



Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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Light Insight

In this week's Torah portion, Abraham banishes Hagar and her son Ishmael. Abraham supplies them adequately, but they lose their way, Ishmael falls ill, and they run out of water. They find themselves on the brink of dying from thirst in the desert and Ishmael prays to G-d to save them.

The Torah says that despite the fact that Ishmael's descendants would in the future murder Jews, nevertheless, G-d judged him "as he was there." At that point in time Ishmael was worthy of being saved, thus he was judged only according to his present merit, and was saved.

A fascinating contradiction arises between this idea and another Torah concept: In Parshat *Ki Teitze*, the Torah instructs us regarding a "wayward and rebellious son." This is a boy who shows specific signs of incipient moral degeneracy. He is put to death, not because of his current behavior, but rather because he will inevitably rob and kill to satisfy his desires. The Torah instructs that he be executed before reaching this future depravity.

The question thus arises, why wasn't Ishmael judged in the same way as the wayward and rebellious son? Why wasn't he judged

according to his evil progeny, and condemned immediately?

Why was he judged "as he was there?"

Let's try and answer this conundrum with another Torah concept. A Torah scroll must be written with black ink on parchment. If the ink is another color, the Torah scroll is invalid.

What if the ink is a type which starts off black but later turns red? Is it permitted to publicly read the Torah while the writing is still black? After all, at that point the ink looks identical to permanent black ink.

The answer is that a Torah scroll written with ink that eventually changes color is invalid even when the ink is still as black as night.

With this concept we can offer an answer to our perplexing contradiction:

The wayward and rebellious son is like the black ink which is going to turn red. We look at him as though he were really red ink masquerading as black. His true nature has yet to become visible, but that's who he is now. It's not that he will change into a highway robber. He is a highway robber now. We just can't see it yet. So the Torah judges him according to his future behavior.

However, the descendants of Ishmael did not represent

Ishmael's essence at the time he prayed to G-d when he was dying of thirst. At that point, Ishmael was still righteous, and thus he was saved.

Maybe this is one of the reasons that on Rosh Hashana we read this part of this week's Parsha about Ishmael.

On Rosh Hashana, the Jewish People stand in the court of cosmic justice. For our past flawed actions, hopefully we have repented. As far as the future is concerned, we have taken upon ourselves an earnest undertaking not to repeat our past mistakes. However, in spite of our most sincere intentions, it is known to G-d that we will stumble again.

How can we hope for forgiveness?

At our core, the Jewish People are "kosher." At our deepest center we want to do G-d's will. Our transgressions are external to our essence. They are like caked mud that sticks to us from the outside. If we do fail again in the future, it is not because we are like the rebellious son with our true nature surfacing. Rather, we are saying to G-d: "We are in a sense like Ishmael. Now our hearts are perfect in repentance. What may happen in the future is not of our essence. Our essence is as we are, here and now."

ETHICS of the FATHERS

“Two who sit together and no words of Torah pass between them — this is a sitting of cynics.”

Two types of cynics are described here. The first is the man who has an hour at his disposal for the study of Torah and he wastes it. He is like the fellow admitted into the royal treasury for an hour and told that he may keep all

the gold coins he can count, but wastes the opportunity. Both display a cynical disregard for the reward available to them.

Another dimension of cynicism exists even when one is already engaged in Torah study but refuses to join with another person who is also studying Torah. Their failure to study together shows that each of them dismisses the knowledge and ability of the other as having any value for him. “No words of Torah pass between them” — their failure to communicate is a silent expression of cynical scorn.

Response Line

The Big Lie

Michael Green wrote:

Can G-d lie? Maybe G-d is cynical. Please explain. Thank you!

Dear Michael,

No, G-d can't lie or be cynical. G-d is All-Merciful and Benevolent, and no form of imperfection or cynicism can be attributed to Him.

There is an example in the Torah where G-d told Abraham information which wasn't "the whole truth." When 90-year old Sarah heard she was going to have a child, she expresses her surprise by saying "After withering, will I become young again? And my husband (Abraham) is old!" When G-d told Abraham

what Sarah had said, G-d didn't repeat Sarah's exact statement.

Instead of saying "my husband is old" G-d told Abraham that Sarah said "I am old."

But even here, G-d didn't lie, but rather paraphrased the first part of Sarah's statement in which she describes herself as old, and omitted the second part where she calls Abraham old. This was done for the sake of the greater goal of peace between man and wife.

Lunar Liturgy

Peter Merker wrote:

Where does kiddush levana (blessing for the New Moon) come from and have there been any Torah authorities who were opposed to it?

Dear Peter,

The source for blessing the new moon comes from the Talmud. To my knowledge, there have never been any Torah authorities who opposed it.

I assume that your question is based on the misconception that sanctifying the moon bears a resemblance to moon-worship. This is a fallacy. We are not worshipping the moon, we are praising G-d for His marvelous creations, including the miracle of the moon's monthly rebirth. One of the principal ways to recognize G-d is through G-d's works; the immutable monthly cycle of the moon is one of the more visible aspects of G-d's masterful creation.

Additionally, we see the monthly rebirth of the moon as a symbol of G-d's promise to ultimately redeem the Jewish People and to make us whole again.