



Perceptions • Marcheshvan 24, 5786 • November 15, 2025 • Issue #2122

SARAH *Imeinu* was the first of the *Imahos* (Foremothers). There is no need or way to question her spiritual greatness. Or is there? Can we?

No, but perhaps the Ramban could, because he did. He said that Sarah's treatment of Hagar was not correct, and this has caused many to wonder if Arab hatred of the Jews started with her. The only thing is that Heaven seemed to sanction Sarah's approach to Hagar because the angel told Hagar to return to her mistress and to subjugate herself.

Sarah's criticism of her husband also seemed out of place. It was Sarah who told Avraham to have children through Hagar on her behalf. And yet, when Hagar became immediately pregnant and turned it back against Sarah, Sarah invoked Divine judgment against her husband for her mistress's behavior, kind of like shooting the messenger.

However, when Avraham was reluctant to send Hagar and Yishmael away at Sarah's insistence, God stepped in and supported her decision. Rashi makes a point of using this to say that Sarah was on a higher level of prophecy than Avraham, which speaks to her greatness again.

Not only this, but we learn from Rashi on this week's *parsha*

that certain miracles constantly happened for Sarah. A Divine cloud hovered over her tent, her Shabbos candles remain lit from week to week, and there was always *brochah* in what she baked.

A miracle can happen for anyone.

Continuous miracles only happen for the righteous.

As for Yishmael's hatred of all things Yitzchak, the Torah says that this was and is a part of his nature, which was even prophesied by the angel in the desert. Sarah didn't give it to him; she just noticed and dealt with it.

As for Hagar, we have to assume that Sarah saw spiritual potential in her and tried to capitalize on it. If anything, it was *Hashgochah Pratis*, Divine Providence, that created the history that soured that potential because a Yishmael had to be born from her. Apparently, and to Jewish consternation, Yishmael is part of the Divine plan to develop the Jewish people into a *geulah*-worthy nation.

And it's working, although not necessarily in the way people think. Yes, the Arabs are making a lot of Jews pray a lot more for redemption, and that's a great thing. But more subtly (and quite ironically), the Arabs are forcing Jews to reveal their true colors. Yishmael is the cause of so many effects today that is forcing Jews to have an opinion in one direction or another.

So? Jews are famous for having opinions. True, but they're also "famous" for not experiencing redemption as a whole, going all the way back to Moshe Rabbeinu's time. First, there was the four-fifths back in Egypt whose opinion about redemption cost them their lives during the plague of darkness.

In the desert, people had to decide how to move forward in Moshe's absence. Most decided to wait it out and see what

would happen next, while some decided to take matters into their own hands and replace him with a golden calf. How did that work out for them?

Then, forty years later, there were tribes of Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe who thought it was redemption enough for them to live east of the Jordan, and that caused them to be exiled before the rest of the nation without ever knowing what it meant to live in *Eretz Yisroel*.

When the dust settled after the Purim miracle, many Jews picked up and returned to *Eretz Yisroel*. Yet, many did not, holding the final redemption even longer, and dying in the Diaspora without having the opportunity to live in the Holy Land. They did not know how many *mitzvos* they lost out on the entire time (*Kesuvos* 110b-111a)!

The moral of the story? Look not upon the event itself to understand the needs of the moment, but upon the way it makes you feel and what it makes you decide. Then ask yourself, “If God came down right now, what would He think about my decision?”

Yes, that’s a loaded question. It presumes a lot. First, you have to believe in God. Then, you’d have to know that Torah came from Him in all its detail. If you did the work and came to believe, then you’d have to be clear about its goals and how a Jew is meant to fulfill them. Then you can look at the events of history and decide more accurately if you’re on God’s side, or the other’s. Then He can decide if a person is worthy of redemption, or not.

Good Shabbos (Mevarchin)

Pinchas Winston