

TAKING BEAUTY IN STRIDE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Soro's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years; the years of Soro's life

Be'er Yosef: From the unusual breakdown of Soro's life-span, Rashi (echoing Chazal) tells us a number of things. The different groups of years are meant to be compared to each other, rather than contrasted. Thus, Rashi teaches that Soro as beautiful at twenty as she was at seven. The final phrase, according to Rashi, means to show constancy throughout all her years.

Let's start with the first point. We are startled that physical attractiveness is worth mentioning altogether. Tzadikim are always praised for matters of real consequence and personal achievement - their mitzvos and refinement of character. Why should we care about her external beauty, especially when she played no role in achieving it? Furthermore, comparing her beauty at age twenty to what it was when she was seven makes no sense to us at all. Physical beauty peaks at around twenty, when a woman achieves full maturity. We don't associate beauty with a seven year old at all!

A passage in the gemara² steers us in the right direction. "Why was she [Soro] called Yiscah? Because sochsah/ she saw with ruach ha-kodesh. Another interpretation: because all sochin/ gazed at her beauty."

At first, these two approaches appear to oppose each other in the extreme. The first speaks of great spiritual achievement; the second deals with a physical attribute. Upon reflection, however, they are complementary to each other, and arrive at the same place. They tell us that Soro rose to prophetic prominence despite her gift of great beauty. While a lesser person would have savored and nurtured that beauty, Soro simply ignored it. Her great spiritual stature left her with little interest in the transitory pleasures that excite so many other people. Her reputation for great beauty did not boost her pride or put a dent in her humility.

Precisely this point resides in the comparison of Soro at twenty with Soro the 7 year old. A typical child of seven doesn't comprehend what it means to be beautiful. At twenty, she understands very well. Soro, however, as beautiful as she was, maintained at twenty the indifference to her superficial excellence.

Rashi's take on the concluding phrase of our pasuk - that all her years were equal and equivalent - means something similar. Typically, different stages of life are distinguished by different strengths. In

youth, a person might show vigor, strength, agility and speed - but not be remarkably deep and comprehending. Old age brings discernment and understanding - but it is accompanied by a loss of power and speed. Soro, however, did not show this separation of attributes. Her mind was composed and settled when she was young, and she was able to act with zeal and alacrity well into her years. All her days were marked by a shared possessions of all kinds of talents.

This message was emblazoned on the famous coin minted by Avrohom and Soro. According to the gemara,³ one side bore the imprint of a young couple, while a representation of an old pair graced the reverse. The coin conveyed the idea of the sameness in the years of this couple. The virtues for which they were known in their younger days accompanied them in their later years - and vice versa.

You can see this at work in the previous parshah, where Avrohom at an advanced age and in an as state of infirmity nonetheless runs⁴ to Soro's time, and the aged Soro hurries in preparing food for the three wayfarers.

The zeal of our patriarch and matriarch were well noted by HKBH. Perhaps it was specifically because they acted with youthful vigor to imitate Hashem's attribute of chesed that He rewarded them, measure for measure, by returning both of them to the flower of youth.

Sources:

1. Based on Be'er Yosef, Bereishis 23:1
 2. Megillah 14A
 3. Bava Kamma 97B
 4. Bereishis 18:6
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