

Hidden Lessons from a Hidden Woman

Haftorat Naso

Shoftim 13:2-25

This week's haftorah describes one of the most hidden women in Tanach: Tzelalponit from whom we can glean so many hidden lessons. I have just learned that the name Tzelalponit has the power to counteract negative spiritual forces. This name protected the daughter of a mother who had lost several infants shortly after birth. It, moreover, has the power to save women whose life is in danger, when added to their original name. Read on and you will understand why...

The Connection between the Haftorah and the Torah Reading

This week's *haftorah* describes the birth of Shimshon, a lifetime *Nazir* (Nazarite). This is an appropriate *haftorah* for this week's Torah reading, which discusses the laws of the *Nazir*, who may not drink wine, partake from anything made from grapes; cut the hair of his head, nor come in contact with the dead. In *Parashat Naso*, the laws of the *Nazir* follow the unfortunate story of the *sota* (the woman suspected of adultery) to teach us that "anyone who sees the *sota* in her disgrace will vow to abstain from wine" [as does the *Nazir*](*Babylonian Talmud, Sota 2a*). In contrast, our *haftorah* prophesies the birth of Shimshon, who was supposed to be a *Nazir* from the womb, not as a result of a moral flaw of any woman, but rather, it was the merit of his mother – Manoach's wife – which brought about the birth of Shimshon.

The Merit of Manoach's Wife

"An angel of Hashem appeared to the woman, and said to her, Behold now, you are barren, and have never given birth; you shall conceive and bear a son. Consequently, beware now, and do not drink wine or strong drink, and do not eat any unclean thing. Because you shall conceive, and bear a son; and a razor shall not come upon his head, for the child shall be a *Nazir* to G-d from the womb; and he will begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines. And the woman came and said to her husband, saying, A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of an angel of God, very awesome; but I did not ask him from where he was and his name he did not tell me. But he said to me, Behold, you shall conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine or strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a *Nazir* to G-d from the womb to the day of his death" (*Shoftim 13:3-7*).

Why did the angel appear to Manoach's wife and not to Manoach? Perhaps it was because the angel appeared without prayer or preparation, and spontaneous prophetic experiences happen more to women. Malbim explains that the reason why the angel didn't appear to Manoach but rather to his wife is because she was more ready than him for the appearance of the angel. In the end of the *haftorah* we see how Manoach's wife excels in *emuna* (faith), and through the high level of her faith she is able to reassure her husband who was afraid that "We shall surely die, for we have seen a G-dly angel" (*Shoftim 13:22*). Manoach's wife reassured him, "Had Hashem wanted to put us to death, He would not have accepted from our hand an elevation-offering and a meal-offering, nor would He have shown us all this, nor would He let us hear such tidings at this time" (*ibid.* 23). She understood that if Hashem wished them to die, he wouldn't have sent them an angel informing them that they would bear a son who would fight the Philistines.

Learning Emuna from Manoach's Wife

Even though Manoach's wife had witnessed far less miracles than *Am Yisrael* in the desert, she would have much to teach the Jewish people in the wilderness. Had only the Jewish people in the desert used Manoach's wife's principle of thinking, many complaints and fears could have been avoided. Using her logic, Rabbi Nebenzahl explains how they should have realized that had Hashem wished to let the Jewish people die of thirst in the wilderness, He would not have accepted their Korban Pesach only a few days earlier. He would not have shown them all the great miracles in Egypt and by the sea, and He would not have promised them entry into *Eretz Yisrael*. When we succumb to irrational fears, it is our *yetzer hara* (negative inclination) that makes us think like Manoach rather than his wife. If we only realize all the endless miracles that Hashem showers upon us every single day, there would be no room for pessimistic thoughts. When things don't go our way, rather than being afraid that Hashem is punishing us, we can learn from Manoach's wife to recognize Hashem's great love for us and that it is all a test to bring us closer to Him.

"Hatzlelponi": Woman of Shadows

Who was Manoach's wife, the mother of Shimshon? Although her name is not directly given in Tanach, according to the *midrash*, her name was צללפוני Tzelalfoni(t) or הצללפוני Hatzlelponi (*Babylonian Talmud, Baba Bathra* 91a). This name appears in 1 *Divrei haYamim* 4:3, being the name of a woman from the tribe of Yehudah. As a rule, it is mainly the males who are mentioned in genealogies, as the heads of families, Hatzlelponi stands out, and there must, therefore, be a special reason for mentioning her. Radak concludes that she was an important woman. The *midrash* explains, that Manoach's wife was righteous, for she merited to speak with the angel. Since she saw an angel her name is called Tzelalfoni. The "Poni" part of her name refers to "Ponah beMalach," – she saw (or turned to) an angel. The "Tzelal" part of her name refers to being in the shadow of the angel. "Tzel" is a term used in the Torah when Lot sees an angel (*Bereishit* 19:8), and Manoach's wife sees an angel twice, therefore she is called "Hatzlel" (with a double lamed), rather than just "Hatzel." (*Bemidbar Rabah* 10:5). This is congruent with Malbim's explanation of Song of Songs 2:17 "*Hatzellalim*" – "The shadows" referring to prophetic visions.

Going After His Wife

Rabbi Nachman said: Manoach was an ignorant man, as is written, "Manoach rose and went after his wife" (*Shoftim* 13:11). But Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak disagreed, asking: Does this mean that Elkana was ignorant, from the verse "Elkana went after his wife" (Tosafot note that they were not able to find such a verse), or Elisha, as is written, "He rose and went after her" (2 *Melachim* 4:30)? In these cases the verse simply means that the man followed the advice of the woman. The same is true of Manoach, who followed his wife's advice. Rabbi Ashi said, in view of Rabbi Nachman's words, claiming that Manoach was ignorant; it would seem that he did not even study the Torah. For it is written, "Rivka and her maids arose, and they rode the camels, and they went after the man" (*Bereishit* 24:41). They did not go before the man (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot* 61a).

Allow the Man to Go First, and He Will Follow the Advice of His Wife

Perhaps one reason why Chazal teach that a man should not walk behind a woman even his own wife, is that seeing the behind of a woman, may cause a man to have improper thoughts. Even in regards to his own wife, it seems to me, that he should not regard her rear, in order not to think of her in a lowly

immodest way. Rather her face should be foremost in his mind. Rabbi Nachman in the *gemara* defends the great men (Elkana and Elisha) who are described as walking after a woman, by explaining that they did not necessarily walk after (behind) a woman in the physical sense, but rather, they followed the advice of the woman, which is totally legitimate. The *gemara* implies that women have what to say even to the greatest prophets. (According to the *midrash*, Elkana was also a prophet.) Rabbi Ashi still insists that although Elkana and Elisha followed the advice of women, in the case of Manoach, he was ignorant and was not only under his wife's influence, but he did, in fact, walk behind her. This had to be so, since the angel appeared to her and not to him, "She alone knew the place where [the angel] appeared" (*Metzudat David, Shoftim* 13:11). However, according to Rashi *ibid.*, Manoach went after his wife's advice. We can, therefore conclude that Manoach followed his wife both in the physical and spiritual sense. A possible reason why it is only acceptable for a man to follow a woman in the spiritual but not in the physical sense, is that on the exterior level it is important that the husband comes before the wife. He needs to feel important in this way in order for him to be ready to follow the internal advice of his wife, for on the innermost level, "The woman of valor is the crown of her husband" (*Mishlei* 12:4).

Saving On Ben Pelet in her Prior Reincarnation

Hatzlalponit, the mother of Shimson, is one of the seven barren women in the world corresponding to the seven days of creation. She corresponds to the sixth day of creation – the day Adam and Chava were created. (*Sefer Kehilat Ya'acov* 95). The Rama of Pano reveals that Tzelaponit was the reincarnation of Lamech's wife Tzila, which also means shadow. She had two shadows (as the word *tzelal* indicates) and was later reincarnated in Chana who sat in the shadow of Hashem. Both of these women, who gave birth to special men after being barren, rectified the original Tzila who drank a potion in order to prevent pregnancy, so her husband, Lamech, could enjoy basking in her undivided shadow. (*Sefer Gilgulei Neshamot* 30). The Rama of Pano, furthermore brings that Tzelalponit was the reincarnation of the wife of On ben Pelet, whom she saved (*hitzila*) from the wicked congregation of Korach. The first part of the name "Tzelal" (צלל) shares the same root as the word for saving (צלה). Since she saved On ben Pelet, in her reincarnation as Tzelaponit, she merited to see the angel first. (*ibid.* 90).

In her Last Reincarnation the Rainclouds Came to Her First

The last reincarnation of Tzelalponit and Manoach was during the time of the Talmud. Abba Chelkiah, the grandson of Choni HaMa'agal (who was famous for causing the rain to fall) was Manoach the ignorant man who went after his wife. The Talmud recounts, that people would come to Abba Chilkiya to ask him to pray for rain. He went after his wife and placed himself between the sages and his wife, because he didn't trust the sages not to look at his wife. Moreover, the clouds of rain came up first from where his wife was standing rather than from where he was standing. The reason is that the wife has more merit since she is in the house and she gives bread to the poor. In this way, she benefits them more than her husband who just gives them money. Another reason why the rain would fall for the wife of Rabbi Chilkiya is that their neighborhood was full of ruffians. Abba Chilkiya prayed (מצלי) that they would die; whereas, his wife prayed that they would repent, and so it happened (*Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit* 23b). The Rama of Pano adds that Abba Chilkiya went after his wife to show that what he did in the reincarnation of Manoach was well intended and for the good, for his wife was very pious. Just as the rainclouds came to her first, so did the angel come to her first in her previous reincarnation of Manoach's wife – the Tzelalponit (*Gilgulei Neshamot* 1).