

## *Shiur L'Yom Shishi<sup>1</sup>*

[Friday's Study]

**READINGS: Torah Lech Lecha:** Genesis 16:1—17:27  
**Haftarah:** Isaiah 41:14-16  
**B'rit Chadasha:** Romans 4:13-25

*I am El Shaddai; I will empower you.*

[Genesis 17:1]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 115:12-18;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is the *Kadosh*, the Prayer of Holiness

*V'Sarai eishet Avram* – And Sarai, Avram's wife ... *lo yaleidah* – conceived not ... Genesis 16:1.

The words *Sarai lo yaleidah* – she conceived not – haunted her. Once the Creator had promised Avram descendants as numerous as the stars of the heavens and the sands of the sea the pressure on her became unbearable. The 'seed'-to-go-with-land' promise had returned a sparkle to Avram's eye and a lilt to his step; but where exactly did she – an old and barren woman - fit in? Sarai knew her age, her body, and her history. After decades of trying to conceive a child – without success - she did not even want to think of it anymore. Her hopes had been dashed a thousand times. She ... just ... could ... not ... bear... to go through the disappointment again. First, she lost the strength, then the will, and finally the physical ability to do what needed to be done to conceive. Albeit reluctantly, she tried to face facts, make peace with her lot in life, and keep smiling. She resigned herself to forever be branded an *akarrah* – i.e. *barren woman*'. But sometimes ... late at night, after all the hard work of a nomad's wife was done; after the animals had all been safely put up and the sheepdog was snoring; and after even the seemingly tireless Avram had nodded off ... a soul-rending ache would visit her, and she would lie in bed and cry. In those moments she was no heroine of faith – she was a little girl lost, frightened, and alone. The abdomen that had never experienced the movement of a child stretching itself would convulse. The breasts that had never satisfied a newborn would feel like millstones hung around her neck to humiliate her. How long, she must have wondered, must she imagine people – or were they unclean spirits - whispering '*Sarai lo yaleidah*'! How long must she endure this disgrace? The normal and intended way of conceiving did not seem to work for her. What was she to do?

About that time each night younger, exotically beautiful Hagar – the Egyptian

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handmaiden gifted to her by Pharaoh - would stick her head into Sarai's tent and whisper: "*Will there be anything else you need me to do before I retire, Mistress?*" One dark, lonely night it struck Sarai. Could willing young Hagar - be the solution she was searching for? Would Hagar be willing? Would Avram? Wait – what was she thinking?

Years of stress and trauma do strange things to the human mind. They cause vain imaginations to take flight in the dark hours of the night. They make the foolish seem wise, the selfish to seem benevolent. Cue the perfect storm, stage left. Say hello to the *aish zarah* – i.e. "strange fire" - the toxic blend of futile thinking, darkened understanding, unclean lusts, vile passions, and vain imaginations that men love to call 'reason' and 'logic'? Enter the incubus of unbridled desires, unfamiliar hormone rushes, unrestrained sensuality, fertility pride, and pseudo-intellectual folly. The Holy One calls it what it really is – the futile thinking of the reprobate mind. See Romans 1:21-32 for the gory details.

### ***In The Midst of All the Blessings Being Poured Out Upon Avram – Why Is There Still No Child of the Covenant?***

It is still early in the *Avraham Chronicles* section of Torah – but it has already been an amazing journey. In just a few chapters of inspired narrative we have seen Avram and Sarai traverse the entire known world. We have seen them meet – and have to find a way to deal with - people of all nations, worldviews and attitudes. We have seen them face some seemingly impossible situations. We have been seen them tested with just about every fleshly distraction the world has to offer. We have seen them struggle with toxic relationships. We have seen them make some mistakes of judgment – but not once have we seen them judged, rejected, or abandoned by the One Who called them. We have seen them Divinely delivered through some incredible obstacles. And in the process we have learned some critically important lessons from them about what it is like *to be a covenant partner of the Creator of the Universe*. We have not yet apprehended the fullness of what this entails of course - nor have we seen the 'endgame' fully unfold. But we are at least learning to trust our Unseen Shepherd's kindness, His wisdom, and even His timing. We are learning what it looks like, in real time, for those who *qalal*/curse us to be *arar*/cursed by the Holy One - and for all who bless us to themselves be richly blessed by Him for our sakes. And, perhaps most importantly, we are learning how acritical it is for those of us who walk this walk to always incline our hearts toward - and respond in real time and real ways to - every word of Divine communication we receive. Doing what 'seems right' in our own eyes, or 'feels right in our heart', or which the people or cultures of the world tell us is 'right', never seems to work out well - for us, for our families, for the nations, or for any of the places we live, trade, or travel. Walking in the Holy One's way

brings us an amazing level of protection and provision and productivity; but walking in the way of the world – *i.e.* according to fleshly desires, cultural expectations, pseudo-scientific theories, and/or ideological principles - yields only personal drama, national crisis, and human misery for us and for every situation we touch.

Alas, some of the most important – and challenging - lessons of Covenant Life lie ahead of us. Some of these lessons will make us want to hang our heads, rend our garments, and cry. But remember that the Holy One is calling us to become overcomers and Transcenders. For that to have any real meaning there must be some very serious obstacles and difficulties for us to face, overcome, and transcend. The Beautiful Voice that spoke to Avram in the fields of Charan never promised him – or us - a rose garden. Every time we leave the narrow path that He has blazed for us and wander off onto the meandering pig-trails of the reprobate mind, thorns and thistles and drama and disaster are to be expected. In the Covenant, real life *choices* have real *life consequences*.

But we were speaking of Sarai Imanu, weren't we. Let's see what life experiences are in store for the *ishah* of the Covenant Household today.

### ***New Levels, New Temptations***

With every new level of Covenant Opportunity comes a new *series of challenges* and a new barrage of *temptations*. The God Encounter of *B'reshit* 15 opened up new levels of Covenant Opportunity to Avram and Sarai, but it also led us right into the proving ground of Chapter 16. Chapter 15 was all about *communing with the Holy One* and enjoying the freedom of *doing things His Way*, in His Timing. Chapter 16, on the other hand, is about what happens when a son of the Covenant *tries to please people* who want to make things happen in *their way*, in *their timing*. Chapter 15 was about discovering and exploring Divine Destiny and purpose. Chapter 16, on the other hand, is all about getting caught up in self-obsessed human drama. There is a warning in there for us somewhere. In case you have not realized it yet, self-obsessed human drama is just another one of those *temptations common to man* against which the Holy One wants to immunize us<sup>2</sup>.

### ***Sarai's 'Achilles' Heel'***

When Avram told Sarai the vision the Holy One had shown him of *zara* – *i.e.* *seed* – something dark in Sarai's heart was apparently triggered. All that talk of 'seed' was fine for Avram – but what could it possibly have to do with *her*? Her 'biological clock' had stopped ticking. Mention of just awakened in her an old

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<sup>2</sup> I Corinthians 10:13: *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*

wound – a self-obsessed pain of the soul - that suddenly cried out to be stroked and pampered. Such talk just exposed and aggravated Sarai’s ‘Achilles’ Heel’. Every time anyone – especially Avram - spoke about children, her pressure-point of ultimate vulnerability started throbbing again.

The Holy One knows exactly where each of us has been – and thus where we need healing. He knows why - and where - we are still tender. He knows precisely what will *ruffle our feathers* and push our ‘freak out’ button. For some people, He knows, it is the thought or mention of a father who abandoned or abused them. For others, He is aware, it is the memory of a friend or sibling who betrayed them, a romantic interest who rejected them, or a dream that died on them. For some the ‘Achilles’ heel’ that needs to be exposed and dealt with is fear of man, fear of rejection, or fear of inadequacy. For others it has to do with failure in business, socialization, or relationships. Whatever the ‘Achilles Heel’ we still have from our worst ‘old man’ days, He wants it dealt with - and overcome. Alas, in most cases, we want the opposite. We want to nurse it. And, when we do that, a lot of unnecessary suffering is endured – and inflicted on others – by those who refuse to let go of the pain.

### ***Sarai’s Mind Wanders Far From the Trail the Holy One has Blazed***

The years of waiting and expectation had taken their toll. Sarai had begun to doubt herself. Avram, after all, kept having God-encounters and getting Divine promises of descendants – but *she* did not. Maybe, she probably thought to herself, *she* was the problem. She most likely began to ponder [if not *obsess*] upon her lifelong barrenness. What she needed, she apparently decided, was ‘family planning’. And so one day as her Egyptian handmaid - a woman we know as *Hagar* - was ministering to her, a thought came into her head. She is young and healthy. She could bear children. She has no husband – or any prospect for any. She is my servant. She understands my predicament. She likes Avram. She won’t say ‘no’.

### ***Introducing the Bondwoman and Her Son***

In an extremely rare moment of weakness and folly, Sarai set the plan in motion:

***Vatomer Sarai el-Avram hineh-na atzarani Adonai miledet***

*So Sarah said to Avram: Behold, the Holy One has restrained me from bearing children*

***bo-na el-shifchati ulay ibaneh mimeinah***

*Please now, go in to my shifchah, and perhaps I will have children through her.*

[Genesis 16:1-2]

Across the generations our voices want to scream: “NO! DON’T DO IT, ABBA! “*This is NOT the Voice or the Plan – much less the Way - of the Holy One!*” “*It is just another form of the ‘fruit of the tree of knowledge’ trap!*” “*Keep your hands where we can see them, and walk away from Hagar’s tent as fast as you can!*”

Alas Avram Avinu cannot hear us. Nor, apparently, does he pause to discuss this idea with the Holy One. Instead, we read to our dismay:

***Vayishma Avram l'kol Sarai***

*And Avram heeded, heard, agreed, and did according to Sarai's words*

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***Vayavo el-Hagar vatahar***

*And he went to Hagar and she conceived.*

*Oy veh!* This is problematic on every level imaginable. It will have fallout beyond anyone involved's imagination. Ripples of negative consequences from this drastic departure from the Covenant will turn into a *tsunami* of resentment that will threaten the entire world.

Oh Beloved, learn this and learn it well - we can never fulfill a Divine Mission, much less rush a Divine Promise into being, by employing *methodologies of consensus* dreamed up by the human mind. The way of the Holy One is always going to be at odds with the recommendation of any committee, any board, any legislature, or any focus group. His Promises must be brought into being in His Time, in His Way.

### ***The 'Bondwoman Syndrome'***

Had the Holy One said *anything* about Hagar playing a part in any of the God encounters about which we have read? No, of course not. Her name had never even been mentioned. So, who is she? Well, she is a real person, of course – with feelings, and value, and purpose, and a destiny; but she is also the prototype of '*the Bondwoman*'. Who is '*the bondwoman*'? The '*bondwoman*' is *anything that man adds to the Holy One's instructions*<sup>3</sup>. And the *Bondwoman's son*? Well, that is *anything created by men in the course of adding to the Holy One's instructions*.

Sarai's idea to use Hagar as a surrogate mother of her children was the epitome of what in Hebrew would be called *chol* - *i.e.* a matter of faulty human reason, birthed from *human emotion* aided and abetted by human logic. That which is *chol* is, of

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<sup>3</sup> The first thing that happened at Sinai was not the Great Theophany. The first thing that happened at Sinai was the visit of Yitro [Jethro] the Midyani. As a result of Yitro's visit and human influence, a whole system of organized religion – replete with titles and even self-serving 'sacrifices' as mediated by Yitro – that was added by Yitro to what the Holy One had instructed. See **Exodus 18:5**. Then came the Great Theophany, with the Holy One speaking beautiful words of instruction for His People. And then came the 'bondwoman' Shaul was talking about – the Golden Calf experience. One of the mistakes of the Judaism of Shaul's day, you see – and for that matter a mistake made by both the 'Judaisms' and the 'Christianities' of the present day – is to become enamored with and follow the Yitro model of organization, leadership appointment, and 'worship' of golden calves, and declaring our own times and seasons, as opposed to *sh'ma*-ing and following the actual instructions given by and the leadership established by the Holy One. This man-centered, numbers-focused, flesh-appealing approach to spirituality is the 'bondwoman's son'.

course, is the exact opposite of things that are *kadosh* - i.e. that which is holy, set apart, touched by and marked by association with the Holy One. And you should know, Dear Reader, that a major component of the responsibility of covenant partners of the Holy One is to both *ascertain the distinction between* and *maintain separation between* the things and ideas in this world that are *chol* and those which are *kadosh*. More on that later in these studies – particularly when we get to the Book the world knows as Leviticus.

### ***Because Lawlessness Will Abound, the Love of Many Will Grow Chol***

But back to our story. Sarai presented Avram with the slave girl, and presented the slave girl with her husband Avram, and made it clear to both what she wanted them to do. Hagar offered no complaint; Avram offered no resistance.

It has been postulated by some that in ancient Mesopotamia, in which both Avram and Sarai had grown up, and in Egypt, from whence Hagar hailed, it was common practice for a married woman to give a maidservant to her husband as a second wife in order to assure the man many heirs. If conception occurred, the woman could then consider the handmaiden's child as her own. Note, however, how this "Ancient Cultures plan" makes a 180 degree turn from the Holy One's plan as set forth in Genesis 2:24. There we were told:

***Al-ken ya'azov-ish et-aviv v'et imo v'davak b'ishto***

*Man shall therefore leave his father and mother and be united with his wife,*

***vehayu l'vasar echad***

*and they shall become one flesh.*

Avram and Sarai were *basar echad* – i.e. one flesh. Hagar was not part of that unity. Avram could not join himself to Hagar without doing serious damage to the *echad* [union] he had with Sarai. When Avram allowed himself to become stimulated at Hagar's embrace, *something happened that went way beyond the physical*. The joinder of two humans engaging in the intensely intimate kinds of behaviors that lead to procreation involves much more than just a casual physical contact. All levels at which two human beings share sexually stimulating thought, conversation, thought, emotion, and touch sends shockwaves *deep into each of those person's souls*. Each sensually-stimulated pulse of adrenalin; each arousal-related burst of dopamine, norepinephrine, serotonin, prolactin, and/or oxytocin; each lustful thought that can never be unthought, each forbidden sight that can never be unseen, each exhilarating pleasurable and/or painful experience that can will be recorded forever in the neocortex and or amygdala regions of your brain; each teasing flirtation that can never be taken back; every smile, giggle, moan, whispered word, or touch that quickens the flow of blood to and/or stimulates secretions or emissions from the organs of procreation – these all combine to wreak lasting changes not just in the physical bodies of the participants in the

episode, but also in each of those persons' souls and spirits. New neural pathways get opened. New emotional experiences are created. New patterns of muscle memory are inscribed. New ways of focusing attention, energy, passion, and lust are formed. A subconscious but unbreakable soul-tie develops between the parties – a confusion of identities that makes the shared experience a permanent part of the psyche of each – always there to rise up without warning and sabotage any and all subsequent intimate relationships with which it might feel it has to compete.

When Avram and Hagar came together, therefore, what happened was not what Sarai expected. It was not by any means as simple as Hagar providing a convenient, unoccupied incubation chamber for Avram's seed. Intimate conduct between human beings between never leaves the participants – or those in relationship to them – unaffected. Something spiritual as well as physical took place. Avram's and Hagar's souls intermingled. A part of Hagar's spirit attached itself to Avram's soul, and vice versa. As a result of the union, the atmosphere in the camp shifted. First their souls – and ultimately the soul of Avram's soul mate, Sarai – became corrupted, marred, damaged. This mixture-syndrome created a ripple effect, that negatively impacted every aspect of the wills, the minds, and the emotions of everyone involved.

How did this marring effect on the wills, minds, and emotions of the parties involved in this dangerous conduct play out in real time? Well, remember that in order for Sarai's plan to work Hagar needed to remain subservient to Sarai's instructions and teachings. But that is not the way it happened. As Torah puts it:

***ki haratah v'tekal gevirtah b'eyneiha***

*When she [i.e. Hagar] saw that she had conceived her mistress was despised in her eyes.*

[Genesis 16:4(b)]

### ***But Wait - Who Was Hagar, Anyway?***

Who, therefore, we may wish to ask, was this woman *Hagar*? With whom – and with what *twisted strands of human and spiritual DNA* - did Sarai call upon Avram to commingle *his redeemed soul* and *his promised family's destiny*? Avram's DNA had just been touched by the Voice, the Words, the Hand, and the image of the Creator of the Universe. He was pregnant with holiness, with promise, with purpose, and with destiny. What would be the consequence of commingling all that holy impartation with ... well, someone we quite frankly do not know much about? Hebrew *midrash* tells us that Hagar was a princess of Egypt - the daughter of the Pharaoh who had taken Sarai into his harem temporarily, as described in Genesis 12. Before leaving Egypt, the legend says, this frightened Pharaoh sought to assuage the plagues that had fallen upon his nation by giving his own daughter Hagar to serve Sarai as a maidservant. As a later Pharaoh would give Yosef the

daughter of a dignitary as a wife, so this Pharaoh gave Sarai his own daughter as a maidservant. All we are told in Torah about this woman, however, is that she was a *Mitzrayin* [Egyptian], that she was Sarai's 'handmaid', and that her name was *Hagar* [an Egyptian name transliterated in the Hebrew language as *hey, gimel, resh*]. Let's take a look at what those things mean.

### **1. Hagar's "Egyptian-ness"**

Ancient Egypt was of course a highly developed society in many ways. Architecturally for instance it was marvelously advanced. It was not then Muslim [Islam did not even exist until the 7<sup>th</sup> Century CE]. Nor was it Arab. It was populated instead by descendants of Cham – the disrespectful son of Noach who, though he personally was saved through the flood by reason of his relationship with Noach, shortly after receiving this salvation dishonored his father, making sport of his nakedness. The society that prevailed in Egypt was idolatrous, and focused not on life but death. But it appears from Torah that Hagar had escaped the idolatry and had through her interaction with Avram and Sarai come to worship the One True God. So, just how much Egyptian culture – or Chamitic character – attached itself to Hagar by the time of Genesis 16 is hard to tell.

### **2. Hagar's 'Handmaid' Status/Vocation**

We know from the text that Hagar served as a 'handmaid' of Sarai. The Hebrew word which our English Bibles translate as 'handmaid' is *shifchah*<sup>4</sup>. This is the same word used in Genesis 12:16 to describe the female servants Avram received as a gift when Pharaoh cast he and Sarai out of Egypt. Other persons in Torah who will be called by the title *shifkhah* will include *Zilpah* [Leah's 'handmaid', given to her by Lavan – see Genesis 29:24], and *Bilhah* [Rachel's handmaid, also given to her by Lavan – see Genesis 29:29]. Also, it will be as a handmaid [*shifkhah*] that Ruth will one day present herself as to Boaz [Ruth 2:13], and it will be as a handmaid [*shifkhah*] of Eli that Hannah will describe herself in I Samuel 1:18. In Joel 2:29 it will be handmaids of the Holy One who will be listed among the recipients of the end-time outpouring of the *Ruach HaQodesh*.

The verb root of the Hebrew word *shifkhah* is *shafakh*, meaning 'to spread abroad'. In reference to a servant it implies that the servant is over the course of the servant's tenure increasingly honored and trusted, and empowered to act as *an extension of the master*. The closest English concept is the *attorney-in-fact*, a person authorized and designated to act, on certain issues, at least, as an ambassador, emissary, personal representative, to give orders and make agreements in the place and stead of the master. The authority an attorney-in-fact has is that which is commonly called 'power of attorney'. It appears therefore that

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<sup>4</sup> Shifchah is *shin, peh, chet, hey*, Strong's Hebrew word #8198, pronounced *shif-khaw*'.

as Eliezer of Damascus was Avram's attorney-in-fact so was Hagar of Egypt Sarai's attorney-in-fact. She was not an ordinary slave-girl who did menial tasks. She was instead a *trusted business associate* or 'personal secretary'. The term 'handmaid' should not therefore in any regard be considered a derogatory term. Yishma'el was not cast out because he was a *handmaid's son* - but *because he personally forfeited the place Avram had made for him in the chosen household by hating, and grievously sinning in regard to, Yitzchak*. Hagar was not cast out [ultimately, in chapter 20] with Yishma'el because she was a *bad person*, or was hated by the Holy One – but because Yishma'el, a mere lad in his teens, *needed* his mother – both physically and spiritually. What Yishma'el needed most was someone who could receive revelation from the Holy One. And that brings us to the third thing we know about Hagar – her name. There is a secret hidden within that name that I believe explains why the Holy One had her sent out into the desert with her son.

### 3. Hagar's 'name'

The name of Sarai's Egyptian maid is written in Hebrew as *hey, gimel, resh*<sup>5</sup>. The first letter, *hey*, presents a Hebraic picture of revelation – like a window in a tent allows light in and allows those in the tent to see outside. The last two letters combined form the word *gar* or *gur*, which is translated stranger, foreigner, or sojourner, and refers to a person living outside his native land. One interpretation of this Hebraic mural [*hey, gimel, resh*] would therefore be that Hagar is a *foreigner/sojourner* [*gimel, resh*] who receives – *i.e.* is the direct object of - revelation [*hey*]. Is that an appropriate interpretation? I think so, because, in today's aliyah, this woman becomes the first person outside the family of Shem to receive a visitation from the Holy One. Later, of course, her kinsman Pharaoh would have divine dreams [which Yosef would interpret], as would Nebuchadnezzar [which Daniel would interpret], and a few other goyim would receive Divine Visitation. But it is rare in TaNaKh for a person who like Hagar is outside the line of the 'chosen people' to receive Divine revelation. She is therefore the first fruits, so to speak, of persons outside the physical line of Avram to receive revelation directly from the Holy One.

Hagar is, therefore, an *important person* in the Holy One's eyes. He *tenderly cared for* her and *honored her* with opportunities to learn his ways [by living in the household of Avram] and with revelation most of us would [figuratively, of course] 'die for'. I mean, how many of us have had wells of living water dug [or at least opened and revealed] by angels? We should not regard Hagar as a villainess. The Holy One certainly did not see her that way.

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<sup>5</sup> The name Hagar is pronounced *haw-gawr*'. The name is probably of foreign derivation, but its Hebrew transliteration is Strong's Hebrew word #1904.

## ***Trouble In Paradise***

Meanwhile, as soon as Avram mingles his spirit with Hagar things start to go wrong. As soon as Hagar knows she has conceived, she throws her fertility right in Sarai's face. If Avram agreed with this *chol* idea to make Sarai happy he soon finds out he has done just the opposite. Sarai is not happy – and as the old saying goes, '*when Sarai ain't happy, ain't no one happy*'. So who does Sarai take it out on? You guessed it – she takes it out on Avram!

### ***Chamasi aleicha***

*My violence [chamas] be upon you!'*

### ***anochi natati shifchati becheikeicha***

*I myself placed my shifchah in your arms!*

### ***vatere ki haratah v'eikal b'eyneiha***

*Now that she sees herself pregnant, she looks at me with disrespect.*

### ***yish'pot Adonai beyni uveineicha***

*Let the Holy One render a healing, redemptive decree between me and you!*

Avram is now at a *crisis point*. What is he to do? If he takes up for Hagar he estranges his wife and jeopardizes his marriage. If he takes up Sarai's offense, however, he estranges Hagar and compromises - and may lose altogether - the opportunity to be a father to the child she is carrying. His response to Sarai is:

### ***hineh shif'chatech b'yadech***

*Behold, your shifchah is in your hands.*

### ***asi-lah ha-tov b'eynaych***

*Do/make with her as seems good in your eyes.*

Sarai took the opportunity to let Hagar know beyond question just who was 'boss', and how she felt. Hagar was not about to accept Sarai's chastisement, so, pregnant or not, she packed up her things and headed back in the direction of Egypt from whence she had come.

## ***Hagar and the Angel of the Holy One***

Fortunately for Hagar, for the unborn child she was carrying, and for all concerned the Holy One was keeping His watchful eye on Hagar all along. When Hagar reached an oasis [Hebrew, *ayin*] on the road back to Egypt the Holy One sent an angel to stop her, settle her down, and turn her around.

### ***V'yomar Hagar shif'chat Sarai***

*and [the angel] said, 'Hagar, maid of Sarai!'*

### ***ey-mizeh vat v'anah teleichi***

*From whence are you coming, and where are you going?'*

It was not that the angel did not know where Hagar had come from - after all, he

called her ‘*Hagar, maid of Sarai!*’ The angel’s question for Hagar was much like the ‘Where are you?’ question Holy One posed to Adam in the Garden, after their ingestion of forbidden fruit. The purpose of the inquiry was not to elicit empirical information, but to encourage *spiritual soul-searching*.

Hagar did not take the opportunity to play the victim. She did not tell her sad but true ‘unwed mother’ tale to elicit the angel’s sympathy. She did not say a thing negative about Sarai or Avram. She did not blame anyone but herself for her present problems. Give credit where credit is due, she told it just like it was:

***V’tomer m’penei Sarai gevirti anochi borachat***  
*I am running away from my mistress, Sarai,’ she replied.*

Now that she had been honest with herself, the ‘right thing to do’ was suddenly clear. The angel spoke to her frankly:

***Shuvi el-gevirtech v’hit’ani tachat yadeiyha***  
*Return to your mistress and submit yourself to her.*

That settled that. Hagar was returning to Sarai. And she would not only *return*, but would *submit*. It was not a matter of guilt, or of inferiority, or of hope of reward. It was a matter of trust. Not trust in Sarai and her returning to good nature - trust in the Creator of the Universe, and in His Grand Redemptive Plan. That is what *sh’ma*-ing is all about.

Hagar would soon find out that she would not go back to Avram’s camp the same person that had run away. Her life was about to be transformed by the prophetic words of the Holy One spoken over her by her presbytery of oasis angels. Hence we read that another angel told Hagar:

***Har’bah arbeh et-zar’ech***  
*You will have very great seed – i.e. many, many descendants.*

***v’lo yisafer merov***  
*And they will be uncountable in their quantity.*

Think that is enough personal prophecy for one day? The Holy One is not through. With regard to the unborn child of Avram’s *zara* [seed] that Hagar is carrying, the Holy One directs the angel to prophetically reveal to her not only the child’s *gender* but also his *name* - *Yishma’el*. But before Hagar left the oasis; before she took one step back in the direction of Avram’s camp; before she submitted to Sarai; before she gave birth to this child on Sarai’s knees; and before she nursed him for even one second; the Holy One made sure Hagar knew just what kind of man her firstborn son was going to grow up to be. Hence, the angel told her:

***V’hu yihyeh pereh***  
*He will be rebellious.*

***adam yado vakol v'yad kol bo***

*His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him.*

***v'al-penei chol-echav yish'kon***

*And before all his brothers will he dwell.'*

We are not told what punishment was accorded Hagar when she returned to camp, or how well – or how badly - Sarai treated her over the next few months. Strengthened by the prophetic words the Holy One had spoken to her, whatever happened, Hagar did not flinch – or run.

### ***The Son of Avram's Flesh is Born***

It is hard to imagine the emotions that were felt by the various people in Avram's camp on the day Hagar gave birth. Avram was finally a 'father'. Sarai would finally hear the sound of a baby's cry in her own tent. And Hagar would know that the child she birthed on Sarai's knees would never be Sarai's child – only hers.

***V'teled Hagar l'Avram ben***

*Hagar bore unto Avram a son.*

***v'yikra Avram shem-beno asher-yaleidah Hagar Yish'ma-El***

*Avram called the name of his son, who had been born to Hagar 'Yishma'el'*

**[Genesis 16:15]**

Why did the Holy One decree that the name of the bondwoman's son would be "Yish'ma-El" – i.e. God will hear? In part it is certainly because of the episode reported in chapter 21 of Genesis where Yishmael, then a lad of approximately 15, and his mother were banished from Avram's home. At that time, in a desperate state of thirst Yishma'el cries out. *God hears*, and sends an angel to lead Hagar to water. Our God is not willing that any should perish. He pays attention. He listens. He hears. He is moved. And He acts. It has always been so. But there is another level at which the name Yishmael has prophetic effect even today. While the Holy One loves and calls unto Himself all peoples, it is no secret to anyone today that Yishmael is at least claimed by the Arabs as the progenitor of the Arab people groups – the peoples who, more than all others, have chosen to hate, and desire the death of, Avram's other descendants, the Hebrews. It is no secret that in public the self-proclaimed descendants of Yishma'el often say they want peace with Israel and the Jews, while in private they plot acts of violence and hatred. The world seems completely deceived by such duplicity. The leaders of the world, the United Nations, and the European Union – even some leaders of the United States and Israel – listen to let themselves and be fooled by the 'we just want peace' talk of people who at least reckon themselves as Yishma'el's descendants. But *not the Holy One*, Dear Reader. Every time Yishma'el's actual or putative descendants plot evil against or slander the descendants of Yitzchak, you see, *God will hear!* And after the Holy One hears, exposes, and thwarts the evil plans concocted and

whispered in secret by those claiming to be Yishma'el's descendants, then the descendants of Yitzchak will be able to live up to their name as well. For the name Yitzchak means 'he will laugh'. I am not talking about the haughty laughter of arrogant souls. I am speaking of true *simchah* – the joy of the Holy One - the joyous thanksgiving of those who know the redeeming power of the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. I am speaking of laughter such as is described in Psalm 126:

*Then our mouth will be filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing.*

*Then those among the nations will say*

***"The Holy One has done great things for them."***

*The Holy One has done great things for us, and we are glad.*

*Restore our fortunes again, the Holy One, like the streams in the Negev.*

*Those who sow in tears will reap in joy.*

*He who goes out weeping, carrying seed for sowing,  
will assuredly come again with joy, carrying his sheaves.*

### ***B'rit Ceremony – Act II***

Our ancestors' season of human failure and self-obsessed interpersonal drama is, fortunately, followed by another glorious season God-encounter. As chapter 17 of *Sefer B'reshit* begins Avram is 99 years of age. It has been more than fourteen years since the Holy One was declared "righteous" in the Holy One's eyes, and completed Act I of the *b'rit* ceremony. Now the 14-year intermission – the intermission necessitated by Avram's insistence upon a son/heir of his own body - is over. Avram now has Yishma'el - the 'son of his own flesh' he bargained for, and hence is ready to complete the *b'rit* the Holy One planned all along.

In the last part of the parsha known as *Lech Lecha* therefore Avram is blessed by a fifth "God-encounter". This encounter is again in the form of a "vision". Here is how Torah's account of this significant event begins:

***V'yehi Avram ben-tish'im shanah v'teisha shanim***

*When Avram was ninety-nine years old,*

***vayera Adonai el-Avram v'yomer elav Ani El-Shadai***

*the Holy One appeared [ra'ah] to Avram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai,*

***hithalech l'fanei v'heyeh tamim***

*Walk before me, and be blameless.*

***V'etnah v'rity beyni uveyneicha***

*I will establish my covenant between me and you,*

***v'ar'beh oteicha bime'od me'od***

*and will multiply you/expand your impact on the world exceedingly."*

In the process of this fifth God encounter Avram is going to learn much more

about the God whom he has come to both love and fear. And the *b'rit* ceremony the Holy One began 14 years ago – then put on hold for Avram to have the son of his own flesh he bargained for - is going to be completed.

What is going to happen in chapter 17 is viewed by some as a ‘new’ covenant. But it is not. The basic covenant terms will not change. It is, therefore, merely a *renewal* of the previous covenant. It is going to be ‘renewed’, re-affirmed – and re-confirmed with a sign - the sign/token the Holy One intended all along for the covenant – the ‘ot’ we call *circumcision* – is going to be established at last.

Although (or perhaps because) Avram has long ago been declared “righteous” before the Holy One on the basis of his *emunah* [Genesis 15:6], the Holy One begins this 5<sup>th</sup> encounter by making it clear something more is expected of Avram than intellectual agreement with that which the Holy One had spoken (the kind of intellectual agreement which would generate fleshly attempts to “make” the promises of God “happen” – like we saw in chapter 16!). Even though he has now been ‘judicially’ declared righteous Avram is still expected to conform his life to the Holy One’s plan from this point forward. He is to walk before the Holy One and be blameless in the present and future tense. And that is not all. He is to *change his whole identity*. He is to receive a *new nature*. He is to become a ‘new creation.’

### ***Avram Gets an Identity Upgrade***

Here are the words with which the Holy One introduces Avram to his new identity:

***Ani hineh b'riti itach***

*As for me, behold, my covenant is with you.*

***v'hayita l'av hamon goyim***

*You will be the father of a horde of nations.*

***V'lo-yikare od et-shimeicha Avram***

*And your collection of characteristics and attributes will no more be called Avram,*

***V'hayah shimcha Avraham***

*But that collection of characteristics and attributes will be called “Avraham ....*

**[Genesis 17:3-6(a)]**

The new identity Avram receives is to be called *Avraham* - spelled *alef, beit, resh, hey, mem sofit*. What is the significance of the *hey* that is added? The *hey* pictures the window/opening of a middle eastern shepherd’s tent. Through such a window, light [and breathable air] come in from outside, and the person(s) inside can see out, and the air is kept fresh. It is the point of connection between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’. It is the door of both *revelation* and *inspiration*.

The man formerly known as ‘Avram’ has now become that window for mankind. It has taken awhile. There were certainly some *wrong turns* along the way. But

now there is *no turning back*. He is ‘*in this thing*’ now - *for better or for worse*. This man Avraham is not the same man who left Charan – or who got kicked out of Egypt. He will never be the same man again. For the Holy One declares over him:

***ki av-hamon goyim netaticha***

*for I have established you the father of a multitude of nations.*

***V'hifreti otcha b'me'od me'od***

*I will make you exceedingly numerous*

***unetaticha l'goyim***

*and I will make you into nations*

***umelachim mimcha yetzei'u***

*and kings will be your descendants.*

***V'hakimoti et-briti***

*I will establish my covenant between me and you*

***beyni uveyneicha uveyyn zar'acha achareicha l'dorotam***

*and your seed after you throughout their generations*

***liv'rit olam lihyot lecha l'Elohim ul'zar'acha achareicha***

*for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your seed after you.*

Of course, the *hey* Avraham's name now contains is the same letter that is in both syllables of the Holy One's covenant name – the tetragrammaton ‘yod, *hey*; vav, *hey*’. The connection is clear. The Holy One and Avraham are inextricably bound together. All with a ‘*hey*’. Then once again the Holy One makes it clear that the land of Kena'an is to belong to Avraham and to his *zara* [seed] forever – as an *achuzat olam* [i.e. an ‘everlasting possession’]. Even more important, however, the Holy One promises Avram regarding his descendants ***v'hayiti lahem l'Elohim*** - i.e. “*and I will be their God.*”

### ***Uh ... There's Just One More Little Thing Avraham ...***

Oh yes, and there is *just one more thing* – one little detail we have not covered. It's – well, it's *radical*. It requires baring oneself in total humility and submission. What is it? Well, let me let Torah tell you. the Holy One spoke further to Avraham, saying:

***This is my covenant, which you are to keep*** [i.e., *safeguard, cherish, treasure*]  
***between me and you and your seed after you. Every male among you shall be circumcised***<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as circumcise is *namal, nun, mem, lamed*, Strong's Hebrew word #5243, pronounced *naw-mawl'*. It means to *clip, trim, or prune*. What is to be clipped, trimmed or pruned? What in English is called a *foreskin* is in Hebrew an *orlah, ayin, resh, lamed, hey*, Strong's Hebrew word #6190, pronounced *or-law'*. This is a noun derived from the verb root *aral, ayin, resh, lamed*, Strong's Hebrew word #6188, pronounced *aw-rawl'*, and meaning *to grow wild* – like a vine or fruit tree that is neither pruned nor harvested. See **Leviticus 19:23**.

***V'n'maltem et bashar orlatem***

*And you are to be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin.*

*It will be l'ot [for the sign/down payment] with regard to the b'rit [covenant] between me and you.*

The fainthearted need not apply. It's as if the Holy One said: "Get your flint-knife out, Avraham. Cut a *hey* into your flesh, where it hurts the most." Or as Torah goes on to say:

*And the Holy One said to Avraham, "As for you, you will keep my covenant, you and your seed after you throughout their generations.*

*He who is eight days old will be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations, he who is born in the house, or bought with money of any foreigner who is not of your seed.*

*He who is born in your house, and he who is bought with your money, must be circumcised.*

*My covenant will be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.*

*The uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from his people. He has broken my covenant."*

***Questions For Today's Study***

1. Here are some questions to get us started in our study:

[A] What lie or lies Sarai have to accept in order to engage in the Mesopotamian plan?

[B] What did Avram have to admit in order to agree to Sarai's suggestion?

[C] What went 'wrong' with Sarai's "Mesopotamian plan"?

[D] What was Sarai accusing Avram of in verse 5?

[E] How did Avram handle the situation?

[F] In verse 6, the NIV says Sarai 'mistreated' Hagar. The KJV says she "dealt hardly" with her. In Strong's, and Gesenius look up the word translated "hardly", and write the Hebrew word and its definition.

2. In verse 7 we find the first reference in Scripture to an "angel".

*The angel of the Holy One found her [i.e. Hagar] by a fountain of water in the wilderness*

[A] In Strong's and Gesenius look up the word translated as "angel". Write the Hebrew word and its definition.

[B] To what ethnic group did the first angel recorded in Scripture appear?

[C] The first time the angel spoke, he greeted Hagar as "Hagar, servant of Sarai". What do you think is the significance of this particular greeting?

[D] The angel then asked Hagar two questions. What were the questions and why do you think the angel (who obviously knew the answers) asked them?

[E] Look up the meaning of Hagar's name in a Bible Dictionary.

[F] Did Hagar answer the questions the angel asked, or merely react emotionally to the way he greeted her?

[G] What instructions did the angel give Hagar?

[H] In Strong's and Gesenius look up the word translated "*submit*" in verse 9. Does this word look familiar? Write the Hebrew word and its definition. Considering that word and definition, how would you interpret what the angel was telling Hagar to do?

[I] What promise did the angel make to Hagar?

[J] What name did the angel tell Hagar to give her son, and what is the meaning of that name? Why was that an appropriate name?

[K] How do you think the Holy One viewed Avram and Sarai's conduct toward Hagar? Explain your answer in light of today's verses.

[L] What things did the angel prophesy to Hagar about her son?

[M] Hagar gave to the angel the name "*El Roi*"? What is the translation of that name? In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the word "*roi*" (translated "*sees*" in verse 13). Do you think "*sees*" is an appropriate translation in this instance? Why or why not?

[N] See if you can find *Beer LaHoi Roi* in your Bible Atlas.

3. How old was Avram when Hagar's son was born?

4. Fourteen years of Avram's life pass between chapters 16 and 17. Then he has the fifth God encounter of his life, in connection with which he *gets a new name* and *is given instructions regarding what is to be the 'sign' of his covenant with the Holy One*.

[A] By what new descriptive name does the Holy One call Himself in this encounter with the Holy One? What is the Hebrew name and what does it mean?

[B] What does the Holy One tell Avram is required/expected? Is this a *command* to Avram and his descendants - a "work" he/they are to perform? Or is it a *prophecy* about Avram and his descendants - something he/they are supernaturally being empowered to do? [**Hint**: looking up the meaning of the name "*El Shaddai*", by which the Holy One introduced Himself, may help answer this question.]

[C] In verse 2 of chapter 17, the Holy One tells Avram what the benefit of the "something more" discussed in verse 1 will be. What will be the benefit?

[D] How did Avram respond to this declaration that something more than intellectual agreement with the Holy One's word was expected of him if he was to receive more than declared righteousness?

[E] What do you think was the significance in the change of Avram's name to Avraham?

[F] In verses 6-8, the Holy One makes a series of covenant promises to the one now called Avraham. List each covenant promise made by the Holy One.

[G] In verses 9-13, the Holy One spells out the "*token*" [KJV] of the covenant the Holy One has made with Avraham, which Avraham and his descendants are to make sure never ceases to be observed. What is the sign/token?

[H] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the word translated as "token" in

verse 11 [KJV]. Write the Hebrew word and its definition.

[I] Was circumcision Avraham's (and his descendants) *basic covenant obligation* under this covenant, OR was it *merely the "token"/"sign" of the basic obligation*. If you believe circumcision was merely the sign/token, what was the basic covenant responsibility of Avraham and his descendants (of which circumcision was to be the sign/token)?

[J] With regard to circumcision, does the Holy One say that circumcision is to take place on the eighth day? What exactly does he say about "eight days"?

[K] What do you think is the implication of verse 14? Do you think it is applicable today? If not, why not?

5. Avraham is not the only one in this week's parsha whose name is changed. Torah tells us that Sarai's name was also changed – to Sarah.

[A] What do you think is the significance of the Holy One's changing Sarai's name to Sarah?

[B] List the blessings the Holy One specifically promised to give to Sarah as part of His covenant with Avraham.

6. According to tradition Avraham's response to the Holy One's promise about Sarai/Sarah is *laughter*.

[A] If we assume for purposes of this lesson that Avraham's response was indeed spontaneous laughter (as Sarah's response to the same promise would later be), why do you think Avraham laughed at this promise?

[B] Why did the Holy One's promises to Sarah cause Avraham concern?

[C] According to verse 18, what was Avraham's plan as to how to make the promises the Holy One had made to him come to pass?

[D] What did the Holy One tell Avraham to name the child that Sarah would bear in her old age? What does that name mean?

[E] What did the Holy One prophesy to Avraham would be the time frame of the birth of the child of promise? How old would Avraham be at that time?

[F] What promises did the Holy One make concerning Yishmael?

7. In today's concluding reading from the haftarah of parsha *Lech Lecha* the Holy One speaks beautiful words of promise and encouragement over the remnant of Israel who would return to His covenant land after the Babylonian captivity:

*Don't be afraid, you worm Ya`akov, and you men of Yisra'el;  
I will help you, says the Holy One, and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Yisra'el.  
Behold, I have made you [to be] a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth;  
you will thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and will make the hills as chaff.  
You will winnow them, and the wind will carry them away,  
and the whirlwind will scatter them; and you will rejoice in the Holy One,  
you will glory in the Holy One of Yisra'el.*

- [A] To whom is the Holy One speaking in these verses?  
 [B] By what names does the Holy One “greet” the ones to whom He is speaking?  
 [C] What promise does the Holy One make?  
 [D] How does the Holy One “sign off” on this promise – with what three names does He ‘sign’ off?  
 [E] What do you think it means that the Holy One will make the faithful remnant of Avraham’s descendants a “*threshing sledge*”?  
 [F] Why do you think the Holy One emphasizes that the “*threshing sledge*” he will make out of this remnant will be “new” [NIV says “new and sharp”]?  
 [G] What do you think the *mountains* and *hills* symbolize?  
 [H] What will be the defining characteristic of the remnant as the ‘*mountains*’ and ‘*hills*’ are being blown away?

8. In today’s reading from the *B’rit Chadasha* Shaul writes words that have been translated into the English language as follows:

*For the promise to Avraham and to his seed, that he should  
 be heir of the world wasn't through the law,  
 but through the righteousness of faith [Hebrew, emunah For if those who are of the law  
 are heirs], faith [emunah] is made void, and the promise is made of no effect.  
 For the law works wrath, for where there is no law, neither is there disobedience.  
 For this cause it is of faith [emunah], that it may be according to grace,  
 to the end that the promise may be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law,  
 but to that also which is of the faith [emunah] of Avraham, who is the father of us all.  
 As it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations."  
 This is in the presence of him whom he believed:  
 God, who gives life to the dead, and calls the things that are not, as though they were.  
 Who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations,  
 according to that which had been spoken, "So will your seed be."  
 Without being weakened in faith [emunah], he didn't consider his own body,  
 already having been worn out, (he being about a hundred years old),  
 and the deadness of Sarah's womb. Yet, looking to the promise of God,  
 he didn't waver through unbelief, but grew strong through faith [emunah],  
 giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised,  
 he was able also to perform. Therefore it also was "reckoned to him for righteousness."  
 Now it was not written that it was accounted to him for his sake alone,  
 but for our sake also, to whom it will be accounted,  
 who believe in him who raised Yeshua, our Lord, from the dead,  
 who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification.*

[A] Shaul says [English translation] that ‘*law*’ brings ‘*wrath*’. What do you think Shaul is referring to when he uses the term ‘*law*’ [Greek word *nomos*]? Possible answers include [i] *the Torah* (the Pentateuch, or first five books of the Bible); [ii] the instructions given at Sinai and in the wilderness (beginning at Exodus 19); [iii] the ‘ceremonial’ aspects of the instructions at Sinai, providing for the priesthood of

Aharon and the *avodah* (service) of Aharon's descendants in the Mishap (Tabernacle/Temple); [iv] the oral traditions added to the Torah by the sages of the schools of Hillel and Shammai (among others) to make a "fence" around the Torah in an effort to prevent transgression of Torah instructions.

[B] What do you think Shaul is referring to in this passage when he uses the term 'wrath' [Greek word #3709, *orge*]?

[C] Shaul then goes on to say where there is no '*law*' there is no '*transgression*' [Greek word # 3847, *parabasis*]. In your Richard's or Vine's Dictionary of Bible Words, look up the Greek words which are, at various places in the B'rit Chadasha, translated as '*sin*'. Is Shaul saying that there was no '*sin*' -- or no *judgment* for sin - up until the Holy One's instructions for living according to His covenant was given at Sinai? If so, how do you explain the punishment of [a] Kayin [Cain], [b] of the world at the time of the flood, [c] the events of today's Torah reading, [d] the destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the Plain? What do you think Shaul does mean when he says where there is no '*law*' there is no '*transgression*'?

[D] At the end of verse 17 Shaul gives two descriptions of the Holy One. What are those descriptions, and what do you think each means?

[E] As to which promise(s) of the Holy One did Avraham's faith [*Hebrew, emunah*] not waver?

[F] As to which promise(s) of the Holy One *did* Avraham's faith [*Hebrew, emunah*] waver?

[G] Shaul [Paul, author of the letter to the Roman fellowship] says that the words "*it was credited to him [for righteousness]*" were not meant for Avraham only. To whom else does Shaul say those words apply? What do you think Shaul means by that?

[H] If those words apply to people today just as they did to people prior to the death, resurrection and ascension of Yeshua, does the rest of the covenant between Avraham and the Holy One apply to people to today as well? Explain your thought process as well as your conclusion. If you are unsure, explain the arguments you can think of on both sides.

*May the Holy One change your name,  
and may you, as Avram and Sarai, receive a 'hey'*

***The Rabbi's son***

## ***Meditation for Today's Study***

Psalm 115:12-18

*The Holy One remembers us. He will bless us.  
He will bless the house of Yisra'el. He will bless the house of Aharon.  
He will bless those who fear the Holy One, both small and great.  
May the Holy One increase you more and more - you and your children.  
Blessed are you by the Holy One, Who made heaven and erez.  
The heavens are the heavens of the Holy One;  
But the erez has he given to the children of men.  
The dead don't praise the Holy One, neither do any who go down into silence;  
But from this time forth and forevermore we will bless the Holy One.  
Praise [hallel] the Holy One!*