

An Extraordinary Woman

We are all familiar with the legendary Eliyahu Hanavi who never dies and has appeared to people throughout all eras. However, there is a woman who embodies many of the same characteristics as Eliyahu Hanavi who also spans the generations but is far less known. We first meet this woman, *Serach* the stepdaughter of *Asher*, in the counting of those who came down to Egypt. She is also listed among those who entered the Land of Israel. The Gemara in *derech erez zuta* counts her among the select few who never die; who entered the Garden of Eden alive. What makes her so special? What is her strength?

The key to understanding this extraordinary woman is through examining the words she uses to describe herself. In *Shmuel bet*, chapter 20, we read the story of *Sheva ben Bichri's* rebellion against *Dovid Hamelech*, immediately following the rebellion of *Avshalom*. *Sheva ben Bichri* takes refuge in the city of *Avela bet Maacha*. *Dovid's* general *Yoav* and his troops surround the city to destroy

it completely at which point a woman calls to *Yoav* to speak with him before he begins his attack on the city. She chastises him for not first asking if the city would be willing to surrender, as is explicitly stated in the Torah. She describes herself as “*Shelumei Emunei Yisrael*”, the one who is whole and faithful in Israel. The Navi then informs us that she used her wisdom to convince the city to kill and hand over *Sheva*, thus saving the entire city from destruction. The *Midrash* notes that she used an ingenious tactic to persuade her fellow townspeople. She first told them that *Yoav* wanted a large amount of people from the city, which they refused. She came back with a lower amount which they also refused. After a number of times she told them that she negotiated with *Yoav* to accept just one person, to which they readily agreed.

She is greatly rewarded for creating this state of peace in *Yakov*

Chazal give us an insight into her description “*Shelumei Emunei Yisrael*”. They note that *Serach bat Asher* was one who connected loyal people together and created peace. She is also one who created greater *emunah*, faith among the

people. We find in the Midrash a number of places that *Serach* played this crucial role. The first, the Midrash notes, is that it was *Serach* who played her harp to gently tell *Yakov Avinu* that *Yosef Hatzadik* was alive. As a reward for restoring “life” in *Yakov Avinu*, he promises her long life. Just as we are told *Yakov Avinu* never dies, she as well entered *Gan Eden* alive. She is greatly rewarded for creating this state of peace in *Yakov*, and reestablishing peace in the whole family. Before *Yakov Avinu* dies, he tells *Yosef Hatzadik* the magic words — *Pakod Yifkod* —that the future redeemer will say. This formula was given over to *Serach* who was able to tell the elders that indeed *Moshe Rabbeinu* was the redeemer. It was only when they heard this confirmation that the Torah tells us “*vayamen ha’am*”, the people believed.

Serach is counted among the 22 righteous women in *Tanach*. The *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni* ascribes the *passuk* “*Piha patcha bechachma*” to her for her brilliance in saving an entire city in Israel. She is truly a model for us to develop these noble traits as we strive to create peace and love in all our surroundings. ■

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