

Rabbi's Article II

Children of Keturah

Upon the verse (-Genesis 25:1), "And Abraham took another wife and her name was Keturah," Rashi (-[Link](#)) comments, "This is Hagar. She was called Keturah because her deeds were as beautiful as incense (קְטוּרָה) and because she tied (קָטְרָה, Aramaic for 'tied') her opening, for she was not intimate with any man from the day she separated from Abraham." Upon this Rashi there are some questions:

- (i) Being that (-Rashi, Genesis 3:8), "I come but to explain the simple meaning of the verse," where is Rashi's need or proof to say that *Keturah* is *Hagar*?!
- (ii) Rashi connects his two interpretations with a prefix *vov* ("and because"), instead of saying, "another interpretation is," hence, making both together being the reason for her name *Keturah*. Why does Rashi see this in the simple meaning of the verse, while the *midrash* (-[Link](#); Bereishis Rabba, Portion 61:4; Tanchuma Bober, 9), sees them as two different reasons?
- (iii) On the verse (-Genesis 21:14), "and she (Hagar) went and wandered," Rashi comments, "She reverted to the idols of her father's house." How then can Rashi now say, "her deeds were as beautiful as incense"?!

Rashi is dealing with the ongoing question of the young student: *How could it be that Abraham* (-Rashi, Genesis 12:5), "whom he had brought under the wings of the Divine Presence. Abraham would convert the men...," was not able to bring Hagar to do *teshuvah* (repentance; return) from her, "reverted to the idols of her father's house"?! We even see that Abraham influenced His and Hagar's son, (-ibid 15:15), "Ishmael would repent during his lifetime"? This drives Rashi to say that definitely Hagar did do *teshuvah*, and the Torah is telling us this with, "And Abraham took another wife and her name was *Keturah*," meaning that, "This is Hagar. She was called *Keturah* because her deeds were as beautiful as incense!" However, being that Abraham was modest and holy in his ways, how could he have taken back Hagar as a wife, if during her, "reverted to the idols of her father's house," she was with another man?! Therefore, Rashi sees *Keturah* to must also be telling us, "she tied her opening -she was not intimate with any man from the day she separated from Abraham."

On a mystical level:

- (i) Our verse states וַיִּזְכֶּה -v'yoisef, which means, "And Abraham 'added on' and took a wife...," meaning that Abraham took a new woman as a wife, so how can this new wife *Keturah* be his previous wife Hagar?
- (ii) Why is Hagar's, "deeds were beautiful," metaphoric with, "incense"?
- (iii) Why is Hagar's *teshuvah* hinted specifically in the verse speaking of her being taken (as a wife) by Abraham?

Abraham's service *after* his being circumcised was elevated to a higher level. Before Abraham's circumcision he was only able to serve G-d within the realm of holiness. And this was done through Sarah, who would separate the *evil* from the *G-dly Spark*, within the (semi-opaque) *Husk of* (somewhat transparent to the) *Light*, and then elevate the *Spark*. However, the *Husk* itself had to be, "Drive out this handmaid and her son." After his circumcision, Abraham was now able to refine and elevate the *evil* itself through *teshuvah*, which then transformed it to (-Yoma 86b), "intentional sins are counted for him as merits."

And this is why:

- (i) Our verse uses the term v'yoisef Abraham, because his transformation of the "refuse - *Three Impure* (totally opaque) *Husks*, is to bring about a totally new addition. As the *Tzemach Tzedek* (-[Link](#)) comments on Rachel naming her son 'yoseph,' because of her prayer, "May G-d add on (yosef) for me yet another son," mystically meaning, "add on a son from (the transformation of) an 'other(-side; impurity)'." And the term v'yoisef Abraham, also applies to Abraham himself. For in order to be able --to not only draw holiness, and to elevate the holy *Spark*, but to also transform the *refuse of impurity* itself into holiness, Abraham had to first experience an added on within himself from the *Blessed Essence of G-d Himself*, for only the *Essence* itself can transform *evil* itself into holiness.
- (ii) Hagar's *teshuvah* is metaphoric to *incense*, which is comprised of 11 spices, representing the transformation of the, "11 Crowns of impurity." --10 represents holiness, while 11 represents impurity.
- (iii) Hagar's *teshuvah* is hinted in the verse speaking of Abraham taking her for a wife, being that the concept of marriage is to, "Be fruitful and multiply." And giving birth is all about addition and new, "And Abraham added and took..."

Concerning our verse, the Talmud (Zevachim 62b) relates a story: *The sons of Rabbi Tarfon's sister were sitting* (silently) *before Rabbi Tarfon*. (In an attempt to encourage them to say something,) *he began and said*: (The verse states:) *And Abraham took another wife, and her name was Yochani. They said to* (Rabbi Tarfon:) *It is written: 'Keturah'* (not Yochani. Rabbi Tarfon) *read* (said) *about them* (the phrase) *'The children of Keturah'* (as they were able to contribute only this small piece of information).

In accordance with the above, we understand the mystical meaning behind this story: Rabbi Tarfon, --seeing that his nephews had not be able to study any Torah,-- wanted to 'birth' them ("He who teaches Torah to the son of another is as if he gave birth to him"), creating of them a total, 'new being -addition'. Hence, he brought our verse which speaks of this new addition, of that which is not of Torah, to Torah, --"And Abraham added on and took a wife -in order to give birth..." And being that this giving birth his nephews was that of a miracle, --a total transformation of 'other' into a 'son',-- therefore, he used the name *Yochani*, which (i) (-Sotah 22a) was the name of a witch who used magic to birth children, and (ii) (-Brochot 57a) is a name connected with miracles. However, when his nephews refuted the notion of miraculous birth (*Yochani*), and remained tied (*Keturah*), he called them, "Sons of *Ketura*." Or deeper yet, Rabbi Tarfon drew into them a miraculous birth to Torah-study, as Abraham drew into Hagar the *teshuvah* of *Keturah*.