

How to Be a Taker

"And Sara gave her to Abraham her husband to be his wife"



Genesis, Ch.16:1-6

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had not borne to him, and she had an Egyptian handmaid named Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the L-rd has restrained me from bearing; please come to my handmaid; perhaps I will be built up from her." And Abram hearkened to Sarai's voice. So Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her handmaid, at the end of ten years of Abram's dwelling in the land of Canaan, and she gave her to Abram her husband for a wife.

And he came to Hagar, and she conceived, and she saw that she was pregnant, and her mistress became unimportant in her eyes. And Sarai said to Abram, "May my injustice be upon you! I gave my handmaid into your bosom, and she saw that she had become pregnant, and I became unimportant in her eyes. May the L-rd judge between me and you!" And Abram said to Sarai, "Here is your handmaid in your hand; do to her that which is proper in your eyes." And Sarai humbled her, and she fled from before her.

(Subsequently, an angel finds Hagar in the desert, tells her to return to her mistress and that she will give birth to Yishmael, a wild man.)

Midrash Rabba 45:1

Rav Yehudah said: The Torah emphasizes that "she had borne him no child"—she bore no children to Abraham but would have borne had she been married to another.

Malbim, Gen. 16:1

It was G-d's plan that Ishmael be born before Isaac and that he be born to Hagar rather than to Sara. Like silver from which all impurities are removed before it is put to its ultimate use, all but the holiest more spiritual forces had to be removed from Abraham before he could beget Isaac. And though Sara could have given birth with another husband, she was restrained from conceiving with Abraham until he had reached a state of complete spirituality. Therefore Abraham married the Egyptian, Hagar. Into Ishmael went any spiritual impurities that were in Abraham's makeup. Thus purified at an advanced age when any subtle negativity was clarified and birth could only be a heavenly gift, Abraham and Sara produced Isaac.

Rashi, Gen. 16:4

Her mistress was lowered in her esteem

Hagar would boast to the ladies who came to visit, "Sara is not the same inwardly as she appears to be outwardly. She cannot be as righteous as she seems for so many years passed without her having children, whereas I conceived after one union."

R' Hirsch

Then Sara humbled her

The cognate verb *vta'aneha* means to answer or to be dependent. It was basic to Sara's plan that Hagar remains dependent on her so that the child could be raised by Sara and treated as if he were hers. Therefore she constantly brought this dependent condition home to Hagar's mind.

Rashi, Gen. 16:2

Abraham listened to the voice of Sara

To the voice of prophecy within her.

Ramban, Gen. 16:2

The Torah does not simply say 'and he did so', rather it emphasizes that 'he heeded the voice of Sara.' This indicates that despite Abraham's own deep longing for children, he acted only with Sara's permission. Even now his intention was not that he be built up from Hagar or that his offspring be from her. He acted only to carry out Sara's wishes that she be built up through Hagar, that she find satisfaction in her handmaid's children, or that she should merit her own children because of her unselfish act. Similarly the verse states 'Sara took Hagar' to give her to Abraham. Abraham did not rush to do this until Sara actually took Hagar and gave her to him.

Let's Review:



- After many years of childlessness, Sara tells Abraham to have a child with her Egyptian handmaid, Hagar.
- Sara may have physically been able to have a child but Abraham needed to undergo a total spiritual purification before Isaac was born, which involved first giving birth to Ishmael.
- Sara selflessly gives Hagar to Abraham in marriage, planning that the child born would be raised with their values and ideals and continue their teachings.
- Hagar became disrespectful to Sara after becoming pregnant. Sara needs to remind her of her dependent state in order for the plan that she sacrificed so much for to work.
- Though Abraham desperately yearned for a child, he only marries Hagar once Sara suggests it and after she actually "gives" Hagar to him in order to fulfill her wish.

Something to Think About:

The foundation of Abraham and Sara's marriage was sensitivity and selflessness. Sara selflessly gives so much for the sake of their ideals; Abraham selflessly takes from Sara—not for his own sake, but to fulfill her wish.

How about you—when have you experienced this level of altruistic giving, and selfless taking?

Video: www.chabad.org/2084928