

TO SERVE OR NOT TO SERVE

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

In last week's Parsha Sarai suggested to Avram that he marry Hagar her maidservant. Avram married Hagar and she became pregnant. Hagar felt that as the future mother of Avram's sole heir she was deserving of becoming Avram's wife. Her status as Sarai's maidservant was no longer appropriate; she deserved better. Hagar became arrogant and rebellious toward Sarai. Sarai refused to ratify her advancement to the status of wife and insisted that Hagar remain her maidservant.

Hagar felt persecuted and abused by Sarai and fled into the desert. Hot, thirsty, tired, and pregnant, an angel appeared to Hagar and told her to return to the home of Avram and subject herself to Sarai. Hagar returned to the home of Avram and the employ of Sarai.

Rashi (15:1) references the Medresh that identified Hagar as the daughter of Pharaoh, a princess of Egypt. Upon leaving Egypt, Pharaoh said to Avram and Sarai, "Better that my daughter be a maidservant in the house of Avram than a princess in the house of Pharaoh."

What came over Pharaoh? What was his motive for sending away his daughter? What possessed him to do such a thing? He was the same king who did not want Avram to live among his people and influence them in any way (12:20). (Contrasted with Avimelech in this week's Parsha 20:15) Why would he offer his daughter to be a servant in the home of Avram? Did Hagar want to go?

In next week's Parsha Avraham instructed Eliezar to find a wife for Yitzchak. He explicitly did not want Yitzchak to marry Eliezar's daughter, even though Eliezar was a true Tzadik. Rashi (24:39) references the Medresh that explains why Avraham did not want Yitzchak to marry Eliezar's daughter. "Someone blessed should not marry with someone cursed." Eliezar was the son of Nimrod and great-grandson of Chum (10:8). Noach cursed Chum that he should be, "a servant to his brothers." Yitzchak, on the other hand, was the grandson of Shem who had been blessed by Noach and the son of Avraham who had been blessed by G-d. Therefore, Yitzchak was blessed and Eliezar's daughter was cursed, and "Someone blessed should not marry with someone cursed."

In last week's Parsha, Sarai told Avram to have children with Hagar, her maidservant. Hagar, the former princess of Egypt, was the direct descendent of Mitzrayim the son of Chum (10:6). Why was it ok for Avram who had been blessed by G-d to have a child with Hagar, the daughter of Chum who had been cursed by Noach, yet Yitzchak was forbidden to marry Eliezar's daughter?

Each of the Avos had a Midah -characteristic, that they had perfected. The characteristic was then

incorporated into the body of the Jewish people. Avraham was Chesed - kindness; Yitzchak was Gevurah - strength and discipline; and Yakov was Emes - truth. This is not to suggest that they didn't each have the qualities of the others, for they certainly did. However, they each had the one Midah that set them apart and made them unique.

The Midah of Chesed demands selflessness and compromise. The Midah of Gevurah demands selfishness and non-compromise. Chesed places the world first and you second. Gevurah allows you to ignore the world and put yourself first.

Avram's name was changed to Avraham because he was to become, "Av Hamon Goyim - A father of many nations." In order for Avraham to realize that potential he had to have children. Avraham knew this and Sarah knew this. Avraham also knew, as did Sarah, that his Bashert - intended was Sarah and only Sarah.

The reality that G-d had created in pairing-up the human male and female was much more than functional procreation. It was the completion of the human individual. "Lo Tov Heyos Hadam Livadoe - it is not good for the human to be alone (2:18)." Male and Female, wife and husband were intended to be equal partners in the creation of children and the completion of each other. As the verse (2:25) says, V'Davak B'ishtoe V'Hayou L'Basar Echad - and he should cling to his wife and become one flesh." The verse focuses the unit of wife and husband on attaching themselves to each other for their own sake as well as for each other's sake; children are adjunct to that mutual completion. It was possible for Avraham to have children with many women; however, his completion could only be through Sarah.

Avraham's relationship with Hagar was not husband and wife. Sarah was the wife, Hagar the maidservant. Sarah gave her maidservant to Avraham in order to have children that Sarah would raise to be monotheistic, G-d fearing, moral, ethical, and responsible people. However, so long as Sarah was alive Hagar would always remain a maidservant, never Avraham's wife.

Noach's curse on the family of Chum was not punishment; it was consequential rehabilitation. The Tikun -fixing of Chum's sin demanded the subservience and humility that would be gleaned in serving his brothers, especially the G-d fearing Shem. So long as the relationship was Cham's descendants being subservient to Shem's descendants, the relationship could exist. However, it could never be a relationship of equality.

In next week's Parsha, Avraham must find a wife for Yitzchak. The man Yitzchak, who was destined to give birth to the next generation of Jew, did not require a servant, he needed a wife, an equal. Therefore, Eliezar's daughter could never marry Yitzchak. She was cursed to be subservient to the children of Shem and the family of Avraham. Only through her service could she ever find the Tikun - fixing and completion of her Neshama. To be any more in relation to Avraham's family would be less than she needed. She could never be Yitzchak's wife because a wife must not be a servant to her husband; she must be his equal! Hagar, on the other hand, never functioned as Avraham's equal.

Her relationship was as the maidservant of Sarah and the mother of Avraham's first son.

The ability of a man and woman, Avraham and Hagar and Avraham and Sarah, to live with such an arrangement demands compromise and selflessness. This was Avraham's uniqueness, Sarah's sacrifice, and Hagar's acceptance. This was Chesed.

Yitzchak, on the other hand, was the paradigm of Gevurah - uncompromised strength and discipline. As we see at the end of the Parsha, he became the Olah Timimah - the perfect offering. His uniqueness was his uncompromised purity. His wife was to be Rivkah, and only Rivkah. There was no room in his life for anything less than absolute right and perfection. Of the three Avos - Forefathers he was the only one who had children with only one woman. That kind of singular focus and necessary selfishness demanded extreme discipline and strength. Once married to Rivkah there could be no other. She was his equal and thereby they were completed. Avraham, on the other hand, still needed Hagar to become the "Father of Many Nations."

Yitzchak's Gevurah was more a reflection of Sarah than Avraham. It was Sarah who was given the responsibility of training Hagar. It was Sarah who understood Hagar's internal conflict between acceptance of servitude and the desire to be an equal to Sarah as Avraham's wife. It is Sarah who had the strength to maintain the consistency of Hagar's training, despite Hagar's conflicts and assumed pain. It was Sarah who demanded that Hagar and Yishmael leave and continue their personal destiny apart from Yitzchak. It was Sarah who instilled in her son the strength to ignore the complications and circumstances of life and always do the necessary right and good. It was Sarah who gave Yitzchak the Gevurah - strength and courage to accept his Akeidah (binding).

The entire episode of Avraham's escape from Canaan to Egypt and the subsequent trials and tribulations mirrors the history of the Bnai Yisroel going to Egypt and their eventual exodus. At the end of the last plague, Pharaoh says to Moshe, "Go out from among my people... go and serve Hashem... and bless me as well! (Shemos 12:31-32)" Pharaoh chased the Jews out of Mitzrayim but recognized that his ultimate Tikun - correction was to be dependent on the Jews. It was a moment of awareness, clarity, and truth. "You are the blessed nation, we are cursed " therefore, before you leave, bless me!"

Years before, his ancestor (political or genetic) had the same moment of awareness, clarity, and truth. "Better that my daughter be a maidservant in the house of Avram than a princess in the house of Pharaoh." Pharaoh knew, as did his daughter Hagar, that their Tikun - fixing demanded subservience to Avraham and his family. Therefore, like Eliezar before him, Pharaoh pledged his daughter into Sarah's service.

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