

Genesis 20: A Poetic and Restorative Translation

1

Then they pulled up stakes, Avraham and Sarah
and travelled south toward the Negev
to settle between Kadish and Shur
(Pitching their tent, you might say,
between holiness and wilderness)
and chose to lodge, for a time,
in the rolling countryside, in Gerar.

2

To Avimelech, the king of Gerar,
Avraham said of Sarah his wife,
“This is my sister.”
And the king, whose name means
My father, my king
stretched out his hand, and took Sarah in,
yes, he grasped her.

3

Until one night The Holy One, Elohim spoke
in a dream: “Avimelech! Beware!
This is a matter of life and death.
Take account of the woman you’ve taken to bed.
Like Asherah to Baal she is wedded
and her womb to the One
has been promised.”

4

Avimelech protested, “I have not
come close to what you claim.”
And, he begged, “My Lord,
you are righteous, do what is right.
Would you destroy my people, who
like me, are blameless?”

5

“And didn’t he tell me that she is his
sister? And didn’t she assure me, here
in this bed, that he is her brother? Yes,
I did take her by the hand to feed my hunger
I did embrace her and hold her.
But we purified our bodies and hearts
to fulfill your promise, together.
Wasn’t it right and righteous,
what we have done here?”

6

Still in the dream, The One answered:

“In your heart, I know you believed
your performance here could make this union
holy and right. But had you taken this farther,
had you taken her, and tried to replace me
I’d have plagued you. It is I who fixed it
so you could not complete your quest;
so you could never truly know her.

7

“Remember.
This bed is not altar,
your lust not kindling,
her body not offering.

So return Sarah to her calling,
to her Husband, who knows my prophecy
and whose prayers will restore you,
will profit you. Or if not,

you will be returned to nothingness,
will be nobody, and no one
who you know, will survive
—nor will you.”

8

Avimelech shuddered awake before dawn
with a night-shattering cry. Startled,
his loyal servants and guards rushed to his side.
The king filled their ears with what had transpired
and the fear that he felt; his retinue now shouldered.

9

Next, Avimelech summoned Avraham
to stand before him. “What have you done to us?”

he demanded. “And what great sin have I done you
to deserve this danger you’ve brought

against me and my kingdom?
Look what you have done!

You put her here with me!
Now this stands between us.

10

“What reason could you have had?
What did you see?
What were you thinking?”

11

Avraham answered,
“Because I thought
Of my God, faraway,
And here all I find
is a thin, empty place
where faith should exist.

I feared, here, amongst your gods,
I am not protected.
And I feared my God’s displeasure,
and that this thing might kill me,
so (Sarah and I) we made you this offering ...

12

“Trust me now,
my word is my vow
she is my sister
my father’s daughter
but not my mother’s – surely
not my womb sister.

What’s more,
she is my happiness,
my support, my partner in faith
and for life. And yes,
Sarah is, and for all time,
also, my wife.

13

“Since God called us to this journey
to wander far from our home and all that we knew,
I proposed to my wife a pact for us both to sign on to,
for love and because of her loveliness:
In each place we’d approach
she would call me—not husband
not consort—but truly, her brother.”

14

On hearing this, Avimelech paid the price:
A flock of sheep to appease the prophet,
a herd of cattle to beseech his bullish God,
and his choicest cows in gratitude
for the nights he spent with Her.
And he gave male servants and maidservants,
and he restored to Avraham
Sarah, his wife.

15

And to make sure all was truly right, he told Avraham,
“Gaze on the lay of my land: Rolling fields of prosperity!

See: water springs from this earth! All for you to enjoy.
Treat her as yours. Wherever it pleases you, lie—
live here in peace. Here may you dwell.”

16

Turning to Sarah he said, “See!
I have soothed your ‘brother’ well
with a thousand silver coins to cover the cost
to you; just as this veil that covers your eyes,
restores your purity in the sight of all
who’ve witnessed this. And so Sarah,
you have prevailed.”

17

Avraham in turn sought to soothe, heal, and mend
with embellished prayers to all the gods
and goddesses of this land and his. He pled
that they would re-weave threads of trust,
and repair what had been rent,
so when they returned to their beds,
women and men would be whole and fruitful
again. El and Shaddai, and all the Names concurred,
yes, the women’s wombs would fill again.

18

And compassion flowed once more like rain
because The One who had closed the door on birth
and stopped the work of the women’s wombs,
as Sarah’s womb had been waiting, too, remembered
all of the deeds of Sarah.



Genesis 20: Original Hebrew text:

20:1

וַיִּסַּע מֶשֶׁם אַבְרָהָם אֶרְצָה הַנִּגָּב וַיָּשָׁב בֵּין-קְדֻשׁ וּבֵין שׁוּר וַיָּגֵר בְּגִרָר:

20:2

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל-שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶתְחִי הוּא וַיִּשְׁלַח אֲבִימֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ גִּרָר וַיִּקַּח אֶת-שָׂרָה:

20:3

וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ בַּחלֹם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הִנֵּנִי מֵת עַל-הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר-לָקַחְתָּ וְהוּא בָּעֵלַת בְּעָל:

20:4

גַּם-צִדִּיק תִּהְיֶה: וְאַבְיִמֶלֶךְ לֹא קָרַב אֵלֶיהָ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי הַגִּדִּי

20:5

הָלֹא הוּא אָמַר-לִי אֶתְחִי הוּא וְהִיא-גַם-הוּא אָמְרָה אֲחִי הוּא בְּתַם-לִבִּי וּבִנְקִלּוֹ כִּפִּי עָשִׂיתִי זֹאת:

20:6

כִּי בָתֵּם-לִבְכֶּךָ עֲשִׂיתָ זֹאת וְאַחֲשֹׁף גַּם-אֶנְכִּי אוֹתָךְ מִחֹטֵא-לִי עַל-כֵּן לֹא-נִתְתִּיךָ לַנָּזֶעַ אֵלֶיָּהּ:

20:7

עַתָּה הִשָּׁב אֲשֶׁת-הָאִישׁ כִּי-נָבִיא הוּא וַיִּתְּפֹלֵל בְּעֶדְךָ וַתִּגְדֵּל וְאִם-אֵינְךָ מְשִׁיב דָּעַ כִּי-מוֹת תָּמוּת אֶתָּה וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר-לָךְ:

20:8

וַיִּשְׁלֹם אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ בַּבֶּקֶר וַיִּקְרָא לְכָל-עַבְדָּיו וַיַּדְבֵּר אֶת-כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים מְאֹד:

20:9

וַיִּקְרָא אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ לְאַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מַה-עֲשִׂיתָ לָנוּ וְיָמָה-חֲטָאתִי לָךְ כִּי-הִבַּאתָ עָלַי וְעַל-מַמְלַכְתִּי חֲטָאָה גְדוֹלָה מֵעֲשִׂים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יַעֲשֹׂוּ עֲשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי:

20:10

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ אֶל-אַבְרָהָם מַה רָאִיתָ כִּי עֲשִׂיתָ אֶת-הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה:

20:11

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם כִּי אֲמָרְתִּי רַק אִין-יִרְצָת אֱלֹהִים בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה וַתִּרְגְּוֵנִי עַל-דְּבַר אִשְׁתִּי:

20:12

וְגַם-אֶמְנָה אַחֲתִי בַת-אָבִי הוּא אֵךְ לֹא בַת-אִמִּי וַתַּהֲיִלִּי לְאִשָּׁה:

20:13

וַיִּהְיֶה כַּאֲשֶׁר הִתְעַדוּ אֹתִי אֱלֹהִים מִבֵּית אָבִי וַאֲמַר לִּי הִנֵּה חֲסִדָּךְ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂי עִמָּדִי אֵל

20:14

וַיִּקַּח אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ צֹאן וּבָקָר וְעַבְדִּים וַיִּשְׁפָּחֹת וַיִּתֵּן לְאַבְרָהָם וַיָּשֻׁב לוֹ אֶת שְׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ:

20:15

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ הִנֵּה אֶרְצִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ שָׁב:

20:16

וַיִּשְׁרָה אֹמֶר הִנֵּה נִתְּתִי אֵלַי כֶּסֶף לְאַחֲיוֹ הִנֵּה הוּא-לָךְ כְּסוֹת עֵינַיִם לְכָל אֲשֶׁר אֶתָּה וְאֶת כָּל וְנִכְסֶתָּ:

20:17

וַיִּתְּפֹלֵל אַבְרָהָם אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּרְפָּא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ וְאֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶמְהַתִּיו וַיִּלְדוּ:

20:18

כִּי-עָצָר עֶצֶר יִהְיֶה בְּעַד כָּל-רֶחֶם לְבֵית אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ עַל-דְּבַר שְׂרָה אִשְׁתְּ אַבְרָהָם: ס