

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital*

Parashat Lech Lecha  
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פרשת לך לך  
י"א בחשוון תשע"ו

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 12:1-17:27

In this *parasha*, Avram and Sarai follow Hashem's call to journey to Cana'an, where the covenant between Hashem and Avraham is affirmed. Avram, renamed Avraham, has a son with Hagar, Sarai's maid, and Hashem promises that Sarai, renamed Sarah, will bear a son as well.

One of the remarkable things about the Torah is that it appears to be the only record of ancient lore that paints its characters as true-to-life rather than larger-than-life. A case in point appears in this week's *parasha*.

Chapter 16 relates the following:

א וְשָׂרַי אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם, לֹא יָלְדָה לוֹ; וְלֵה שִׁפְחָה מִצְרִית, וְשָׂמָה הָגָר. ב  
וּתְאֵמֶר שָׂרַי אֶל-אַבְרָם, הִנֵּה-נָא עֲצָרְנִי הִי מִלְּדַת--בְּאֵ-נָא אֶל-שִׁפְחָתִי,  
אוּלַי אֲבִנָּה מִמֶּנָּה; וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם, לְקוֹל שָׂרַי. ג וַתִּקַּח שָׂרַי אֵשֶׁת-אַבְרָם,  
אֶת-הָגָר הַמִּצְרִית שִׁפְחָתָהּ, מִקֶּץ עֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים, לְשֵׁבֶת אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן;  
וַתֵּתֶן אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָם אִישָׁהּ, לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה. ד וַיִּבְרָא אֶל-הָגָר, וַתֵּהָרֶה; וַתֵּרָא כִּי  
הָרְתָהּ, וַתִּקַּל גְּבֵרָתָהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ. ה וּתְאֵמֶר שָׂרַי אֶל-אַבְרָם, חֲמָסִי עֲלֶיךָ--  
אֲנֹכִי נָתַתִּי שִׁפְחָתִי בְּחִיקָךָ, וַתֵּרָא כִּי הָרְתָהּ וְאֶקַּל בְּעֵינֶיהָ; יִשְׁפֹּט ה',  
כִּינִי וְכִינֶיךָ. ו וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל-שָׂרַי, הִנֵּה שִׁפְחָתְךָ בְּיָדְךָ--עֲשִׂי-לָהּ, הַטּוֹב  
בְּעֵינֶיךָ; וַתַּעֲנֶה שָׂרַי, וַתִּבְרַח מִפָּנֶיהָ.

**1** Now Sarai Abram's wife bore him no children; and she had a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. **2** And Sarai said to

Abram: 'Behold now, Hashem has restrained me from bearing; go in, please, to my handmaid; it may be that I shall be built up through her.' And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. **3** And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar the Egyptian, her handmaid, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to Abram her husband to be his wife. **4** And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. **5** And Sarai said to Abram: 'My wrong be upon you: I gave my handmaid into your lap; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: let Hashem judge between me and you.' **6** But Abram said to Sarai: 'Behold, your maid is in your hand; do to her that which is good in your eyes.' And Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her face.

Sarai came up with what seemed like a great idea to solve the problem of her childlessness. In her head, giving Hagar to Avram would solve this issue. Her heart, however, did not cooperate, and she found that, emotionally, she could not deal with Hagar bearing Avram's child while she could not. Most of us, I suspect, have experienced this kind of cognitive dissonance when something that makes intellectual sense still does not sit right with us emotionally.

Furthermore, Sarai responded more impulsively than reflectively. First, she blamed Avram. In my head, I have always imagined the scene of Sarai confronting Avram, and Avram, befuddled, saying, "I don't understand! I just did what you told me to do!" Subsequently, she opted to treat Hagar in such a manner that the latter had no choice but to flee. Not exactly the mature response we might expect from a matriarch such as Sarai.

Further reflecting true-to-life characters, we read five chapters down the road that Sarah has grown and progressed in dealing with difficult situations involving Hagar. In chapter 21, after Yishmael has grown and she and Avraham are celebrating Yitzchak's weaning, Sarah once again determines that Hagar and Yishmael need to go. But this time, in contrast to what we read in chapter 16, she opts to speak with Avraham, and instead of fleeing empty-handed, Hagar and Yishmael leave the homestead with food and drink in hand.

We can draw inspiration and encouragement from these stories in two ways. First of all, each of us has within us the potential to become an Avraham or a Sarah. They were not perfect, nor were they expected to be perfect. They were special, insightful, and spiritual, but not perfect. Each of us can strive to emulate these characteristics while giving ourselves some latitude for whatever errors we make or failures we experience.

In addition, just as we see Sarah learning and improving throughout her life, we, too, can look at our shortcomings and tell ourselves that we can address these and become better people throughout our existence on this earth.

We can all draw strength from the foibles and failures, in addition to the successes, of our Biblical role models.

Shabbat shalom.

For Discussion:

- Discuss a Biblical character, other than Avraham or Sarah, who exhibits both strengths and weaknesses. What can we learn from that person?
- Describe a time when your head and your heart told you two different things. What did you do to resolve the difference?
- Do you think the stories of Avraham and Sarah are true? Why or why not?