

SHE JUST LAUGHED...

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of Vayera. "Vayera ailav Hashem [Hashem appeared to him (to Avrohom)][18:1]." The passuk [verse] doesn't state the purpose of this visit nor does it state what Hashem said to Avrohom. Rashi therefore understands that this passuk is a continuation from the last passuk of the previous parsha which dealt with Avrohom's bris milah [circumcision]. Rashi teaches that the purpose of Hashem's appearance to Avrohom was 'bikur cholim' [visiting the sick].

Avrohom lifted his eyes and saw three 'men' approaching. He, in spite of his pain, rushed to greet them and to invite them for a meal. They were in fact three angels, each with an individualized mission. One informed Avrohom that in one year's time, Sarah would give birth to a son.

Sarah was standing in a doorway behind the angel when she heard him make this pronouncement. She was a mere eighty nine years old at the time and Avrohom was ninety nine. "Sarah laughed wondering: After I've aged will I regain my youth?[18:12]"

"Hashem spoke to Avrohom saying: 'Why did Sarah laugh... Is there anything that is beyond Me?[18:13-14]'"

"And Sarah denied it saying 'I didn't laugh.' And he (Avrohom) said: 'No, you laughed.'[18:15]"

This entire episode with Sarah's laughter and subsequent denial is very hard to understand.

The Ramban explains that, although Hashem had already told Avrohom that he was going to have a son, Avrohom had not relayed that prophecy to Sarah, thinking that Hashem would inform her Himself. Furthermore, in Sarah's eyes, these visitors were nothing more than idolatrous merchants who had perchanced past their tent. Therefore, there was really no reason that she should have attached any credibility to their seemingly ridiculous declaration.

If so, what was the complaint against Sarah that Hashem voiced to Avrohom?

The Ramban explains that the thought of having a child should not have been so astounding in Sarah's eyes. Instead of scornful laughter her reaction should have been along the lines of a heartfelt: 'From your lips to G-d's ears.'

The Ramban explains further that when Avrohom spoke to Sarah about her attitude, she thought that he was basing his censure on her not having shown happiness when she heard their declaration. She denied it. Once Avrohom stated in a definitive manner: "No, you laughed," she realized that he was basing it on what Hashem had revealed to him. She therefore remained quiet.

The Noam Elimelech explains in a different way which I think has some applications to us.

He writes that a person must aspire to reach such a heightened state of 'Hashem-awareness' that even an 'amazing' event won't be a cause for surprise. Hashem runs the world and can do anything He wants. On the contrary, the fact that Hashem conceals Himself behind the cloak of nature is very out of the ordinary and quite 'amazing'. Hashem breaking nature and doing His will regardless of what's considered normal is in fact a natural state of His existence and will.

He explains that Sarah laughed with gleeful surprise. What a miracle! Amazing!

Hashem complained to Avrohom: "Is there anything that is beyond Me?" Why was she so shocked? Was she being tricked by and falling into the clutches of nature's illusion?

Sarah was concerned that Avrohom shouldn't mistakenly think that she had scoffed at the thought of having a child. "And Sarah denied it saying 'I didn't laugh.'"

"And he (Avrohom) said: 'No, you laughed.'" On your level, the surprised happiness that you exhibited was tantamount to a scoffing laugh...

We certainly are not on a level where we're expected to accept supernatural events as commonplace, yet there are things which we shouldn't find so surprising. We too are misled by the natural world and are 'surprised' and gleeful when scientific advances lead us right back to the knowledge we already had through the Torah. Of course, there should be no contradictions between science and Torah. One is the probing and revealing of the world's secrets through painstaking experimentation and observation. The other is the knowledge of those very same secrets through the Creator's revelations.

Maimonides, through his knowledge of the Oral Transmission of Torah, writes that the lunar month is exactly twenty nine and a half days, plus $793/1080$ of an hour. This comes out to .732459 of an hour or .03059 of a day. The month is therefore 29.53059 days.

NASA, based on information gathered through the most sophisticated telescope they had, concluded that the length of the lunar month is 29.530588. Rounded up to the nearest one hundred thousandth this comes out to the identical number always known to us. When the scientist was told that the Jews already had that number, his response was: Good guess...

That's where we run into difficulties with science. When a monopoly of knowledge has been proclaimed...

However, we should accept these findings as commonplace.

The Talmud [Sotah] teaches that one should only pray for a specific gender during the first forty days of pregnancy. After that point, it's too late as the gender has already been set.

Newsweek reported that researchers at the Institute for Biomedical Research in Cambridge, Mass.

'discovered' that in the seventh week of pregnancy, the gene which determines the gender of an embryo launches a process that leads to sexual development.

Surprised?

Good Shabbos,

Yisroel Ciner

This week's parsha-insights is dedicated in mazel tov to Howie HersHKovich and Martha Vays in honor of their upcoming wedding. May they be zocheh to much happiness together and to build a bayis ne'eman b'Yisroel.

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