

# I 'NA' KNOW...

*by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner*

Avrohom was tested ten times, each test bringing latent potential to the realm of realization, programming the spiritual DNA that would be passed on to his descendants, the nation of Israel.

Soon after Avrohom's arrival in Eretz Yisroel, a famine struck. According to Rashi, this was one of his tests, seeing if he would have complaints against Hashem who first instructed him to go to Eretz Yisroel and was now rendering it unfit for him to remain. Avrom, personifying the middah [attribute] of bitachon [firm trust] in Hashem, accepts the Divine decision, even though its understanding is beyond him, and descends to Mitzrayim.

"And it was, as they drew close to Mitzrayim, and he (Avrom) said to Sarei (Avrohom's wife, name later changed to Sarah): Hineh 'na' yadati [I 'na' know] that you are a good-looking woman." [12:11] Afraid of what the Egyptians might do to the husband of such a woman, they agree to only mention that Sarah is Avrohom's (married) sister (she was actually his niece, however, with grandchildren called and considered children, a niece would also be called and considered a sister).

Much discussion is generated over the word 'na'--"I 'na' know that you are a good-looking woman." The usual meaning of 'na' is please. However, Rashi here explains it to mean 'now'.

What is the meaning of Avrohom now being aware of Sarah's beauty?

Rashi explains that the simple understanding is that Avrohom, of course, was well aware of her beauty and had been for quite a long time. However, now that they were traveling to a place known for its adulterous ways (S'forno) where such beauty was not commonplace, Avrohom now needed to be concerned about that beauty and take steps to avert any harm that her beauty might cause.

The Gaon of Vilna writes that a very righteous person has what's called 'chut shel chessed' [a 'thread of charm'] surrounding them. The Talmud [Megillah 13A] teaches that Queen Esther actually had a greenish complexion. She did not have natural beauty, yet her righteousness gave off a beautiful glow.

The difference between a natural beauty and a 'chut shel chessed' can be discerned in a situation where that beauty will cause others to stumble. In such a situation, the natural beauty will remain, posing its dangers, while the 'chut shel chessed' will dissipate.

The Vilna Gaon explains that when Avrohom saw that Sarah's beauty had remained, even as they were approaching the dangers of Mitzrayim, he now knew that (in addition to the beauty of her

righteousness) she had natural beauty and he had better plan to stave off that danger.

Alternatively, Rashi offers a different explanation. He writes that the normal way of the world is that a person gets harried from the wearying effects of travel (ever try riding a camel for even five minutes?) and looks it. However, when Avrohom saw that Sarah's beauty was unaffected by the rigors of travel, he now understood just how beautiful she was and he knew that they had to make some preventative plans before they reached Mitzrayim.

Although there are many different interpretations as to Avrohom's awareness of Sarah's natural beauty, his appreciation of Sarah's innate beauty and qualities resounds throughout the story of their life together and her subsequent death.

As such, the relationship of Avrohom and Sarah stands as a beacon of light to us, thousands of years later...

I've witnessed many relationships. Some have been worn out and have lost their luster from the rigors of travel down the road of life while others have built on the hardship-tests that life invariably deals, becoming stronger and more beautiful with every jolt and bump along life's road.

I remember my father and I bringing my grandfather to the hospital to visit his wife, my grandmother. At the time, my grandparents a"h had been married over sixty years. While we were there visiting, a nurse came to take my grandmother out of her bed for some sort of treatment. My grandfather immediately jumped up to smooth out the sheets, making sure that my grandmother would be as comfortable as possible when she would again lay down.

Each Shabbos, my grandfather would walk the considerable distance to the hospital to spend the afternoon with her. My brother told me the impression it made on him when he went to pick him up after Shabbos and found him sitting next to her, stroking her arm. Seeing the beauty in each other, each of them in their eighties.

I've also witnessed tragically sad situations. Relationships where the surreal glow of the wedding smiles have become jaded over time.

Each relationship is, of course, unique and each has its particular hurdles and difficulties. However, a common denominator in any good relationship is the focus on the positive. Every one has faults and every relationship is begun with that realization. The early glow comes from the focus being on the beautiful aspects of each person.

As we wind our way down the long and winding road of life, our focus must be on the positive qualities of those making the trek with us, allowing us to enjoy the constant surprise of 'na' [now] knowing and realizing just how beautiful our co-travelers are.

Good Shabbos,  
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