

## When To Rely on Your Wife

"In Sara's Merit"

### Genesis Chapter 12

"And there was a famine in the land and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there for the famine was severe in the land.

"And it came to pass when he came near to enter to Egypt that he said to Sarai, his wife, Behold, I know that you are a pretty woman, It shall come to pass when the Egyptians shall see you that they shall say 'this is his wife', they will desire you because of your beauty and they will kill me but you they will keep alive. Therefore please say that you are my sister so that they will benefit me because of you, and my life shall be spared because of you."

"And it came to pass that when Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and praised her for Pharaoh, and the woman was taken to Pharaoh's palace. And he treated Abram well for her sake, and he had sheep and oxen and male asses and menservants and maidservants and female asses and camels. "

"And G-d plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. And Pharaoh called Abram and said, 'What is this that you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife. Why did you say, 'she is my sister?' So that I might have taken her for my wife, now therefore she is your wife, take her and go your way. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him and they sent him away and his wife and all that he had."



### Rashi

*And G-d plagued Pharaoh*—with a plague of impotence.

*And all his household*—All the men of his household.

*Because of the word of Sarai*—Through Sarai's word. She said to the angel 'strike him' and he struck him."

### Rashi

*And when Abram came to Egypt*—The verse should have said when 'they' reached Egypt. However, this teaches us that Abram hid her in a box and when they, the custom officials, collected taxes they opened it and saw her.

### Midrash Rabbah

He reached the Egyptian customs station, the official asked him to pay duties for the chest. Abram replied, "I am prepared to pay duties." The official told him, "You have dishes in there." Abram answered that he would pay duties for dishes. They said, "No you are carrying gold in there." He answered, "I will pay the duties for gold." Then they said, "No, You are carrying expensive silver." He said, "I will pay the duties for expensive silver." They said, "No, you are carrying precious stones." He answered, "I will pay the duties for precious stones." They said, "This is not feasible, you will have to open it and show us what is inside." (The official became suspicious as it occurred to him that the foreigner who was so possessive of his belongings might be hiding something potentially harmful to his country.) As soon as he opened it, the whole land of Egypt radiated from her countenance.

R' Azariah and R' Yochanana son of Chagai in the name of R' Yitzchak said, "The beauty of Chava, Eve, was given over to the great women leaders of each generation who shared her beauty."

The officers of Pharaoh saw her and each bid money to take her to Pharaoh. One said, "I will pay 100 dinar to take her." Another said, "I will pay 200 dinar to take her."

## Malbim

Abram told Sarai, "Say that you are my sister, that they may benefit me because of you." That is to say, tell everyone that you wish to marry, but only one who acknowledges that you are my sister and therefore that he must obtain my legal and personal consent. Announce that the man who wishes to marry you must compensate me with as many gifts as I deem proper. The accepted rule was that an orphaned sister belonged to the legal domain of her brother, it was the custom to offer silver and gold to the girl's father or brother in exchange for her hand in marriage. Thus Abram would set a price so high that no man wishing to marry her would be able to pay it. It did not occur to him however that the king himself would want her.

## Zohar

Rabbi Elazar says, *Say please you are my sister.*

This is a very difficult passage. Abram who had awe of G-d and who was beloved by G-d would he say this about his wife so that he would acquire material benefit?

However, (the explanation is), Abraham, even though he had a fear of sin, he did not rely on his own merit, but on the merit of his wife that he will inherit because of her. A person only receives wealth in the merit of his wife, as it says, (Prov 19:14) "a house and a fortune is an inheritance from parents but only from G-d is an intelligent woman." Someone who merits an intelligent wife, he inherits it all. As it also says (ibid 31:11) "the heart of her husband relies on her and he lacks no bounty."

Abraham went in her merit to receive the bounty of the other nations. He relied on her merit that they would not be able to harm her or abuse her. Therefore he was not afraid to say, "She is my sister."

Moreover, he saw an angel that accompanied her who told him not to be afraid regarding her but that G-d had sent him to take out the wealth of other nations and to watch her from everything. That is why Abraham was not afraid for her, only for himself, because he did not see an angel accompanying him—only her!

## Let's Review:



- On their way down to Egypt, Abraham tells Sara, **Say you are my sister so that they will benefit me because of you and my life will be spared because of you.**

- From the words **"And when Abram came to Egypt"** rather than "when they came to Egypt", Rashi learns that Avraham hid Sara in a box so she wouldn't be seen.

- If she was discovered he asked her to **say she was his sister** and, as her brother, intended to set a price too high for anyone to afford to take her in marriage.

- Sara is brought to Pharaoh who gives Abraham many presents for her.

In the palace G-d plagued Pharaoh **because of the word of Sarai**—as Rashi explains Sara said to the angel to strike Pharaoh every time he approached her.

- The Zohar explains that Avraham was willing to ask Sara to say she was his sister so he would be spared and benefit from Pharaoh's gifts because of her since he realized that their entire sojourn in Egypt would be **in Sara's merit**. He knew he could not rely on his own merit but only through her would their mission in Egypt be accomplished.

## Something to Think About:

- What have you learned about Sara's great spiritual powers?
- Centuries later, the Jewish people were enslaved in Egypt. They left then too in the merit of the righteous women who drew upon the strength and powers of their matriarch, Sara.

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