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Abstract

This essay offers a commentary on the short story of Hagar and Ishmael's expulsion at the hands of Abraham (Gen 21:14–20). The commentary lays a claim on traditional interpretation but is not itself necessarily a traditional interpretation.

Keywords

Jewish interpretation, Midrash, Rabbinics, Torah, Hagar, Ishmael, Tradition

Introduction

The task of this essay is to offer a Jewish interpretation of Hagar and Ishmael. To write a Jewish interpretation supposes or implies writing within the tradition of Jewish interpretations.

What is it to write within a tradition? Gerald Bruns writes of the Renaissance practice of quotation as creating a tradition.¹ That is, authors would quote prodigiously from earlier, and especially, classical works in order to place themselves and their own work physically in relation to that earlier work, thereby creating a tradition. Denise Kimber Buell has documented the practice among the early church fathers of claiming authenticity by way of filiation, or intellectual descent from one of the apostles.² In the Muslim *hadith* tradition, authenticity is a function of a reliable line of tradition going back as close as possible to the companions of the Prophet.³

1 Gerald Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* (Yale Studies in Hermeneutics; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

2 Denise Kimber Buell, *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

3 Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Foundations of Islam; Oxford: OneWorld, 2009).

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To write within the Jewish tradition means to approach the text as already read. The Palestinian Talmud says, “Even that which a senior student will one day teach before his teacher, has already been spoken to Moses at Sinai” (*y. Pe’ah* 2 16d).⁴ This is either a very conservative or a very liberal statement. One can read this statement as saying that *only* that which was said to Moses at Sinai *is* Torah. This would radically limit the things one could say or the interpretations one might suggest. Or one can read this statement as saying that what was revealed to Moses at Sinai is being gradually revealed *by way of* all the innovative teachings of students of Torah. This latter road, which is well-travelled by many great sages and scholars, gives license to lay claim to the widest meaning of Torah. If a student of Torah can *find* it in Torah, then it is in the tradition. On the other hand, the license is not infinite. One of the heresies that the Talmudic sages derive from the biblical statement, “For he has spurned the word of the Lord, and his commandment he has violated” (Num 15:31), is “revealing an aspect of Torah that is inappropriate” (*b. Sanh.* 99a). It was obvious to the sages that the tools available to them to reveal Torah through midrashic exegesis were very powerful and therefore, some policing mechanism was necessary to ensure that that which was revealed was not “inappropriate.” To write within the Jewish tradition, then, is to lay claim to the tradition as ground and proof of whatever claim one is making. It is also, then, up to the “people” to decide whether the interpretation is actually within the tradition. This latter path, of course, is an ongoing and dynamic process (as an example of claiming a text as always already read, in the previous paragraph I claimed an interpretation of a statement found in one of the cornerstone texts of rabbinic tradition [the Palestinian Talmud] as the ground and/or proof-text of my interpretation of what writing in a tradition means).

The exegetical and interpretive tools of the tradition are manifold, as plentiful as those of the humanistic fields. The one interpretive mode for which a claim might be made that it is uniquely Jewish is classic *midrash*. There is by now a library of scholarship analyzing what *midrash* is and how it is deployed and what it does. I will here not add to it but only summarize in a highly abbreviated form. *Midrash* is both an interpretive practice and a collection of such interpretive comments. There are books of *midrash*, and also *midrashim* (plural of *midrash*) which are found in non-midrashic collections such as the Talmud. The practice of *midrash* involves reading a verse (or a part of a verse) outside its local context. Using a strong reading of the words or phrases of that verse (e.g., alternative parts of the semantic field of certain words) in order to connect the verse with a verse from a different context (often referred to as the intertext), thereby creating both a new context and a new narrative. This new narrative is then read out of the original verse. Hence, the “midrashic reading.”

Here is an example from the first verse of the Torah: *When God began to create heaven and earth* (Gen 1:1). The first word in the Hebrew is *bēre’ šīt*, which here is (and should be) translated as “When [God] began.” The word *rē’ šīt* “beginning” has a prefix, the Hebrew letter *bēt*, which has a number of possible interpretations. The preposition *bē-* (*bēt* with a *šewā*) can mean “when”

4 All translations of non-biblical texts are mine. Translations of the Torah are from Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004).

or “at” or “in”. There is also the tantalizing possibility that it means “for” as a contraction of the Hebrew word *bišvīl*. The medieval French commentator Rashi (the universally used acronym of Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, 1040–1105 C.E.) quotes a *midrash* from the 8th or 9th century Palestinian *midrash* collection *Genesis Rabbah*, which deploys a verse from Proverbs (8:22) to claim that Torah is called “the beginning of his way.” The *midrash* then reads this back into the first word of Gen 1:1, and now reads the verse: “For Torah God created the heavens and the earth.”

In addition, we are witness here to the budding of the commentary tradition, as Rashi is quoting this *midrash* (along with some others) in his commentary to Gen 1:1. Rashi was the first to write a verse-by-verse commentary that aimed to expound the linear narrative of Torah and not just midrashically read its individual verses. Rashi had to domesticate *midrash*. He had to bring to heel the impulse to generate many *midrashim* on each verse, and choose the *midrash* that he thought fit with the narrative that he was building. Though radically original in form, Rashi’s commentary was immediately seen as traditional or authentic because it deployed the midrashic form, and midrashic understandings, in the service of expounding the Torah’s text. There were, of course, many who followed Rashi—some were more grammatically focused; some of a more philosophical bent; some more interested in the mystical meanings of the text; and some lay a stronger claim to the “plain meaning” of the verses. Many of those disagreed vehemently with both Rashi’s approach and his explanations. None, however, ever achieved the centrality or the popularity of Rashi.

In what follows, I offer a commentary to the short story of Hagar and Ishmael’s banishment by Abraham (Gen 21:14–20). I make a claim on the Jewish tradition, my tradition, and at the same time stand at a place that overlooks the tradition—a vantage point granted not by the neutrality of academe but by its traditions. Additionally, I write this commentary in the hope that it will welcome the learning of the other commentaries in this issue. In the confluence of these traditions, I look to see the ways in which this story reverberates at many levels of Jewish text—and leaves itself open to reverberations beyond its borders.

The Story

And Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar, placing them on her shoulder, and he gave her the child, and sent her away, and she went wandering through the wilderness of Beersheba.

And when the water in the skin was gone, she flung the child under one of the bushes and went off and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away, for she thought, “Let me not see when the child dies.” And she sat at a distance and raised her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad and God’s messenger called out from the heavens and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the lad’s voice where he is. Rise, lift up the lad and hold him by the hand, for a great nation will I make him.” And God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water, and she went and filled the skin with water and gave to the lad to drink.

And God was with the lad, and he grew up and dwelled in the wilderness, and he became a seasoned bowman. (Gen 21:14–20)

The Commentary

And Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar, placing them on her shoulder, and he gave her the child, and sent her away, and she went wandering through the wilderness of Beersheba. (Gen 21:14)

Whose story is this?

Rising early urges upon us, the readers, the urgency of the moment. There is also in this act a foreshadowing of the urgent arising which frames ch. 22, the next sacrifice (involving Isaac) in Abraham's career. Though in that arising it will be Abraham wandering to a place, an unnamed place pointed to by the One who demands sacrifice, and wandering. That arising, early, is marked by the tradition as a sign of righteousness: the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Pesah* 4a) comments that Abraham arose early because he was hastening to fulfill a *mitzvah* ("commandment"); it was his way not to tarry when fulfilling the commandments. And so, there, it was Abraham by himself who saddled his donkey, and took his two "lads"—Rashi, the dean of medieval rabbinic commentators, names them, reveals them, as Ishmael (veteran of the sacrifice we have not yet narrated), and Eliezer (who would bring Isaac also into betrothal)—and Abraham by himself who split wood for the offering, and went, and wandered for three grueling days⁵ before trudging up the mountain, carrying the split wood "as one who carries his crucifix on his shoulders."⁶ And that was Abraham's story.

The history of facing the dawn in the urgency of a task begins with Abraham, but not with this story, and it does not only describe his actions. Abraham rises early to witness the destruction of Sodom (Gen 19:27–28). Then Abimelech summons his advisors early in the morning when he discovers Abraham's duplicity about Sarah (Gen 20:8): she was not his sister, but his wife, though technically, according to the rabbis, his sister, too. Jacob builds a monument to the God that appeared to him in a dream—at the break of dawn (Gen 28:18–19). But Laban also, not a paragon of virtue for either the biblical authors or the traditional commentaries, rises at dawn to see his daughters and their family off (Gen 31:55 [32:1]), beset, it would seem, by the mixed emotions of loss and longing, resentment and rage.

Later, Pharaoh would saddle his horses by himself to chase the Israelites after he freed them (Exod 14:6, *Mekhilta*, Rashi). This did not happen at the break of day, rather at the moment of rude populist awakening. Urgency, however, also informed the evil intention of the ruler who hardened his heart unto death.⁷

5 Midrash *Tanḥuma*, *Vayera* 22.

6 *Gen. Rab.* 56:3.

7 Both love and hate, the midrash tells us, can cause people to do things that might not normally be their place to do. Joseph, the viceroy, saddled his own carriage out of love, to see his father, and Pharaoh saddled his own carriage out of hate, to destroy Israel (*Gen. Rab.* 45:8).

“And Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water” (Gen 21:14). There is no other *hēmat mayim* “skin of water” in the Bible. This scene embarrasses the rabbis. They ask: “Did not Abraham have great wealth? Could he not have given Hagar more than a paltry skin of water and a loaf of bread?”⁸ Their embarrassment, perhaps, leads to their demonization of Hagar and Ishmael. Abraham’s seeming miserliness is a sign that he saw them as sinners, idolators, who could not stay in the same household as he and, especially, as Isaac.⁹ Abraham gives, and places, and sends away. This sending echoes with the “sending” out of Eden (Gen 3:23), the same structure, save that Abraham was generous compared to God, in that Abraham sent Hagar out with bread and water. God “sent” the male human being (i.e., the reference is masculine singular in Gen 3:23) out of Eden with only the echoes of the curse in his ears. After the sending, east of Abraham’s Eden, as it were, the story is no longer his. Hagar went, and wandered, stumbled into her own future.

But we need not leave the morning too quickly. This performance at break of day is also, like the binding of Isaac, preceded by a divine command. At first, Abraham resists Sarah’s entreaties to send Hagar and Ishmael away. It is God who takes Sarah’s side and urges Abraham, “Whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her voice” (Gen 21:12). The promise of seed and acclaim would be through Isaac. Thus, Abraham, who argued brazenly with God about the destruction of Sodom (Gen 18:16–33), and not at all about the sacrificing of Isaac (Gen 22:2–3), nominally protested the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, and then quietly acquiesced—and sent them away at dawn.

What is it about morning/bōqer?

“In the morning, the Lord will make known” (Num 16:5). Thus, Moses invited God to choose between him and Korah at dawn. It was also when morning was dawning that God’s presence was made known on the mountain with great thunder and lightning and the sounding of the shofar (often translated as “trumpet”) growing louder and louder (Exod 19:16).

Equally, when discernment dawns, at the moment when there is an ability to distinguish blue from white, or, perhaps, person from animal, one is permitted to recite the Shema (the foundational command of Deut 6:4–9). At the time that God appeared at Sinai, it is permitted for a Jew to declare her fidelity to that God (*m. Ber.* 1:2; *b. Ber.* 9b).

Dawn—the beginning of clarity, the cusp of awakening, heralding discernment. As the terrors of the night disappear, so do the soft edges. The passionate lovers of the night take stock in the light of the day (*b. Ber.* 3a). By dawn on the Day of Atonement—the day, according to tradition, on which Abraham bound Isaac for slaughter—the courtyard of the temple would be filled with Israelites awaiting the start of the service which would bring atonement to them all (*m. Yoma* 1:8).

And just so, in the first rays of light, Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael out.

8 *Exod. Rab.* 1:1.

9 *Exod. Rab.* 1:1.

This then, now, is Hagar's story.

... and she went wandering through the wilderness of Beersheba.

And when the water in the skin was gone, she flung the child under one of the bushes and went off and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away, for she thought, "Let me not see when the child dies." And she sat at a distance and raised her voice and wept. (Gen 21:14–16)

Wandering, perhaps lost, like Joseph on the cusp of his own disaster (Gen 37:15), perhaps like Israel wandering in the wilderness of Sinai caught between the nightmares of Egypt and the nightmares of the desert, perhaps like the exiles waiting, hoping, to be gathered by God at end of days (Ps 107:4). The wilderness is a palate of vulnerability, a place for revelation, but also a place in which one can be lost, perhaps, forever. Most of the Israelites who left Egypt did not make it to the promised land.

The Babylonian Talmud alludes to the power of the desert. If a person is walking in the desert and does not know when Shabbat/Sabbath is, Rav Huna, a Babylonian sage of the fourth century, proposes he counts six days and then keeps the seventh as Shabbat. Hiyya bar Rav, a younger contemporary of Rav Huna's suggests the opposite as the law, that he immediately keep the day as Shabbat and then count six days until the next Shabbat. The anonymous editor frames the debate as depending upon whether one counts from the first day of creation, or from the creation of Adam. The former theory explains Rav Huna's ruling. Shabbat was the culmination of creation. The six days themselves are a necessary part of that creation. For Rav Hiyya bar Rav, the experience of the world is important from the creation of a human. Human experience has Shabbat first, as a gateway perhaps to the six days of the week (*b. Šabb.* 69b). From either point of view, however, it is the desert that undoes creation. The one wandering in the desert is out of sync with the order established at creation. It is into this maelstrom that Hagar is sent.

Hagar, having been sent away (*šālah*), flings (*sālak*) her son under one of the bushes (Gen 21:15), her homophonic actions mirroring Abraham's. Hagar takes up her place "opposite" (*minneged*) the tree (v. 16), as Israel encamped "opposite" (*minneged*) the mountain, waiting for a revelation. Hagar sits a bowshot away from her son, who will be a seasoned Bowman (v. 20). Hagar and Ishmael are tied by the use of the word bow. It is the only time in Torah that the word is used to mean a bow that shoots arrows. In its metaphoric meaning, we find the bow as the rainbow sign of covenant by which God promises not to destroy the world (Gen 9:13–17). In a conciliatory mood, God promises, ordains, that the bow will appear in the clouds and then God will remember the covenant—as God remembered the covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob when God heard the cries of the Israelites—and the world will not again be brought to destruction.

Hagar's first expulsion at the hands of Sarah puts into play the language of "oppression" (Gen 16:6), which would construct the experiences of the Israelites in Egypt (Exod 1:11–12), and that would legislate the proper treatment of the sojourner (Exod 22:21–22). In this expulsion, Hagar wanders and then waits opposite "the place" in language that frames the Israelites' wandering and

waiting in the desert of Sinai. Like them, she will receive a vision. Unlike the Israelites, Hagar is running from a home toward an unknown future that is increasingly bleak. So she raises her voice and cries.

That is Hagar's story.

Ishmael's story

And God heard the voice of the lad and God's messenger called out from the heavens and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the lad's voice where he is. (Gen 21:17)

Almost uniquely in Torah, God *hears the voice* and is moved to action.¹⁰ As God hears the cries of the enslaved children of Israel (Exod 3:24), God hears the voice *of the lad*. Just as God remembers the covenant with the patriarchs and is then moved to redeem the Israelites, God restates the promise (Gen 16:10) to Hagar about Ishmael and saves the boy's life. Here, then, is Ishmael's story interjected within Hagar's story. God hears the cry of the lad.

God's hearing is worth pursuing for a moment. Both *Elohim* (Heb. *ʾēlohîm*, usually translated as "God" when referring to Israel's Deity) and *YHWH* (usually translated as "Lord") hear. It is *Elohim* who hears both Ishmael and the Israelites' cries (and also Leah's cries). *Elohim's* hearing seems to be attuned to distress, and moves toward redemption. *YHWH's* hearing is more multivalent. *YHWH* hears and is then enraged and moved to fierce action—against Israel (e.g., Num 11:1; Deut 1:24) or their enemies (e.g., Num 21:3; Deut 26:7). *YHWH* also hears and is moved otherwise (e.g., Deut 5:25). It is *Elohim* who hears both Ishmael and the Israelites' cries (and also Leah's cries).

God hears the lad's voice. Where is he? Is the answer to that question geographic or existential? The first time the question, "Where are you?", was asked, it was asked by God. It reverberated in the garden and was answered by a fearful Adam (Gen 3:9–10). That question, too, was both existential and geographic. The first human beings—the man and the woman—tried to hide from God after eating of the fruit of the tree. The question then was also geographic, topographic, having to do with location. However, it was more so a question of existence. "Where are you?" did not only reverberate in the garden. The *ʾayyekkâ* ("Where are you?") of the garden, according to rabbinic *midrash*, become the *ʾēkâ* ("woe") of Lamentations; it became the lamentation of the long road of exile. This scene at the birth of the humanity of humans was also the birth of the condition of exile.

Just so, Ishmael's predicament is also understood as both existential and geographic. The Babylonian and Palestinian (Jerusalem) Talmuds both derive from this phrase, "Where is he?", the idea that "[A] person is only judged according to the actions of that moment."¹¹ That is, a person is not judged on the basis of her future actions, but only based on what she has done at that moment.

10 In the only other instance of God "hearing" (i.e., *vayyishmaʿ ʾēlohîm*), God hears Leah's plea and delivers her a son (Gen 30:17).

11 *y. Roš. Haš. 1:1; b. Roš. Haš. 16b.*

Ishmael to that moment, and at that moment, was innocent and therefore *Elohim* heard the cry of the lad.¹² This understanding is conveyed by Rashi. Nachmanides, a Spanish scholar born almost a century after Rashi's death, dismisses the existential understanding and writes that this phrase refers to where Ishmael was actually placed. In that place there is, or will be, a well of water. The miraculous rescue will occur in that place "where he is."

Whereas God, or more specifically *Elohim*, hears the lad's cry—it is the angel of *Elohim* who speaks to Hagar. It is the angel of *YHWH* that, later, stops Abraham from harming Isaac on the altar on the top of the mountain. Both times the angels call from the heavens, as if the urgency to comply with the sacrifice—Abraham's volition and Hagar's despair—did not leave time for a terrestrial visit to undo the harshness of the decree. It is as if the angels are taking sides in the debate between the schools of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael about whether God came down to the mountain at Sinai. The school of Rabbi Akiva claims God's intimacy on the mountain top, while the school of Rabbi Ishmael (in the guise of Rabbi Yosi) states firmly that Moses neither went up to the heavens, nor did God come down on to the mountain.¹³ There is a reinforcement here of distance and transcendence in the moment of theophany and covenant.

That is Ishmael's story.

“. . . Rise, lift up the lad and hold him by the hand, for a great nation will I make him.” And God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water, and she went and filled the skin with water and gave to the lad to drink. (Gen 21:18–19)

Here, perhaps, it is God who speaks, or perhaps it is still an angel. At the end of v. 18, the address is direct; it does not sound like an angel conveying God's message. Rather, it seems that God is talking to Hagar without angelic mediation. The first part of the verse then reverberates with Elisha's statement to the Shunammite woman (2 Kgs 4:36): "Lift up your son." The Shunammite's son, also a child of promise, a promise broken by death, is revived by Elisha (2 Kgs 4:34). Ishmael, the child of promise, also the promise of God's listening (*yišma' 'el*: "God will listen"), rests on the cusp of life and death, fulfillment and betrayal.

God, then, is quoting God's self from the dialogue with Abraham ("But the slave girl's son, too, I will make a nation, for he is your seed"; Gen 21:13), or from the original promise to Hagar ("I will surely multiply your seed and it will be beyond all counting"; Gen 16:10).

There is a fascinating tension between the two halves of this statement. On the one hand, the intimacy of "lift up the lad and hold him by the hand," while on the other hand, the bombast of "a great nation will I make him." This calls to mind the promise of the new covenant in Jeremiah (31:31), where God recalls holding Israel by the hand (Jer 31:32) as God took them out of Egypt.

12 This conflicts with another rabbinic tradition that Ishmael worshiped idols and engaged in other transgressive conduct—which is why Sarah demanded that Abraham throw them out. See *Exod. Rab.* 1:1.

13 *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Bahodesh*, 9; cf. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah* (trans. Gordon Tucker; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006).

There the intimacy is embedded in the epic narrative. The epic narrative is a prequel to the downfall and the need for a new covenant in future days.

The promise to Hagar and by extension her son is a prequel to salvation. The act of salvation itself is ambiguous. “And God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water.” Was this opening an intervention into reality? Was there now a well where there was no well before? Or, was this an existential opening of the eyes, reminiscent of the opening in the garden: “And the eyes of the two were opened, and they knew they were naked” (Gen 3:7). Did Hagar comprehend that which she did not comprehend before? Was she so overtaken with despair that she was blinded to possibility, so that God had to point out to her that which was actually in front of her? Or was God, like Elisha, so chastened by her cries, and especially the cries of the lad, that God worked a miracle, that a well that was not there before now was?

The well, which was or was not there before, was destined to stay. Abraham’s house servant Eliezer found Rebecca for Isaac by a well, and Rebecca allowed Eliezer to drink as Hagar gave Ishmael to drink (Gen 24:45–46). Jacob found his betrothed by a well, as did Moses. According to the Talmud, Miriam, Moses’ sister, was the guarantor of the well that travelled with the Israelites through their wanderings in the desert (*b. Ta’an. 9a*). When Miriam died, the water vanished, and the people “gathered against Moses and against Aaron” (Num 20:1–2).

The well is also Torah (*b. Ta’an. 7b*). All the patriarchs dug wells, drank in Torah; so, too, did Hagar give Ishmael to drink from the eternal well of the living God, the words of Torah.

God’s story

And God was with the lad, and he grew up and dwelled in the wilderness, and he became a seasoned bowman. (Gen 21:20)

This is Ishmael’s story, but also God’s story. God was with the lad. This is not said of many people. God was with Ishmael, and yet he was a seasoned bowman. This could be a neutral statement. Voices in the tradition understand this in light of the earlier naming of Ishmael as a *pere’ ʾādām*, a “wild ass of a man” (Gen 16:12). Rashi relates the *midrash* that Ishmael camps beside the roads and use his skills as a bowman to steal from the passing caravans. Others say he tried to shoot Isaac with the bow.

On the other side, there is a tradition that is generated by the fact that Ishmael came to bury Abraham together with Isaac. In this telling, Ishmael was righteous. Even if he was not righteous in his youth, he was righteous as he grew older. This understanding of Ishmael as righteous must have been, at least at one time, of considerable weight. One of the leading rabbis of the second century, quoted often in Mishnah, is Rabbi Ishmael—presumably not named after an evil person.

God made promises to two different strains of Abraham’s descendants. Were these promises reconcilable? God promised Abraham back in Haran that he would be “a great nation,” and his

seed would be so numerous that it would be impossible to count them, and they would inherit the land. God then promised Hagar at the spring, the first time she ran from Sarah, that her son, Ishmael would be too numerous to be counted.

God then promised Abraham that Sarah would have a child, although she was in her 90s, and that his progeny would be kings and nations. Then when Sarah demanded that Abraham chase both Hagar and Ishmael out, God assuaged Abraham's pain by promising "for through Isaac shall your seed be acclaimed" (Gen 21:12). Yet God also declares, "But the slavegirl's son, too, I will make a nation" (v. 13). Then finally, God tells Hagar "a great nation will I make him" (v. 18). That is Ishmael, of course.

And God was with Ishmael. As God was with Isaac? Is this God's story? Perhaps there was no choice of one son over the other: rather, God chose both without taking into account that people cannot understand a logic of love that is not binary and supremacist. Is God's story one of conciliation which did not account for the human tendency toward animus? Is then a tradition that reads one over against the other, misreading God's story?