

BORROWING FROM THE STRENGTH OF SARAH

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 105, Tallis: Does It Cover Only Married Men? Good Shabbos!

Borrowing From the Strength of Sarah our Matriarch

This week the Torah recounts the mission of the spies. The verse lists the names of the various spies. We all know that one of the spies was Yehoshua. The verse makes a point of telling us that his name had been Hoshea bin Nun and Moshe -- at this point in time -- changes his name to Yehoshua.

Many of us are familiar with the teaching of our Rabbis that the letter Yud that was added to the name Hoshea came from the name of our first Matriarch. Sarah originally was called Sarai. Moshe took the Yud that was dropped from her name and gave it to Hoshea.

There is an interesting Medrash in the book of Bereishis: The Yud was upset at being dropped from the name of our Matriarch and complained before the Heavenly Throne. The Yud protested, "Because I am the smallest letter, You took me away from the righteous woman? That's not fair!"

G-d responded, "Before you were at the end of a name, now I am going to put you at the beginning of a name... (You are not being discriminated against, on the contrary -- it is a promotion!)."

This is the type of Medrash that begs for explanation.

In previous years, we mentioned an interesting Targum Yonasan ben Uziel. He explains that Moshe added an extra letter to Hoshea's name after witnessing Hoshea's humility.

Moshe anticipated that Yehoshua would need tremendous strength and assertiveness to stand up against the other spies in defending the Land and the plan to inhabit it. Moshe felt that because of his personality traits, Hoshea did not have the resolve necessary to stand up and fight. That is why he had to give him the new name including the letter Yud.

But still, what does the Yud from Sarai have to do with protecting Hoshea? The Menachem Zion says a wonderful interpretation:

If there was one personality in Tanach who had this inner fortitude, to stand up to adversity and know how to fight ill influences, that was our Matriarch Sarah. When she saw that there was a Yishmael growing up with her son Yitzchak and she saw that this person would provide the wrong type of influence for her son, she knew what type of action was necessary.

She insisted, "Send this lady out of my house with her son, into the desert!" When Avraham questioned her how he could act so cruelly, G-d told him, "All that Sarai tells you, listen to her" [Bereishis 21:12].

That took a tremendous strength. But a mother knew what was right for her child. She knew that so-called compassion now would end in cruelty. What was required over here was to say emphatically, "I am sorry. I will not have my son ruined!"

Yehoshua also required that. There were 10 people, great and worthy leaders. It would be necessary to stand-up to the Gedolei HaDor, in effect. Where does one get that strength? One gets it from what Sarah our Matriarch had.

Sarah was the Torah prototype when it came to standing up to the wrong crowd. That is what G-d told the 'Yud'. "I need you, Yud. You represent the strength of personality that will be needed by Yehoshua."

There is a powerful Medrash in Mishlei. In the chapter of the Woman of Valor (Chapter 31) we read, "...she seeks out wool and linen..." The Medrash Tanchuma says, "This refers to Sara who told Avraham 'Send out this hand-maiden and her son.'"

What is the interpretation of the Medrash?

We know that wool and linen is Sha'tnez -- they cannot be mixed together. Wool by itself may be fine. Linen by itself may be fine. But together they are no good. The woman who "expounded concerning wool and linen" -- who knew that certain combinations are no good -- was Sarah, who insisted that Hagar and Yishmael be sent away.

Yehoshua needs this ability to recognize when to take action and this strength of personality to persevere and stand up for what is right. That is why it was the Yud from Sarai that was given to Yehoshua.

A Timely Enactment: Aleinu L'Shabeach (We Need to Give Thanks...)

Later in the Parsha the verse tells us that the Meraglim came back and reported, "And we were like grasshoppers in our eyes, and so too we were in their eyes" [Bamidbar 13:33].

"We heard them saying, 'There are people-ants crawling around in the fields.'" [Rash"i ibid.]

Rav Yaakov Kamenesky, z"tl, explains that the reason they looked like ants to the inhabitants of the Land was because they saw themselves as ants in their own eyes.

Rav Yaakov says, "If you hold yourself to be a rag (shmateh), others will hold you to be a rag as well!" If one thinks he has no chance, he will, in fact, have no chance.

We have a mesorah [tradition] that before Yehoshua took the Jews into Israel he instituted the prayer "Aleinu L'Shabeach" in which we thank G-d that "He did not make our portion as their portion and did not make us like the families of the earth." We are not like idol worshippers, we are not like the misdirected of other nations -- they bow down to vanity and nothingness, to a god that will not save!

Rather, we bow down and give thanks to the King, King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed be He. We are special. We are Jews.

This is the only attitude with which they would be able to conquer an Eretz Yisrael. The tefilah that the new generation was given was an antidote for the inferiority complex of the old generation. The old generation held themselves to be like ants. So long as they maintained that view of themselves, it would be impossible to do battle with the 31 Kings of Canaan. The cure for that was to go in with the attitude -- we must thank G-d for **not** making us like the nations.

Personalities & Sources:

Menachem Zion -- Rabbi Menachem Ben-Zion Zachs

Targum Yonatan ben Uziel -- Aramaic translation of the Torah, attributed to Yonathan ben Uziel (circa 50 c.e.)

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky -- (1892-1986) Rosh Yeshiva of Mesifita Torah VaDaath, New York City.

Glossary

Meraglim - Spies

Gedolei HaDor -- Greats of the generation

Sha'tnez -- forbidden species

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