

Hagar Meditation

written by Michelle Mikeska

Centering Prayer:

Take a moment and center yourself to prepare to hear from God. If you are outside, focus on an aspect of nature and take deep, intentional breaths. As a breathing exercise, when you breathe in imagine you are breathing in the love of God, and as you breathe out, imagine you are accepting God's love. Do this for five minutes, if you can.

Introduction:

The following meditation is based off of Hagar's story found in Genesis 16 and Genesis 21:8-21, and my own prayerful meditation. It is inspired by Womanist scholars like Dr. Delores S. Williams and Dr. Wilda C. Gafney. This is my own interpretation/retelling from Hagar's point of view and I hope you find it to be a blessing. However, I also encourage you, if you have time, to read the story on your own and ask God to reveal something to you. Underline words that stand out to you. Focus on what those words mean to you and what you think God might be saying to you through them.

Hagar: Seen by God - A Meditation

I am a slave. My masters bought me in Egypt. I am an outsider, a nobody, their property. We have journeyed to a new land and they say it is at the bidding of their god. Their god is strange and not like my gods. This god has made them promises. Something about a child, a nation, a land. Sounds far fetched but I stay out of it. The gods, if they exist at all, clearly don't care about me. So I keep my head down and hope to continue to exist unnoticed. What a naive fool I was.

Years have passed. I am largely invisible to my owners. I am like other slaves. My worth is assigned in terms of my usefulness, my full humanity is not acknowledged, I am absent from the page. I didn't know my invisibility was a blessing.

One day my mistress asks for me. She gives me no explanation, but says she needs me to come to her. I am used to this and enter my master's tent with my usual wariness and mask of calm. She and her husband are arguing. I don't have to guess what it's about. It's common gossip in the camp that their god hasn't come through on his promise. Sarai remains barren.

I'm starting to get nervous now. Whatever reason they brought me here, it can't be good. I hear my mistress say that I am the solution to their problem. That Abram should take me as a wife and that I will give them their heir.

"Wife".... "heir" ... I know what this means. These are pretty words to cover up what this really is. I am their slave. I was not consulted and my consent was neither required nor given. Let's call this what it is: rape, forced marriage, forced surrogacy. This is the only time I'll be called a wife. When they talk about me again, they will name me slave. What I would give to be invisible now.

Months pass. I feel this new life growing inside me, and I cannot contain my joy. But my joy is dangerous and my mistress takes notice. She interprets my joy as contempt and the entire camp hears our masters yelling. "Your slave is in your power." He says "Do with her as you please." Two sentences and my fate is sealed. I have never felt such fear.

I am whipped and beaten at the hands of my mistress. I flee to the wilderness to protect my unborn child. I am completely alone, forsaken by the gods. I cannot remain with my masters, but how will I survive out here? I lay down near a stream and give into despair. I don't pray, I don't cry out. I don't believe enough in any god to pray anyway.

I hear a voice. I'm worried this is a sign of dehydration and weakness from the beating. But the voice persists. It's clear and is calling me by name. The voice asks where I'm going so I tell them my story. I tell them I'm on the run from my slave masters, that I'm pregnant and worried for my child. Then the voice tells me to go back to them. I'm about to tell the voice where they can stick their unsolicited advice, when their next words stop me short.

They start talking about my son. I always suspected my child was a boy and now it's confirmed. They tell me my boy's name is Ishmael, which means God hears. And I now realize that the voice is God. And that this God has heard my cries, in the middle of the night, when I thought I was alone. This God knows my story and cares about my affliction.

And then they give me a promise. We'd all heard the stories about Abram's god. How he took him out in the middle of the night and cut a covenant with him. A god made a covenant? It was unheard of, this promise-making god. All the other gods had humans make promises to them. I thought Abram's promise was a special circumstance, or only reserved for his people. But this God is making me a promise too, a nobody, a foreigner, a slave. This God is telling me I'll be a nation too. But in order for these promises to come true, for my son to survive, I have to go back.

I give God a name, I name them God Who Sees. Because I thought I was alone and that my life didn't matter. But this God saw me, heard me, and saved me. This God gave me hope, a promise and a future.

I will go back to my masters, but I won't stay there long. God's promise will not leave me a slave. When my baby is weaned we will be discarded for the offense of my child laughing. Abram will give me a water skin and a loaf of bread and cast me out into the wilderness.

But God who Sees will meet me there again. This time there is no going back. This time *the wilderness* is my salvation, my safe haven. It is here where my son will grow, here where our nation will rise. I thought this wilderness would only bring me death, but in it I have found life, hope, and the promise-making God. The God who always has and continues to see me.

Closing Prayer:

Go back to the centering prayer breathing exercise. Think about the things revealed to you as you breathe in and out. Focus on God's love for you and the world as you breathe.