



JEWISH MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN

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In the Torah reading of the first day of Rosh Hashana, and of the second day – the two days are considered “one long day;” two parts of the same “head.” We relate the stories of Sarah, Rachel and Chana, because, the Talmud explains, on Rosh Hashana they each conceived, “their plights were remembered.” So Torah informs us that it was on Rosh Hashana that G-d blessed Sarah, Rachel and Chana with children, so obviously there is a message here for the entire year.

Where do we find the lesson? In the Torah of Light, which illuminates its own teachings, enabling us to learn from them.

So, what lesson can we derive from the Torah reading about Sarah, on the first day of Rosh Hashana? Immediately in the first verse it says: “... G-d remembered Sarah.” G-d had made a promise to Sarah and He fulfilled it – she gave birth to a son.

The son was Yitzchak, as the Torah narrates at length. The Torah reading the second day continues on, describing Yitzchok’s qualities, having been raised by Avraham and Sarah. Sarah involved herself in his upbringing from the outset, even more so than Avraham.

This has its roots in Torah; during a child’s early years “he is dependent upon his mother.” And when due to Avraham’s great compassion he asks of G-d, “If only Ishmael could live before You,” Sarah interjects, “he will not be your heir;” rather it will be Yitzchok – for G-d had stated, “Yitzchok will be known as your offspring.”

On Rosh Hashana, we underscore both themes: G-d blessed Sarah with a child because she beseeched and she argued forcefully, even telling Avraham “you are responsible,” for not praying enough for a child.

Sarah was a respectful wife; how did she speak to Avraham that way? When it comes to having a Jewish child and raising him Jewishly one does not stop; and all measures – Torah measures – must be used.

“Torah’s ways are pleasant and all her paths are peace” – but these ways of peace can be employed with Torah’s intensity; and these efforts will succeed, as Sarah’s did; “Yitzchok will be your heir.” We read the continuation in the Torah portion of the second day that Avraham and Yitzchok “proceeded together.” Rashi explains “together” to mean with the same level of self-sacrifice.

This is what is meant by the statement: “Educate a child...even when he grows old he won’t turn away from it.” This refers to education in a child’s formative years – which



depends mostly upon the woman, the mother, as explained in Jewish Law, and as seen in day-to-day life.

Similarly, regarding Rachel, we find that on Rosh Hashana G-d remembered her plight. The Written Torah describes, and to a greater extent the Oral Torah, the self-sacrifice she invested in order to have a child; subsequently, "G-d opened her womb" – as the Midrash describes at length. The same is true regarding Chana.

As said, these three women have in common, that G-d blessed them on Rosh Hashana.

So at the beginning of the year we must remember and contemplate their deeds, applying them to our actions throughout the year – especially for a mother, a teacher and mentor.

A child requires both elements: He needs to eat, drink, and sleep, as well as play, so that he will be healthy, preparing him to carry out his G-dly purpose in this world when he will grow up.

At the same time, there is another dimension to attend to: The child's education in spiritual matters.

As said many times, immediately upon a child's birth it is a Jewish custom, "which is Torah," that the baby immediately see holy words around him. It was customary to hang, in the birthing room, holy amulets, etc.

And when rocking the baby to sleep, the mother would sing – the baby could not yet understand – but a mother knew to put her baby to sleep by singing to him, at one or one-and-a-half years, a lullaby that "there is nothing better than Torah." There are raisins and almonds, but they all fall short; "the true merchandise and the best merchandise is Torah."

Through the child hearing this... – we are told of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya: His mother would bring his cradle to the Study Hall, and the Mishna praises him, "Happy is she who bore him" – and because of this, he grew to become the great Rabbi Yehoshua.

And not only was his mother praised; he himself was extolled for it!

