**CHEVRAH TORAH…LT, 5780**

**Discovering the Other—Understanding Ourselves**

Through the human exchange, difference becomes a blessing…We must learn the art of conversation, from which truth emerges not, as in Socratic dialogues, by the refutation of falsehood, but from the process of letting our world be enlarged by the presence of others who interpret reality in ways radically different from our own…We will make peace only when we learn that God loves difference and so, at last, must we.

[The Dignity of Difference, Rabbi J. Sacks, pgs. 22-23]

**Lech L’cha**

**Genesis 16:1-16**

**Key KOSHI:**

*HOW is Hagar’s relationship to God a lesson in Jewish spirituality?*

*WHAT does the relationship of Sarah & Hagar teach us*

*about discovering the “other” and better understanding “ourselves”…?*

**P’SHAT…The Story that Unearths THE Question: WHAT Are We to Become**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 16:1] Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. 2] And Sarai said to Abram, “Look, the Lord has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her.” And Abram heeded Sarai’s request. 3] So Sarai, Abram’s wife, took her maid, Hagar the Egyptian—after Abrahm had dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years—and gave her to her husband Abram as concubine. 4] He cohabitated with Hagar and she conceived, her mistress was lowered in her esteem. 5] And Sarai said to Abram, “The wrong done me is your fault! I myself put my maid in your bosom; now that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her esteem. The Lord decide between you and me!” 6] Abram said to Sarai, “Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right.” Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she ran away from her.  7]An angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the road to Shur, 8] and said, “Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?” And she said, “I am running away from my mistress Sarai.”  9] And the angel of the Lord said to her, “Go back to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment.” 10] And the angel of the Lord said to her,  “I will greatly increase your offspring,  And they shall be too many to count.”  11] The angel of the Lord said to her further,  “Behold, you are with child  And shall bear a son;  You shall call him Ismael,  For the Lord has paid heed to your suffering.  12] He shall be a wild ass of a man;  His hand against everyone,  And everyone’s hand against him;  He shall dwell alongside of all his kinsmen.”  13]And she called the Lord who spoke to her,  You are El-roi,” by which she meant, “Have I not gone on seeing after He saw me!” 14] Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it is between Kadesh and Bered. –15] Hagar bore a son to Abram, and Abram gave the son that Hagar bore him the name Ishmael. 16] Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. | 1 וְשָׂרַי֙ אֵ֣שֶׁת אַבְרָ֔ם לֹ֥א יָֽלְדָ֖ה ל֑וֹ וְלָ֛הּ שִׁפְחָ֥ה מִצְרִ֖ית וּשְׁמָ֥הּ הָגָֽר: 2 וַתֹּ֨אמֶר שָׂרַ֜י אֶל־אַבְרָ֗ם הִנֵּה־נָ֞א עֲצָרַ֤נִי יְהוָֹה֙ מִלֶּ֔דֶת בֹּא־נָא֙ אֶל־שִׁפְחָתִ֔י אוּלַ֥י אִבָּנֶ֖ה מִמֶּ֑נָּה וַיִּשְׁמַ֥ע אַבְרָ֖ם לְק֥וֹל שָׂרָֽי: 3 וַתִּקַּ֞ח שָׂרַ֣י ׀ אֵשֶׁ֣ת אַבְרָ֗ם אֶת־הָגָ֤ר הַמִּצְרִית֙ שִׁפְחָתָ֔הּ מִקֵּץ֙ עֶ֣שֶׂר שָׁנִ֔ים לְשֶׁ֥בֶת אַבְרָ֖ם בְּאֶ֣רֶץ כְּנָ֑עַן וַתִּתֵּ֥ן אֹתָ֛הּ לְאַבְרָ֥ם אִישָׁ֖הּ ל֥וֹ לְאִשָּֽׁה: 4 וַיָּבֹ֥א אֶל־הָגָ֖ר וַתַּ֑הַר וַתֵּ֨רֶא֙ כִּ֣י הָרָ֔תָה וַתֵּקַ֥ל גְּבִרְתָּ֖הּ בְּעֵינֶֽיהָ: 5 וַתֹּ֨אמֶר שָׂרַ֣י אֶל־אַבְרָם֘ חֲמָסִ֣י עָלֶ֒יךָ֒ אָֽנֹכִ֗י נָתַ֤תִּי שִׁפְחָתִי֙ בְּחֵיקֶ֔ךָ וַתֵּ֨רֶא֙ כִּ֣י הָרָ֔תָה וָֽאֵקַ֖ל בְּעֵינֶ֑יהָ יִשְׁפֹּ֥ט יְהוָֹ֖ה בֵּינִ֥י וּבֵינֶֽיךָ: 6וַיֹּ֨אמֶר אַבְרָ֜ם אֶל־שָׂרַ֗י הִנֵּ֤ה שִׁפְחָתֵךְ֙ בְּיָדֵ֔ךְ עֲשִׂי־לָ֖הּ הַטּ֣וֹב בְּעֵינָ֑יִךְ וַתְּעַנֶּ֣הָ שָׂרַ֔י וַתִּבְרַ֖ח מִפָּנֶֽיהָ: 7וַֽיִּמְצָאָ֞הּ מַלְאַ֧ךְ יְהוָֹ֛ה עַל־עֵ֥ין הַמַּ֖יִם בַּמִּדְבָּ֑ר עַל־הָעַ֖יִן בְּדֶ֥רֶךְ שֽׁוּר: 8 וַיֹּאמַ֗ר הָגָ֞ר שִׁפְחַ֥ת שָׂרַ֛י אֵֽי־מִזֶּ֥ה בָ֖את וְאָ֣נָה תֵלֵ֑כִי וַתּ֕9 וַיֹּ֤אמֶר לָהּ֙ מַלְאַ֣ךְ יְהֹוָ֔ה שׁ֖וּבִי אֶל־גְּבִרְתֵּ֑ךְ וְהִתְעַנִּ֖י תַּ֥חַת יָדֶֽיהָ: 10 וַיֹּ֤אמֶר לָהּ֙ מַלְאַ֣ךְ יְהֹוָ֔ה הַרְבָּ֥ה אַרְבֶּ֖ה אֶת־זַרְעֵ֑ךְ וְלֹ֥א יִסָּפֵ֖ר מֵרֹֽב: 11 וַיֹּ֤אמֶר לָהּ֙ מַלְאַ֣ךְ יְהֹוָ֔ה הִנָּ֥ךְ הָרָ֖ה וְיֹלַ֣דְתְּ בֵּ֑ן וְקָרָ֤את שְׁמוֹ֙ יִשְׁמָעֵ֔אל כִּֽי־שָׁמַ֥ע יְהוָֹ֖ה אֶל־עָנְיֵֽךְ: 12 וְה֤וּא יִֽהְיֶה֙ פֶּ֣רֶא אָדָ֔ם יָד֣וֹ בַכֹּ֔ל וְיַ֥ד כֹּ֖ל בּ֑וֹ וְעַל־פְּנֵ֥י כָל־אֶחָ֖יו יִשְׁכֹּֽן: 13 וַתִּקְרָ֤א שֵׁם־יְהוָֹה֙ הַדֹּבֵ֣ר אֵלֶ֔יהָ אַתָּ֖ה אֵ֣ל רֳאִ֑י כִּ֣י אָֽמְרָ֗ה הֲגַ֥ם הֲלֹ֛ם רָאִ֖יתִי אַֽחֲרֵ֥י רֹאִֽי: 14 עַל־כֵּן֙ קָרָ֣א לַבְּאֵ֔ר בְּאֵ֥ר לַחַ֖י רֹאִ֑י הִנֵּ֥ה בֵין־קָדֵ֖שׁ וּבֵ֥ין בָּֽרֶד: 15 וַתֵּ֧לֶד הָגָ֛ר לְאַבְרָ֖ם בֵּ֑ן וַיִּקְרָ֨א אַבְרָ֧ם שֶׁם־בְּנ֛וֹ אֲשֶׁר־יָֽלְדָ֥ה הָגָ֖ר יִשְׁמָעֵֽאל: 16וְאַבְרָ֕ם בֶּן־שְׁמֹנִ֥ים שָׁנָ֖ה וְשֵׁ֣שׁ שָׁנִ֑ים בְּלֶֽדֶת־הָגָ֥ר אֶת־יִשְׁמָעֵ֖אל לְאַבְרָֽם: |



**REMEZ…An Interchange of Truths: The More Jewish—The More Human**

V.1-2 *Sarai, Abram’s wife, had no children. She had an Egyptian handmaid whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, “Look, the Lord has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid; Maybe I’ll have a son through her.” And Abram heeded*

**SARNA**…”*Hagar*”—The name suggests a connection with the Arabic *“hajara—to flee.”* A people named Hagrites, mentioned in Psalms 83:7 and I Chronicles appear to have been pastoralists and roamed the Syro-Arabian desert…

The stress on her origins may have ironic significance in light of the prediction that the descendants of Abraham were to be oppressed in Egypt. The very name in Hebrew suggests a wordplay on *“ger—stranger.”*

**ALTER**… *“shif’chah—slavegirl.”* The tradition of English versions that render this as “*handmaiden*” imposes a misleading sense of European gentility on the sociology of the story. The point is that Hagar belongs to Sarai as property, and the ensuing complications of their relationship build on that fundamental fact.

**RASHI**… It was Pharaoh’s daughter. When he saw the miracles that were performed for Sarah, he thought, “Better that my daughter be a slave in this household than a mistress in another.”

**RAMBAN**… *“Abram listened to Sarai…”* Implying that although Abram deeply longed for children, he would not take this step without Sarai’s permission. He only intended to carry out the wishes of Sarai to be *“builded up”* through Hagar, and that Sarai should derive satisfaction from the children of her handmaid… The text also mentions *“Sarai, Abram’s wife…”* gave her to Abram…Sarai was still his wife, She’d not given up the hope of having children; she did not distance herself from him…She still wished, however, that Hagar should have the status of wife and not merely be concubine. All this underlies Sarah’s righteous character…

V.3 *So Sarai, Abram’s wife, took her maid—Hagar the Egyptian, after Abram dwelt 10 years in Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram as wife.*

**ABRAVANEL**… Did she need to be identified? The text is telling us that she was confident of remaining his wife even after giving her handmaid to him.

**IBN EZRA**…Our tradition teaches a husband should not stay with his wife for more than 10 years if she bears no child

**RASHI…** “took” her with words: How lucky you are to have the privilege of being with such a pure & holy man!

**R’ Elie MUNK**… Sarai’s spirit of self-sacrifice goes so far as to make use of her powers of persuasion to convince her reticent husband and her handmaid, the latter unwilling because of Abram’s advanced age. [MIDRASH RABBAH]

V.4-5 *He cohabited with Hagar and she conceived…and her mistress was lowered in her esteem. Then Sarai said to Abram: This is your fault!...*

**RASHI…** Each translation gets part of it correct. She’s saying: I cast punishment for the wrong done to me on you!

You prayed to God for children, but you prayed only for yourself. You should have prayed for both of us! And you do further harm to me when you hear Hagar disparaging me and say nothing!

**KIMCHI**… I only did this for you, and now that I’m being scorned, you don’t say a thing! I can’t discipline her!?

V.6  *Abram said to Sarai: Your maid is in your hands, deal with her as you wish. Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she ran away…*

**KIMCHI**… She made her workload overly hard, and even struck her and cursed at her…We know it was wrong.

**RAMBAN…** Our matriarch sinned in treating her this way, as did Abraham in permitting her to do so. God saw, and so gave Hagar a wild-ass of a son, who would come to treat the descendants of Abraham & Sarah harshly.

V.8-9 *“Where have you come from & where are you going?” She said, “I’m running away from Sarai my mistress.” And the Angel said to her: Go back; submit to her treatment.*

**MUNK…** Of the angel’s 2 questions, Hagar answers only the first. The fugitive rarely knows where he is going.

**RALBAG… *“****Go back,”* for Sarah’s treatment of her was for her own good, not to take advantage.

**HIRSCH** …Verses 9,10, and 11 comprise three separate speeches…Finally, in V.12, she is ready to return; for a son.

**ALTER**…The formula is repeated as Hagar stands in baffled silence in response to the command that she return to suffer abuse at Sarai’s hand. Even the promise of progeny does not suffice to allay her doubts…

V.11 *“The angel of the Lord said further, Behold…You shall bear a son: Call him Ishmael, for the Lord has paid heed to your suffering…*

**ALTER**…”*God has heard*” The previous occurrence pf hearing is Abram’s heeding Sarai’s voice. God’s hearing is then complemented by His and Hagar’s seeing in V.13.

V.13-14 *“She called upon The Name YHVH who spoke to her, You are El-Ro’I, for she said, Did I not go one seeing after He saw me?*

**WOMEN’s COMM’TRY***…”God who looks upon me.”* The clause is difficult to parse…However, Hagar is the only woman whose experience is enshrined in a place name: Be’er Lachai Ro’i. None of the matriarchs receive this honor. Such a privilege for the marginalized slave-woman, the outsider, is striking. The narrative views Hagar with sympathy.

**ETZ HAYIM**…Hagar is spiritually stirred; she has become conscious of God’s concern…God notices the needy, the marginalized, of whom society takes no notice.

**DRASH…A Dialogue of Celebrating Difference: Listening for the Ligh****t**

**Rabbi MIKHAL SHEKEL**…[from The Women’s Torah Commentary]

…The encounter between Hagar and the Divine is a cause of discomfort in traditional Jewish interpretation. Why not Sarah?....Yet, Gen. 16:13 reveals the nature of the Divine revelation uniquely experienced by Hagar. Every time that God is mentioned in this narrative, God’s Divine Hebrew name, YHVH, is used. There is no doubt that it was Adonai’s angel, or messenger, who spoke to her, and at the very end of the chapter she encounters God directly. This pattern is similar to that of Abraham’s Divine encounter in Chapter 18…

One can discover three occurrences in this parashah that mirror Abram’s experiences…But, most significantly, unlike Abram, Hagar gives God a name…Hagar is somehow more accepting, more comfortable with God. Hagar accepts her encounter for what it is. She takes the initiative and names God. What Courage!....Hagar names God *el ro’i*, “God Who sees me.”  This is in response to God’s naming her child “*Yishma’el*, which means “God hears.” In naming God, Hagar affirms that God sees as well as hears. Here, too, there is a parallel with Abraham. After the *akedah*, the binding of Isaac, Abraham calls the mountain where he offered his son “Adonai sees.”

Hagar is a woman who has had a spiritual encounter and is strengthened by it to such an extent that she is the first person in the Torah who has the *chutzpah* to endow the Divine with a name….Consciously or not, Hagar has a sense of the Divine evident from the moment she flees Sarai…When her water runs out, she will lose faith and sit down to watch her son die. But her “God of Seeing” will open her eyes and Hagar will find a well.

Hagar has arrived at a place of spiritual focus and renewal. Her encounter with God happens at a well that is henceforth called *Be’er-lehair-ro’i* (Gen. 16:14), commonly translated as the “Well of the Living One Who Sees Me.”…Hagar is a woman of innate spirituality encompassing a sense of the Divine. Ironically, this can be seen by the omission of Hagar from the most significant part of the Torah portion *Lech Lecha,* the renaming of individuals performed by God. Abram’s name is changed to Abraham, Sarai’s name is changed to Sarah. Yet, Hagar is left out. Why?...For there was no reason to change her name, because she already had a measure of the Divine presence…Why is this ignored in traditional interpretations of the text?

One can read the tradition as saying that Hagar is an outside, the other, alien to God, by interpreting her name as *Hey ger*, “Adonai is foreign.” Yet, all her actions in chapter 16 prove that this is not so. Hagar sets off on a journey and finds a holy place that others will find only later. She is met by Divine messengers, is told she will have a child, and that her offspring will be “too many to count.” The Divine messenger names her child; Hagar reciprocates by naming the Divine. Hagar is no stranger to God; she is comfortable with God’s presence in a way that is less formal than God’s relationship with Sarah. Hers is a more personal relationship with God. This is symbolized by the Divine letter *hey*, which is part of her name from the moment we first meet her. For surely, Hagar fulfills the destiny of her name, *hey gar*, “Adonai dwells” with her.

**SOD…Courage & Vulnerability: The Open Questioning that Leads to Love**

**Dr. TIKVA FRYMER-KENSKY**… [Prof in Bible, Univ of Chicago Divinity School, died in 2006]

The story of Sarah and Hagar stands at the center of the Abraham-Sarah cycle, between the two covenants of Gensis 15 & 17 and midway between the Lech L’cha of Abraham’s call and the Lech L’cha of the call to sacrifice Isaac.

The story revolves around the relationship of two women dependent on the will of one man…Powerlessness does not unite the powerless: It pits them against each other. Sarah and Hagar are rivals, and Sarah has all the advantages…When Sarah does not treat Hagar well, traditional readings find fault with Hagar and contemporary readers condemn Sarah for not showing compassion. The story begins as Sarah, who has not given birth, offers her Egyptian slave Hagar as her surrogate…As the laws of King Hammurabi show, the wife’s gift of a slave as her surrogate forestalls the husband’s taking a second wife.

Neither Sarah nor Abraham nor the ancient text obtain the slave’s consent…The womb, like the muscles, could be utilized for the good of the master. So Sarah proposes to be “built up” through Hagar’s womb…But the plan goes awry. Hagar, who is supposed to be a neutral body, reacts: “her mistress is lessened in her eyes.” This womb with legs is a person with her own viewpoint. She knows that she has something that Sarah doesn’t have—fertility—and she no longer considers Sarah’s status exalted…Sarah realizes that she has lost her status and can do nothing because her husband has authority over both of them. Abraham understands the power issue and restores her authority: “Your slave-girl is in your hands.” Neither Abraham nor Sarah ever calls Hagar by name—her personhood is in the way of their plan.

Sarah wants to reassert her dominance, and as her last act in the story, she “oppresses” Hagar…The story never explains how…Once again, Hagar reacts. Not wanting to be under Sarah’s authority, she runs away. The story goes with her into the wilderness, the same wilderness where Elijah meets and angel. An angel addresses Hagar by name…and the reader feels the pathos of the oppressed slave-girl, but the angel says: “Go back to your mistress and continue to be oppressed under her hand.” An informed biblical reader may be bewildered. Ancient Near-Eastern law demands that a runaway slave be returned to its owner. But why should an angel place the laws of property over personal freedom?

Some elements of the story ring bells. Hagar is an Egyptian slave. Egypt is the land where God had to rescue Sarah from the house of Pharaoh; Sarah herself is just a freed-slave. Egypt is also the site of the future Exodus story that lies at the basis of Israel’s self-understanding…The story’s identification of Hagar as an “Egyptian slave” is a direct allusion to the central myth of Israel’s origins….

In the previous chapter [15], God tells Abraham that his descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and the people will enslave them and oppress them…But God hears Israel’s affliction, and Hagar’s…The story of Hagar is the story of Israel…After the birth of Isaac, Abraham sends Hagar & Ishmael away…They leave Abraham’s household as emancipated slaves, wandering thirsty in the desert until, miraculously, God gives them water and pronounces the great future of Ishmael. The emancipated Israelite slaves also wander thirsty in the desert till God brought water…miraculously.

The story of Sarah and Hagar is not the story of conflict between “us” and the “other,” but between “us” and another “Us.” Hagar is the archetype of Israel: She is us. …Her story forces us to realize that the destiny of Israel is not utterly different from the people around it. Ishmael’s God-given destiny of utter freedom may have looked very attractive to an often marginal and exploited Israel on the brink of destruction.

The story raises ethical questions. Why does God insist that we suffer before we are rewarded?...Why must Hagar return to the oppression of her mistress before her future unfolds?...Sarah’s behavior also disturbs us, for her experience as a slave does not make her more empathic to the slave in her home. It makes her want to assert her dominance, so she won’t lose it again. The story shows us how easily the oppressed can become oppressors.

We live in a world in which many peoples are experiencing their liberation. Once again, the children of Sarah and Hagar must try and work out their covenanted futures in relationship with each other. The issues raised by the Sarah-Hagar story play themselves out as we realize that the destiny of one is intricately intertwined with the destiny of the other. The nuanced, non-triumphalist understanding of the reality in Genesis can empower our own struggles to this very day.

Rabbi HAYIM ANGEL… [Jewish Bible Quarterly]

…One can offer an interpretation that combines the best elements of both readings. The ancient codes are relevant to explain the conventions that Sarah and Hagar followed. Since there were clear legal standards, Hagar breached them by asserting freedom, and Sarah acted within her rights to reassert Hagar's servitude. Therefore, the angel ordered Hagar to return to her legal servitude and called her slave of Sarai. In this regard, R. Samet's analysis is textually sound, and the Torah appears to vindicate the behavior of Abraham and Sarah. Simultaneously, Prof. Leibowitz is correct when she maintains that the Torah offers a sympathetic treatment of Hagar, including the poignant comment of the angel that God responded to Hagar's innu′i and blessed her that that her descendants would be free and a great nation. However, the Torah is not criticizing Sarah, who had acted legally in her context. It is critical of the entire social context of the Mesopotamians. While Sarah was legally correct and therefore acted morally in her context, the story remains painful at the human level. God expresses sympathy toward Hagar, indicating that the moral-legal system of that era would necessarily lead to tragic results, such as what occurred with Sarah and Hagar. This thesis is corroborated by the later Torah legislation to help a runaway slave escape: You shall not turn over to his master a slave who seeks refuge with you from his master. He shall live with you in any place he may choose among the settlements in your midst, wherever he pleases; you must not illtreat him (Deut. 23:16-17). Contrast this law with the Code of Hammurabi (#15-16), which prescribed death for anyone who helped a slave escape or who harbored a runaway slave. The Torah shifts its moral focus to the humanity of a slave, who is ul- SARAH'S TREATMENT OF HAGAR Vol. 41, No. 4, 2013 217 timately endowed with rights as well. 9 The Torah's radical departure from the prevailing laws of slavery would push humanity toward a morality that would finally abolish slavery altogether. 10 In highlighting Hagar's suffering and God's sympathy for her, the Torah illustrates its dissatisfaction with the morality of the ancient Near East. Through its narratives and laws, the Torah paved a moral path that would prevent the recurrence of these painful stories in the future. 11