

פרשת לך לך

Did anyone ever tell you the *story* of Avraham Ovinu and the *Akeida*? Did anyone ever tell you the story of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs?

Odds are that you heard both stories and many more. You were told stories of Yosef and his coat and of Little Red Riding Hood.

We hear lots of stories when we are children. And they all have the same grouping- 'stories'.

What happens when we get older and learn that stories are myths – events that never happened? Deep in our psyche, how do we view all of these 'stories'? Do we take that entire grouping of 'stories' and lump them all together?

And as we advance and know that Aesop and Grimm and Anderson were merely 'stories' and that the events in the Torah were real, are we able to extricate ourselves from that childhood mind-set of 'stories' or are we enslaved to that particular mode of thinking that we developed when we were toddlers?

The threat is that when we continue to learn new episodes, as well as those that we 'already know', that the Torah reveals to us as adults, do we approach them with the same attitude we had at the age of 5 or do we see them as we do the other sections of the Torah that we learned and studied only when we became older?

When we study events with which we are familiar from our childhood, we must make special efforts to view and study them with the intensity, depth and understanding as we would any section of the Torah.

Let us take an event from our Parshas Lech Lecha and contrast the way that it may have been perceived as a child's tale with a Torah-approach to its meaning.

We read (B'reishis Perek 16/P'sukim 1-16):

וְשָׂרִי אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם לֹא יָלְדָה לוֹ וְלֵאמֹר שְׂפָחָה מִצְרִית וַיִּשְׁמָהּ הָגֵר: וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרִי אֶל אַבְרָם הִנֵּה נָא עֲצָרְנִי ה' מִלְדָּת בָּא נָא אֶל שְׂפָחָתִי אוּלַי אֲבִנָּה מִמֶּנָּה וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל שָׂרִי: וַתִּקַּח שָׂרִי אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם אֶת הָגֵר הַמִּצְרִית שְׂפָחָתָהּ מִקֶּץ עֶשְׂרִי שָׁנִים לְשִׁבְתָּהּ אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַתֵּתֶן אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָם אִישָׁהּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: וַיָּבֵא אֶל הָגֵר וַתֵּהָר וַתֵּרָא כִּי הָרְתָה וַתִּקַּל גְּבֻרָתָהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ: וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרִי אֶל אַבְרָם חֲמָסִי עָלֶיךָ אֲנֹכִי נָתַתִּי שְׂפָחָתִי בְּחִיקָךָ וַתֵּרָא כִּי הָרְתָה וְאֶקַּל בְּעֵינֶיהָ יִשְׁפֹּט ה' בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶיךָ: וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל שָׂרִי הִנֵּה שְׂפָחָתְךָ בְּיַד עֲשִׂי לָהּ הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ וַתַּעֲנֶה שָׂרִי וַתִּבְרַח מִפְּנֵיהָ: וַיִּמְצָאָהּ מְלֶאכֶה ה' עַל עֵין הַיָּמִים

בַּמִּדְבָּר עַל הָעַיִן בְּדֶרֶךְ שׁוּר: וַיֹּאמֶר הָגָר שִׁפְחַת שָׂרַי אִי מִזֶּה בָּאת וְאַנָּה תִּלְכִי וְתֹאמְרִי מִפְּנֵי שָׂרַי גְּבֻרָתִי אֲנֹכִי בְּרַחֲתִי: וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מִלֵּאָה ה' שׁוּבִי אֶל גְּבֻרָתְךָ וְהִתְעַנִּי תַּחַת יָדֶיךָ: וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מִלֵּאָה ה' הֲרֵבָה אֲרֻבָּה אֶת זְרַעְךָ וְלֹא יִסְפֹּר מִרְבִּי: וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מִלֵּאָה ה' הֲנִנָּה הָרָה וְיִלְדֶת בֵּן וְקָרָאת שְׁמוֹ יִשְׁמַעְאֵל כִּי שָׁמַע ה' אֶל עֲנִיָּה: וְהוּא יְהִי פָּרָא אָדָם יָדוּ בְּכָל יוֹד כָּל בּוֹ וְעַל פְּנֵי כָּל אֲחִיו יִשְׁכֵּן: וְתִקְרָא שֵׁם ה' הַדְּבָר אֲלֵיָּה אֶתָּה אֵל רָאִי כִי אָמְרָה הַגֵּם הַלֵּם רָאִיתִי אַחֲרַי רָאִי: עַל כֵּן קָרָא לְבָאָר בָּאָר לְחַי רָאִי הִנֵּה בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ וּבֵין בְּרָד: וְתִלְד הָגָר לְאַבְרָם בֵּן וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָם שֵׁם בְּנוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִלְדָה הָגָר יִשְׁמַעְאֵל: וְאַבְרָם בֵּן שָׁמְנַיִם שָׁנָה וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים בְּלָדֶת הָגָר אֶת יִשְׁמַעְאֵל לְאַבְרָם:

Sorai, the wife of Avram, did not give birth for him; she had an Egyptian maidservant¹ – her name was *Hagar*. Sarai said to Avram, ‘Behold, G-d has prevented me from giving birth, come now to my maidservant, perhaps I will be built from her; Avram listened to the voice of Sarai. Sarai the wife of Avram took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar after Avram had lived in the Land of Canaan for ten years and she gave her to Avram her husband for him as a wife. Avram came to Hagar and she became pregnant and she saw that she was pregnant and her mistress became unimportant in her eyes. Sarai said to Avram, “My anger is against you – I gave my maidservant in your bosom and she saw that she became pregnant and I became unimportant in her eyes; let G-d judge between me and between you.’

Avram said to Sarai, “Behold your maidservant is in your hand, do to her that which is good in your eyes; Sarai afflicted her and she fled from before her.

The angel of Hashem found her near the spring in the wilderness, by the spring on the road to *Shur*. The angel said, ‘Hagar, maidservant of Sarai, from where are you coming and to where are you going?’ She said, ‘From before my mistress Sarai I am fleeing.’ The angel of Hashem said, ‘Return to your mistress and let yourself be afflicted by her.’ The angel of Hashem said, ‘I will surely increase your seed so much that they will not be able to be counted because of their multitude. The angel of G-d said to her, ‘Behold you will become pregnant and you will give birth to a son and you will name him Yishmael because Hashem has heard your affliction. He will be a wild

¹ A שפחה, translated here as ‘maidservant’, is a female slave, the feminine equivalent of *eved*. Further on, the implications of that status will be a focus of our discussion.

person, his hand will be against everything and the hand of all will be against him and he will dwell against all of his brothers.’

Hagar called the name of Hashem Who speaks with her ‘You are the G-d Who sees me’ because she said, ‘Is it so that also here I saw after I saw [the angels in the house of Avram]?’ Therefore she called the well, ‘The well of He Who saw me to save my life’; behold it is between *Kodesh* and *Bo’red*.

Hagar gave birth to a son for Avram and he named his son whom Hagar bore – Yishmael. Avram was eighty-six years old when Hagar gave birth to Yishmael for Avram.

What may be our impression if this becomes just another story? Is Sarah I’meinu the villain and Hagar the victim with Avraham Ovinu being blamed for that which he was not at fault? With what intonation is the ‘story’ read? What body-language do I see? Each of us can imagine the various interpretations that can be conceived.

Undoubtedly, with a proper Torah approach, we could study this passage for the next weeks and remain with many questions for further investigation and contemplation.

But, for this one week’s learning, I will raise what seems to me to be the basic issues that reflect upon our founding father, our Patriarch Avraham Ovinu and our Matriarch Sarah² I’meinu.

First we want to know how to view Sarah I’meinu. Were her actions correct or incorrect? On the one hand the Posuk teaches us that Hagar had ‘an attitude’. She

² The names of Avraham and Sarah are changed from Avram and Sarai, respectively, only at the end of our Parsha. When quoting P’sukim and other sources we will use their names as they are written in the sources. When writing about them we will generally use the names by which they became known permanently.

We read in Masseches B’rachos (13 a):

תני בר קפרא: כל הקורא לאברהם אברם - עובר בעשה, שנאמר: והיה שמך אברהם. רבי אליעזר אומר: עובר בלאו, שנאמר: ולא יקרא עוד את שמך אברם.

Bar Kapara taught, ‘Anyone who calls *Avraham* by the name of *Avram* violates a positive commandment as it says, (B’reishis Perek 17/Posuk 5) “Your name will be Avraham”. Rabi Eliezer says, ‘He transgresses a prohibition as it says, “Your name will no longer be called Avram.”’

was the maidservant who looked down upon her mistress. On the other hand she was afflicted.

Furthermore, why did Sarah blame Avraham for the inappropriate attitude of Hagar? It was Sarah who initiated the relationship, not Avraham.

And how do we view the response that Avraham gave to Sarah:

הִנֵּה שְׁפָחֶתְךָ בְיָדֶךָ עָשִׂי לָהּ הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ:

Behold your maidservant is in your hand, do to her that which is good in your eyes?

Did, in fact, Avraham Ovinu retreat from all involvement and say, more or less, 'It is between you and her; I want nothing to do with it'?

And, we cannot ignore Hagar. Angels of G-d speak to her; she has a Divine revelation and she is told that she will bear a child to Avraham. Can such a distinctive moment be ignored or dismissed? Can we dismiss out of hand the fact that she is told that the child that she will bear will be a testimony that G-d had mercy upon her?

ישמעאל

G-d hears!

Of course a seven year old who will hear these P'sukim as we have stated them would not be able to provide a sophisticated analysis of the personages involved. But that lack of intellectual ability does not mean that seeds of confusion and misunderstanding have not been sown.

All of the above questions stem from an initial reading of the verses without the benefit of any *meforshim* whatsoever.

But, even when learning these verses with Rashi, or, perhaps because of learning these verses with Rashi, the questions and possible confusion looms even larger and we must have a commitment to study them to the best of our ability and to know when we must remind ourselves that we have not yet reached total understanding.

We must note that which we do not understand and seek answers and be aware that when we think that we do understand, we must validate our thinking.

Let us see some selected commentaries of Rashi and comment upon them.

Hagar was described as an Egyptian handmaiden. Rashi writes:

שפחה מצרית - בת פרעה היתה, כשראה נסים שנעשה לשרה אמר מוטב שתהא
בתי שפחה בבית זה ולא גבירה בבית אחר:

An Egyptian handmaiden – she was the daughter of Par’o and when he saw the miracles that were done for Sarah [in Egypt], he said, ‘It is better that my daughter should be a maidservant in the house of Avraham rather than a mistress in a different household.’

The uniqueness of the house of Avraham was secondary to the uniqueness of Avraham Ovinu himself. When we read of the formation of the union between Avraham and Hagar we have much to consider. Rashi writes:

ותקח שרי - לקחתה בדברים: אשריך שזכית לידבק בגוף קדוש כזה:

Sarai took Hagar – She ‘took her’ with words [saying], ‘You are fortunate that you merit to cleave to a body as holy as him.’

We may interpret from here that Hagar was not interested in having a relationship with Avraham Ovinu; perhaps Hagar thought that it was improper and Sarah l’meinu had to persuade her. Sarah l’meinu told her that it was the correct thing to do because of the inherent holiness of Avraham Ovinu.

And, if one thinks that we are judging the Egyptian maidservant/princess too favorably, skip ahead to the end of Parshas Chaye Sarah, long after the death of Sarah l’meinu. We read (B’reishis Perek 25/P’sukim 1-4):

וַיֹּסֶף אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה וּשְׁמָהּ קֵטוּרָה: וַתֵּלֶד לּוֹ אֶת זִמְרָן וְאֶת יֶקֶשׁן וְאֶת מֶדָן וְאֶת
מִדְיָן וְאֶת יִשְׁבָּק וְאֶת שׁוּחַ: וַיִּקְשֶׁן יֶלֶד אֶת שָׁבָא וְאֶת דָּדָן וּבְנֵי דָדָן הָיוּ אַשּׁוּרִים וְלִטּוּשִׁים
וְלְאֲמִיּוֹת: וּבְנֵי מֶדָן עֵיפָה וְעַפְרָן וְחִנֹּךְ וְאַבְדִּיעַ וְאַלְדָּעָה כָּל אֵלֶּה בְנֵי קֵטוּרָה:

Avraham continued and he married a woman; her name was *Ketura*. She gave birth for him to Zimran and Yokshan and M’don and Midian and Yishbok and Shu’ach. Yokshan was the father of Sh’vo and D’don and the children of D’don were the Assyrians, the L’etushim and the Le’umim. The children of Midian were ‘Eifo and ‘Eifer and Chanoch and Avida and Elda’ah; all these were the children of Ketura.

Who was this *Ketura* who merited being the wife of Avraham Ovinu and bearing so much progeny?

When I read the word קטורה I have two associations. One is the *Ketores* that was offered twice-daily on the golden altar. The other is a word that is primarily Aramaic that means tied. In this meaning it is the equivalent of the L'shon HaKodesh word קשר³.

Rashi sees both associations as valid and writes:

קטורה - זו הגר, ונקראת קטורה על שם שנאים מעשיה כקטרת ושקשרה פתחה
שלא נזדווגה לאדם מיום שפרשה מאברהם:

Ketura- this refers to Hagar. She was called *Ketura* because her deeds were as pleasant as the *Ketores* and because she 'tied herself' and was with no other man after she separated from Avraham.

In fact, that *Ketura* was the mother of many nations should be no surprise at all. That is what the angel told her as we read above:

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאֲכָה ה' הַרְבֵּה אֲרֻבָּה אֶת זַרְעֲךָ וְלֹא יִסְפָּר מִרְבּוֹ:

The angel of Hashem said, 'I will surely increase your seed so much that they will not be able to be counted because of their multitude.'

And we do not forget that Hagar's return to Sarah's rule came about because the angel appeared to her and told her to return.

And, in that context, we note that the angel's words are not introduced by the expected ויאמר-he said, only. Time and time again we read ויאמר ה'. Wouldn't you have thought that once the angel was introduced that ויאמר alone would have sufficed? Rashi thought so as well and thus he shared with us an additional commentary:

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאֲכָה ה' וְגו' - על כל אמירה היה שלוח לה מלאך אחר, לכך נאמר מלאך
בכל אמירה ואמירה:

³ Some say that the *Ketores*-incense that was offered on the altar gets its name from this meaning of קטורת in that the offering of the *Ketores* ties us to HaKodosh Boruch Hu.

The angel of Hashem said to her – for each and every ‘saying’ another angel was sent to her. Therefore it says, ‘angel’ with each and every ‘saying’.

Perhaps, at this particular moment, Sarah I’meinu looks like she has to be on the defensive. With so much objective praise heaped upon Hagar, can anything be said on behalf of Sarah I’meinu?

But, when I read another Rashi, it does not seem appropriate to blame our first Matriarch either.

Rashi writes:

לקול שרי - לרוח הקודש שבה:

[Avraham listened] to the voice of Sarai – [He listened] to the Ruach HaKodesh that was within her.

Sifsei Chachamim explains the source of this *drasha*:

הוכחתו מדכתיב לקול שרי הוה ליה למימר לשרי, אלא הכי פירושו לקול הבא לשרי
דהיינו רוח הקודש:

Rashi’s proof is that it is written ‘to the voice of Sarai’. It could have written [just] Sarai [without the word ‘voice’]. Thus, the explanation is ‘to the voice that came to Sarai which is *Ruach HaKodesh*⁴.

⁴ We read in Parshas Va’yeira (B’reishis Perek 21/P’sukim 9-12):

וַתֵּרָא שָׂרָה אֶת בֶּן הַגֵּר הַמִּצְרִית אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְאַבְרָהָם מִצְחָק: וַתֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָהָם גֵּרֶשׁ הָאִמָּה הַזֹּאת
וְאֶת בְּנָהּ כִּי לֹא יִרְשׁ בֶּן הָאִמָּה הַזֹּאת עִם בְּנֵי עִם יְצַחָק: וַיִּרַע הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּעֵינֵי אַבְרָהָם עַל אִוֹת
בְּנוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָּהּ...לְקִים אֶל אַבְרָהָם אֵל יִרַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ עַל הַנְּעַר וְעַל אֲמֹתָי כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלַיךְ שָׂרָה
שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי כִּי בִיצְחָק יִקְרָא לְךָ זֶרַע:

Sarah saw the son of the Egyptian Hagar, who gave birth for Avraham, making jest. Sarah said to Avraham, ‘Banish this maidservant and her son because the son of this maidservant will not inherit with my son, with Yitzchak.’ This matter was very bad in the eyes of Avraham regarding his son. G-d said to Avraham, ‘This should not be bad in your eyes regarding the lad and your maidservant; all that Sarah will say to you, listen to her voice because it is Yitzchak who will be called your seed’.

Rashi writes:

At one point I thought that this D'var Torah should conclude here because, Bs" d we have seen that the outward trappings of a story can lead to much confusion that is not related to the *p'shat* and that a true investigation of the sources can yield a great deal of information that requires methodical investigation and a good deal of thought.

Nevertheless, I decided to continue to come to at least a partial understanding, or an approach, of some facets⁵ of a very complicated interaction between Sarah l'meinu, Avraham Ovinu, Hagar and *Malach Hashem*.

Our investigation will require us to review many of the verses written above. And this time we will seek key words in them.

We read:

וְשָׂרָי אִשְׁתְּ אַבְרָם לֹא יֵלְדָה לוֹ וְלֵה שְׂפָחָה מִצְרִית וְשָׂמָה הִגְרָה:

שמע בקולה - למדנו שהיה אברהם טפל לשרה בנביאות:

Listen to her voice – We learn that Avraham was secondary to Sarah regarding prophecy.

Already in this week's Parshas Lech Lecha, which predates the episode on Parshas Va'yeira by about thirteen years, we saw that Avraham knew on his own that Sarah possessed *Ruach HaKodesh*. What, then, is the *chiddush* here?

Perhaps in Parshas *Vayeira* HaKodosh Boruch Hu validated Sarah's prophecy and told Avraham that her prophecy overrode his. Thus, we know Avraham was secondary to Sarah – otherwise why did he have to listen to her.

Also, in Parshas Lech Lecha there is no obvious Divine intervention. Avraham's choice to listen to Sarah does not give an objective statement that her prophecy was superior to his.

Additionally, in our Parsha we did not see that Avraham's opinion differed from that of Sarah and thus we are not able to establish a hierarchy. In Parshas Va'yero, Avraham's opinion differed from that of Sarah and when Hashem commanded to him that Sarah's opinion was superior, we learn of the superiority of her prophetic powers in general.

⁵ We emphasize 'some' facets because a full treatment of this subject, assuming that this writer is capable of doing so, would require a full monograph at least.

Sorai, the wife of Avram, did not give birth for him; she had an Egyptian maidservant – her name was *Hagar*.

We are quite aware of the identity of Sarah l'meinu. We know that Avraham Ovinu is her husband. It seems superfluous to identify her as אשת אברם, the wife of Avram.

We also note that Hagar is identified in three ways: her name, her country of origin and her status in the household of Avraham and Sarah.

We continue learning:

וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרַי אֶל אַבְרָם הִנֵּה נָא עֲצָרְנִי ה' מִלְדֹת בָּא נָא אֶל שִׁפְחֹתַי אוּלַי אֲבִנָּה מִמֶּנָּה
וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל שָׂרַי:

Sarai said to Avram, 'Behold, G-d has prevented me from giving birth, come now to my maidservant, perhaps I will be built from her'; Avram listened to the voice of Sarai.

We note that in the previous verse, Hagar was identified by name and by her status – a maidservant. In this verse, her name is not mentioned; she is identified by the term 'maidservant' only.

The Torah continues:

וַתִּקַּח שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ אַבְרָם אֶת הַגֵּר הַמִּצְרִית שִׁפְחֹתָהּ מִקֶּזֶץ עֶשְׂרֵי שָׁנִים לְשִׁבְתּוֹ אַבְרָם
בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַתִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָם אִישָׁהּ לֹו לְאִשָּׁה:

Sarai the wife of Avram took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar after Avram had lived in the Land of Canaan for ten years and she gave her to Avram her husband for him as a wife.

At this point we cannot ignore what would seem to be superfluous repetition. Sarah l'meinu is again identified by her matrimonial status and Hagar by name, country of origin and status within the household of Avraham and Sarah.

וַיָּבֵא אֶל הַגֵּר וַתְּהַר וַתֵּרָא כִּי הָרְתָהּ וַתִּקַּל גְּבֵרְתָהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ:

Avram came to Hagar and she became pregnant and she saw that she was pregnant and her mistress became unimportant in her eyes.

If we have been following our train of thought we will note that there are two outstanding features in this verse. First, Hagar is mentioned by name only without other terms of identification and this narrative verse refers to Sarah as Hagar's mistress.

It is true, of course, that Sarah's status of Hagar's mistress was implied by referring to Hagar as the maidservant. Nonetheless, even though such a mutual relationship was understood, the Torah here states it explicitly.

The following verse reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂרַי אֶל אַבְרָם חֲמָסִי עָלֶיךָ אָנֹכִי נָתַתִּי שִׁפְחָתִי בְּחִיקָךָ וַיִּתְּרָא כִּי הָרְתָה וְאֶקַּל
בְּעֵינָיִךָ יִשְׁפֹּט ה' בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶיךָ:

Sarai said to Avram, 'My anger is upon you – I gave my maidservant in your bosom and she saw that she became pregnant and I became unimportant in her eyes; let G-d judge between me and between you.'

Here, addressing Avraham, Hagar has no name, no country of origin; only her status is noted.

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל שָׂרַי הִנֵּה שִׁפְחָתְךָ בְּיָדְךָ עֲשִׂי לָהּ הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ וַתַּעֲנֶנּוּ שָׂרַי וַתִּבְרַח
מִפְּנֵיהָ:

Avram said to Sarai, "Behold your maidservant is in your hand, do to her that which is good in your eyes;" Sarai afflicted her and she fled from before her.

Avraham Ovinu responds in kind. There is no personal name, no country of origin – only the status of the maidservant.

We continue:

וַיֹּאמֶר הַגֵּר שִׁפְחַת שָׂרַי אֵי מִזֶּה בָּאת וְאַנָּה תֵּלְכִי וַתֹּאמֶר מִפְּנֵי שָׂרַי גָּבַרְתִּי אָנֹכִי בְּרַחַת:

The angel said, 'Hagar, maidservant of Sarai, from where are you coming and to where are you going?' She said, 'From before my mistress Sarai I am fleeing.'

We have proceeded to the meeting of the Angel[s] with Hagar. We are primed to look for and note how the angel addresses her: will he use her personal name, her nationality or her status or one or two of these identifying factors?

Perhaps this is the point to note which may seem obvious. Addressing someone by their name is very personal. When personally identified, the individual is seen as unique. There is only one Hagar, even if there are other women with the same name. At the same time, if I identify someone by their country of origin, there are thousands who are part of that class. If I identify someone by their social status, they are not singular or unique whether the status is prominent or insignificant.

And, here, as we see, the Angel addresses her personally, Hagar, and, at the same time, as the maidservant. Is there tension between these various forms of reference?

And Hagar's response to the Angel, this very first time that we hear her voice, is the exact inverse of how she was addressed.

She is addressed as Hagar the maidservant and she refers to Sarah I'meinu as 'Sarai, my mistress'.

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאָךְ ה' שׁוּבִי אֶל גְּבֻרְתֶּךָ וְהִתְעַנִּי תַּחַת יְדֶיךָ:

The angel of Hashem said, 'Return to your mistress and let yourself be afflicted by her.'

The angel could have said, 'return to *Sarai*, your mistress'. But he didn't. The name Sarai does not cross the lips of the *Malach* this time. the omission of the name Sarai in this verse, referring to her only as 'your mistress', makes it clear beyond doubt that her return is predicated on her being subjugated to Sarah I'meinu.

It is impossible to ignore the accumulation of evidence that the way Sarah I'meinu and Hagar were discussed and addressed must be a basic aspect of the event. We now need to know what the implications of these varying modes are.

But prior to seeing if our investigation will yield substantial results, let us look at one more verse from our section and remind ourselves about part of the promise that the Malach gave to Hagar at the conclusion of his words.

We read:

וְהוּא יְהִיָּה פֶּרָא אָדָם יְדוּ בְּכָל יוֹד כָּל בּוֹ וְעַל פְּנֵי כָל אָחִיו יִשְׁכֵּן:

[The angel of G-d said to her, 'Behold you will become pregnant and you will give birth to a son and you will name him Yishmael because Hashem has

heard your affliction.] He will be a wild person, his hand will be against everything and the hand of all will be against him and he will dwell against all of his brothers.'

We will let the *K'sav V'Kabbalah* express our astonishment:

להמפרשים היה זה בשורה רעה אליה, מחסרון ישמעאל והיותו לסטים משחית
ומושחת, ואינו נכון, כי איך יגיד העתידות האלה המלאך להגר, ובזה אין בשורה
מוצאת, ואיך יתיחס זה לענין תשובתה לבית אברהם

According to the commentators⁶, this is a very sad pronouncement for Hagar. [It discusses] Yishmael's deficiencies and that he would be a highwayman, corrupting and corrupt. But this [cannot be] correct. How could the angel tell these future happenings to Hagar? There is no good news here and [additionally] how does this pronouncement relate to Hagar's return to the House of Avraham?

And thus, now that we have seen the entire section once and many parts of it twice, and as I attempted to have a grasp on this event as a whole, I searched for an explanation that would be inclusive of those points that I thought were significant and I found it in the *Malbim*.

Let me share what the *Malbim* taught me by reading excerpts from his commentary on this section of Sarah I'meinu, Avraham Ovinu, Hagar the Egyptian maidservant and *Malach Hashem*.

As always, Malbim prefaces his commentary with a number of leading questions which serve as the entrée and guideposts to his *peirush*. We will abbreviate his writing and urge the serious student to read the entire commentary because there are points that we will omit purposely⁷.

⁶ In one way or another, Yishmael is prophesied as being a wild person, in conflict with the entire world and the entire world with him.

The verses seem to say this clearly and the *meforshim* interpret the phrase פרא אדם to explicate its specific references.

⁷ No less a reason for reading the entire commentary is to check that this reader did not err in his understanding and reported the commentary of Malbim accurately and fully.

After discussing the reason why the first child of Avraham Ovinu could not be Yitzchak, Malbim tells what we can learn from the introduction with which the Torah introduces Hagar:

...הגר היתה מוכנת שבנה ישאב הזוהמא, מצד שהיא שפחה, ומצד שהיא מצרית
שעתידה תורה לאסור. ושמה הגר, רצונה לומר שלא נתגיירה כי לא נשתנה שמה,
שבעת הגרות היו משנים את השם:

Hagar was prepared that her son would imbibe impurity from the aspect that she was a maidservant⁸ and from the aspect of her being Egyptian; in the future, marriage with Egyptians would be prohibited⁹.

⁸ We learn in Masseches Gittin (13 a):

עבדא בהפקירא נחא ליה, זילא ליה, שכיחא ליה, פריצה ליה.

A slave is pleased with a *hefker*-unbridled existence; it without dignity, easily found and promiscuous.

Based on the sources that we have brought regarding Hagar as Hagar and Hagar as *Ketura*, it is not clear that this description would apply to her. Nonetheless, Malbim says the fact that the Torah describes in detail with the repetitive descriptions is indicative of something of her nature, at least in its potential. If that potential was not realized by Hagar, it certainly was by Yishmael.

There are examples in Chazal of very respectable slaves. Rabban Gamliel said about his slave *Tobi* as we read in Masseches B'rachos (16 b):

אין טבי עבדי כשאר כל העבדים, כשר היה.

My slave Tobi is not like the rest of the slaves; he is *kosher*.

Hagar could have been 'kosher' as well but that does not remove the implication of the emphasized '*shifcha*' throughout our section.

⁹ We read in Parshas Ki Setze (D'vorim Perek 23/P'sukim 8-9):

לא תתעב אדמי כי אחיך הוא לא תתעב מצרי כי גר היית בארצו: בנים אשר יולדו להם דור שלישי
יבא להם בקהל ה':

Do not despise the Edomite because he is your brother; do not despise the Egyptian because you were a stranger in his land. Sons that will be born to them in the third generation can marry into the Jewish People.

We read in Shulchan Aruch Even HoEzer (Siman 4/s'if 3):

מצרי ואדומי אינם אסורים אלא עד שלשה דורות, אחד זכרים ואחד נקבות, ה[שאחר שנתגייר הוא
ובנו שנולד לו אחר שנתגייר, אסורים, ובן בנו מותר.

By writing 'and her name was Hagar' the implication was that she did not convert and thus her name wasn't changed because at the time of conversion the convert is given a new name¹⁰.

The Torah tells us the rationale of Sarah l'meinu for suggesting that Avraham have a child with another woman. But it does not tell us why Sarah suggested Hagar. Malbim does tell us:

ותאמר שרי, באשר שרה ידעה מן היעודים שיעד ה' לאברהם שבהכרח יתקיימו, ואחר שראתה שעצר ה' אותה מלדת, התיראה שבהכרח ישא אברם אשה אחרת שיוליד עמה, וזה או שהיא תמות או שיקח צרה עליה בחייה, וטוב לה שיקח את שפחתה שבן הנולד לה הוא עבד של שרה וקנינה ונחשב כאלו הוא בן שלה...

Sarai said – Since Sarah knew that the goals that Hashem set for Avraham would certainly be fulfilled and since she saw that Hashem prevented her from giving birth, she was concerned that Avraham would take a second wife who with bear a child for him – either after her death or as a second wife while she was alive.

She preferred that he would take her maidservant because the child born to a slave is the property of the slave's owner and thus it would be considered as if he was her son.

And now, we can have insight into the repetitiveness of descriptions of Sarah as the wife of Avraham and Hagar as the Egyptian maidservant. We are to know that the status of neither Sarah nor Hagar has changed even though now Hagar will bear a son for Avraham. Malbim continues his commentary:

The Edomite and the Egyptian are only forbidden in marriage until three generations, both men and women. After the Edomite or Egyptian convert, he and his son, they are still forbidden after the conversion. The son of his son is allowed to marry into the Jewish People.

¹⁰ Even in regards to a *Ba'al Teshuva*, Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva (Perek 2/Halachah 4) writes:

מדרכי התשובה להיות השב...משנה שמו כלומר אני אחר ואיני אותו האיש שעשה אותן
המעשים...

Among the ways of Teshuva is that the penitent changes his name as to say, 'I am someone else; I am not that person who sinned

וַתִּקַּח שָׂרַי אִשְׁתְּ אַבְרָם אֶת הַגֵּר הַמִּצְרִית שְׁפָחָתָהּ בְּאֵר שְׁבֻזָּה לֹא וַיִּתְּרָה דְבַר מִן הָאִישׁוֹת שֵׁלָה, כִּי לֹא הוֹצִיָּאָה לְחֵירוֹת בְּזֵה, כִּי עֲדִיין הִיְתָה שְׁפָחָתָה קַנִּין כֶּסֶפָה, וְהִיא נִשְׂאָרָה אִשְׁתְּ אַבְרָם לְבָדוּ וּבְמִדְרַשׁ לֹא לְאִשָּׁה וְלֹא לְאַחֵר, רְצוּנָה לֹא הָיָה יָכוֹל לְמַכְרָהּ כִּי נִשְׂאָרָה קַנִּין שְׂרָה...

Sarai the wife of Avram took her handmaiden Hagar the Egyptian – the Torah is explaining [by restating the status of Sarah and Hagar] that even though Sarah gave Hagar to Avraham to bear children, she did not forego her marriage to him. She did not free Hagar when she gave her to Avraham. Hagar was still the property of Sarah and she was given to Avraham as a wife, but not as his property. And thus the Midrash interprets ‘to *him* as a wife’, but he could not give her to another person, that is to say that Avraham had no rights over Hagar to sell her because Hagar remained the property of Sarah.

Even after the objective narrative of the Torah telling us that Sarah remains *the* wife and Hagar remains the maidservant, we now see the subjective view of Hagar, as Malbim explains:

וְתִקַּל גְּבֻרָתָהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ. כִּי חֲשָׁבָה שְׂאֵחֵר שֶׁהִרְתָּה יֵצֵא מִרְשׁוֹתָה...

Her mistress became unimportant in her eyes – Hagar thought that now that she became pregnant she would no longer be the possession of Sarah.

And not only was there a subjective reaction on the part of Hagar, Sarah I’meinu had her own subjective reaction as she viewed what she thought to be the silent acquiescence of Avraham Ovinu to this new attitude of Hagar. That subjective perspective explains Sarah’s very strong words against Avraham Ovinu.

Malbim explains:

חֲמִסֵּי עֲלֶיךָ, שְׂרָה חֲשָׁבָה שְׂאֵבְרָם הוֹצִיָּא אוֹתָהּ לְחֵירוֹת וְעַל כֵּן הִיא מְקִילָה בְּכַבּוּדָהּ, זֶה חֲמִס כִּי הִיְתָה שְׁפָחָה מִנְּכִסֵּי מְלוֹג שֵׁלָה שְׂאֵין הַבַּעַל יָכוֹל לְשַׁחֲרָרָהּ, כִּי הִקְרַן שֵׁלָה וְהוּא אוֹכַל פִּירוֹת כְּנוֹדַע, וְעַל כֵּן צַעֲקָה עַל הַחֲמִס, וּבְרָרָה זֶה הִלָּא אֲנִכִּי נִתְּתִי שְׁפָחָתִי בְּחִיקָךְ שֵׁלָה הוֹצִיָּאתִיָּה לְחֵירוֹת רַק שֶׁתִּשְׂאָר שְׁפָחָתִי, וְאִם כֵּן אֵיךְ וְאֵקַל בְּעֵינֶיהָ. שֶׁזֶה מוֹרָה שֶׁהִיא עֲתָה בֵּת חוֹרִין, וְאִם כֵּן יִשְׁפֹּט ה' בִּינִי וּבִינֶיךָ, עַל הַחֲמִס וְהַגְּזֵל:

My anger is upon you – Sarah thought that Avraham freed Hagar and that was the reason that Hagar did not treat her with respect. And that is called

*Chomos*¹¹, taking someone else's property. Hagar was the property of Sarah and Sarah gave her to Avraham to bear children¹² but not that she would be his property.

Therefore Sarah cried out *chomos* – thievery and she clarified her claim by saying, “Did I not give *my* maidservant in your bosom?” This meant that Sarah did not set Hagar free, rather ‘she should remain *my* maidservant’. And if that would have been so, how could I not be respected by Hagar? She acted as if she was a free person and thus ‘G-d should judge between me and you, Avraham’ regarding the *chomos* and thievery.

After gaining understanding and clarification regarding the subjective attitudes of Sarah I'meinu and Hagar, we can appreciate the exactitude of Avraham's response, as Malbim teaches:

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל שָׂרַי הֲיִנִּי שֹׁפְחָתְךָ, אֲנִי לֹא הוּצֵאתִיָּה לְחִירוֹת וְהִיא עֲדִיין שֹׁפְחָתְךָ,
וְהִיא בְיַדְךָ שֶׁתַּעֲשֵׂי לָהּ הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ, כְּמוֹ שִׁיעֵשָׂה בְּמִקְנֵת כֶּסֶף:

Avram said to Sarai, 'behold your maidservant – [This means that Avraham said] 'I did not free her; she is still your maidservant. She is in your hands to do what is best in your eyes', just like one does with any piece of personal property.

We now come to the words of the Malach to Hagar. Unlike Rashi who learned *p'shat* that there were many different angels, Malbim takes a different tact. Malbim teaches that there were many different statements made to Hagar. Each

¹¹ In this context *chomos* is akin to theft. The commentators deal extensively with the precise translation of *chomos* and the source of Sarah's anger.

¹² The Hebrew here is נְכֵסֵי מְלוּג which refers to a woman's property brought into the marriage whereby the husband is given permission to benefit from the property but it does not become his.

Our translation here of this phrase is contextual, not literal.

statement was prefaced by ויאמר and the Malach said. Each statement had as its goal to convince Hagar to return to the House of Avraham¹³.

When the angel was not successful with one statement, he tried a different reason to convince Hagar to return to the House of Avraham.

As we will see, the statements were not variation on the same theme. Each had its own valence.

The first of those statements was meant to convince Hagar of the spiritual value of being in the House of Avraham and to convince her that the spiritual attainment that she would receive there would be worth the price that she would pay for the suffering at the hand of Sarah that she worried about.

We begin with Malbim's explanation of the angel's first argument.

ויאמר הגר שפחת שרי, העיר אזנה שהיא עדיין שפחה לשרי וחפשה לא נתן לה. על כן שימי אל לבך אי מזה באת ממקום קדוש כזה, ואנה תלכי למצרים מקום הטומאה והזמה, ורצה שתתעורר לשוב מצד אושר הנפש, והיא לא שמה לב על זה ותאמר

¹³ This does not mean that Malbim rejects Rashi's explanation of multiple angels. It does mean that Malbim holds that the point of the repetitive ויאמר was to emphasize the distinct and dissonant statements made by the angelic beings.

There is a reason to argue that Malbim would also agree with Rashi's premise that there were different angels speaking.

Since according to Malbim, each statement was unique, it would appear that each statement was a separate Divine mission.

We know the principle that (Midrash B'reishis Rabba Parshas Vayera Parshata 50/2)

אין מלאך אחד עושה שתי שליחות

One angel does not do two missions.

If we see that the separate statements were separate missions then it follows that there were multiple angels.

We further note that had the verse written only ויאמר, *He said*, without the addition of 'the angel', we could have attributed multiple statements to one angel. When the Torah repeatedly writes 'ויאמר מלאך ה', it is difficult to say that there was only one angel.

מפני שרי גברתי אנכי ברחת שהענוי מספיק אצלה שתברח ולא תחוש על אושר
נפשה:

The angel said, 'Hagar maidservant of Sarai' – the angel made her aware that she was still the maidservant of Sarah and she was not freed. Therefore the angel told her, 'Attend to the holy place from where you have just come and where now you are headed – to Egypt, a place of impurity and licentiousness.'

The angel wanted to arouse her awareness to return to Avraham so that her soul would find happiness. But, Hagar did not pay attention and she said, 'I am fleeing from before Sarai my mistress'. The suffering that Hagar had was sufficient a reason for her to flee and to ignore spiritual happiness.

If Hagar would have been accepting of this statement there would have been no need for the angel[s] to continue to speak to her. Their continued speaking indicates that they were unsuccessful at that particular juncture.

ויאמר. עתה בא שלש דברות אחרות, דבור ראשון מצד המשפט והצדק, שעל זה אמר שובי אל גברתך והתעני, כי מן הדין והמשפט את מחוייבת לעבוד ולסבול, וזה הערה מצד הטוב והיושר:

And the angel said – Now come an additional three statements. The first statement is in regards to justice and righteousness. That is the thrust of 'return to your mistress and be afflicted because legally you are obligated to work and to suffer.' This is an arousal to act according to that which is good and proper.

The unsuccessful statement is followed by one that hopefully will make a sufficient impression upon Hagar. Malbim explains its content:

ויאמר, אחר שראה שלא שמה לב על זה בא דבור אחר מצד המועיל, שיסבול אדם ויעונה עתה אם יקנה על ידי זה טוב בעתיד, על כן יעדה שירבה את זרעה בעבור זה:

And the angel said [a second time] – When the angel saw that she did not attend to the first point, he then makes a second argument to her that it is for her benefit. 'It is worthwhile for a person to suffer and be afflicted if there will be a future good that will be gained'. Thus, in this statement, the

angel explained [that if she would return to Avraham] her future would be one of having many offspring.

But, still another statement was necessary because also this previous one was unsuccessful. Malbim explains the final statement that was crowned with dubious success:

ויאמר, אחר שגם על זה לא שתה לבה הבטיח לה שלא תעונה עוד, ועל זה אמר שתקרא שם הנולד ישמעאל כי שמע ה' אל עניה, ויתן בלב שרה שלא לענותה עוד:

The angel said – Since Hagar did not attend to the second statement either, the angel promised her that she would suffer no longer [if she returned to Avraham's household]. That is the implication of the angel telling her, 'You will call the name of the child born to you, *ישמעאל* - *Yishmael*' meaning that G-d will listen to your affliction and He would cause the heart of Sarah to desist from afflicting Hagar any longer.

However, her failure to heed the first statements of the angel had its implications. And those implications lead to the 'announcement' regarding the nature of *Yishmael*, the son who would be born to Hagar. Malbim continues:

והוא, אולם בעבור שלא שמעה לקול המלאך לשוב בעבור הצלחת הנפש ולא בעבור הצדק ואף לא בעבור המועיל, על כן גם זרעה לא יצלח להיות אדם מאושר רוצה בטוב או במועיל ככל תורת האדם, רק יהיה...אדם פראי...

However, because Hagar did not heed the voice of the angel to return to the household of Avraham neither for her own spiritual welfare or righteousness and not even for the benefit that would accrue to her, therefore her seed, *Yishmael*, would not succeed to be a happy person, seeking good or that which is beneficial as is the way that all people behave. [The opposite is true.] He will be a wild person.

In the continuation of his commentary, Malbim teaches the connection between the names given to the place of the appearance of the angel[s] and the content of words that the angel[s] spoke with Hagar.

Thus, the 'story' that the Torah tells us in this episode that Malbim says was a preparatory event for the birth of Yitzchak¹⁴ is anything but a story.

No different than any other part of the Torah, the language of the Torah here is Divinely-crafted so that each phrase and each nuance conveys meaning and understanding, presenting us with the greatness of our forefathers and what we can learn from them, usually in a positive manner but sometimes from their errors as well.

We are challenged to treat all parts of the Torah with the sanctity it deserves – not by lip-service in which we give verbal acknowledge that we believe in *Torah min haShamayim*, but by the seriousness, reverence and *emunah* with which we approach every chapter, every Posuk and every word.

Perhaps the opening verse of our Parsha can symbolize the trek that we must cross from Bible stories to the sanctity of the Word of Torah and its study with awe and trepidation on the one hand and love and happiness on the other hand.

We read (B'reishis Perek 12/Posuk 1):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה:

Hashem said to Avram, 'Go for yourself from your land and from your birthplace and from the house of your father to the land that I Hashem will show you.

G-d says to Avraham and his descendants: Go for yourselves from the way they relate to My Torah in your country where it may be discounted, and even from your birthplace where sufficient sanctity was not attributed to the Torah and even from the wonderful house of your father where they told you about Torah as part of the stories that you heard.

Leave all of that behind and go to a different place, go to the place where you will allow Me to teach you, inspire you and lead you as I Hashem will show you the Torah that I have given to your fathers and now to you.

Shabbat Shalom

¹⁴ That section of Malbim was not brought here.

Rabbi Pollock