

The Inner Meaning of Infertility

Barren Women

The first barren woman in the Bible was Sarah. In fact, not only was she barren, but she was also "without child". The sages explain that this means that she had no "child-bearing organ." Sarah had no possibility of having children because she had no womb. The fact that she eventually was able to give birth is a double miracle.

Sarah "gave birth" to Isaac twice: once physically, when she was 90, and then again spiritually, when she was 127. According to the *Zohar*, Isaac was born with a feminine soul, meaning that he was not able to marry and father children. Sarah passed away during the Binding of Isaac. As a result of her passing and due to Sarah's self-sacrifice, Isaac received a masculine soul.

Sarah is the all-inclusive barren woman. Following Sarah, Rebecca was barren then Rachel then Channah (Samuel's mother).

Rachel and Sarah have a special connection. They are both characterized by their sacrifice for the Jewish people. Just as Sarah died in order to spiritually "give birth" to Isaac, Rachel died while giving birth to Jacob's twelfth and last son, Benjamin.

There is another famous barren woman in the Bible. The wife of Mano'ach, Samson's mother. The word "barren" (עֲקָרָה) appears twice in regard to her, indicating an extra level of barrenness. Mano'ach's wife merited a son of a very unique character. Samson is sometimes characterized as a chaotic Mashiach. The Messianic formula is lights of chaos in rectified vessels. Samson had the lights of chaos, but he did not have enough rectified vessels.

When the Philistines captured Samson, they took him so that he would "play before them," meaning that he was displayed in their stadium. We learn from the Arizal that to play before them (וישחק) is actually related to Isaac, whose name appears in this form 4 times in the Bible. Here we see a connection between Isaac and Samson, and apparently there is a connection between all four men who were born to barren mothers.

Akeret Habayit

The first chapter of *Hallel*—the section of Psalms recited on all joyous occasions—praises God for the miracle of redemption from Egypt and ends with the verse, "The *akeret* of the house is transformed, the mother of the children is joyous, Halleluyah".

The Hebrew word *akeret* (עֲקָרָת) is usually translated as "mistress." But actually, the word *akeret* means "the barren woman." And so the correct translation of the verse is, "The barren woman of the house is transformed, the mother of the children is joyous." God transforms her and gives her children. He makes her a home.

Why were these women barren? What does it mean to be barren? One of the explanations the Lubavitcher Rebbe gives is that there was an imbalance between the

two parts of the pulse of their soul, between the “run” and the “return.” If there is too much running to God in the soul, which was the case with these barren women, it causes the soul to depart from the body. Every Jew has a true yearning for God, wishing to be included only within God. This is especially true of righteous women. The *Zohar* compares this to a little flame below always yearning for the large flame above. Like the woman who is always yearning for her husband, she has a tremendous yearning to be included, even swallowed up, within the Divine. Because of this experience of constantly running to God, she cannot give birth. There is not enough “return,” i.e., not enough connection our mundane reality. This is the meaning of the words, “the barren woman is transformed,” which can also be read as “the barren women is given ‘return.’” As much as the small flame is yearning to reach above, it has to settle down and connect below, as well.

Akeret (עֲקֵרֶת), is a very unique word, appearing only once in the entire Bible. Its value is 770, a very important number for Lubavitchers. 770 is also the numerical value of *paratzta*, “You shall spread forth” (פָּרַצְתָּ) as in the verse, “You shall spread forth [to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south].” This “spreading forth” is accomplished by having many children.

This verse “You shall spread forth” was said to Jacob. The four corners of the earth (and four directions) correspond to Jacob’s four wives. The name Peretz, Judah’s son, from whom the Mashiach comes, shares a root with *paratzta*. 770 also equals “Beit Mashiach,” meaning “the house of Mashiach” (בֵּית מְשִׁיחַ). To have children is to make a house, the house of Mashiach. With every child, a woman sacrifices herself in order to bring another spark of Mashiach into the world.

Joy

Giving birth is more meaningful after being barren. After a barren woman gives birth, she is filled with joy. But in order for her to give birth in the first place, she needs to have joy. Joy is the key to redemption. The joy comes from faith that the good will come, “Think good and it will be good”. “With joy” (בְּשִׂמְחָה) has the same letters as “thought” (מַחְשְׁבָה). All thought should be filled with joy and through this good joyful thought, a woman becomes pregnant.

Earnest faith in God is actually “the mother of the children is joyous” (אִם הַבָּנִים שִׂמְחָה). The initial letters of this phrase spell “woman” (אִשָּׁה) and since it equals 306, the average value of each letter in “woman” (אִשָּׁה) is 102, the value of “faith” (אֱמוּנָה).

The first joyous person was Isaac, whose name literally means, “He will laugh.” To laugh is the true expression of great joy in the soul. Clearly Isaac’s essence is laughter and joy. Indeed, he is the embodiment of, “the mother of the children is joyous.” Not only is he laughter, but he brought joy and laughter to both Abraham and Sarah. That is the Mashiach.

Every child should be an Isaac. He should be able to take the lights of chaos and place them into rectified vessels, i.e., Torah and *mitzvot*. He should fill the world with light, with love of the people of Israel, so that the light reaches all four corners of the world.



Abraham was also a messianic figure, but because of Isaac's joy, Abraham realized that the true messianic figure was his son. That is why it says that in the future when the Mashiach comes we will call Isaac, "our father," not Abraham and not Jacob. Isaac has a special essence that connects him with Mashiach.