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Two Young Arabs who May Shape Jewish History

By Daniel Brenner

Walking out the door on my way to synagogue on the second day of this Rosh Hashanah, I glanced down in horror at the photo on the front page of the morning newspaper that lay on my doorstep. Staring back at me, in shock, trembling in fear, was a twelve year old Arab boy, Mohammed Aldura, photographed moments before his death.

I held that scene in my heart as I walked. And I began to think of the other young Arab boy whom Jews focus on during Rosh Hashanah.

On the first day of the holiday, we had read the story of Hagar, the stranger, who is sent out into the wilderness with her child, Ishmael. They walk along and as their water is used up, Hagar places the boy under a bush so that she will not have to face his suffering. Then, in a classic biblical ambiguity, Hagar calls out but God hears the boy. Why does the text read that God hears the boy? A midrash concerning this tale relates a discussion between God and the

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ministering angels. The angels say to God: "Why are you helping this boy? He will be the enemy of your beloved people!" God replies: "I know what he will be, but I answer him now, in the place where he is."

On this Rosh Hashanah morning, I felt that sense of empathy and shock for that boy lying in the streets, in the place where he was. Ishmael was only two years older when he cried out. Four thousand years have passed and the cries have not stopped.

Surely Isaac's children have cried, too, and many are still calling out. But I sense that we both, as children of Abraham, might learn something from a God who sees past the lines that divide us.



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