Jewish Tribune – Lech Lecho

**Hope and Hopelessness**

“So what did you call the baby?” you ask the young couple.

All too often they will reply with two names, one less popular and one more modern. The former is after a great grandmother and the other “we liked”. No prizes what the baby will be known by.

In this week’s sedra we are introduced to Eliezer eved Avrohom, the faithful and enigmatic servant of Avrohom Ovinu.

Interestingly, Moshe Rabbeinu named his second son Eliezer. Was this after Eliezer the servant of Avrohom? Or was it just a name “we liked”?

Naming after Eliezer eved Avrohom would seem strange given that Chazal tell us that Eliezer was cursed. Rashi in parshas Chayei Soroh (Bereishis 24,39) tells us when Eliezer harboured thoughts of Yitzchok marrying his own daughter, Avrohom told him that Yitzchok was blessed and that Eliezer was cursed and the shidduch wouldn’t work.

In reality, Moshe Rabbeinu did not name his son after Eliezer, but named him Eliezer for the same reason that Avrohom named his servant Eliezer. Let me explain.

Reb Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin (Divrei Sofrim 16) explains that our very nation is built on the concept that only HKBH can save us when all is lost. Who would have dreamt that an aged Avrohom Ovinu and Soroh Imeinu would have progeny? It is only when all seems lost, that Hashem comes to our rescue.

Reb Tzadok writes:

אבל באמת מאת ה' היתה זאת שיהיה בנין האומה דוקא אחר היאוש הגמור שלא האמין שום אדם ואפילו שרה שתיפקד עוד

In truth, everything was from Hashem, that the building of a nation would only be after all hope is lost, when everyone, even Soroh Imeinu, had given up hope that she would yet bear a child.

Indeed, in the future too, salvation will only come at this point too. As the Gemoro (Sanhedrin 97a) says:

אין בן דוד בא עד עד שיתייאשו מן הגאולה

Moshiach will only come after we have despaired from the redemption

Furthermore, Chazal (Berachos 10a) tell us that we must live with this high level:

אפילו חרב חדה על צוארו אל ימנע מהרחמים

Even if a sword is placed on a person’s neck, he should not despair from mercy

Reb Tzadok adds that Avrohom Ovinu demonstrated this faith and confidence and went to save Lot when all others had abandoned any hope of rescuing him.

And who did Avrohom take with him on this dangerous rescue mission?

Eliezer. The gematria of Eliezer’s name is 318 which is one more than the gematria of the word יאוש (317) hopelessness. Avrohom knew this secret. That only HKBH can rescue us from the worst of scenarios, even after all hope seems lost.

Avrohom Ovinu named his servant Eliezer to remind him of this. It is no coincidence that, according to the Pirkei D’R’Eliezer, Eliezer was a gift to Avrohom from Nimrod after surviving the kivshan ha’esh, the fiery furnace.

And that is why Moshe Rabbeinu named his son Eliezer. Moshe Rabbeinu was also in a very difficult bind. The Midrashim tell us that Pharaoh tried to have Moshe executed but Moshe‘s neck turned to marble and the executioner was unable to carry out his job and Moshe was able to run away.

The name Eliezer contains Hashem’s name Kel and ezer, help. Moshe was thanking Hashem for helping him be delivered from the sword of Pharaoh.

As the possuk in Yisro (Shemos 18,4) says:

כִּי אֱלֹקֵי אָבִי בְּעֶזְרִי, וַיַּצִּלֵנִי מֵחֶרֶב פַּרְעֹה

The G-d of my father came to my aid and rescued me from Pharaoh’s sword.

Calling his son Eliezer reminded Moshe that his neck was quite literally on the line and that it is only HKBH we can turn to in moments of despair.

Moshe Rabbeinu did not name his second son after Avrohom’s servant, but the same name was chosen as a reiteration of the same theme, that only HKBH can come to our aid when all hope seems lost. That a Jew must never give up hope. Eliezer represents the theme of 318 over 317, of hope over hopelessness. An important and comforting thought.

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