

And Sarah laughed at herself, saying, “After I have withered shall I again have delicate skin? And my husband is old!” (18:12)

Is it possible that Sarah *Imeinu* questioned Hashem’s ability to produce a miracle? Certainly not! She simply did not believe that this was a Divine message. It was the courteous wish of a guest who was just being nice. Sarah had long passed her childbearing age. It would take nothing less than a miracle for her to give birth to a child. Had she known the true identity of these travelers, she would not have been so quick to laugh. **Horav Mordechai Eliyahu, zl**, has a different approach to the entire *parsha*, which I feel portrays Sarah in a positive light and teaches us an added dimension concerning her character.

Sarah was the epitome of integrity. This is indicated by the Torah’s emphasis, *Va’techacheish Sarah*, “And Sarah denied” (that she had laughed). They had never before heard any form of prevarication from Sarah. Obviously, this was an isolated incident which is underscored. There must be more to it. The *Rishon L’Tzion* explains that, just as today there are support groups for many ailments and situations, women at that time must have similarly supported one another. Childless women must have provided solace for one another. A support group allows a group of people who are grappling with the same issues to come together, to talk, encourage one another. The group allows them a “release” from the general unintentional lack of sensitivity to those who have special needs, who have a family member in a special needs situation, or who have undergone a trauma which distinguishes them from others. People are not mean; some are insensitive or just plain thoughtless. The support group avails a person an escape from a society that is thoughtless.

A woman who is barren has a greater sense of compassion for another woman who is living through a similar situation. Sarah *Imeinu* was the rallying point for other women in her situation. Now, let us picture what must have taken place when Avraham *Avinu* shared with his wife the wonderful news of a child imminently joining their family. Sarah was ecstatic, but very demanding. She could not perceive herself as a mother with a child walking down the street, while all of her friends to whom she had been a tower of support continued to endure a life of pain and loneliness. She demanded that Avraham pray for all of the other women who were childless. If she was to be a mother – so, too, should they become mothers. Our Matriarch stood crying bitter tears before her husband: “Please, you must intervene on behalf of the others. My motherhood will only increase their pain.” Avraham prayed, and when Sarah conceived, so did all of the other women who had until that time been barren.

When Sarah gave birth to Yitzchak, the air was filled with the sounds of infants crying, because when Sarah gave birth, so, too, did all of the other women. The joy was palpable. The entire region was awash with the joyful sounds of *mazel tov!* There was a problem, however. The *litzanei ha’dor*, skeptics of the generation, sick individuals who simply could not tolerate the good fortune of

those who adhere to Hashem's command, did not believe in miracles. How could they? They did not believe in G-d! If there is no G-d, there can be no miracles. They conjectured that all of these women – including Sarah – had been ill with some undisclosed disease that had attacked the reproductive ability of certain women, thereby rendering them barren. It was no miracle. It was a medical breakthrough.

Such foolish talk, albeit nonsensical, can damage the minds of simple people, influencing them to believe the utter nonsense they were hearing. Hashem performed a miracle. In those days, there was no such "invention" as a baby bottle. An infant nursed from its mother. If this was not feasible, the mother would hire a wetnurse to nurse her child. Since so many women had babies all at once, certainly there was a shortage of wetnurses. To make matters more obvious, Hashem prevented the flow of mother's milk from all of the women other than Sarah, thus compelling all of the new mothers to turn to our Matriarch to sustain their babies. They said, "It is only in your merit that we have given birth, but now, we have no milk to nourish our children. Can you help?" Sarah nursed all of the children. This is what is meant by the *pasuk* (*Bereishis* 21:1), *Heinikah banim* Sarah, "Sarah would nurse children," – all of the children.

This could not go on forever. The women begged Sarah to pray for them – which she certainly did. A whole generation of barren women was now acutely aware of the miraculous births of their children. It was no medical breakthrough. It was the work of Hashem. Avraham and Sarah had intervened for them. Thus, a generation of pagans turned to Hashem with conviction when they were exposed to the truth.