "I am not as old as it says on my passport. If you will carry out what I am

requesting now, it will be a sign that you do not perceive me as an old Jew, but as a young man with young ideas."



The pasuk says in reference to the Akeida ויקח את שני נעריו אתו, Avraham took his two young men with him.⁵ An alternate explanation given is that Avraham took his younger years with him, as שני נעריו (literally it means two young men) can be translated as his vernal, youthful years. When one is younger, he is more energetic and passionate, and thinks he can conquer the world. As he gets older, he has been demoralized by others and has run into dead ends. Avraham at the Akeida was old, as he was 137 years

¹ Tehillim 92:15.

² There is a saying, "If you want to kill a big dream, share it with small-minded people."

³ Tehillim 71:9.

⁴ When the Lubavitcher Rebbe suffered a heart attack in 1977, R' Moshe Feinstein penned a letter to his rabbinic colleagues asking them to make

a public appeal for congregants to involve themselves in the mitzvah campaigns of Chabad such as tefillin, mezuzah and Shabbos candles arguing that "since it is into this that the tzadik and genius of Lubavitch puts his entire soul...certainly every activity in these campaigns will strengthen his health."

⁵ Breishis 22:3.

old. However, he acted young as the pasuk tells us that he took his younger youthful years with him.

Ever since the 1960s, R' Dovid Kviat's⁶ (1920–2009) hands would shake. Yet, he overcame this physical impediment and continued to write his own chidushim. However, very few people were able to decipher his handwriting, and therefore were unable to type them up. Undeterred, R' Kviat was able to locate someone in Yerushalayim who could still read his writing. However, a few years before he died, R' Kviat's handwriting deteriorated further. Now, no one could decipher his handwriting, not even R' Kviat himself. Undaunted, he continued to write, because writing helped him crystallize his Torah thoughts. It helped him further his understanding of the sugya. Then, someone suggested that he learn how to type on a computer. His initial reaction was that he was too old to learn a new skill. He was almost eighty and the shaking in his hands was significant, not to mention his eyesight was now quite poor. Nevertheless, he tried his hand at typing, and in a matter of a few days, he was typing a few thousand words per day. A few months and a few *sefarim* later, he called the person who taught him how to type and said, "I want a laptop!"



Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer conducted an experiment in 1979. She wanted to recreate the world of 1959 and ask subjects to live as though it were twenty years earlier. Eight men in their 70s stepped out of a van in front of a converted monastery in New Hampshire. They shuffled forward, a few of them arthritically stooped, a couple with canes. Then they passed through the door and entered a time warp. Perry Como crooned on a vintage radio. Ed Sullivan welcomed guests on a black-and-white TV. Everything inside, including the books on the shelves and the magazines lying around, was designed to conjure 1959. The men didn't just reminisce about what things were like at that time (a control group did that). They were instructed to behave as if it were *actually* 1959, while the control group lived in a similar environment but didn't act as if it were decades ago. They discussed historical events as if they were current news, and no provisions were made that acknowledged the men's weakened physical state; no one carried their bags or helped them up the stairs or treated them like they were old. Nothing — no mirrors, no modern-day clothing, no photos except portraits of their much younger selves — spoiled the illusion that they had shaken off 22 years. A week later, both the control group and the experimental group showed improvements in "physical strength, manual dexterity, gait, posture, perception, memory, cognition, taste sensitivity, hearing, and vision. Most of those improvements were much more significant in the group told to live as if it were actually 1959; a full 63% of them had better intelligence test scores at the end of the experiment than they did at the beginning, compared to 44% in the control group. Four independent volunteers, who knew nothing about the study,

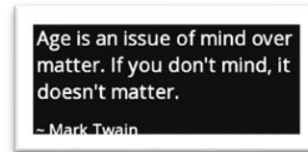
⁶ He was a Rosh Yeshiva at the Mirrer Yeshiva in Brooklyn and the Rav of the Agudas Yisrael Shul of 18th Avenue. His most famous for his works on Gemara entitled Succas Dovid.

⁷ R' Dovid Ganz (1541-1613) in the sefer Tzemach Dovid (Volume 2, os 395) relates what happened in the city of Kenigsberg in the 1600s: "A person died at the age of 152. At age 104, he had a son, and at age 120 he married a woman and had twins from her."

⁸ Breishis 18:11-14.

⁹ Vayera, s.v. *V'Avraham*. A wealthy person set his eyes on the Meor V'shemesh for his daughter from the age of 5. He therefore asked the father of the Meor V'shemesh to promise him that he would designate his son for his daughter. Soon after his Bar Mitzvah, the Meor V'shemesh married her (Meor V'shemesh, beginning of Toldos Hamechabeir). The

looked at before and after photos of the men in the experimental group and perceived those in the "after" photos as an average of two years younger than those in the "before." On the last day of the study, Langer wrote, men who had seemed so frail just days before ended up playing an impromptu touch football game on the front lawn.



A Most Pure Relationship

When Sarah was told about having a child at such an old age,⁷ she laughed in disbelief. Let us cite the pesukim: ואברהם ושרה זקנים באים בימים חדל להיות לשרה ארה כנשים... אחרי בלוית היתה לי עונה, ודנה ואדני זקן... הפלא מה! דבר למועד אשוב אליך... Avraham and Sarah were old, well on in years, the manner of women had ceased to be with Sarah. Sarah laughed saying after I had withered shall I again have delicate skin? And my husband is old. Then Hashem said to Avraham why is it that Sarah laughed saying shall I in truth bear a child although I have aged. Is anything beyond Hashem?! At the appointed time I will return to you at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.⁸

The Meor V'shemesh⁹ (1751-1823) struggles to understand where Sarah's Emuna was. Didn't she know that Hashem could give her children at an old age?

The Meor V'shemesh understands this episode in a different light. Through the act of relations of a couple, the physical body of a child can be born. However, Avraham and Sarah purified their bodies so much and had no physicality to their act of relations since it was with such holiness and purity.

In this light we can grasp the meaning of the pesukim. זקן, the Gemara says, refers to wisdom.¹⁰ This means they cleansed themselves spiritually more and more as they got older.¹¹ The next words are חדל להיות לשרה ארה כנשים: she wasn't naturally physical like other women. She therefore said אחרי בלוית היתה לי עונה: I can't bring myself to any physicality which is under the domain of time as עונה can mean time as in עדני זקן: my master Avraham clings to Hashem so much (as זקן is a contraction of שקנה חכמה, one who has acquired wisdom) and he also has no physicality to him. Since in order to bring about a child into the world there must be some physicality involved in the act of relations, how is it then possible, Sarah wondered, for her to have a child!

מועד. הפלא מה! דבר למועד אשוב אליך refers to time. So Hashem answered, אשוב אליך, I can return you under the domain of time, in order that you can have some physicality so that you can bear a child — ולשרה בן.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of six books including the recently released Dazzling Money Insights. His writings, some of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2] where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

Meor V'shemesh later became a Chassid and was close to the Noam Elimelech as well as the Chozeh of Lublin. Although the city of Cracow where he was, was opposed to Chassidus, the Meor V'shemesh started the first Chassidish Minyan there. The Rav of Cracow, R' Yitzchok Halevi, who was opposed to this, gathered his Beis Din together and put the Meor V'shemesh in excommunication.

¹⁰ Kidushin 32b. The Gemara says that זקן is an abbreviation for שקנה חכמה, one who acquires wisdom (Rashi s.v. אין). The Pnei Yehoshua (Kidushin 32b, s.v. רשי) is bothered that זקן hints to שקנה חכמה. The Gemara elsewhere (Nedarim 41a) states ... דא קני מה חסר, one who has lacks nothing. Consequently, שקנה חכמה must refer to שקנה חכמה.

¹¹ There is a saying, "The world is like a book. If you don't travel (spiritually), it is like staying on the same page."