

Shabbat Vayera – Genesis 21:8-19

P'SHAT

⁸The child grew up and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

⁹Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing. ¹⁰She said to Abraham, “Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.” ¹¹The matter

distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his. ¹²But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed over the boy or your slave; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you. ¹³As for the son of the slave-woman, I will make a nation of him, too, for he is your seed.”

¹⁴Early next morning Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them over her shoulder, together with the child, and sent her away. And she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. ¹⁵When the water was gone from the skin, she left the child under one of the bushes, ¹⁶and went and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away; for she thought, “Let me not look on as the child dies.” And sitting thus afar, she burst into tears.

¹⁷God heard the cry of the boy, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is. ¹⁸Come, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” ¹⁹Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water, and let the boy drink. ²⁰God

8 ויגדל הילד ויגמל ויעש אברהם משתה גדול
ביום הגמל את יצחק; 9 ותרא שרה את בן-העג
המצרית אשר-ילדה לאברהם מצחק;
10 ותאמר לאברהם גרש האמה הזאת ואת
בנה כי לא ירש בן-האמה הזאת עם-בני עם-
יצחק; 11 וירע הדבר מאד בעיני אברהם על

אודת בנו; 12 ויאמר אלהים אל-אברהם אל-
ירע בעיניך על-הנער ועל-אמתך כל אשר
תאמר אליך שרה שמע בקלה כי ביצחק יקרא
לך זרע; 13 וגם את-בן-האמה לגוי אשימנו כי
זרעה הוא; 14 וישבם אברהם בבקר ויקח-לחם
וחמת מים ויתן אל-הגר שם על-שכמה ואת-
הילד וישלחה ותלך ותתע במדבר באר שבע;
15 ויכלו המים מן-החמת ותשלך את-הילד
תחת אחד השיחים; 16 ותלך ותשב לה מנגד
הרחק כמטחי קשת כי אמרה אל-אראה במות
הילד ותשב מנגד ותשא את-קלה ותבך;
17 וישמע אלהים את-קול הנער ויקרא מלאך
אלהים אל-הגר מן-השמים ויאמר לה מה-לך
הגר אל-תיראי כי-שמע אלהים אל-קול הנער
באשר הוא-שם; 18 קומי שאי את-הנער
והחזיקי את-ידך בו כי-לגוי גדול אשימנו;
19 ויפקח אלהים את-עיניה ותרא באר מים
ותלך ותמלא את-החמת מים ותשק את-הנער;

KEY KOSHI: What are they thinking?! How might we find ‘peace of mind’ in challenging times?

ברוך אתה, יי אלהינו, מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'civvanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

REMEZ

v. 9 - Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing.

RASHI: מַצְחֵק MAKING SPORT — This means worshipping idols, as it is said in reference of the Golden Calf, (Exodus 32:6) “And they rose up to make merry (לְצַחֵק).” Another explanation is that it refers to immoral conduct, just as you say in reference to Potiphar’s wife, (Genesis 39:17) “To mock (לְצַחֵק) at me.” Another explanation is that it refers to murder, as (2 Samuel 2:14) “Let the young men, I pray thee, arise and make sport (וַיִּשְׂחָקוּ) before us” (where they fought with and killed one another) (Genesis Rabbah 53). From Sarah’s reply — “for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son” — you may infer that he (Ishmael) was quarrelling with Isaac about the inheritance, saying, “I am the first-born and will, therefore, take a double portion”. They went into the field and he (Ishmael) took his bow and shot arrows at him (Isaac), just as you say (Proverbs 26:18-19) “As a madman who casteth firebrands, [arrows and death] and says: I am only מַצְחֵק mocking” (Proverbs 26:18).

SFORNO: מַצְחֵק, making fun of the big party Abraham had given to mark the weaning of Isaac. He claimed that Sarah must have become pregnant from Avimelech. The reason he had not made such remarks already at the time when Yitzchak had been born, was because he had only overheard wicked gossip about this at a later stage, and now he repeated what he had heard.

R' G. PLAUT: Clearly, *m'tzachek* is an illusion to *Yitzchak*. The wordplay may suggest that Ishmael “played at” being Isaac. Sarah, seeing him in this assumed role, fears that today’s play may become tomorrow’s serious rivalry, and she therefore resolves to end the relationship by freeing Hagar and sending her and the boy away. God’s approval indicates that the divine judgment favored the separation of the brothers, so that each one could play his role in history.

v. 10: She said to Abraham, “Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”

ESKENAZI-WEISS: From a feminist perspective, the call for the expulsion of Hagar raises troubling questions. The story portrays the oppression of one woman by another; it also places responsibility for the enmity between two peoples—the descendants of Isaac and those of Ishmael—upon women, especially Sarah. As a story about domestic relations, the narrative builds sympathy for Hagar at Sarah’s expense. Some scholars respond by pointing out that Sarah’s concerns are legitimate. As an old woman, she anticipates her young son’s vulnerable position in the event of her death. She takes steps to protect him by removing the competition for Abraham’s possessions—and possibly also for his affection. Rather than casting a human drama in simplistic terms, the story of Sarah, Hagar and Abraham poignantly illustrates the dilemma of multiple commitments. Among other things, this passage may seek to sensitize the reader to the plight of the outsider.

T. J. SCHNEIDER: In the collection of Hammurabi, a child of a slave inherits only if the father claims him. The sons of Zilpah and Bilhah—women of a status similar to Hagar—do later inherit along with the children of the primary wives, Leah and Rachel.

DRASH from ALAN MORINIS – WITH HEART IN MIND, chapter 8, 75-79...

Yishuv can mean dwelling, sitting, or resting. Some commentators understand this quality to be a frame of mind—inner composure and clarity of thought. Others, maybe of a more concrete bent, see this as the quality of sitting down to study, with an emphasis on being diligent...

Peace of mind is an unstable and fleeting experience, and there are any number of candidates available to disrupt that inner balance. We experience peace of mind when there is no stress or tension between the intentions we set for ourselves and our physical desires or emotional states. Rav Shlomo Wolbe writes that the goal of all personal spiritual practice is to be at peace with oneself, with one's environment, and with God.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler explains how to reach that goal. It is impossible to concentrate when outside interests and desires cloud the mind. A settled mind is achieved primarily by *clearing the mind* of all else but the task at hand. He adds that when a person makes a little effort in this direction, he or she is rewarded with Divine assistance, and that through the process of trying to achieve mental settledness, one comes to acquire *menuchat ha-nefesh* (tranquility, a settled soul).

EVERYDAY HOLINESS, Equanimity, 98-106: The Mussar teachers see the importance of a calm soul, but they don't see that inner state as a final station called "Peace and Tranquility" where the journey ends, even as life continues. Instead, they view equanimity as an inner balance that coexists with a world and an experience that accepts turbulence and even turmoil because that's just the way life is...

The situations—large and small—that crop up in everybody's life and disturb our inner peace are not just painful inconveniences, the Mussar masters say, they are tests. As such, it is open to you to pass or fail. Where you get tested is in those specific soul-traits where you yourself are vulnerable...

Calmness of the soul is described as a kind of *independence*...All sorts of feelings will come, as they do in all our lives, but when you are possessed of equanimity, your inner core is not left open to being whipped around by external experiences. You are freer than that...

How are we to attain a settled mind that keep its composure despite the vicissitudes of life? Rabbi Leffin uses the term "rise above" to help us find our inner stance, and this is helpful, though I would like to suggest an alternative that shows up more frequently in the Mussar literature and that I think is more practical: the guidance is to *distance yourself*...

By "distance yourself" we are surely *not* being told never to be angry, proud, jealous, and the like, because Mussar teachers consistently assert that this would be an unrealistic goal—everyone experiences the full range of inner states, and in and of itself, every inner trait is neither good nor bad. More important is how we respond to what we feel. "Distance yourself," then, can mean only two things. Either we are to stay physically far from people who are angry, proud, and so forth, or we are being directed to develop some kind of *inner* distance from the experience of our own anger, pride, and other incendiary soul-traits.

SOD from R' Joshua Loth Liebman in *Peace of Mind* (1946)

A word to the reader: It may seem strange for a man to write a book about peace of mind in this age of fierce turmoil and harrowing doubts. It may seem doubly strange for a rabbi, a representative of a people that has known so little peace, to engage in such an enterprise. However, I make no apologies for this attempt to find new answers to the basic problems of human nature: its needs, motives, fears, and dreams. I have written this book in the conviction that social peace can never be permanently achieved so long as individuals engage in civil war with themselves. I maintain that a co-operative world can never be fashioned by men and women who are corroded by the acids of inner hate, and I believe that our much-heralded "society of security" will remain a Utopian vision so long as the individuals composing that society are desperately insecure, not only economically but emotionally and spiritually.

Give Us Heroes [191-5]: Contemporary psychological experiment reveals that man cannot have true inner security or fulfillment without possessing an ideal to imitate, a hero to follow. Human beings can get along without many of the physical conveniences of life much more readily than they can dispense with the experience of ideal companionship and comradeship...

Matter—the most important thing in the world? No! Ideals! Companionship of inspiring heroes, martyrs, saints, teachers, leaders. These are the indispensables for human achievement. Man cannot live without the support of other human personalities—wise, friendly, and compassionate. We all know that the child cannot grow without reliance upon the strong adult. What is not recognized sufficiently as yet is that adults seldom outgrow that need for the idea hero-friend. We go throughout life in continual search for men whom we can trust. We can never be cured of the yearning for higher standards and codes of conduct embodied in both saints and friends.

...Religion will serve humanity best in one area of existence when it emancipates men from false, distorting, and unworthy identifications, and at the same time inspires men on both the conscious and unconscious levels, to attach themselves to genuine heroes of the spirit.

Out of this hero-worshipping instinct in all of us, a sobering truth emerges. If we are influenced by powerful personalities around us, may not we, in turn, influence others? Yes, for better or worse, we do. Constantly, without our knowing it, we are sources of infection for good or evil. We are carriers of health and disease—either the divine health of courage and nobility or the demonic disease of hate and anxiety. No one can be immunized against us; as long as we live we make the world freer or more enslaved, nobler or more degraded

...Depth-psychology has opened up a new dimension of ethical responsibility by showing us that what we are today helps determine the shape of tomorrow, and that our personalities will be either a blessing or a curse upon the coming generation that cannot help imitating us.

PRACTICE: Who do you spend time with – a friend, a family member, a teacher – that supports your peace of mind and/or models peace of mind? Seek that person out this week, and observe what exactly you could imitate about that hero in your life.