

A PARAGON OF CARING



It has been a year since the passing of
Rav Sraya Deblitzky zt”l,

the pious Torah giant who studiously avoided the limelight throughout his life, yet had an incredibly powerful impact on the Jewish people. Now, at the request of the *Yated*, his grandsons, Rav Betzalel and Rav Chaim Mordechai Deblitzky, share some incredible stories about their illustrious grandfather’s life.

BY TZVI YAAKOVSON

Rav Sraya Deblitzky zt”l was a Torah giant who lived a modest life in Bnei Brak. He was a world-class *tzaddik* and famed *posek*, yet he was incredibly unassuming. I asked two of his grandsons, Rav Betzalel Deblitzky and Rav Chaim Mordechai Deblitzky, to share some of their recollections of their illustrious grandfather. When we spoke about his greatness in the realm of *bein adam lachaveiro*, they revealed that Rav Sraya would take the needs or troubles of others to heart to such an extent that he once made a special trip to Yerushalayim to benefit a person in need, even though he rarely traveled there for his own purposes, and the trip entailed enormous exertion for him.

When Rav Sraya passed away, several *gedolim* eulogized him and endeavored to isolate definitions for his personality. He was described as an *ish tam*, an *adam hashaleim*, and a man who lived with a constant awareness of Hashem’s presence. Rav Moshe Sternbuch, who had been his close friend, referred to him as an *eved Hashem*.

During his lifetime, many people were awed by Rav Sraya’s fervent *avodas Hashem*. His recitation of *Shema* was astounding. His *Seder* on *Pesach* was remarkable. Everything he did was informed by profound *kavanos*. Volumes could be written about his righteous behavior, about his own writings, and about his *halachic* rulings. In this article, we will focus primarily on his caring and concern for his fellow Jews, both as individuals and on a communal level.

The Strength to Recite a Brocha

Rav Sraya’s *davening* was a source of amazement and inspiration to everyone who observed it. There was his painstaking preparation before *davening* and his meticulous enunciation of every word. He took exquisite care to avoid even the slightest mispronunciation of a word. Whenever he pronounced the *Sheim Hashem*, it was with utmost care

and diligence. One of his grandsons related, “The *rov* was very particular about reciting *Asher Yotzar* immediately after he washed his hands. I heard that he also studiously refrained from speaking until he had recited the *brocha*. Once, toward the end of his life, he was too weak to recite the *brocha* when the need arose, and he asked to be reminded about it later. Sometime later, when he had regained his strength to some degree and had sat down to learn, someone reminded him to recite the *brocha*. ‘I remember,’ he said, ‘but I am still not able to do it.’ Now, it is a short *brocha*, and even at his slow and deliberate pace it wouldn’t have taken more than a minute to recite. Nevertheless, he could not tolerate the thought of reciting any *brocha* without the greatest possible concentration and focus, and he needed a good deal of strength in order to do that.”

Living with Hashem

For average people, Rav Sraya’s reluctance

to recite a “simple” *brocha* may seem extraordinary or even incomprehensible. For a person of his spiritual stature and depth of understanding, though, it was only natural. He understood that with every word he recited, he would be tugging on spiritual “strings” that would evoke a shower of ethereal influences from the upper worlds. It stood to reason, then, that he needed to recite every word with all of his strength and with enormous precision and care.

Rav Sraya once wrote a letter in which he apologized to the recipient for the delay in his response. “I was suffering from pains in my eyes,” he explained, “and I was unable to write back sooner. Now, *boruch Hashem*, the pains were cured by virtue of a *tefillah* that I *davened*.” Such was the pure, deep-rooted faith with which he lived.

Hishtadlus for Pollard

I mentioned in passing that Rav Sraya once made a highly uncharacteristic trip to

Yerushalayim. The full story is as follows. In the year 5769/2009, President George W. Bush was about to complete his tenure as president of the United States. One day, a Jewish man showed up at Rav Sraya’s home and asked to discuss a confidential matter with him. This man, who was meeting Rav Sraya for the first time, presented a detailed plan for securing the release of Jonathan Pollard from prison in America. He proposed that Rav Sraya would ask both Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv and Rav Ovadiah Yosef to appeal to the Israeli prime minister to ask the outgoing president to pardon Pollard. Rav Sraya listened intently to his suggestion, and although he had never met his visitor before and had no familiarity with him, he decided to act on the man’s suggestion. He asked for someone to find the telephone numbers of the two *gedolim*, but it soon became evident that he would not be able to reach them by phone. “In that case,” Rav Sraya announced, “let’s go to Yerushalayim.” His family members tried to dissuade him from making the trip, in light of his old age and his dignity, not to mention the fact that the plan seemed to have little chance of succeeding. But Rav Sraya was the type of person who would not rest until he had taken care of the matter.

When he arrived in Yerushalayim, Rav Elyashiv was in the middle of learning, but he rose to his full height out of respect for his visitor. This was despite the fact that it was the first time they had met. One can assume that for a *talmid chochom* of Rav Sraya’s caliber, an encounter with Rav Elyashiv constituted a golden opportunity to discuss a wide assortment of issues with him. However, he immediately began discussing the matter that had brought him there. After his meeting with Rav Elyashiv, he made his way to the home of Rav Ovadiah Yosef, where he immediately brought up the subject of Pollard once again. There is no doubt that Rav Sraya was well aware that his efforts were unlikely to bear fruit, yet he was willing to spend his precious time for the sake of the tiniest possible chance of assisting a fellow Jew in distress.





Coming to the Aid of the Boys in Japan

A similar episode took place when reports arrived in Israel of three *bochurim* who had been duped into involvement in a criminal enterprise and had been imprisoned in Japan. These *bochurim* hadn't sought Rav Sraya's aid, nor were their families members of his community, but their plight affected him so deeply that Rav Sraya appealed to a prominent public figure, remonstrating with him repeatedly both in person and in writing in an effort to convince him to serve as a character witness for the imprisoned boys. Rav Sraya hoped that his testimony would help extricate them from their predicament.

Responsibility for Klal Yisroel

After Rav Sraya's passing, his family members discovered among his belongings a large collection of notes that he had written to himself, along with letters that he had received from others that shed light on a hitherto unknown dimension of his life and personality. One of his missives to himself consisted of three words: "*Bishvili nivra ha'olam*—The world was created for me." Those three words are a source of enormous responsibility. If a person feels that the world was created for him, then he will feel a tremendous sense of responsibility to the world. In another note, Rav Sraya recorded his resolution to act as if every one of his actions had the potential to tilt the scales of judgment both for himself and for the world as a whole. When he recited *Tikkun Chatzos*, he viewed it as part of his personal commitment to declare Hashem's sovereignty over the world. He would always quote the words of the *Rif*, "Therefore, a person must always view himself as if the entire world depends on him." When it is obvious to a person that his actions will affect all of *Klal Yisroel*, that alone will impel him to attain perfection. Amazingly, as much as Rav Sraya seemed to have withdrawn from the world in the pursuit of his service of Hashem, he was perpetually attentive to the troubles and needs of the community as a whole.

Davening for Our Enemies' Defeat

His thoughts were constantly focused on the troubles of both the Jewish community as a whole and individual Jews. When Jews began falling prey to Arab terrorism, Rav Sraya began sounding the *shofar* after davening, in fulfillment of the *mitzvah de'Oraisa* of *tekias shofar* at a time of distress. Every morning, he would open a newspaper and would immediately turn to the notices requesting *tefillos* for people who were ill. He would then recite the words "*Keil na refa na lah*," and would immediately read all of the names aloud. He would often burst into tears when reading about tragedies that had befallen people whom he had never even met. When three teenage boys were abducted in Gush Etzion and their fate remained unknown for many days, Rav Sraya began leading *Selichos* in his *bais medrash* and then in his home, despite the fact that he was frail and suffering from illness at the time. In 2005, when the residents of the Gaza region were driven from their homes and even the deceased were exhumed from their graves, Rav Sraya was deeply pained by their suffering. He kept a list in his *siddur* of the leaders of various Arab states who regularly announced their intentions to destroy the people of Israel and he davened every day for their downfall.

Fasting on Account of Arab Terrorism

One of Rav Sraya's personal notes, dated in the year 5730/1970, stated the following: "*Elul* 5730. Before *Elul*, I planned that on every one of these holy days, I would write down my thoughts concerning the *avodah* of that day. But then a terrible disaster struck at the beginning of *Elul*, when several planes were captured by beastly Arab murderers. Many of the passengers on those planes are among our Jewish brethren—men, women, and children, including several great *talmidei chachomim* and righteous men and women. All of them were taken to a desert in Jordan, where they were kept in those airplanes in the blazing heat. If not for Hashem's assistance, they would already have been killed there. Even now, several dozen of our fellow Jews

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remain in captivity there, facing the threat of murder, *Rachmana litzlan*. May Hashem have mercy on them and redeem them on this day. This incident disrupted everything, and I began *davening*, fasting, and crying out at the *kevorim* of *tzaddikim*, in Meron, and so forth. This made me unable to focus on anything about *Elul*, even though this saddening incident is itself a tremendous source of *mussar* in advance of the Days of Judgment. Nevertheless, we have to prepare, and so I am beginning to write about it today, on the 13th of *Elul*...



Prayers for the Hostages in Entebbe

Another document in this archive reveals Rav Sraya's actions during the Entebbe hostage crisis in 1976. He begins by explaining the reason he felt the need to record the events in writing: "So that there will be a remembrance of Hashem's kindnesses and wonders, and the fact that the *tefillas* of Jewish people are heard and are effective." Here is a brief excerpt of this document: "I do not recall the spiritual awakening that took place within religious circles in Eretz Yisroel being particularly extraordinary. However, I was very worried about the possible outcome, *chas veshalom*. One evening, there was a large *tefillah* gathering that was held, not at my initiative, in the Ahavas Chesed *shul*. The *shul* was full, mainly with *yungeleit* and *bnei Torah*. They



Standing opposite the *makom haMikdosh*, with his suit torn on both sides.

recited *Tehillim*, *Selichos*, and the *Shlosh Esrei Middos*. (I indicated to the people standing around me that they shouldn't recite the *Shlosh Esrei Middos*, since it wasn't yet midnight.) The event created tremendous inspiration and ended after midnight, and then I recited *Tikkun Chatzos*. But I didn't feel that that was sufficient, and I tried to organize a trip to Meron to *daven* and perform *Hakafos* there, similar to what we did on *Chol Hamoed Sukkos* of the year 5734 with Rav Yosef Toledano *zt"l* after the Yom Kippur War began, when we performed *hakafos* there and that *tefillah* served to accomplish

something. In this case, for some reason I was not successful in organizing a group, and I decided to make the trip on my own. 'In a place where there is no man....' When I arrived in Meron, I found no one there. I performed *hakafos* and *davened*, and then I returned home with the hope that Hashem would fulfill all of our requests. I relied on the *Maggid*, who had taught the *Bais Yosef* that if *hakafos* are performed there at any time of trouble, salvation will come...."

Rav Sraya added that he did not fully understand why he had chosen Meron for his *tefillas*, rather than a place such as the *Kosel*, which was already accessible at that time. "If it is because of the Vilna Gaon's teaching that the *Shechinah* rests on *kivrei tzaddikim* today," he wrote, "then there is also a *maamar Chazal* that attests that the *Shechinah* has never departed from the *Kosel Hamaarovi*."



Concern for the Jews of Syria

In 1964, Rav Sraya learned from the newspapers about the plight of the remaining Jews of Syria. Overcome with concern for his brethren there, he began struggling to formulate plans to assist them. To his friend, Reb Meir Amsel *zt"l*, the editor of the periodical *Hamaor*, Rav Sraya wrote, "I am writing to you today about something that pertains to *Klal Yisroel* as a whole and to a matter of *pikuach nefesh* for many people. Since I am not familiar with political matters, and I do not know which leaders of *chareidi* Jewry in America or Europe to contact about this, I chose to write to you, so that you can determine who the appropriate people are to contact about this issue. I believe that it is a great *mitzvah*, and I have not heard of anyone who is involved with this matter at this time. I saw the pictures in the newspaper of the scene following the murder of a *yungerman* in Damascus, which I am attaching for your review. I believe that if our intentions are *lesheim Shomayim*, then it may be possible for us to succeed. The subject is the terrible plight of our Jewish brethren in Syria, among whom there are certainly G-d-fearing, wholesome people and *talmidei chachomim*... It has become known that the situation in Syria now is extremely bad... We have already heard about what they did to the captives who were there for some time. The tales of torture and

affliction that they experienced are truly hair-raising... What we must do is bring as much influence as possible to bear on the governments of America, England, and France, so that they will try to influence the Syrian government to stop torturing the Jews there and to allow them to live in peace and tranquility as they always have... It is very urgent for you to bring this to the attention of the *gedolei Yisroel* whom you know ... so that they can appeal to the governments of the United States, England, and France to attempt to influence those wicked Arabs to allow the Jews to live in peace."



Defying His Own Nature

As part of his concern for the Jewish people, on both a communal and an individual level, Rav Sraya sometimes felt it necessary to correct or reprove other people. His words of rebuke always came from a place of piety and virtue. He was never content with the fact that he himself was not guilty of wrongdoing. He always worked to benefit the community just as much as himself, and when it was impossible to affect the community as a whole, he worked tirelessly to influence anyone whom he could reach. Although he spent his life avoiding public attention, and he never sought prominence or positions of authority, he did not allow that to prevent him from speaking up when he felt it was called for. His sense of responsibility overcame his natural reluctance to assert authority over others. Many of his writings were also born of the desire to benefit the community in areas that seemed to require strengthening.



"I Will Be Your Father"

A prominent *talmid chochom* once related, "I was a child when my father passed away, and my grieving mother took me away from the city where I was born and went to live in her parents' home in Bnei Brak. As a child, I *davened* in Rav Sraya's *vosikin minyan*, and he was invariably kind and solicitous toward me. I had some conflicts at home with my mother and with my grandparents, and one day Rav Sraya called me over and said, 'I have heard an unconfirmed rumor that you have not been getting along with your mother and your grandparents. I am sure that the situation isn't exactly as it was reported, but still, since these are extremely serious matters, I prepared something for you to keep in your pocket and to read from time to time.' He handed me an envelope, which contained several pages covered with his impeccable handwriting. He had laboriously copied a series of passages from *Pele Yoetz*, *Orchos Tzaddikim*, *Chofetz Chaim* and other *seforim* about the severe prohibition of causing pain to a widow, the obligation to show respect to one's grandparents, and similar issues.

"When I was about fourteen years old," he continued, "the *rov* once invited me to his home on a *Shabbos* morning after *davening*. He recited *Kiddush* on wine and served some *mezonos*, and then he said to me, 'There are some things that only a father speaks with his son about. But you have no father. Who is going to talk to you? Therefore, with your

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permission, I would like to speak with you about these things.' He spoke about the need for caution regarding matters of *kedusha*, and he explained to me that in these areas, a person's success depends on his formation of proper habits. If a person becomes accustomed to the correct behavior, it will be much easier for him. If a person develops improper habits, on the other hand, the results can be disastrous. 'You should know,' he admonished me, 'that refraining from impure thoughts is not only for *tzaddikim*. If people were aware of the severity of the prohibition, they would certainly be very careful about it, but their habits tend to get the better of them.' The *rov* spoke with great emotion about this issue, and tears fell from his eyes as he addressed it. That lesson has accompanied me throughout my life and has given me strength on many occasions."



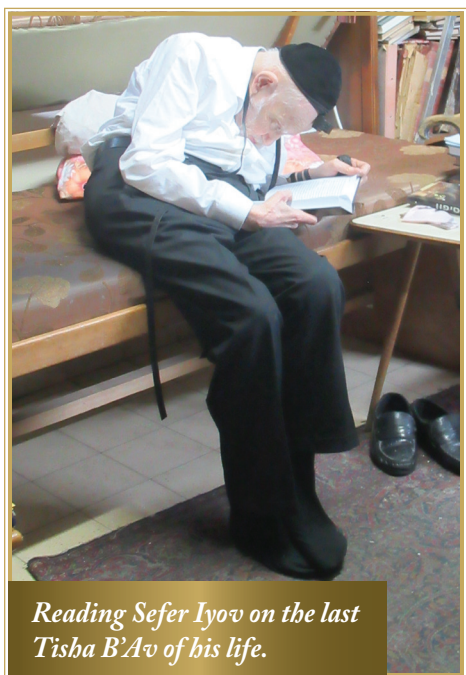
Rebuking a Cardinal

Rav Sraya's words of reproof were not reserved only for Jews who had maintained their connection to their religion. In 1995, the cardinal of Paris, a man who was born Jewish and whose parents had been killed in the Holocaust, visited Israel. When Rav Sraya heard about the visiting cardinal, he was deeply disturbed. How could a Jewish person be serving as a priest of a foreign religion, especially if that man was the son of parents who had been martyred *al kiddush Hashem*? Rav Sraya managed to obtain the cardinal's address and sent him a lengthy letter, in which his pointed reproof was expertly packaged in inoffensive language. He first introduced himself as a Jewish rabbi and the author of many *seforim* in the hope that those credentials would make the cardinal receptive to the letter's contents. He then quoted *Chazal's* depiction of Avrohom Avinu as the man who disseminated faith in Hashem throughout the world and added that Avrohom refrained from dealing with people who were devoid of potential, and that he only engaged in dialogue with people who spent their lives on productive activities. Therefore, he explained, since the cardinal was an intelligent man, he should certainly be receptive to a letter from a *rov*.

The *rov* went on to relate that the Vilna Gaon once encountered an apostate Jew and observed that the man had not recited a *brocha* before taking a drink. The Gaon

rebuked him for that lapse, and the apostate laughed at him. He had forsaken his religion altogether, he pointed out, so why would he be expected to observe any details of *halacha*? The Vilna Gaon insisted, though, that this was no excuse. "The fact that you took on the Christian religion does not exempt you from even the most minor *mitzvah*," the Gaon informed him. "At the end of your life, after 120 years, when you stand in judgment before Hashem, the King of all kings, you will be prosecuted and judged for your smallest infractions just like the greatest *rov* in *Klal Yisroel*. After all, you are a full-fledged Jew, and you will be properly punished for all of your wicked sins. Your denial of the Jewish faith will accomplish nothing for you, and you will still have to undergo the same punishments and will always remain Jewish, for the offspring of Avrohom will never be obliterated."

When the apostate heard the Gaon's rebuke, he began to quake. It did not take long for him to make a complete return to the religion that he had forsaken. "I am making a similar statement to you," Rav Sraya wrote to the cardinal. "Death will come one day to every man, and when that day comes, every one of us must give a reckoning before our Creator. How will you reply if you are asked in the Heavenly Court why you abandoned the Torah and *mitzvos* of the religion of Hashem? When that day comes, you will suffer severe punishments for every sin you have committed, even the smallest one, and no excuse will help you on the day of judgment. But you still have the ability to rectify this matter and to make it as if none of these things had happened. Even today, you can begin your life anew with a blank slate, exactly like a newborn infant. That will take place if you immediately repent before Hashem at the moment that you receive this letter, if you abandon your position and immigrate to our Holy Land to spend the rest of your days steeped in *teshuvah*, in Torah, and in the service of Hashem... Walk before Hashem in the holy, pure atmosphere of the Holy Land, in complete repentance, and all will be atoned for you as if it had never happened, for His mercy is unending. Then, after you conclude your life in pleasantness in this way, you will be admitted to *Gan Eden* to bask there for all eternity in the place inhabited by *baalei teshuvah*, where even the greatest of the righteous cannot stand, and you will receive the reward that is known to no one but Hashem. It would be a good thing for you to repent as soon as you receive this letter, to *daven Mincha* on that very day and to put on *tefillin* immediately. I quote the statement of the *Kuzari* concerning you: 'Your intentions are desirable; now please try to make your actions desirable as well.' Please have mercy on yourself and on the holy *Shechinah*, which is suffering tremendous anguish over your deeds. Have mercy on your holy parents, who may be at the highest level of *Gan Eden* since they were killed for Hashem's honor, but are deeply pained by the life their son leads. With this action, you will certainly bring them tremendous satisfaction. Please do not ignore the truths that I have written here, and do not be ashamed before any human being, for a person should never feel shame before anyone other than the Creator. I conclude this letter with the hope and prayer that Hashem will send a spirit of purity down from Heaven to all those who truly wish to serve Him."



Reading *Sefer Iyov* on the last *Tisha B'Av* of his life.

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Rav Chaim Friedlander's Testimony

Rav Sraya's sense of responsibility to the Jewish community could be traced back to his earliest days. Even during his youth, his sense of responsibility seemed far beyond his years. On that note, Rav Chaim Friedlander attested that during his visits to the Gra *shul* in Tel Aviv many years ago, he would invariably find Rav Sraya, who was a young man at the time, sitting and learning in solitude at the front of the *shul*, with the bearing and demeanor that one might expect of a venerable *talmid chochom*.

Protecting a Niftar

One example of this phenomenon during his youth can be found in a letter that Rav Sraya once sent to a close friend, Rav Zussman *zt"l*, in 1964. "Regarding what you wrote about the words of the Gra and the *Rashash*," the letter begins, "I haven't had an opportunity to examine the matter yet. I will write to you about this subject in the coming days, *bli neder*. This week, I was not in the best of health, and last week I was busy for two full days saving a small child who had passed away from the hands of surgeons who wished to cut up his body. After investing superhuman efforts, we succeeded in rescuing his body from them, *boruch Hashem*, and the *keverah* took place on Thursday night at midnight. For two days, I did not *daven Mincha* and I barely ate."

Furniture for a Russian Immigrant

There is no doubt that the majority of Rav Sraya's deeds have remained unknown, and they will likely remain that way permanently. There was nothing that he loathed more than publicity, and many of his acts of kindness took place in complete secrecy. Nevertheless, in some cases, his acts of kindness to others have been revealed by the beneficiaries themselves. Slowly, but surely, information came to light about his vast *tzedakah* activities, as people came forward and revealed that they had been supported by his largesse, or by the *tzedakah* funds that he managed.

Here is just one story that illustrates his munificence: An elderly woman who had immigrated from Israel to Russia appeared one afternoon outside the Tiferes Tzion *bais medrash* and revealed in broken Yiddish—the only language she spoke other than Russian—that she lived in Ramat Gan and had no way to furnish her home, and she had come to Bnei Brak in the hope that the good Jews there would assist her. When she asked the identity of the *rov*, several of the *yeshiva bochurim* pointed to Rav Sraya, who was still *davening Mincha*. The woman waited until he emerged, and then approached him and poured out her tale of woe with the handful of Yiddish words she knew. The *rov* took down her address and



promised to deal with the situation. On the spot, he summoned two of his family members and ordered them to visit her apartment and to report on the conditions under which she lived. They traveled to Yerushalayim and found that the situation was exactly as she had reported it, and the *rov* then sent the necessary furnishings to her home.

Shoes for a Poor Bochor

After Rav Sraya's passing, one of his *talmidim* related that during his time as a *yeshiva bochor* in Tiferes Tzion, he often discussed his learning with Rav Sraya. As the son of poor parents, he wore shoes that were worn and tattered. One day, Rav Sraya informed the young man that he had received a package for him from one of his relatives abroad, and that he did not know the identity of the sender or what the package contained. The young man naively believed Rav Sraya's story and took the package, in which he found a pair of brand new, sturdy shoes. A few days later, he told the story to another *bochor* in the *yeshiva*, and the latter revealed that he, too, had been told by the *rov* that a package had mysteriously arrived for him. In that case, the delivery consisted of a winter coat to replace his previous coat, which had long grown threadbare.

Saving Sunrise

In 1974, a proposal was advanced in the Israeli government for Daylight Savings Time to be extended throughout the winter months as well. This would have caused *alos hashachar* and *neitz* to be very late during the winter, and workers who had to rise early for their jobs would have been forced to *daven* regularly before sunrise. Rav Sraya was adamantly opposed to this, and he worked tirelessly to prevent the proposal from being passed. He certainly could have found plenty of reasons to refrain from dealing with the issue. After all, it didn't impact him personally, and he had no influence within the government. Nevertheless, he toiled to avert the potential decree, and he even put out an open letter in a widely read periodical, calling on the public to oppose the "gezeirah against *tefillah*."

Standing Guard for Yiddishkeit

In 1949, when he was only 22 years old, Rav Sraya became aware of a disturbing new trend, as it was becoming increasingly common for *bris milah* to be performed by doctors in hospitals, rather than by *mohalim*. He considered this a violation of the character of the *mitzvah* and a major threat to the continuation of the proper practice, and he penned a letter to a prominent *rov*, exhorting him to do everything in his power to address the situation. During the same year, he also wrote to a religious newspaper and asked it to refrain from printing flags for *Simchas Torah* that contained names of Hashem, out of concern that these items might be treated disrespectfully.

In 1950, Rav Sraya came across a newspaper article that related that a child passenger on a ship belonging to an Israeli company had died, and since there was nowhere on the ship to keep the body, the crew had thrown it into the sea. The article added that this was the typical manner in which such incidents were handled. Rav Sraya reacted by writing a vehement letter to the editor, condemning the practice and those who were responsible for it.

In 1951, Rav Sraya sent a letter to the administration of the Eidah Hachareidis in which he presented a detailed proposal as to how they could ensure an adequate supply of fruits and vegetables during the *Shemittah* year and benefit *Shemittah* observant farmers despite the government's restrictions on imports.

These habits continued in his later years as well. He protested when the procedures for *keverah* began to be changed and several longstanding *minhagim* were discontinued, and when the practice of multi-story burial began to make a comeback, he instructed several of his family members to combat the phenomenon, and published several letters about the issue. When he heard about a plan for a *shul* to be built above a women's *mikvah*, he sent a personal letter to the authorities protesting the plan, and he refused to rest until he had received official notification that the plan had been canceled. When he noted that the standard *heter iska* in banks had been changed in a way that he felt invalidated the *heter*, he was not content with merely writing

a personal *heter iska* for himself. Instead, he sent a flurry of letters to everyone involved in the issue, and he personally made a trip to meet with an individual who he felt would be able to address the matter.

These are only a few examples of the actions of a man whose life was characterized by his profound concern for every other Jew in every respect.

Reinstating the Original Tikkun Chatzos

At a young age, Rav Sraya researched the subject of the precise time for *davening kevosikin* and concluded that it was a function of the sunrise that was visible to the eye, rather than the time identified by astronomers. He wrote extensively about the subject and worked to disseminate his conclusion, which was a highly daring move, considering that the standard practice at the time was for *minyanim* to base their timing on the astronomical definition of sunrise. In fact, there were many *gedolei Yisroel* who *davened vosikin* and paid no heed to the time when the sun actually became visible. It was quite unusual for a young *talmid chochom* to promote such a radical change, but Rav Sraya's efforts paid off. Today, hundreds of *minyanim* with thousands of *mispallelim* base their timing on the actual appearance of the sun, instead of *davening Shemoneh Esrei* at the earlier time of sunrise, when their *tefillos* would be considered only *b'dieved*.

A similar situation involved *Tikkun Chatzos*. At a young age, Rav Sraya observed that the original text of *Tikkun Chatzos*, which is attributed to the *Arizal*, was fairly short, and that it would take no longer to recite than the bedtime *Krias Shema*. However, over the years, many more passages had been added to it by other illustrious *rabbonim*, to the point that it had become a lengthy procedure. Rav Sraya felt that the length of *Tikkun Chatzos* had created an undesirable situation, since many people were deterred from reciting it on account of its length. As a result, he commissioned the printing of the original text of *Tikkun Chatzos* alone—and he was only 32 years old at the time. Innumerable people recite *Tikkun Chatzos* today as a result of his initiative.

Reaching the Heavens

At the conclusion of the first twelve months after his passing, Rav Sraya was eulogized by Rav Meir Auerbach, who quoted the *posuk* in which the Torah relates that Yaakov dreamed about "a ladder that stood on the ground, and its head reached the heavens, and the *malachim* of G-d were ascending on descending on it." Rav Auerbach proclaimed, "Rav Sraya was a 'ladder that stood on the ground'; he lived among us, just like one of us, but his head reached the heavens. The *mitzvos* that most people tend to ignore were elevated to a lofty status by Rav Sraya, who saw them as major *sugyas* with many details in their own right. Those *mitzvos* were the '*malachim*' that ascended on account of his efforts. And the *malachim* that descended were the sublime concepts of *Kabbolah* and other such areas of wisdom, which Rav Sraya brought down to earth by elucidating them in the greatest detail."