מדרש

# Midrash

ON GENESIS 17:15

## Why Sarah's name change meant she outranked Abraham

Bereshit Rabbah 47:1

Sarah's elevation in name signals her elevation in status: the Rabbis teach that she surpassed her husband in worth, so much so that God instructs Abraham to heed her voice. The removed yod from "Sarai" is not lost but divided and honored—half joining Abraham's name, and in Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai's telling, the letter itself protests its removal and is comforted with a promise of future prominence, as seen when it later begins the name Yehoshua. Rabbi Mana closes by noting that Sarah's new name reflects her expanded role: once a princess to her own people, she now becomes a princess to all humanity. AI SUMMARY

“God said to Abraham: Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, as Sarah is her name” (Genesis 17:15). “God said to Abraham: Sarai your wife…” – it is written: “A woman of valor is her husband’s crown” (Proverbs 12:4). Rabbi Aḥa said: Her [Sarah’s] husband was crowned with her, but she was not crowned with her husband.

The Rabbis say: She was her husband’s superior. Everywhere the man gives the orders; here, however, “Everything that Sarah says to you, heed her voice” (Genesis 21:12). Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korḥa said: The yod that the Holy One blessed be He took from Sarai was divided – half for Sarah and half for Abraham.

Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai said: The yod that the Holy One blessed be He took from Sarai soared and flew up before the throne of the Holy One blessed be He. It said before Him: ‘Master of the universe: Because I am the smallest of the letters, You have removed me from the righteous Sarah?’ The Holy One blessed be He said to it: ‘In the past, you were part of the name of a female and at the end of the letters; now I shall place you into the name of a male and at the beginning of the letters, as it is stated: “Moses called Hoshea son of Nun, Joshua [Yehoshua]” (Numbers 13:16).

Rabbi Mana said: In the past she was a princess for her people. Now she will be a princess for all the inhabitants of the world.

