

A Lawyer's Reflection on Abraham's Blessing

Torah tells us that Sarah asked her husband to banish Ishmael and his mother Hagar, that he not inherit with her son Yitzak. When Abraham prayed for guidance, God said, “do as she asks,” then reminds him of the blessing that was not negated by this requested separation. I believe that the blessing was fully executed by the time of Sarah’s request, and was given to Abraham’s seed, and was unchangeable thereafter by Abraham or Sarah.

Retired Attorney Jerry A. Green graduated from University of California in Berkeley and attended Boalt Law School. He defended holistic health practitioners and pioneered role clarification and published and lectured on the healthcare contract. He is a special consultant to other attorneys on medical issues in malpractice cases and an advisor to [CommonSpace Community Land Trust](#), and he offers coaching for individuals who as self-represented in litigation matters. He studied Somatics, Structural Integration and has trained in Aikido since 1980. Currently he chairs the NorCal Elder Council of The Mankind Project.

"I encourage us to develop Jerry’s thoughts about the blessing of Ishmael through history....." — Rabbi Arthur Waskow

This Peace Plan's Premises:

1. Abraham’s Blessing inured to Isaac and Ishmael and was not negated by Sarah’s request that he should not inherit with her son.
2. The reunion of Isaac and Ishmael on the death of Abraham demonstrated their appreciation of their shared blessing.
3. Israelites and Ishmaelites lived in harmony on the land from Abraham’s passing until 1948.
4. Since statehood, Israel has denied their shared inheritance and has executed land claims by force.
5. Those who have turned their shared loss by bloodshed into mutual healing and friendship ([The Parents Circle](#),) are capable of overseeing the creation

of trusted agencies for the equitable repatriation of a portion of the occupied lands to Palestinian ownership.

6. This vision has the potential to remove the condition of disarmament from negotiations for a two-state resolution of conflict.

Shalom Center's Rabbi Arthur Waskow wrote me on July 17, 2021,

If I may further extend Brother Jerry's thought:

In Chayei Sarah (Gen 25: 7-11) not only are Ishmael and Isaac for the first time called "Abraham's sons" (plural and together) as they come together to bury their dangerous father, but in verse 11 we are told that Isaac settled at *Be'er Lachai Ro'i*, Well of the Living One Who Sees Me. This is the well that was named by Hagar during her first troubled venture into the wilderness while she is pregnant with Ishmael and then finds the Well again in her travail with the teen-age Ishmael in the wilderness, the well that perhaps was renewed by her tears that "opened her eyes." (Gen. 16: 9-16 and 21: 15-21) It surely became Ishmael's wellspring as well (you might say). So the two brothers do at last come to live together. There is ample evidence back in chapters 16 and 21 that Torah affirms the blessing of God to Ishmael.

For decades, Rabbi Phyllis Berman and I have always, whenever we had the responsibility to lead Torah reading on Yom Kippur, have made sure that the passage of Genesis 25: 7-11 is read from the Torah as a crowning story for the two readings on Rosh Hashanah – making a tikkun and a tshuvah of the earlier stories, as the Torah Herself does the work of tshuvah that we are taught to do during the Ten Days that are fulfilled by Yom Kippur. We believe that failing to lift this reading in the same way as the expulsion of Ishmael and the Binding of Isaac are lifted from their regular places for Rosh Hashanah is a failure in our own duty of Tshuvah, and we believe that raising the Genesis 25 passage to special Yom Kippur consciousness could help lead us to a new approach to peacemaking between Muslims and Jews, Palestine and Israel.

I am glad also to encourage us all to develop Jerry's thoughts about religious affirmation of the blessing of Ishmael through history,

Shalom, salaam -- *Arthur*

In Parashat Hayyei Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac bury Abraham and "reconcile" of return or repent "tschuvah." We might read from their language in this account that they parted agreeing there was no "disinheritance" of Ishmael from the Abrahamic blessing to be a great nation and share in the land. I can't imagine their meeting being described as tschuvah/reconciliation/return if they thought Ishmael was disinherited.... In which case we would hear of fighting over birthright.

The interpretation of Abraham's Blessing in Genesis that holds God wanted Hagar and Ishmael gone from the tents but didn't want to "disinherit him" is in the email exchange of August 28, 2013. That would justify Arabs sharing in the blessing, which includes entitlement to the land. It has also occurred to me that the affinity among Palestinian and Israeli families that have lost loved ones in the conflict that plagues their land could be the trusted resource for distributing half of the occupied territories to Arab owners. What if [The Parents Circle](#), which is made up of Israeli and Palestinian parents who have lost kids to the violence, created an agency to decide what occupied lands might be returned to Arab hands. Palestinian members of The Parents Circle have already established the trust of bereaved Israeli families, who would be likely intermediaries with the government and others.

Such an evolution might circumvent the disarmament conditions that have so far been such a barrier to negotiations. If half the occupied territories were agreed to be returned to Palestinian hands (or any other percentage; i.e. some "compromise" standard) and then the agency (or Israel) were entrusted to set criteria for deciding which lands were returned, then Palestine could keep their armaments for defense and self-esteem; they wouldn't want to use them and threaten the deal.

In Genesis 21:10 Sarah tells Avram "Banish this slave and her son. He shall not inheret with my son Isaac." God tells Avram, "Don't be troubled about Ishmael. Do as Sarah says, but I will make him a great nation for he is your offspring."

Does God mean to disinherit Ishmael? It doesn't say so expressly, and God's words suggest that Sarah will get the banishment, but not the disinheritance. There are two requests. God responds only to one. "Do as Sarah says...."

1. Granting the first request doesn't mean granting both wishes. God wants sholem bayit, peace in Sarah's tent, which is accomplished by the expulsion.

2. The original blessing is express, and **it's to Avram's seed**, not even to Avram. Neither he nor Sarah have authority to change God's blessing. You can't undermine an express promise with an implied one. Even if we interpret the parsha as Israeli fundamentalists might wish, the interpretation is ***implied, not expressed***.

The original blessing said, "I will give this land to your offspring." And an alter was built at Bethel. Genesis 42:7

On Sep 8, 2013, Aquarian Minyan Rabbi Diane Elliot wrote to me:

The text traditionally read on 1st day Yom Kippur includes G~d's promise to Hagar that He will also make of Ishmael a great nation. This doesn't exactly sound like disinheritance, although other Torah traditions say that Abraham's lineage is to come through Isaac.

Gmar khatimah tovah, a beautiful completion to your Days of Awe, and an easy fast to you,

Diane

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Diane:

Thank you.

Your thoughts align well with my hypothesis that the traditional interpretation of disinheritance is *implied* from the promise of becoming a great nation. Both boys get the great following. My hypothesis is that it's ***implied, not express*** as is God's express promise (not to Avram, but) to Abraham's seed, which includes Ishmael his firstborn. No one, neither God nor Abe, certainly not Sara, can overcome an express promise by implication. If there's disinheriting to do, God must act expressly. But here, he's simply carving out some shalom bayit.

Nina Wise's Drash on 2nd Day focused on sacrifice and we contemplated Abraham's letting go of what he most love, twice, with Ishmael and with Isaac. Both times God steps in with a fix. I wonder if the message about our divinity is, not to emulate, but to step in with a fix. God fixes human faults; barbarity, jealousy, selfishness and cruelty. We are now warring nations, and it's still about this entitlement.

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Shema Hashem Shalom
Salam Shalem Shalom

Hear the sounds,	Issmao issim,
the sounds of peace,	issim il salam,
the sounds of healing peace.	issim shifa il salam.

Shema Hashem Shalom
Salam Shalem Shalom