HAFTORAH OF SIDRA : וירא

— *A JEWISH MOTHER* —

In this week's Sidra and Haftorah we find a powerful lesson in contrasts.

Our Mother Soroh, ever watchful over her precious son Yitzchok, is concerned that Yishmo'el is having a bad influence over her son. She correctly surmises that the source of the trouble lies with Yishmael's mother, Hoggor, and she tells Avrohom to send Hoggor and Yishmo'el away, if only for a short time, to teach them a lesson and to show that Yishmo'el is not the true son and successor of Avrohom, but only Yitzchok is. Avrohom is greatly saddened about Yishmo'el but HaShem tells him to listen to Soroh. She is right. (From this Parasha we learn that in matters of Chinnuch, education, in questions of what is a good influence and what is a bad influence on our children, the conscientiously religious Jewish mother is often a better judge than her husband. With her simple faith and loyalty to HaShem and His Torah, the true Jewish mother is sensitive about what is fine and noble for the Neshomo of her children.)

And so, Hoggor and Yishmo'el are expelled from the house of Avrohom. But the disappointment and upset of the Tzaddik and the Tzadekes have a direct effect on the boy and he becomes feverish. In his fever, he drinks a lot and the water that would ordinarily have been sufficient, gives out. His mother Hoggor is desperate. Her son is dying of thirst. In her desperation she throws her boy under the shade of one of the desert bushes and distances herself from the whimpering child, saying, "I cannot bear to see him die!" And she sits down and weeps. But then HaShem hears the cries of the boy there and He provides a well of water and Yishmo'el is saved.

In the Haftorah, we learn of the childless woman who is promised by Elisha HaNovvi that she would have a baby. Sure enough, the following year, the mother and her husband, although advanced in years, are blessed with a child. One day a couple of years later, the child is with his father in the field when he complains of a headache. One of the farmhands carries him back to his mother and she holds him tenderly on her lap to soothe his suffering. But it is to no avail and her little boy dies in her arms. She then makes her way quickly to Elisha and in the end, Elisha prays to HaShem and the child is brought to life again.

But it is interesting to see how these two women acted so differently! There is no question that Hoggor was a great woman. After all, she was a wife of Avrohom Ovinu. Angels spoke with her and she didn't fall in a faint. Nevertheless, however great she was, Hoggor was an Egyptian and she did not have the Rachmonnus, the compassion and the empathy, of a Jewish mother. To watch a child suffer as he dies is the most terrible thing and it is understandable that she couldn't bear to see it. ***But what about the child?*** He needs you! For ***his*** sake, contain your own feelings and help the child, soothe him, comfort him!

Without a doubt, the Shunamis woman was just as heartbroken to see her little boy die. Of course it tore her heart! But because he needed her, she conquered her own grief and heartbreak and held her little boy in her arms till he died and she could do no more for him. ***That*** is a Jewish mother.

One of our special qualities is that we are Rachmonnim, compassionate, and it is so important that we keep ourselves and our children far away from those influences (especially of today's so-called "entertainment") that can brutalize and corrupt so badly even the most refined Neshamos.

May HaShem grant that we only know of joy and happiness from our children and be spared any grief and heartbreak. And may we always remember to treasure and nurture that great quality of the Jewish people, our hallmark of Rachmonnus.