

Temple Emanu-El ~ Rosh HaShanah 5782

Some suggestions for discussing the Torah portion:

1. While Genesis 21 is traditionally read on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, most Reform congregations substitute Chapter 22, the story of the binding of Isaac (normally read on the second day), so this story of Hagar and Ishmael is less well known. In discussing this morning's Torah reading, you may wish to consider the similarities and differences between this story of Hagar and Ishmael and the more familiar one of Abraham and Isaac (pp. 240-241 in the prayerbook).
2. An interesting approach to thinking about Torah narratives is to act out an interaction among the characters. Have members of your small group volunteer to be Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, and Ishmael* and discover what they might want to say to each other. (*Jewish tradition says that he is 17 at the time of this story.)
3. Both Jewish and Muslim traditions see Ishmael as the father of the Arab people, while Isaac's descendants were the Jews. What does this biblical story imply about the relationship between the two peoples? How would you retell it to give equal dignity to both cultures?
4. Rather than focussing on specific questions, it's always possible to have an engaging conversation about Torah by going through the text to discuss parts of it that seem especially interesting or ambiguous.