

Divine Permission to Lie?

Source Sheet by Benjamin Sigal

Genesis 18:10-13

(10) Then one said, “I will return to you next year, and your wife Sarah shall have a son!” Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, which was behind him. (11) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having the periods of women. (12) And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment—with my husband so old?” (13) Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?’

- What is going on here?
- Why does God change Sarah's words?

Ramban on Genesis 18:13

(1) I BEING OLD. This is the explanation of Sarah's words, *after I am waxed old*. And G-d's words [that Sarah had said, “I being old”], were true, but for the sake of peace God did not reveal what she also said, namely, *My lord being old also*, for [if He were quoting Sarah], God should have said, “I and my lord are old,” as Sarah had laughed concerning both of them.

- What is Ramban's explanation of the events?
- What is Ramban's proposed fix? How do you feel about it?

Bava Metziah 87a:10-11

It is written that Sarah said: “**And my lord is old**” (Genesis 18:12), **and it is**

בראשית י"ח:י"ג-י"א

(י) וַיֹּאמֶר נָשׁוּב אֲשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ כְּעֵת חַיָּה וְהִנֵּה-בֵן לְשָׂרָה אֲשֶׁתְּךָ וְשָׂרָה שֹׁמֶעֶת פֶּתַח הָאֵהָל וְהוּא אֶתְרִיו: (יא) וְאַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה זָקְנִים בָּאִים בְּיָמִים חֲדָל לְהַיּוֹת לְשָׂרָה אַרְח כְּנָשִׁים: (יב) וַתִּצְחַק שָׂרָה בְּקִרְבָּהּ לֵאמֹר אֶתְרִי בְלֹתִי הִיתָה-לִּי עֵדוּנָה וְאֵדֹנִי זָקֵן: (יג) וַיֹּאמֶר יְקֹוֹק אֶל-אַבְרָהָם לְמָה זֶה צָחֲקָה שָׂרָה לֵאמֹר הֲאֵנִי אִמָּנָם אֶלֶד וְאֲנִי זָקֵנָתִי:

רמב"ן על בראשית י"ח:י"ג

(א) ואני זקנתי הוא פירוש אחרי בלותי ודבריו אמת אך מפני השלום לא רצה לגלות מה שאמרה "ואדוני זקן" כי היה ראוי שיאמר "ואני ואדוני זקנים" כי שרה בשניהם תצחק:

בבא מציעא פ"ז א:י"ג-י"א

כתיב (בראשית יח, יב) ואדוני זקן וכתיב

written: “And the Lord said to Abraham: Why did Sarah laugh, saying: Shall I certainly bear a child, **and I am old?**” (Genesis 18:13). This verse indicates that **the Holy One, Blessed be God, did not repeat** to Abraham **that** which Sarah actually **said**, that her husband is old. Why did God change the wording of her statement so that she was referring to herself? **The school of Rabbi Yishmael taught: Peace is** of such **great** importance **that even the Holy One, Blessed be God, altered** the truth for the sake of preserving peace, **as it is stated: “And Sarah laughed within herself**, saying: After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, **and my lord is old,” and it is written: “And the Lord said to Abraham: Why did Sarah laugh, saying: Shall I certainly bear a child, and I am old?”**

- What is the Talmud trying to teach us here?

Chizkuni, Genesis 18:13

(1) למה זה צחקה (1) “why is it that she ridiculed, etc.?” [the author now repeats something he had already explained, at the top of this page, offering an alternate explanation. Ed.] “If you were to ask why G-d did not rebuke Avraham when he entertained similar doubts in Genesis 17,17, the answer is that seeing that Sarah is considered as on a lower spiritual level than her husband, it is considered as clear that if even her doubts were criticised, her husband’s doubts were deserving of a rebuke even more so, without the need for the Torah to spell this out. Our author uses a parable to demonstrate this point, writing that when a wise woman wishes

(בראשית יח, יג) ואני זקנתי דלא מותיב הקב"ה כדקאמרה איהי תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל גדול שלום שאפי' הקב"ה שינה בו שנאמר (בראשית יח, יב) ותצחק שרה בקרבה וגו' (בראשית יח, יב) ואדוני זקן וכתיב (בראשית יח, יג) ויאמר יקוק אל אברהם וגו' ואני זקנתי

חזקוני, בראשית י"ח:י"ג

(א) למה זה צחקה אם תאמר למה לא הקפיד הקב"ה על אברהם כמו שהקפיד על שרה, שהרי כמו כן צחק אברהם כמו שנאמר בפרשה אחרונה שבפרשת לך לך אלא משל לאשה חכמה שבאה להוכיח כלתה והוכיחה את בתה וממילא הרגישה כלתה בעצמה, כך אם הוכיח הקב"ה אברהם בפניו היה מתבייש אברהם אלא הוכיחו מן הצד. (ב) ואני זקנתי פרש"י שינה הכתוב בשביל השלום, כלומר דהכי אמרה שרה אפשר להיות לי תקנת ולד שהרי אחרי בלותי פי' זקנתי, ידעתי

to rebuke her daughter-in-law for something both she and her daughter had been guilty of, she rebukes only her daughter instead, allowing her daughter-in-law to draw the necessary conclusions about her own behaviour. If G-d had rebuked Avraham in Sarah's presence, he would have felt ashamed; He therefore did so in an indirect manner. (2) ואני זקנתי, "seeing that I am too old?" According to Rashi the Torah changed what Sarah had actually said out of concern for the harmony existing between Avraham and Sarah. What Sarah had actually meant was: "what good does it do for me to have been rejuvenated as long as my husband cannot be rejuvenated also?" How can I become pregnant from his seed? Had the Torah conveyed this thought to Avraham it would have meant that it was only Avraham's inadequacy that prevented Sarah from having a child.

שהיתה לי עדנה ובחרות שהרי פירסתי
נדה ואדוני זקן כלומר כל זה איננו שוה לי
שהרי אדוני זקן ואיך אתעבר עוד, א"כ
תלתה הזקנה באברהם לגמרי ובזה שינה
הכתוב.

- What is Chizkuni's explanation for why everything happened?
- How does this explanation feel to you?

Genesis 18:15

(15) Sarah lied, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was frightened. Came the reply, "You did laugh."

בראשית י"ח:ט"ו

(טו) וַתִּכְחַשׁ שָׂרָה אֵל לֵאמֹר לֹא צִחֲקֹתִי
כִּי אִי גֵרָאָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵל לֹא כִּי צִחֲקֹתִי: