חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

SUDILKOV · DEGEL MACHANEH EPHRAIM, VAYERA

Why can Sarah still give birth in old age?

Degel Machaneh Ephraim

The Degel Machaneh Ephraim reads Sarah's laughter, "Shall I really bear a child, now that I am old?", as a hint about the yetzer hara (the evil inclination) and the sitra achra (the "other side"), which the author links to barrenness through the numerical values of ha'af and amnam. Drawing on the Midrash's image of the Holy One cooling the male so that he would not beget, the author presents the sitra achra as old because it does not generate. He then answers Sarah's question in the verse, "Is anything too wondrous for Hashem?", by treating pele's alef as binah (understanding), the aspect of Ima (the mother) that enables birth once the divine judgments are sweetened. AI SUMMARY

"Shall I really bear a child, now that I am old?" One may say, by way of hint, that the yetzer hara (the evil inclination) is called "an old and foolish king," and this is in the manner of "he cooled the male so that he would not beget, so that they would not confound the world." For this reason the sitra achra (the "other side") is called old, because it does not beget. And this is what one may say about the word ha'af: its numerical value is that of Elokim, 86. Amnam has the numerical value of Samael, who is other gods and the sitra achra. This is why Sarah wondered, "Shall I bear a child, now that I am old?" That is, these aspects do not beget. The discerning will understand.

"Is anything too wondrous for Hashem?" One may say, in the manner that pele (wonder) is alef, and alef is the aspect of binah (understanding), as our Sages, of blessed memory, said: "alef is binah." This is the aspect of Ima, the mother, which is birth, for there is no mother without birth. Therefore this was the answer to Sarah's words, "How shall I bear a child when I am old?" So HaKadosh Baruch Hu (the Holy One, blessed be He) said, "Is anything too wondrous?", that is, alef, binah. When the name eled is included in its source, which is Ehyeh, all the dinim (judgments) are sweetened, and from there birth comes. Understand this. There is a wondrous hint in this: hayipale, that is, the first heh, which is always bound with the yod. Understand this well.

