

PARASHAS VAYAIRA / 5769

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

God said to Avraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed give birth, being so old?' Is anything too wondrous for God? At the appointed time I will return to you, in this season, and Sarah will have a son." (Bereishis 18:13-14)

Is there anything too wondrous for God? Of course not, and Sarah Imeinu obviously knew that, and lived with the reality of that. That is the essence of what it means to be Sarah Imeinu, and the wife of Avraham Avinu: to believe that God is omnipotent, Creator of the world and able to change it by simply willing it. No, God's ability to do anything He wants was not the issue for Sarah Imeinu, and the reason for her laugh of disbelief.

Rather, she laughed because she thought to herself, "Why should God change Creation for me?" She thought, No one conceives at the age of 89 years, not even righteous people. For me to do so will require a great miracle ... one that she thought she did not deserve. In other words, her lack of belief was in herself, not in God, which God obviously knew, and yet, it was treated as a lack of trust in God. Why?

The following from the Leshem provides the answer: *They (the Generation of the Desert) made two major mistakes. Firstly, The Holy One, Blessed is He, does not play games with His creations, as the Talmud teaches (Avodah Zarah 3a). All a person can do is constantly strengthen himself for: One who comes to purify himself receives help (Shabbos 104a; Yoma 38b). There it says that if a person sanctifies himself a little they sanctify him a lot. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 114)*

Though it certainly seems at times as if Heaven has a sense of humor, when it comes to the serious matters of life, God is all business. Likewise, if God makes a promise for good, you have to believe it will come true. It might overwhelm you with joy to even just consider the possibility, as did the news of Yitzchak's impending birth to Avraham in last week's parsha. However, it should not make you doubt, not in God, and not in yourself.

Their second mistake was with respect to the concept of bitachon — trust in God. In truth, nothing stands in the way of bitachon, as it says in the Midrash: One who trusts in God will be surrounded by kindness (Tehillim 32:10); even an evil person who trusts in God will be surrounded by kindness (Midrash Tehillim 32:10). It further says: Many are the agonies of the wicked (Ibid.) — because they do not place their trust in The Holy One, Blessed is He (Ibid.). See there. (Ibid.)

Hence, trust in God is so powerful that it guarantees results. Unfortunately, many people think that

they have full trust in God, when in fact, they only have full hope in God, meaning that they know He can save them, they hope He will save them, but doubt that He will. "After all," they reason to themselves, "What do we ever do to warrant such miracles?"

A true Ba'al Bitachon — one who has mastered trust in God — doesn't ask such questions. He doesn't just hope God will save him, he knows He will. That is, the Ba'al Bitachon easily assumes that redemption will come, one way or another, even if only at the very last micro-second. He doesn't walk into the Red Sea hoping that it will split. He walks into it knowing that it will split, even if just one moment before the drowning point.

Indeed, according to the Zohar, it was this very belief, the very trust in God's desire to save the Jewish people from the pursuing Egyptian army at all costs, that split the sea for them. If God is prepared to perform such miracles for evil people, if they would only trust in God, then how much more so is He prepared to perform great miracles and bring salvation for people who at least mean well!

Even for evil people? Yes, says the Midrash:

The Ramban says something similar. This is why it says, "Trust in God and do good" (Tehillim 37:3), and it does not say "Do good and trust in God." Rather, [from this we learn that] trust in God does not depend upon good deeds at all, but rather one should trust in God whether he is righteous or evil. (Ibid.)

It's a difficult concept to get used to, and an even harder one to implement and live with on a daily basis. However, those who have, can attest to the success they have had living on such a high spiritual level, even though they are the first to admit that they can afford to clean up their spiritual act somewhat.

And, they must, as the Leshem warns:

It concludes, however, with "do good" because if you do not [do teshuvah from past sins] then "they" will exact payment from you nevertheless. The Holy One, Blessed is He, is very patient, and will find the time to take payment from you (Sefer Emunah v'Bitachon, Ch. 1). (Ibid.)

This means that, if at the time of crisis, a person who still has a list of sins for which to atone, trusts that God will help him out, God will save the day for him. However, it also means that, if the person does not do teshuvah for those sins some time soon, a time will come when the same God who saved him because of his bitachon, will later exact punishment from him for not doing teshuvah in time!

Hence, if someone wants to accomplish something meaningful, he has to trust in God with a full heart, and how much more so, explains the Leshem, when it is the same thing God has promised, as in the birth of Yitzchak. A lack of belief in oneself does not come into play once God has already

promised a miraculous result, and doubting oneself becomes tantamount to doubting God, as the Leshem adds:

This is the issue: It is well known that the trait of fear of sin is one that is above all others, as it says: Happy is the one who constantly fears (Mishlei 28:14). Nevertheless, the main point of this is to protect oneself from that which can lead to transgression. However, the idea of worrying that maybe a sin may occur is not the trait of the righteous, as it says: "Of evil tidings he will have no fear, his heart is firm, confident in God" (Tehillim 112:7). For, since his heart is firm, confident in God: "His heart is steadfast, he shall not fear" (Ibid 8), as the commentators explain there, and as we have said regarding the matter of bitachon (Siman 3). This is certainly true for one who does not feel he has sinned, and even more so for one who has been promised [well-being] by The Holy One, Blessed is He. (Ibid. p. 115)

And, as had been the case with Sarah Imeinu. The fact that God had promised she would give birth to a son at her age meant that God was going to bless her with a son no matter where she was been holding at the time. And, even though we are not as fortunate as Sarah Imeinu to hear such promises directly from God, nevertheless, complete trust in God is a guarantee for success for anyone, says the Leshem, especially when it comes to succeeding at something that advances the cause of one's spiritual growth, and even more so, the ultimate goals of the Jewish people.