

HAFTORAH COMMENTARY PARSHAS VAYERA

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel

M'lochim 2 4:1

This week's Haftorah reveals to us an incredible dimension of faith and its astounding result. Out of deep appreciation to a Shunamite lady's hospitality the Prophet Elisha promised that she would bear a son. This startling prediction raised major concern due to her elderly state coupled with her physical inability of bearing children. Indeed, she sensed some reservation in Elisha's words and expressed her strong desire that the child live a full, healthy life. (see Malbim's comment to 4:14,16) Elisha responded by repeating his promise and predicting the date of her son's birth. His promise was fulfilled and she gave birth to a boy on the exact date of prediction. When the boy matured, sudden tragedy befell him and he took seriously ill and died soon after in his mother's arms. The Shunamite lady did not despair and immediately traveled to Elisha. Upon arrival she calmly reminded him of his promise, whereupon Elisha ordered his servant to rush to the scene of her motionless child. Elisha prayed to Hashem and warmed the boy's body and Hashem responded and returned the child to life.

When reading these p'sukim we are overwhelmed by the Shunamite's manner in dealing with her son's sudden passing. Scriptures record her response and state, "She arose, placed the (dead) child on the prophet's bed, closed the door and left." (4:21) There is no mention here of any emotional outburst, cry of despair or feeling of grief or anguish. Scriptures continue to relate that she calmly requested a donkey and informed her husband that she was rushing to the prophet on a peaceful journey. Even after arriving at Elisha's doorstep she maintained that everything at home was in order. Only after entering his private quarters did she allude to his promise and hint to the seriousness of her situation.

This entire episode reveals the Shunamite's incredible strength of character rooted in her total faith in Hashem and His prophets. She displayed an unparalleled degree of trust and regarded physical impossibilities within the realm of reality. Her conviction in Hashem was so strong that she sincerely anticipated His performance of a miracle of major proportions. She simply refused to accept that her miracle boy's life ended so soon. She reasoned that if Hashem defied His rules of nature to grace her with a son He could likewise defy them and return her son to life. Since Hashem accepted Elisha's first request for a miracle Hashem would conceivably accept Elisha's second request for another miracle. Therefore, with total conviction she calmly awaited a nearly unprecedented experience - the revival of her dead son. Indeed, Hashem rewarded her for this perfect faith and she merited to

witness one of Hashem's greatest revelations of all times.

Where did she develop such faith and conviction? Although we know that Hashem's ability is limitless we are also aware of the improbability of His altering His master plan for the world. The revival of the dead is an experience reserved, for the most part, for the end of days and is not meant to happen before then. Prior to the Shunamite's miracle world history saw the revival of two people, our Patriarch Yitzchok during the Akeida and the Tzorfati boy revived by the Prophet Eliyahu. (see Pirkei DR' Eliezer 31, M'lochim 1 17:22) How could this Shunamite even dream of such supernatural occurrences, let alone believe that they would happen to her son?

One could suggest that she drew her strength from a lesson in this week's sedra. We read this week about three common travelers who informed our Patriarch Avrohom that his wife, Sora would bear a son. Sora, a ninety year old barren lady whose husband was also quite elderly, didn't place much value on this prediction. In fact, she found the travelers' words somewhat amusing and chuckled at the notion of her bearing a child at her ripe age. Hashem reprimanded her and said, "Why did Sora laugh saying, 'Can I give birth when I am so aged?'" Hashem continued and said, "Is anything out of Hashem's reach?" (Breishis 18:14) We are somewhat puzzled by this dialogue. Sora's response merely reflected the true improbability of child bearing at her ripe age. Why should she, physically incapable of giving birth and well past that stage, entertain the bizarre phenomena of returning to her youth? Nachmanides places this in perspective and reminds us that this prediction came from three angels disguised as ordinary Arabs. Our Matriarch Sora was totally unaware of their true identity and seemingly responded in a most appropriate way. She certainly appreciated their blessing but had long given up on considering such ridiculous things. Nachmanides questions why then did Hashem fault and reprimand her for a natural and logical response?

He answers that Sora's faith in Hashem should have exceeded such physical restrictions. With her level of knowledge she should have entertained the possibility of the nearly impossible. She should have believed that such miracles could actually happen or respond, at least, by wishing that Hashem willed them to be so. Sora's profound understanding of Hashem's ways should have left room in her mind for even the most remote of suggestions. She certainly realized that Hashem could do anything and should have eagerly entertained the fulfillment of this blessing. (Nachmanides to Breishis 18:15)

This interpretation, apparently, understands that Sora should have valued the blessing of common ordinary travelers. Indeed, the Sages teach us never to take anyone's blessing or curse lightly because of their possible degree of truth. (Mesichta Baba Kamma 93a) In this vein, even the seemingly ridiculous words of ordinary Arabs has merit. Who knows if their words were not a reflection of a miraculous development in the near future. Although it was highly improbable for this to be so, the possibility did exist and should not have been overlooked. Maybe these travelers were angels in disguise delivering a message from Above! Our Matriarch Sora's chuckle reflected that child bearing for her was outside of reality. Hashem reprimanded her and reminded her that nothing

is ever outside of reality. If she had considered things from Hashem's perspective she would have concluded that nothing is beyond His capability or difficult to bring about.

Sora should have hearkened to the definitive tone of the travelers' prediction. As remote as it seemed the Arab travelers may have been sending her a message. After all, Sora was privileged to witness Hashem's involvement in every step of her life. Hashem therefore expected her never to limit His degree of involvement and respond favorably to this most remote prediction or blessing and contemplate its possible reality.

One could suggest that the Shunamite lady thoroughly absorbed this lesson and applied it to her own predicament. She, in fact, already merited to witness a miracle of major proportions. She was also incapable of child bearing and well on in her years before she miraculously conceived her son. Once she experienced this, she thoroughly researched Hashem's guidelines for miracles and concluded that nothing was beyond reality. She totally identified with this principle and continuously viewed her son's existence in this light. When her sudden tragedy occurred she saw in it the perfect opportunity to practice her belief. Drawing on her inner principles of faith she immediately engaged them into action. She fully believed that her son's death was no cause for despair because Hashem could easily restore him if He so willed. Consequently, she immediately traveled to Elisha and elicited him to daven for a miracle. Her unwavering faith served her well and in its merit Hashem responded to Elisha's prayers and restored her son to life.

We consistently daven to Hashem to end our troubles and bring us the long awaited Messianic era. For many people it is difficult to conceptualize or fathom how this phenomena will come about. At present, there are so many obstacles in the way that any stage of redemption will require unprecedented miracles. In the recent tragic American experience Hashem displayed untold levels of compassion. Close to one thousand souls were spared from a horrifying death due to unexpected Divine intervention. For those fortunate people Hashem's perfectly timed miracles will undoubtedly remind them of His constant involvement in their lives. But, even we who are privileged to learn of these miracles can draw inspiration from them. Let us daven to Hashem that as He has begun showing us His open hand He should continue doing so until the entire world recognizes His sovereignty and warm relationship with His devout children.

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