

Why Sarah Laughed – למה צחקה שרה – A study of Parshat VaYera

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dr. Esther Shkop

At the end of Parshat Lech Lecha, Hashem informs Avraham that Sarah would have a child. Avraham fell on his face and he laughed and he said in his heart, "At 100 years can one conceive a child and Sarah at the age of 90 will give birth?" Hashem answered him, "But I'm telling you Sarah will have a son and you will name him Yitzchak." As if to say, "I know what you're thinking and that laughter you thought was inside you. You will name him Yitzchak and my covenant that the land would be yours, that you would be a great nation will not happen through Yishmael but through Yitzchak."

The Parsha tells us further how three angels come to visit Avraham and one angel tells over the news that Sarah will have a child. "And Sarah was listening and Sarah laughed inside herself as if to say, "Now that I'm all used up I will become young again and my master is old." Hashem then asks Avraham, "Why did Sarah laugh..." Why does the Torah emphasize all this laughter?

There was a hunger in the land and Avraham and Sarah were forced to go down to the land of the Pelishtim. Avimelech abducts Sarah, is forced to release her, and then the Torah tells us, "And Hashem remembered Sarah." Avraham named the child Yitzchak and he was circumcised. Then Sarah says, "Zechok asa li Elokim...-Hashem made a laughing-

stock of me..." When the child was weaned, Avraham made a party. Sarah saw Yishmael, "mitzachek,"-making merry.

In Yechezkel it describes how Yerushalayim bemoans the destruction, "Zechok v'laag asani...- Hashem made me into a laughing stock.." In Shemot, when the Torah describes how the Jews sinned with the golden calf it says, "Vayukumu l'tzachek." When the wife of Potiphar accuses Yosef of sinning, she says, "l'tzachek bi." We see that the expression of tzchok appears negative.

Why did Avraham and Sarah laugh? Why did Yishmael laugh? And why did Sarah then ask Avraham to send him away? Hashem promised Avraham He would make him a great nation. When Sarah saw she could not have children, she gave Hagar to Avraham thinking the promise would be fulfilled the promise through Yishmael. When Avraham heard Sarah would have a son he laughed because now things were getting complex. Through whom would the promise be fulfilled?

The Midrash says that when Sarah heard she would have a son she thought, my husband is too old. We need a miracle for him too. When Sarah was taken to Avimelech, she was already expecting Yitzchak. Rashi explains the verse in Parshat Toldot, "Avraham holid et Yitzchak." The scoffers of the generation said that Sarah had Yitzchak with Avimelech. That is why Sarah laughed. It was a bitter laughter.

When Hashem asks Avraham why Sarah laughed he was not only admonishing her but also Avraham.

The Netziv says Hashem was trying to get the two of them to talk. Sarah was thrilled and devastated at the news that she would have a child. She was worried about what would ultimately happen but she didn't share this with Avraham. So too, Avraham never told her she would have a child. Sarah says, "Tzchok asa li Hashem." She didn't believe in herself. She didn't believe she was worthy to be the mother of the great nation that Avraham was promised.

So if the name Yitzchak has such negative connotation, why put it on this most innocent child, this oleh *temima*? The Netziv points out, it says in Divrei Hayomim, "Asher karaat et Avraham ushevu'ato l'Yitzchak." We find the same verse in Tehilim but there Yitzchak is spelled with the letter *Sin*. The Netziv explains, David Hamelech tells us that when *Mashiach* comes Yitzchak's name will be changed to Yisachak. Then the laughter will not be bitter or mocking but happy. *Tzchok* represents the harsh laughter of exile that began with Avraham. Avraham's name was changed to Avraham and Yaakov's name was changed to Yisrael. Yitzchak's name will be changed when *Mashiach* comes when the laughter will be reversed to one of true, everlasting, joy.

First Perek: What is a Mashal Part 2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

In order to interpret the *mashal*, you have to know where you want to go. The most important thing to know is *yirat Hashem*. *Yirat Hashem* isn't fear of punishment. That's fear of suffering. Imagine getting the job you've always dreamed of. Your employer is impressed with you and your work. If he gives you an assignment it will be very important to you to do it right. This is *yirat Hashem* on the simplest level. Hashem created you as you are with your spiritual powers and emotional

disposition. He put you in a place where you could maximize yourself, where you could be like the *menorah* that gives eternal life. That which is drawn down to you from Hashem is called your *mazal*. Hashem gave you the perfect job and he is impressed with you. He made you Jewish. Every Jew has the ability to be close. accepted and successful. *Yirat Hashem* is, "I want to do it right." "*Yirat Hashem* reishit daat- The fear of Hashem is the first thing to know. *Daat* is the ability to

draw conclusions. It's the bridge between your mental capacity to interpret and your plan to integrate. *Daat* is you.

Rashi says a person who has more *chochma* than *yirah*, meaning he sees the flow, but doesn't see Hashem, is in a terrible situation and becomes an *avil*. An *avil* is someone who can see the surface, but refuses to see Hashem. There are people who know an enormous amount about the workings of

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nature but never discern its divine nature. The tragedy of having the perfect job, doing the work perfectly, is never seeing the employer who cares about you. The *avil* despise *chachma* and *mussar* because it forces him to go beyond selfish motivation.

The word *mussar* comes from the root word *yissurim* - suffering. You can never learn anything without some degree of suffering. Anything new pushes aside the old and the difficulty of learning to think in a different direction is huge. *Mussar* is loving the new and suffering what it tells you. If you learn about the value of honesty you might have to stop all the petty lies and that's not so easy if you're used to them. People in general don't like *mussar*. But a *chacham* will say, "Yes, I want new ways of thinking. I don't want to stick to these old ways. I'm still alive." An *avil* who only sees the surface of things doesn't want this.

"*Shema beni mussar avicha v'al titosh Torat*

imecha- Hear my son the *mussar* of your father and don't abandon the *Torah* of your mother." The ultimate father is Hashem. Hashem's *mussar* is the oral and written *Torah*. The function of the written *Torah* is to tell us, these are the rules, this is how to see life, intellectually, emotionally, and on all levels. Listen to it. Don't be afraid to hear new things. The oral law will tell you the details, how to make this work within your life. The written *Torah* will tell you, "Do not steal." The oral *Torah* gives it definition and practical examples. None of this is easy. The *mitzvot* that are hardest, the ones where you encounter the most resistance will help you move beyond where you already are. So, listen to the *mussar* of your father, Hashem. Your mother is *Kneset Yisrael*, the community of Israel. Rashi says your primary identity is being part of the collective *Am Yisrael*. Picture a human body. Each Jew has a specific place in the body. For sure the brain is in a different position than the fingers, but they are equally part of the same body. The more you identify

with the whole of the body, *Kneset Yisrael*, the more you'll care about every part and want it to be healthy. The *minhagim*, the *gedarim*, all the things that were instituted to keep the body healthy, are called the *Torah* of the mother, the *Torah* of *Kneset Yisrael*.

To summarize, there's a flow of wisdom from Hashem and if you're really wise, you'll see and understand more. You'll make more deductions and look at the world as a *mashal* and be willing to ask yourself, "How can I take this *mashal* and know what Hashem wants of me and let it speak to my heart?" You'll be willing to hear what the wise have to say and recognize that your search for direction is such that you really want to serve Hashem. You'll have awe of Him and know that He's the one who gave you your mission. You won't be so absorbed by living until you forget why you're living. And as a member of *Kneset Yisrael*, you'll hear His *Torah* and integrate it and reach heights you never thought you could reach.

Travelling through Life Accompanied by Tehilim Part 1

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Let's talk about *Tehilim*. In *Shmuel Bet*, Chapter 23, the prophet tells us-" These are the last words of David..." In these last words, David Hamelech describes himself, "*Nai'm zemirot Yisrael*-the pleasing of the songs of Israel. When David Hamelech wrote these songs, he had the Jewish people in mind. His life was not easy. Beginning with his lineage which was not clear and caused him to be rejected by his own family and the Jewish people, to his difficulties with Shaul when he had to run for his life, to his own son rebelling against him. Add to it all, the wars he fought for the Jewish people, and we get a picture of a life fraught with challenges. Yet through it all, *David Hamelech* wrote songs to Hashem. Much of *Tehilim* contains prophecies.

Although it expresses David Hamelech's trials and tribulations and how he reacted to it, it is a book meant for all of *Klal Yisrael*. Just as the

life of the avot were a forerunner of what the Jewish people would face, so too was the life of *David Hamelech*. Through *Tehilim*, David Hamelech teaches us how to view, act and react, to every situation in life. His *zemirot* are the *zemirot* of the Jewish people.

We see further in *Shmuel Bet* that David Hamelech says, "The spirit of Hashem spoke through me. His words are upon my tongue." *Tehilim* was written with divine inspiration and it contains the power of prophecy. To the extent, that David Hamelech asked Hashem that when a person would recite *Tehilim* it should be considered as if he toiled in *Torah*. *Tehilim* is divided in five sections corresponding to the five books of the *Torah*. It has a very special place in the heart of every Jew and accompanies us throughout life. In fact, we start our day with chapters of *Tehilim*. In Shachrit, in *Pesukei D'zimra*, we say *Baruch*

She'amar and we say "*U'visherei David avdecha nehalelcha*..."-And through the songs of David we will praise you..." and we then recite verses of *Tehilim*.

The book of *Tehilim* are the words of David Hamelech but throughout the generations we have used it as a way to connect to Hashem. Not only do we want to say it, but we want to understand what we are saying and discover the life messages, attitudes, and view on history, it conveys.

David Hamelech begins *Tehilim* by discussing the topic of happiness. He defines who is a happy person and how to become one. The Redak says that this first chapter in *Tehilim* is very fundamental and it should be treasured and studied in depth. We will continue to probe this chapter in the coming weeks b'n.