

A GIANT IN GENEROSITY

by Rabbi Label Lam

And Sarai said to Avram, "Behold now, HASHEM has restrained me from bearing; please come to my handmaid; perhaps I will be built up from her." And Avram hearkened to Sarai's voice. (Breishis 16:2)

What does Sara mean that she will be "built up" from raising a surrogate child? In which way will she be "built up"?

A good many years ago when my wife returned to work from maternity leave after having given birth to our first child and she was greeted by a senior co-worker, Esther, who was already raising a large family. She had a heart for my wife's situation. What Esther told her was more than a little puzzling. After a little discussion we think we figured out what might be the meaning to her riddle-like statement.

She said empathetically, "Dear, I know how you feel. When you have one child it's very hard. When you have two it gets even harder. However, when you have three it gets easier and when you hit seven then you're really flying."

We reasoned that when you have one child, it's hard because you still want to do the things you did when you didn't have that cute little bundle to care for. You want to go shopping and eat lunch with friends but you need the help of Bubby or a local babysitter. It's a huge inconvenience.

When you have two it gets even harder to do all the things you want to do. You can strap one and leave one at a baby sitter. You can make a round-robin play group with a couple of friends so you can go out foot loose and fancy free at the cost of having to care for a some other kids including your own.

Here comes the brain teaser. When you have three kids though it gets easy because then you would need a real professional babysitting service and even Bubby won't answer your calls anymore. So what do you do?

You have one choice and that is to accept that this is your new role as a mommy and the luxury of going out care free like the "old days" is over. Then miraculously, and paradoxically, it gets easy!

When you get to seven and more then you're really flying because it's not about "you" anymore. You become so absorbed in the enormity and the constancy of the task that your identity is subsumed by the greater cause. You only pause long enough to regain strength to be able to give even more.

The Mesilas Yesharim spells out a program for developing hidden potentials. It goes like this,

"Outward movements awaken an inner desire!" It's a little like but much more than, "fake it to you make it" or maybe not. You are actually making it.

The exercise of spiritual muscles builds and strengthens those valued traits. If someone practices kindness enough then they are literally transformed from being a reluctant "doer of kindness" to a passionate "person of kindness."

It was years after digesting well Esther's theory that we were driving to Boston as a family and we were at that stage where it was promised that my wife we should be already flying. I was casually observing the whole way how true it was.

There wasn't one uninterrupted moment in the four hour drive that my wife was not washing a face, putting cheese on a cracker, changing a tape, reading a book, filling a drinking and even changing a diaper and more. There I was just driving and watching all the while this wondrous phenomenon.

Sara dedicated her entire life to feeding and teaching the world. However, what she longed for more than anything was that fixed responsibility that accompanies raising a child to spiritual heights which results in the mother's metamorphosis into ... **a giant in generosity**