

# ROSH HASHANAH

תשפ"ד

There is a very interesting krias haTorah on Rosh Hashanah. It is about how Soroh Imeinu gave birth to Yitzchok. At the Bris Bein Habesorim, Hashem told Avrohom Ovinu that he will have descendants with Soroh from which Klal Yisroel will emerge. Avrohom expressed his doubts and mentioned that Soroh is physically incapable of having children. Hashem says no, Soroh will have a child because I will raise both of you above the laws of nature. Hashem runs the world. He tells Avrohom to believe that He is not limited by natural law.

At this point, Hashem did not provide a definite time by which they will have a child. Nevertheless, Avrohom trusted in Hashem's promise completely, and he was rewarded for this trust by getting Yitzchok as a son. But it was many years later before he finally had this promised son. Hashem wasn't ready to give it to him yet. It took 13 years until He instructed Avrohom to have a bris miloh. Then he will be on the level to have Yitzchok. On the third day of the miloh, the malochim came to inform Avrohom and Soroh that they will have a child in exactly a year.

At that point, Soroh was not only physically incapable of bearing children, but she was also 89 years old. She inwardly smiles at the thought that she will give birth. Nothing stands in Hashem's way. 'וה' פקד את שרה. What does this word פקד mean? First, Hashem predicted it would happen, and then He made it happen. It went in stages. In between, Hashem arranged the whole incident with Avimelech and Soroh to happen. Why?

Hashem runs this world with precise hashgocho protis.

In certain instances, Hashem wants to make it absolutely clear to everyone that events are being orchestrated by Hashem. But there is always room for people with an agenda to try to deny the obvious.

When announcing Makkas Bechoros, Moshe Rabbeinu changed the wording to make sure people had no way to deny that Hashem caused the makkoh through an open miracle. All the Egyptian bechoros die simultaneously. But had Moshe said they would all die precisely at midnight instead of around midnight, the Egyptians would have been able to claim it was a little off on their clocks, and dismiss the whole thing as coincidence!

Here too, Hashem wants to make it completely obvious and undeniable to everyone that Soroh miraculously gave birth at the advanced age of 90. Everyone saw how her wrinkled and shriveled skin became smooth and young once again. But then there is that little opening for the leitzonei hador to find some way to dismiss the whole thing. They want to claim that Avimelech is the father instead of Avrohom.

It is an absurd claim – Yitzchok looks physically identical to Avrohom, and Avrohom is clearly capable of having children even at an advanced age. He had Yishmoel and he will go on to have more children from Hogor. But all this doesn't matter. You can prove anything you want and they will twist everything to disprove it.

Hashem shows us how He runs the world if you are honest and open. But people want to ignore the message and Hashem always gives the opportunity for people who want to deny. Chazal say בדרך שאדם רוצה אותו לילך מוליכין אותו.

A few years ago, a number of archaeologists working in the area of the Dead Sea all agreed that the area of S'dom exactly at the time of Avrohom Ovinu was extremely fertile, and was an economic center of commerce for the whole region. Then all of the sudden a meteor must have come and exploded with sulfur and devastated everything

and killed all life in the area creating the Dead Sea. They described in this academic paper the exact cataclysmic event that is described in the Chumash. Hashem allowed these archaeologists to discover total confirmation to what is written in Chumash. But they still chose to deny it. They made some kind of twisted analysis to be able to dismiss the whole thing as natural.

Hashem brings the middas hadin to our lives in a very clear way, and we have to open our eyes to see it. Hashgocho protis is something you can see on a regular basis if you allow yourself to. This is one of the reasons we read this story of Soroh being remembered on Rosh Hashanah – to reinforce the idea that Hashem is always keeping the cheshbon and fulfills His promises to the exact detail.

For the haftorah, we read the story of Chana and Peninoh. Chana was also remembered on Rosh Hashanah, but for a very deep reason. Elkono had two wives. Peninoh had seven children and Chana was barren. Peninoh intentionally got under Chana's skin and always provoked Chana in order to get Chana to daven with more kavono. Chazal tell us that Peninoh acted l'shem shomayim.

Finally, Chana's tefillos were answered and she had a son, Shmuel. Many of the Ovos and Imahos were barren in order to teach us the power of tefillos.

But then, whenever Chana had an additional child, Peninoh lost a child, until Chana had seven children and Peninoh lost all her seven children. But why? Wasn't she doing it l'shem shomayim? The answer is that lofty motivations of l'shem shomayim cannot come at the expense of middos tovos. Among the aveiros Hashem is most exacting on, the din on bad middos is severe and inescapable. When you cause other people to suffer, it destroys like a fire – it doesn't matter how good your motivations are.

Bad middos manifest themselves in two ways – actively taunting and tormenting someone, and passively turning the other way and not coming to someone's defense. Because not only did Peninoh lose these seven children, her husband Elkono lost them too. They were also his children as much as they were Peninoh's. Chana's seven children are never going to be a replacement for Peninoh's lost children. Elkono was also punished because he stood back and watched the pain and grief Chana was receiving from Peninoh and didn't do anything to stop her. Trying to console her after the fact was not enough.

It was an incredible din, and we read it on Rosh Hashanah in order to hear this message.

As we make a cheshbon hanefesh approaching Rosh Hashanah, we ask ourselves what Hashem wants us to do. One of the things is to open our eyes and see the hashgocho that Hashem is running the world with. We need to look for the middas hadin, as well as the chessed. Sometimes we don't see the justice in what happens in the world. Sometimes it looks like there is no din – we don't understand how things could be justified.

This was Iyov's challenge. He couldn't explain how he deserved so much suffering. It was undeniable that Iyov was a huge tzaddik, but he demanded to understand how Hashem calculates the balance of reward and punishment in this world. Chazal say that had Iyov overcome his nisoyon, we would mention him in our shmoneh esrei along with the Ovos! But he flunked because he insisted on being able to understand the rules of reward and punishment in a way that made

sense to him. Hashem told him that he cannot understand and he has to make peace with his lack of understanding.

The Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim says a fascinating thing. He says all the suffering of Iyov was justified. We can in fact say it was a blessing. Because through Iyov's whole process of struggling with Hashem's cheshbon and failing, he came to a deeper understanding of how futile it is to try to reach into the mind of Hashem. He rose much higher in his level as a result and this made all his suffering worth it in the end.

On Rosh Hashanah, we read about how long Avrohom and Soroh

waited for a child. They reach the age of 99 and 89 and finally, they are told by the malochim that exactly in a year from now, Soroh will have a child. This was Pesach time. In reality, she conceived later – on Rosh Hashanah. She was given a youthful body on the spot, yet she did not conceive at Pesach time. Even after Hashem promises something, Hashem decides how and when that promise is fulfilled.

She did not conceive nine months before Pesach. Hashem made them wait an extra two and a half months because Hashem wanted them to understand that He is in charge of every detail of their lives. There is nothing that happens automatically.