

Zera Shimshon

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Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter III: Lech Lecha (Gen. 12:1–17:27)

Essay 21. Tension between Abraham and Sarah

פסוק "הנהנא עצרני ה' מלדת באנא אל-שפחתי אולי אבנה ממנה" וכו'. יש מפרשים שפוננת שרה היתה שהואיל שהמתפלל על חבירו והוא צריך לאותו דבר הוא נענה בתחלה אף היא בהתפללה על הגר תהנה נענית תחלה. אבל קשה שלא מצינו שהתפללה שרה על הגר, דאי תימא שהתפללה למה לא נענית היא תחלה.

There is a verse: “And Sarai said to Abram, ‘**Look, the L-rd has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall be built up [i.e., have a child] through her.**’ And Abram heeded Sarai’s request.”¹ **There are those who comment that the intent of Sarah was thus: One who prays on behalf of his friend, and he needs the same thing as his friend, [the one praying] is answered first.² Thus, even [Sarah] in her praying for Hagar would be answered first. But a difficulty is that we don’t find that Sarah prayed for Hagar, for if you say that she prayed for her, why wasn’t she answered first?**

ויש לומר ששרה היתה סבורה שעפוב הריון שלה בא מצד אברהם שלא היה ראוי להוליד, ומכל מקום בתרה [בצרת] נפשה ליתן לו את הגר כדי להתפלל אחר כך אל ה' שיתן לו בנים מהגר. ומתוך כך תהיה היא נענית תחלה שאברהם יוליד אף עמה, וזהו שאמרה "אולי אבנה ממנה", אולי יצטרף שאני אתפלל בשבילה ובשביל אברהם, אבל עם הגר לא הוצרך לזה דהא ונבא אל-הגר ותהר" וכו' ומיד "ותקל גברתה" וכו'.

It can be said that Sarah believed that the hindrance of her pregnancy came from Abraham’s side, that he was not worthy to have a child, and in any case, she chose with difficulty in her soul to give him Hagar in order to afterward pray to G-d that He should give him children from Hagar. For this reason, she would first accept that Abraham would have a child even with her, and this is the reason that she said, “perhaps I will be built up through her,” maybe he will need that I prayer for her and for Abraham, but with Hagar it wasn’t necessary for this, as “[Abraham] cohabited with Hagar and she conceived,” and immediately, “her mistress was lowered in her esteem.”³

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¹ Gen. 16:2.

² Bava Kamma 92a.

³ Gen. 16:4.

וְשָׂרָה נִתְרַעַמָּה עִם אַבְרָהָם וְאָמְרָה לּוֹ "תִּמְסִי עֲלַיָּךְ", שְׁלֵא הִתְפַּלֵּלְתָּ אֵלָּא בְּשִׁבְלֵךְ שְׂאֲמַרְתָּ "מִה־תִּתֶּן־לִי וְאֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי" וְכוּ' וְהִקְב"ה הִשִּׁיב לָהּ "לֹא יִירָשְׁךָ זֶה", שְׁמַע מִיָּנָה שְׁלֵא תִשְׁבַּת אֵלָּא שְׂיִהְיֶה לָּךְ בֶּן יוֹרֵשׁ נִחְלָה וְלֹא תִשְׁבַּת כְּלוּם עָלַי שְׂיִהְיֶה לָּךְ בֶּן מִמֶּנִּי, שְׁמַע מִיָּנָה שְׂאֵין אֶתָּה חוֹשֵׁב אוֹתִי לְכְלוּם, וְזֶה נָתַן מְקוֹם לְהִגֵּר שְׂתוֹלֵז לְבִי.

Sarah was angry with Abraham and said to him, “ ‘The wrong done to me is your fault,’⁴ that you only prayed for your own sake, when you said, ‘O L-rd, what can You give me, seeing that I shall die childless, and the one in charge of my household is Damascus Eliezer, . . . Since You have granted me no offspring, my steward will be my heir,’⁵ and the Holy One, Blessed be He, answered you, ‘That one shall not be your heir; none but your very own issue shall be your heir.’⁶ Hear from this that you only thought that you would have a son to inherit your estate, and you thought nothing of me, that you would have a son from me. Hear from this that you thought nothing of me, and that made possible for Hagar to despise me.”

וְאִם תֹּאמַר שְׂאֶתָּה הֵייתָ סוֹבֵר שְׁהַעֲפוּב הָיָה בָּא בֵּין מִמֶּנִּי וּבֵין מִמֶּךָ וְלֹא רָצִיתָ לְשְׂאוֹל הַרְבֵּה מֵאֵת הַמְּקוֹם רַק מִה שְׁהָיָה מוֹכֵרָח לְבַד, דּוּמְנָא לְמַה שְׁכַתְּבוּ הַתּוֹסְפוֹת בְּפֶרֶק ט' דְּמַצִּיעָא (דְּף ק"ו ד"ה לְגִיסָא) שְׂאֵין הִקְב"ה מְקַבֵּל הַתְּפִלָּה מִמִּי שְׂמִתְפַּלֵּל שְׂיִצְלַח כָּל מַה שְׂיִזְרַע, אִם לֹא בְּדֶרֶךְ גֹּס, אֲבָל אִם מִתְּפִלָּל עַל דְּבָר אֶחָד בְּלִבְד דְּהֵינּוּ שְׂיִצְלִיחוּ חֲטִים אוֹ שְׂעוּרִים שְׁלוֹ אֲז דּוּקָא מְקַבֵּל תְּפִלָּתוֹ. וּמִשּׁוּם הָכִי לֹא הִתְפַּלֵּלְתָּ אֵלָּא עָלַיָּךְ, אִם כֵּן הֵם דְּבָרִים הַמְּסוּרִים לְלֵב, שְׂאֵינּוּ יוֹדְעֵי בְּהֵם אֵלָּא הַמְּקוֹם, וְלָכֵן "יִשְׁפֹּט ה' בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶיךָ".

“Maybe you will say that you were of the opinion that the obstacle was between me and you, and you did not want to ask much from the Omnipresent, only what was necessary. This is similar to what the Tosafists wrote for the ninth chapter of tractate Bava Metzia (page 106a, text beginning ‘a small miracle’), that the Holy One, Blessed be He, would not have even accepted for consideration a prayer from one who prayed very broadly that he should succeed in whatever he plants, unless he were someone who was worthy of a miracle. But if he were to pray for only one thing, that his wheat or his barley should succeed, then [G-d] would at least accept his prayer for consideration. Perhaps because of this, you only prayed for yourself. If so, these are matters given to the heart, which only the Omnipresent knows, and therefore, ‘G-d will judge between me and you.’”⁷

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⁴ Gen. 16:5.

⁵ Gen. 15:2–3.

⁶ Gen. 15:4.

⁷ Gen. 16:5.