In a few moments I will be offering to us a dvar Torah, a word of Torah commenting on today’s reading – the Story of the expulsion of Hagar.

This dvar torah –word of Torah emerges from one of simultaneous avenues of Torah interpretation that are identified by the acronym- PaRDeS–The Orchard.

These four levels of interpretation ensure that the Torah doesn’t remain a relic. Our interpretive powers reveal the vibrancy and breadth of the grand mythic structure of our people. As Homer’s writings have become the mythic structure of Western Civilization –the contributions of the grand Jewish myth is considerable in spite of the tension between Athens and Abraham.

First we must understand the simple meaning what the Torah text actually says –what do the words mean –Bible scholars at universities around the world engage in this work every day as do Greek scholars continue to pore over Homer’s works to understand its archaic Greek. Pshat- the simple meaning is the P in Pardes –

At the same time the reading of the text “hints” at something beyond it –we are somehow nudged by our interaction with the text. This hint is Remez - the R in Pardes

If you’re interested in creating a dvar torah – a word of Torah –we delve into the test- we seek in it lessons that will work for us today –this is the source of the commentaries of the Rabbis –midrash –their imaginative reading between the lines of the text. It is also the basis of a drasha- a sermon. Drash – seeking is the D in Pardes

Simultaneously our connection to Torah is watered and thrives on a subterranean stream the nurtures our capacity to see beyond the narrative of the Torah itself – to open oneself to the esoteric, hidden, mystical and mysterious meaning where the Torah stops being an historical document but rather becomes a guide to the heart and soul. This is Sod- the secret –the S in Pardes.

The Pardes- the Orchard is a wonderful image; an inviting image.

The Orchard, protective and plentiful; the Orchard, providing shade and sustenance; the Orchard, where underneath its Trees we sit and pass on the oral teaching; the verdant Orchard that is irrigated by the 4 rivers leaving Eden; the Orchard invites us in from wherever we come – from wherever we are. The Orchard has no walls or gates; the Orchard is an oasis in a parched existence.

Come let us go down to the garden, to the Orchard –come reap the blessings of our four fold path of making Torah our own.

We tend such an Orchard at TBZ. I invite all of us to benefit from it; to feel its protection from the heat of the Sun and to be wrapped in warmth when it is cold ; to taste of the bounteous fruit of our tradition.

We enter the Orchard every Shabbat morning at 9 am – Early? Not really, a great way to start your Shabbat. I invite you to an exhilarating experience –an adult experience, no Hebrew necessary.
All you have to bring is your whole self and you will join us in planting seeds in the Orchard's soil—these seeds will slowly sprout and show signs of growth and not much further down the line your *divrei Torah*—your words of Torah will be added to your branch on the tree of life. This will be one of the most important legacies you can leave to your descendants.

Many of our Torah study community stay for services at 10, others do not—there is no judgment.

The Orchard waits for you. So come on September 28 as we begin the Torah cycle with the Book of Genesis—our story of the creation of the universe and the creation of our people. Our ancient myths still inform our lives as Jews.

I challenge you to come for 4 weeks in a row as we examine the Creation and the recreation of the world and the Creation of our people. Try it, you’ll like it.

Now to today’s reading: the well-known story of Sarah and Hagar.

There is a back story to the story we will read today in Chapter 16—5 chapters back in the book of Genesis—*sefer bereshith*. It involves a younger Hagar.

*Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had given him no children; and she had a servant, a woman of Egypt whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, See, the Lord has not let me have children; go in to my servant, for I may get a family through her. And Abram did as Sarai said. So after Abram had been living for ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai took Hagar, her Egyptian servant, and gave her to Abram for his wife. And he went in to Hagar and she became with child, and when she saw that she was with child, she no longer had any respect for her master’s wife. And Sarai said to Abram, May my wrong be on you: I gave you my servant for your wife and when she saw that she was with child, she no longer had any respect for me: may the Lord be judge between you and me. And Abram said, The woman is in your power; do with her whatever seems good to you. And Sarai was cruel to her, so that she went running away from her. And an angel of the Lord came to her by a*
fountain of water in the waste land, by
the fountain on the way to Shur.
And he said, Hagar, Sarai’s servant, where
have you come from and where are you
going? And she said, I am running away
from Sarai, my master’s wife.
And the angel said to her, Go back, and
put yourself under her authority.
And the angel of the Lord said, Your seed
16:10 will be greatly increased so that it may
not be numbered.
And the angel of the Lord said, See, you
are with child and will give birth to a son,
to whom you will give the name Ishmael,
because the ears of the Lord were open to
your sorrow.
And he will be like a mountain ass among
men; his hand will be against every man
and every man’s hand against him, and he
will keep his place against all his brothers.
And to the Lord who was talking with her
she gave this name, You are a God who is
seen; for she said, Have I not even here in
the waste land had a vision of God and
am still living?
So that fountain was named, Fountain of
Life and Vision: it is between Kadesh and
Bered.
And Hagar gave birth to a child, the son of
Abram, to whom Abram gave the name of
Ishmael.
Abram was eighty-six years old when
Hagar gave birth to Ishmael.

In chapter 16 we read about the earlier conflict between Sarai (not yet Sarah) and the
concubine, Hagar (literally the “émigré”) after she is offered to Avram (not yet Avraham)
husband as a wife (isha) not as a concubine pilegesh. These events occur before the fully
realized covenant that Avram and Sarai will soon enter into and undergo the name change - the
“hey” ה that will be added in both their names - the “hey” representing the Divine. Avram and
Sarai will become Avraham and Sarah.
Sarai –is a name that may describe a title of someone in authority –a princess –one of royal stature. In our rabbinic commentaries Hagar is also understood to be a princess of Egypt- the daughter of the Pharaoh. The Rabbis go on to describe how, during the sojourn of Avram and Sarai in Egypt –the Pharaoh’s daughter is asked to be a companion to Sarai, as a gesture of friendship and gratitude. The Pharaoh had many daughters and allying her with a man of wealth and prominence and his regal wife, was an acceptable turns of events. But was it? a young daughter of Pharaoh and her elderly mistress. What could go wrong?

The earlier story tells us that Sarai offers Hagar to Avram in order that she would be “built up”, that is, to build up a household so that her legacy will be assured; a household that would nurture the next generation in the ways of Avram and Sarai.

Hagar’s new status as a wife isha to Avram, and not a concubine pilegesh, shifts authority over from Sarai to Avram. When confronted by Sarai’s anger over Hagar’s flaunting of her fertility before her barren mistress, and perhaps seeing her receive too much of Avram’s attentions he relinquishes his authority and tells Sarai to deal with Hagar as she wishes. We will deal with Avram’s apparent nonchalance in a moment.

Hagar’s pregnancy also threatens Sarai’s role in asserting the boundaries of legitimate inheritance (I guess she is still hopeful of bearing a child, a hope borne out in our reading today). One can also theorize that the basis for Sarai’s anger that Hagar and Avram may have fallen in love with each other. Insult added to injury is Sarai’s role in “arranging” this liaison. Sarai reacts by making Hagar’s life miserable – an understandable reaction, and the younger wife, Hagar, the émigré, flees into the desert as a result of the torments inflicted upon her.

In the story that we read today, Hagar is expelled from Avraham’s household and in her despair does not flee to the oasis but this time fails to see it.

But in our earlier tale -it is at the oasis on the Shur road where she is spotted by a passerby - a malach –messenger of the Divine. This the first encounter of a Divine messenger with a woman in our texts.

In contrast to our reading today the malach finds Hagar. But he does not respond to her cries of despair. In today’s reading the angel says that he is responding to voice of the lad and not Hagar’s cries. This leads to a wonderful interpretation that God listened to Ishmael even though he didn’t utter a word. Here the malach responds to silent prayers in his heart that need no articulation. A Hasidic teaching attributed the Vorke Rebbe, whose teaching was one of silence, tells us that it is silence that permits the Divine to permeate us and renew our spirits. It is in silence that the Divine, so to speak, “divines” the innermost prayers we all carry in our hearts. This is an apt observation for us at this season and every season.
The *malach-messenger* - is aware of her torments and tells her to go back to Avram and Sarai and that her travails will be rewarded by a son who is to be born and will be called Yishma-El – God will hear –this a foreshadowing of the account we read today.

Hagar is promised that this son will be his own man and will receive blessings. Then we see something extra special that does not appear in today’s reading. In her encounter with the messenger after hearing about her son and his blessings–she calls God by his four-letter name-YHVH and says that in her life God is El Roi- the God who has enlightened her and gave her new sight, a new way of seeing her situation. In many biblical episodes an ancient tale story serves to explain why a certain existing Negev oasis is call *be’er likhai ori*-the oasis of the living light. Another remarkable feature of Hagar’s meeting with the *malach* is her ability to overcome the awe and dread of such an encounter with the Divine and to engage in a conversation, using the YHVH the ineffable name acknowledging her allegiance to the God of Avram. In today’s reading, too, God will “open” Hagar’s eyes, as he will Avraham’s in tomorrow’s reading of the binding of Isaac.

The promise of Avram and his descendants, she is told, will be fulfilled by Yishma-el as well. He would be a founder of the 12 tribes

[By the way –Yishma-el’s nephew, Esau, Jacob’s twin will also be the founder of 12 tribes. Both Yishmael and Esau’s genealogies are given prominence in the Torah text ]

In our earlier story Avram shows no overt negative reaction to Sarai’s treatment of Hagar –but as the years passed and Yishma-el and Avram bonded, our reading today tells us that Sarah’s request to expel Hagar and Yishma-el seems evil in his eyes. Avraham is reassured, perhaps in a dream—that he should accede to Sarah’s demand and is assured that this is the right thing to do. The God who spoke within Avraham in today’s reading is an expression of Avraham's deep inner acknowledgment that he must stay true to Sarah and that their legacy had to emerge from her, both physically and spiritually. Sarah is the molder of our tradition. Sarah is our mother.

But the act of expelling his wife and son leaves an ominous mark on Avraham. Does he know of Hagar’s plight and encounter with the *malach* –did Hagar tell him of her first encounter when she was pregnant? Did Avrahaam send out someone to follow Hagar?

Avraham falls into a deep depression at the abrupt loss of his beloved wife and son. This depression leads him to a crisis of faith and is the context of Avraham’s final test, the request to offer up his son, Yitzhak on the altar. Avraham’s depression and passivity again prevents his protest of what he sees as God’s request. Perhaps this passivity is a mask for the anger he retains over Sarah’s request to expel Hagar and Yishmael –perhaps it is a conscious or an unconscious act of vengeance to offer up Sarah’s son as Sarah has offered up Hagar’s. In our
Let’s jump ahead a bit: to chapter 25: Genesis Chapter 25

1 And Abraham took another wife, and her name was Keturah.

2 And she bore him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah.

3 And Jokshan begot Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim.

4 And the sons of Midian: Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoch, and Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah.

5 And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac.

6 But unto the sons of the concubines, that Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts; and he sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.

7 And these are the days of the years of Abraham’s life which he lived, a hundred threescore and fifteen years.

8 And Abraham expired, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.

9 And Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron.
Yitzhak and Yishma-el will come together to bury their father. I don’t know if they embraced and wept on each other’s shoulders or did they just give each other a wink and a nod of recognition – but the sparkle in both their eyes said silently- we are sons of the same father "we’ll be seeing each other forever."

Ironic of course is that Isaac will dwell at be-er lekhai ro’i the place of Hagar’s epiphany, the place of Yishma-el’s annunciation.

It is this irony that clouds our contemporary engagement with the Muslim world. We see ourselves as offspring of the same father and we are comfortable in each other’s resting places.

The Jewish-Muslim connection here in Boston and elsewhere in the US must be strengthened – we can’t hold it hostage to the conflicts in the Middle East. Over the last decade or so I and a number of rabbinic colleagues have participated in learning exchanges with Muslim Imams and lay clergy.

We rotate from Mosque to shul. We do a little show and tell –Torah, ark, menorah eternal light, etc. And so we, too, visit the various mosques in our area and receive the necessary show and tell. Last time at TBZ our Muslim guests wanted to hear the Torah being chanted. Muslims love and use chants all the time. As I read I felt that were hearing something familiar- a tiny remembrance of the time when the Muslim and Jewish communities in Arabia and later in Spain lived together in their own peaceful manner.

Some in our community have claimed that we are dupes, being used by the Muslim community to put a good face on an inherently violent culture; that Islam condones lying in the service of the faith. We are familiar with such accusation hurled again Jews throughout the diaspora.
Some in the Jewish community, who hold strong anti-Muslim views (although they would deny it) accuse my colleagues and I as being dupes in a Muslim conspiracy to take over the world. That’s sounds familiar too.

But we have persevered and trust is in formation between us. This is the result of studying Koran and Torah texts together. We know so little about each other’s Scriptures (Islam’s Koran does not, as the Christian Gospels do, see itself as an extension of the Hebrew scripture). Muslims don’t really know the Hebrew Bible and we really do not know the Koran. So I know that we have a long way to go.

My friends: if Jews and Muslims cannot talk to each other in Boston –where will we be able to do so?

The first three Wednesdays in October we will offer a three part series on Judaism, Christianity and Muslim connection to the Holy Land. Our guests will include an Episcopalian priest and an Imam in their respective sessions.

This is a prelude to a 10 day synagogue pilgrimage leaving February 16 of next year. Everyone in the community is invited to the three part series.

Our trip will be following the Path of the Children of Abraham visiting Jewish, Christian and Muslim sites. We will encounter teachers from all of these three traditions. We will have daily contemplative services at sites of importance to these three traditions. Space is limited; let us know a.s.a.p. if you are interested in joining our community trip. Flyers are outside the Sanctuary.

Shana Tova