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| **Hagar and Sarah: A Conversation by Jelly Morgans** | |
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| Sarah | It is often the mother who discerns God’s design, and helps the son destined to carry it on |
| Hagar | This was true both for Sarah and I, but also for Rebbekah, Isaac’s wife and cousin, with their twins Jacob and Esau. |
| Sarah | My name was Sarai until God told Abraham I was to bear a son in my old age. Sarah, my new name, means duchess. When I became Sarah, I became a mother, not just to Isaac, but to a nation. |
| Hagar | My name, Hagar, means outsider or stranger. Outsiders will always look to me and know that they are called inside. Slaves will know that they are made to be free, single mothers will know that God hears them, and African & black women will know that they have power to name the divine themselves. |
| **Both** | **This is our story.** |
| Sarah | I was barren, and I offered my husband Hagar, my slave, so that she could conceive his son for me. |
| What a woman will do to fight her biological clock! |
| Hagar | I had no choice. Sarah and Abraham decided for me. |
|  | Ishmael was conceived. I had a new found self-esteem. Sarah was now my equal, my co-wife. I was no longer hers to command. |
| Sarah | God and I have a complex history. Our relationship was often fraught. God had made me barren, and did not intervene when Hagar’s opinion of me changed. |
| Hagar | Sarah misunderstood my attempts to ensure that Ishmael remained my son. She thought I was slighting her. |
| Sarah | I was so angry. I blamed Abraham for what were *my* actions. Then I took it out on Hagar. I felt like it was my only option. |
| Hagar | I became Sarah’s rival, but that was the way the system worked. Women are not encouraged to support one another, to be friends, because this could threaten the position of the men. |
| Sarah | Women cannot work together for our own cause, cannot fight the same fight, when we continue to do such violence to one another. |
| Women must remember that we have been enslavers |
| Hagar | As well as slaves ourselves. |
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| Sarah | I had Hagar exiled when she was still pregnant. Hagar found herself sitting, alone and bereft, by a spring of water. But somehow she was still proud, strong. Maybe it had something to do with her swelling stomach. |
| Hagar | God came to me. God had searched for me in the wilderness. But this did not seem to me the same God that Abraham told us about. This was a big, black, breasted God, who took me in her arms. |
| She said “You and I know your proper place, so what are you doing in the wilderness?” I knew it was a question of concern, not chastisement. God was telling me that my fate was in my own hands, that I had been recognised. And while I needed to return to Sarah and Abraham, I was a changed woman. |
| God calls me by my name, as Sarah and Abraham never did. And because God called me by *my* name, I in turn named God, and Ishmael is named from the encounter too. |
| Ishmael is named ‘for God hears’. So I name God, black face to black face. I name God El Ro’i, God sees me. |
| Sarah | Hagar was audacious. She was the theologian I never was. She needed to be away from Abraham and me for her to be truly herself, truly seen. |
| Hagar | Women often must flee the place of abuse and oppression in order to fully encounter the divine. |
| Sarah | Hagar returned, and Ishmael was born. But I merely tolerated him over the years as he grew into a boy. |
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| Sarah | Years later, Abraham and God make a plan while I was absent. God said I was to have a child of my own. Abraham told God that he was happy with Ishmael, and did not need another son. |
| When I listened in to their conversation, changing my name to Sarah and declaring that I would conceive, of course I laughed! Abraham laughed when he heard the news too. And Isaac was to be named for God’s laughter. But God rebuked my laughter, and not Abraham’s. |
| But at least, in the rebuking, God finally spoke to me directly! And Isaac was to be the special gift just for me. |
| Hagar | Sarah showed God that they needed an unmediated relationship, just as God and I had. |
| Sarah | The Torah judges my faithlessness, fickleness and impatience |
| Hagar | But it does not see Sarah’s rage, her desperation, and her independence of Spirit. |
| Sarah | But God remembered me! Isaac was born. |
| Isaac was always a Mama’s Boy. I found his weaning from me difficult, not that Abraham noticed in the noise of his party. It was hard for me seeing the two brothers playing together, so close. |
| I didn’t want to demonise Ishmael and Hagar. Abraham was an idealist but I, a realist. Ishmael was a threat to Isaac’s future. Our sons were always going to be in competition, and our sons were our lives. |
| Hagar | Abraham cared for Ishmael, and thought of him as his first son. But this didn’t stop Abraham from sending us away to die, sacrificing us both to his God. |
| Sarah | God told Abraham to listen to me. But that’s what Abraham never did. He did as I asked, but he *would never just listen to me!* So I took my anger out on Hagar and the boy. |
| Hagar | We were sent away again, and were soon dying of thirst in the wilderness. After all I had seen, the good and the bad, I could not watch this. The only way to show my defiance was to look away from my dying boy. He was a teenager, but to me he was still my baby. |
| Sarah | I could not understand this, I didn’t understand the pain, until Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac, later on. It was only then, in that common horror, that I felt able to connect with Hagar. I felt horror and guilt. |
| Hagar | But when God called me to return my sight, I saw water. I saw my future return, my position as a mother and a matriarch. The great black smile of God made me laugh too. |
| I had not only found God, but myself. |
| God promised that Ishmael would make a great nation, that he would have the full independence that I had not had, because of my actions. God grinned delightedly, and was gone. |
| I am the only woman in the Bible to choose a wife for my son. It was important – both because of my Egyptian-ness, but also my experience of being a foreigner, an outsider. This is something Ishmael needed to remember, and experience in his own future. |
| Sarah | Hagar received a taste of her destiny, a promise of where her own power to defy and name would take her. |
| Hagar | We could never be friends, be the sisters that we really were. |
| Sarah | But we take delight in our sons. And later we were brought together in the marriage of Hagar’s granddaughter Mahalath to my own grandson, Esau. And of course, the two boys who played together fathered two great nations – the Israelites and the Gentile Muslims. |
| **Both** | **But that is another story.** |