



LECH LECHA

In this week's reading of Lech Lecha, we learn how Sarah was barren, and how she gave her maidservant Hagar as a second wife to her husband Avram so that they might have a child together.

While Sarah was still Avram's "primary" wife, she made sure that any visitors or guests accorded proper acknowledgement and respect towards Hagar as well. She was, after all, a wife to Avram as well.

However, we know that after Hagar indeed became pregnant, she did not return Sarah's kindnesses towards her. In fact, she used every opportunity to taunt her; "Look, Sarah is not as righteous as everyone thinks she is! She cannot seem to conceive a child, yet I became pregnant right away!" She kept this up to the extent that, according to the midrash, Sarah had to punish her, and she then "ran away from home!" G-d sent angels to tell her that she was to return to the house and submit herself to Sarah's authority.

What was Hagar's failing? Hagar took a blessing from Hashem, and instead of taking personal pride and joy in her blessing, she used it to torment and taunt another person. It's as if a person who won the lottery would go outside and laugh in the faces of beggars; or if a student who always receives straight "A's" would make fun of classmates with learning disabilities.

Hagar was punished for her actions; some say that it is because of this that she is expelled from the house of Avraham, along with her son Yishmael in next week's parsha. Her son, unfortunately, learned from her way, his Ishmaelite descendants taunt, mock, and look to harm us in any way possible until this very day.

We should definitely appreciate the many blessings Hashem sends us- but let us be careful not to use that blessing to hurt another person in any way!

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Cohen