

A NEW INSIGHT INTO: HER BEAUTY AT 20 WAS LIKE THAT OF A 7 YEAR OLD

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Chaye Sarah

A New Insight Into: Her Beauty at 20 Was Like That Of A 7 Year Old

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #788, Be Careful What You Ask For. Good Shabbos!

The parsha begins with the words "Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years; the years of Sarah's life." [Bereishis 23:1] The famous Rashi at the beginning of the parsha explains why the noun "years" (shanah) is repeated after each unit of her age: "To say to you that each one is expounded on its own: to teach that when she was a hundred years old she was like twenty with respect to sin, just as one who is twenty is considered as if she has not sinned, for she is not liable to punishment, so too when Sarah was a hundred years old, she was without sin. And when she was twenty years old she was like seven years old with regard to beauty.

If we were to take a poll as to who is more beautiful, a 20 year old woman or a 7 year old girl - I believe it would be the overwhelming conclusion that a 20 year old has greater beauty than a 7 year old. Beyond that, it seems strange that the Torah needs to put such emphasis on the fact that Sarah was a beautiful woman. We are all familiar with Mishlei 31:30, which we recite every Friday night -- "Grace is false and beauty vain, a woman who fears Hashem, she should be praised."

Of course, we understand that as an individual who attempted to bring many women "under the Wings of the Divine Presence," it was important that the matriarch Sarah should be an attractive person, which she was. But that the Torah should place such emphasis on her physical beauty seems strange. If I were to be called upon to eulogize a great woman from this community and I said "This woman was pious and righteous and humble and she was gorgeous!" - rest assured that would be the last eulogy I would ever be called upon to give in Baltimore, Maryland.

There is a Zohar in this week's parsha which reads "Happy is the person who makes himself humble in this world. Such a person will be happy in the world to come. This is how Rebbe used to start his lecture in the Yeshiva: 'The one who is small in his own eyes is really big; on the other hand, one who

is big in his own eyes is really small." The Zohar cites as its proof text for this principle the aforementioned pasuk at the beginning of our parsha. When the pasuk mentions the number 100, which is large, it uses the term year (shanah) in the singular. When it mentions the number 7, which is small, it uses the term years (shanim), in the plural.

The Yeshuos Malko explains that this is exactly the trait of Sarah. When Chazal say that Sarah had the beauty of a 7 year old when she was 20 years old, the Medrash knew that 20 year old women are more beautiful than 7 year old girls, but they were talking about Sarah's attitude toward her beauty. Normally, when a 20 year old is beautiful, she knows it, she is proud of it, and she may even flaunt it. But Sarah was so modest that when she was 20 years old, her perception of her beauty was such that it was reminiscent of a 7 year old. Because of her child-like innocence, a seven year old is totally unaware of how cute and even beautiful she is.

Chazal are not praising beauty for beauty's sake. They are praising the fact that Sarah did not let her beauty go to her head. When she was 20 and truly gorgeous, her beauty was like that of a seven year old - meaning she was totally oblivious to it, as a result of her modesty. Sarah was the embodiment of the idea expressed in the Zohar that no matter how big one is, the smaller they see themselves to be, the more admirable they are.

The Gemara many times says "this is what people mean when they say..." (haynu d'amree inshee) as an indication that expressions people use in the vernacular have truth to them. Haynu d'amree inshee: Humility makes a man feel smaller as he becomes greater.

We all have our favorite "Gedolim stories", stories of the great humility displayed by the great sages of Israel. I have always been struck by the fact that our master Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, besides all his other outstanding qualities, was such a humble man. He was once walking on the Lower East Side and was getting into a car. A fellow walking on the street noticed a friend of his down the block and yelled out "Hey, Moshe!" Rav Moshe Feinstein turned around and asked "What is it you want?" How many people on the Lower East Side used to call Rav Moshe Feinstein "Hey, Moshe"? How could he think that this person meant him? The answer is because he was extremely modest. He was a person who was unbelievably big and took that greatness and nevertheless perceived himself to be a small person.

This is the greatness of our Gedolim. This is the lesson of the Matriarch Sarah. She was as beautiful as 20, but she saw her beauty as innocently as would a 7 year old.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Chayei Sarah are provided below:

Tape # 030 - The Shadchan in Halacha

Tape # 072 - Superstition in Halacha
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Tape # 214 - Pilegesh: An Alternative to Marriage?
Tape # 258 - Intrusion on Another's Shidduch
Tape # 304 - The "Mazik" of a Child: Is He Responsible?
Tape # 348 - Determining the Salary of the Shadchan
Tape # 392 - Purchasing a Burial Plot
Tape # 436 - Daughters: Shidduchim & Parental Wishes
Tape # 480 - Calling Off an Engagement
Tape # 524 - The Badekin
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Tape # 744 - Turning 20: A Scary Birthday
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Tape # 876 - Kavanah in the First Bracha of Sh'monei Esrei
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