



B"H

Rosh Hashanah Message

On the first Day of Rosh Hashanah we read the dramatic and significant story about Hagar and her young son Ishmael, who become lost in the desert. Their water runs out. Hagar hides Ishmael under a bush, too pained to watch him die. At the last moment, we read: "Hashem's angel called to Hagar from heaven and said to her...Do not be afraid. G-d has heard the cry of the boy from where he is." And the two are saved.

Our sages ask, what is the meaning of the last three words "from where he is?", as these words appear to be superfluous. Obviously, the words Hashem heard came from where Ishmael was.

The Midrash, which reveals the background to many of the narratives in the Torah, records a conversation between Hashem and the angels that took place while the young Ishmael was crying. The angels argued that Ishmael should be allowed to die because his descendants would one day persecute and kill countless Jews.

In response, Hashem asked the angels: "What is he now, innocent or guilty?"

"Innocent," they responded.

"I judge persons only on the basis of where they are now," responded Hashem.

Ishmael is rescued because of "where he is at the moment" – that is, for what he is now – an innocent boy – and not for what he might become in the future.

Contained in this Midrash is an empowering message to us all as we stand on the threshold of the New Year, 5779. As we approach these awesome days and we think about *Teshuvah* - returning to Hashem, we sometimes feel, in moments of despair that it's too hard to change. We believe that we are prisoners of our habits and our past. How many of us give up on our dreams because we do not believe that we will be able to fulfil them? And even if we do achieve them, we are filled with

regret that our success will not wipe away other transgressions of our past. When we think this way, we argue as the angels did. But *Hashem* rejects this argument. The Midrash reminds us that we need not be perfect, nor do we need to have been perfect in the past, nor do we need to achieve perfection in the future.

If we are sincere, if we pray from the heart, *Hashem* will listen to us based on where we are now, at this moment, as loving parents who appreciate the smallest effort their child makes. Every mitzvah is independently cherished, every good resolution is precious, regardless of what that child may have done or may do in the future.

The past is gone, and the future is a fantasy. Neither is real. We can learn from yesterday and strive for tomorrow, but the real universe exists in the now. There is only one minute in which you are alive, this minute.

May Hashem bless you and your family that you may be inscribed and sealed for a good sweet year, filled with excellent health, happiness, prosperity and nachat.

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