

"And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had born unto Avraham making sport." (21:9)

Rashi explains that the term "making sport" denotes idol-worship. The question which confronts us upon reading the narrative is: Why was Sarah so inflexible regarding Yishmael's iniquity? She noticed Yishmael "making sport," i.e. worshipping idols and she immediately proceeded to request that Avraham drive him from their home. This attitude does not seem to be typical of Sarah *Imeinu*, who was noted for her proselytizing efforts on behalf of the One G-d. She worked side by side with her husband, Avraham, to inspire a world of non-believers to believe in the Almighty. Her compassion, understanding, and patience were exemplary in dealing with these infidels. Why was Yishmael's behavior so intolerable?

Horav Chizkiyahu Cohen z.l., offers a profound insight into Yishmael's behavior. The key to understanding what distinguished Yishmael's conduct from that of other idol-worshippers lies in the word, *ejmn*, making sport, making fun. One may be able to inspire thousands, to infuse a generation of people with belief in Hashem. However, if one scoffer comes along, he can destroy everything. It is impossible to penetrate the mind of one who ridicules everything he hears.

Chazal teach that "one jest can dispel the effect of one hundred rebukes." Derision and ridicule are either the result of a lack of self-respect, or the lack of respect for the one who is admonishing the other. No one is frivolous in the face of someone he reveres, or concerning something he truly values. The scoffer demonstrates a shallowness which defines his entire personality. To attempt to inspire a group in which an individual member ridicules and disrupts is practically impossible. One must first rid the assembly of this scoffer and his air of levity. Only then can the group be open to serious words of reproof.

Sarah understood that Yishmael's idol-worship was different. He made light of everyone's belief. He attempted to inject a virulent strain of derision into the environment. His goal was to undermine Sarah's accomplishments and to restrict her continued achievements. Sarah could not reach someone with such a harmful attitude. He had to be sent away, so that the only person he could harm would be himself.