

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



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

Parashat Vayigash
January 7, 2017

פרשת ויגש
ט' בטבת תשע"ז

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* [Genesis] 44:18-47:27

In this *parasha*, Yosef reveals himself to his brothers, prompting the entire family to move to Egypt, where Yosef reunites with his father, Yaakov.

The list of the people who went down to Egypt as part of Yaakov's family mentions only the men by name, with two exceptions: Deena, Yaakov's daughter by Leah, and Serach, the daughter of Asher. Many people believe that only the men are mentioned by name because in the patriarchal society of that time, only men affected history.

Why, then, is Serach mentioned? The *Midrash* (Midrash Avot 45) asks this question and offers the following answer: When the brothers found out that Yosef was still alive and was in fact the viceroy of Egypt, they were afraid to tell their aged father for fear of the news being too overwhelming for him. This fear was justified, as we see in verse (45:26): " וַיִּגְדּוּ לוֹ לֵאמֹר, עוֹד יוֹסֵף חַי, וְכִי-הוּא מֹשֶׁל, בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם; " – They [the brothers] told him [Yaakov] saying, 'Yosef is still alive and he rules over all of Egypt' and his heart became faint because he did not believe them."

Enter Serach, who sang Yaakov a song and, in the course of the song, kept mentioning Yosef, until she finally wove into the song the fact that Yosef was still alive and living in Egypt. This is reflected in verse (45:27): " וַיִּדְבְּרוּ אֵלָיו, אֵת כָּל- דְּבָרֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵהֶם, וַיִּרְא אֶת-הָעֲגֵלוֹת, אֲשֶׁר-שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף לְשֵׂאת אֹתוֹ; וַתַּחֲי, דְּבָרֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵהֶם – They told him all of Yosef's words which he had spoken to them, and he saw the wagons which Yosef had sent to carry, and the spirit of Yaakov, their father, revived."

According to another *midrash*, in gratitude for Serach's compassion and modesty, Yaakov blessed her with long life. She lived through the entire exile in Egypt and was the one who told Moshe where to find the bones of Yosef, which the Bnei Yisrael took out of Egypt with them (*Mechilta Bashalach* 10). In return for her song and breaking the news, Yaakov blessed her, saying "May you live forever and never die." According to the *midrash* in *Kallah Rabbati* 3:23, Serach was eventually permitted to enter heaven alive, something achieved only by very few, people such as Chanoch (Genesis 5:22) and Eliyahu (II Kings 2:11).

The mention of Serach foreshadows the beginning of *Sefer Shemot* (the Book of Exodus) in which women play all of the critical roles. The midwives who refused to kill the Jewish babies, Moshe's mother who put him into the bulrushes, his sister who stood on the bank to guard over him, and the daughter of Pharaoh who drew him out of the water were the exceptional women who put the wheels of redemption into motion. The redemption from Egypt could not have happened without the women, even in the context of a patriarchal society. This line of remarkable women begins in this *parasha* with Serach, the daughter of Asher.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What was so kind and compassionate about the way Serach broke the news of Yosef being alive to Yaakov?
- Name some other remarkable women in the Torah. What made them so remarkable?
- Name a remarkable woman that you know. What makes her so remarkable?