

THE WILDERNESS AND DIVINE REVELATION TO WOMEN: A COMPARISON OF JEWISH AND ISLAMIC UNDERSTANDINGS OF HAGAR'S STORY

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Master's Study Program of Islamic Studies at the
Faculty of Islamic Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of**

Master of Arts (M.A.)



by:

Fithri Dzakiyyah Hafizah

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UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INTERNASIONAL INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

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MA in Islamic Studies

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A woman stands deeply connected to the heart of the wild expanse, alone, overlooked, and without her protectors. In her profound isolation, she reaches out to the Divine and receives an immediate reply. This woman is Hagar. Her lament, her insight, and her designation of God as *El Ro'i* signify not just endurance but a moment steeped in the sacred. Nevertheless, in the majority of spiritual traditions, Hagar remains a peripheral character, overshadowed by the male prophetic heritage she helped cultivate. This thesis explores her wilderness experience, a liminal realm that bridges her encounter with the divine, where revelation emerges not from prophetic authority but from profound obedience and vulnerability. This exploration presents a mystical and philosophical reinterpretation of Hagar's narrative as a recipient of divine revelation in the wilderness by weaving together wisdom from Kabbalistic and Sufi worldviews. Through an interpretive journey with both sacred and mystical writings, it explores Hagar juxtaposed with the women within holy tales, such as Yocheved, Maryam, and Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', who come to know revelation amid turmoil, crafting a unique prophetic pattern: existential crisis, divine encounter, and spiritual elevation. By traversing Jewish and Islamic traditions, this thesis honors Hagar not as a mere theological figure but as an embodiment of spiritual richness, whose divine meeting epitomizes a mystical archetype. The wild environment, rather than resembling a barren nothingness, becomes a channel of sacred urgency, an occurrence of what Mircea Eliade termed hierophany. Core to this examination are two fundamental questions: To begin, how does the wilderness operate as a theological domain of revelation within the experience of Hagar? Furthermore, what is the theological significance of reading Hagar's experience of divine revelation in the wilderness through the mystical frameworks of Judaism and Islam? By exploring her narrative, not just as curious side notes to spiritual beliefs, but also as a vital framework for understanding women's experience of divine revelation, this thesis asserts that Hagar's marginality and solitary life might become a vessel of divine essence. In doing so, it rejuvenates Hagar not merely as a historical figure but as a harbinger of theophany, whose spiritual influence transcends the confines of tradition and beckons a reimagining of revelation itself.

Keywords: *Hagar, women, wilderness, divine revelation, mysticism, philosophical, Jewish, Islam, spiritual.*

الملخص

فَطْرِي ذَكِّيَّة حَافِظَة

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ماجستير في الدراسات الإسلامية

الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية الإندونيسية

تقف امرأة متصلة بعمق بقلب الفضاء البري، وحيدة، مُهملة، وبلا حماء. في عزلتها العميقة، تتوجه إلى الرب وتتلقى رداً فورياً. هذه المرأة هي هاجر. إن نداءها وبصيرتها وتسميتها لله باسم *El Ro'i* لا تُمثل مجرد صبراً، بل لحظة مشبعة بالمقدس. ومع ذلك، في معظم التقاليد الروحية، تظل هاجر شخصية هامشية، تُطغى عليها الإرث النبوي الذكوري الذي ساعدت في إنشائه. تبحث هذه الأطروحة في تجربتها في البرية، ذلك العالم الحدي (الليمني) الذي يربط بين لقائها مع الإلهي، حيث ينبثق الوحي ليس من سلطة نبوية، بل من الطاعة العميقة والضعف. يقدم هذا البحث تفسيراً صوفياً وفلسفياً جديداً لقصة هاجر كمُتلقية للوحي الإلهي في الواد، من خلال نسج الحكمة من رؤي القبالة (Kabbalah) والصوفية. عبر رحلة تفسيرية مع النصوص المقدسة والصوفية، يُفَارَن البحث بين هاجر ونساء أخريات في الحكايات المقدسة، مثل Yocheved ومريم وفاطمة الزهراء، اللاتي عرفن الوحي وسط المحن، مشكلات نموذجاً نبوياً فريداً: الأزمة الوجودية، اللقاء الإلهي، والارتقاء الروحي. ومن خلال الجمع بين التقاليد اليهودية والإسلامية، تُكْرَم هذه الأطروحة هاجر ليس كمجرد شخصية لاهوتية، بل كتجسيد للثراء الروحي، حيث يمثل لقاءها الإلهي نموذجاً صوفياً أرثوذكسياً. فالبيئة البرية، بدلاً من كونها فراغاً قاحلاً، تصير قناة للضرورة المقدسة، أو ما أسماه ميرسيا إلباده "التجلي المقدس" أو الهيروفانيا (hierophany). يركز هذا البحث على سؤالين أساسيين: أولاً، كيف تعمل البرية كمجال لاهوتي للوحي في تجربة هاجر؟ ثانياً، ما هي الأهمية اللاهوتية لقراءة تجربة هاجر مع الوحي الإلهي في الواد عبر الأطر الصوفية في اليهودية والإسلام؟ من خلال استكشاف سيرتها، ليس كهوامش غريبة للمعتقدات الروحية، بل كإطار حيوي لفهم تجربة النساء مع الوحي الإلهي، تؤكد هذه الأطروحة أن هامشية هاجر وحياتها الوحيدة قد تصبح وعاءاً للجوهر الإلهي. وبذلك، تُعيد إحياء هاجر ليس كشخصية تاريخية فحسب، بل كسابقة للتجلي الإلهي، الذي يتجاوز تأثيرها الروحي حدود التقاليد ويدعو إلى إعادة تصور الوحي نفسه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: هاجر، النساء، الواد، الوحي الإلهي، التصوف، الفلسفة، اليهودية، الإسلام، الروحانية.

TRANSLITERATION GUIDE

Hebrew-SBL Handbook of Style

Hebrew	Consonants		Hebrew	Vowels	
א	'ālep	'	ב	pataḥ	a
ב	bêt	b	בֿ	furtive pataḥ	a
ג	gîmel	g	גֿ	qāmeṣ	ā
ד	dālet	d	דֿה	final qāmeṣ hê	â
ה	hê	h	הֿיו	3 rd masculine singular suffix	āyw
ו	wāw	w	וֿ	sēgōl	e
ז	zayîn	z	זֿ	ṣêre	ē
ח	ḥêt	ḥ	חֿי	ṣêrê yôd	ê (יֿ= êy)
ט	ṭêt	ṭ	טֿי	sēgōl yôd	ê (יֿ= êy)
י	yôd	y	יֿ	short ḥîreq	i
כ	kāp	k	כֿ	long ḥîreq	ī
ל	lāmed	l	לֿי	ḥîreq yôd	î
מ	mēm	m	מֿ	qāmeṣ ḥāṭûp	o
נ	nûn	n	נֿ	ḥōlem	ō
ס	sāmek	s	סֿ	full ḥōlem	ô
ע	'ayin	'	עֿ	short qibbûṣ	u
פ	pê	p	פֿ	long qibbûṣ	ū
צ	ṣādê	ṣ	צֿ	ṣûreq	û
ק	qôp	q	קֿ	ḥāṭêp qāmeṣ	õ
ר	rês	r	רֿ	ḥāṭêp pataḥ	ă
ש	śîn	ś	שֿ	ḥāṭêp sēgōl	ě
ת	tāw	t	תֿ	vocal šewa	ě

TRANSLITERATION GUIDE

Arabic-IJMES

Arabic	Consonants	Arabic	Consonants
ا	a	ض	ḍ
ب	b	ط	ṭ
ت	t	ظ	ẓ
ث	th	ع	ʿ
ج	j	غ	gh
ح	ḥ	ف	f
خ	kh	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	و	w
ش	sh	ه	h
ص	ṣ	ي	y

Vowels	
اَ	a
اِ	i
اُ	u
آ	ā
إِ	ī
وِ	ū
أَيَّ / إِيَّ	ay
أَوَّ / أُوَّ	aw
أَيَّ	ayy, iyy
أَوَّ	aww, uww

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To conclude, I feel compelled to express my sincere gratitude to Hagar, not solely as a subject of examination in this thesis, but also as a vivid reflection of the ethos that instills essential teachings on living, tranquility, and positivity. In her presence, I discovered resilience embodies a unique kind of bravery, that solitude can serve as a sanctuary for profound insights, and that when despair envelops us, it could be the instant we find ourselves nearest to the Divine.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE.....	i
STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY	ii
ANTI-PLAGIARISM STATEMENT.....	iii
THESIS ATTESTATION.....	iv
THESIS DEFENSE APPROVAL	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
TRANSLITERATION GUIDE	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	x
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	xii
LIST OF TABLES	xiv
ABBREVIATION DIRECTORY.....	xv
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Research Background	1
1.2 Research Objectives.....	4
1.3 Research Questions.....	4
1.4 Literature Review	5
1.5 Theoretical Framework.....	9
1.6 Research Significance.....	11
1.7 Methods	12
1.8 Outline	15
CHAPTER II THEOLOGICAL RE-INTERPRETATION OF THE WILDERNESS	16
2.1 Wilderness within Sacred Traditions: Torah and Qur'an	16
2.2 Wilderness as a Context for Divine-Human Interaction exemplified by Prophetic Figures	23
2.3 Wilderness as a Sacred Threshold within the Perspectives of Saints and Ascetics	31
2.4 Hagar's Wilderness Journey: Prophetic Revelation or Ascetic Transformation?.....	38
CHAPTER III HAGAR IN THE WILDERNESS: COMPARATIVE SCRIPTURAL ANALYSIS	45
3.1 Close Reading of Genesis 16 and 21	45

3.2 Close Reading of Surah Ibrahim (14): 37.....	58
3.3 Comparative Analysis of Hagar’s Journey in Jewish and Islamic Narratives.....	69
CHAPTER IV WOMEN, WILDERNESS, AND DIVINE REVELATION IN JEWISH AND ISLAMIC TRADITIONS	
4.1 Hagar: God’s Promise and the Sacred Geography of <i>Hajj</i>	77
4.2 Hagar vis-à-vis Yocheved (<i>Umm Mūsā</i>): Female Agency amidst Crisis	89
4.3 Hagar vis-à-vis Maryam (Virgin Mary): Wilderness as a site of Divine Revelation.....	101
4.4 Hagar vis-à-vis Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’: The Wilderness of Grief and the Embodied Divine Femininity	111
CHAPTER V WILDERNESS AND DIVINE REVELATION TO HAGAR: SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS IN THE JEWISH AND ISLAMIC MYSTICISM	
5.1 Analysing Hagar’s Experience of Divine Revelation in Jewish and Islamic Mysticism.....	120
5.2 Wilderness as a Cosmological Mirror: An Exploration of Hagar’s Spiritual Agency in Jewish Mysticism	124
5.3 Wilderness as a Space of God’s Manifestation: An Exploration of Hagar’s Spiritual Agency in Islamic Mysticism.....	133
5.4 Hagar as a Liminal Archetype: Between Emanation and Annihilation (<i>Fanā</i>)	141
CHAPTER VI CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
6.1 Conclusion	148
6.2 Recommendations.....	150
REFERENCES	151

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Thematic intersection of wilderness among the three Abrahamic prophets	30
Table 2.2 Hagar’s Experience of Divine Encounter: A Prophetic Pattern.....	40
Table 2.3 Hagar’s Experience of Divine Encounter: A Prophetic Pattern.....	41
Table 2.4 Hagar’s Wilderness Journey: Between Prophetic Revelation and Ascetic Transformation.....	42
Table 3.1 Comparative Analysis of the Narrative of Hagar in Jewish and Islamic Sacred Texts.....	71
Table 3.2 Notable Aspects of Convergence and Divergence of Hagar’s Wilderness Experience in Jewish and Islamic Perspectives.....	74
Table 4.1 Comparative Analysis of Wilderness and Divine Revelation to Women: Hagar as Paradigm	87
Table 4.2 Comparative Insight of Spiritual Agency between Hagar and Yocheved	99
Table 4.3 Comparative Insight of Spiritual Authority between Hagar and Maryam	109
Table 4.4 Comparative Insight of Spiritual Authority between Hagar and Fāṭimah	118
Table 5.1 The mirroring aspect of Shekinah and Hagar’s Wilderness Experience.....	129
Table 5.2 Theological Resonance of Hagar’s Experience of Revelation in the Wilderness within the Framework of Jewish and Islamic Mysticism	146

ABBREVIATION DIRECTORY

SBL	: <i>Society of Biblical Literature</i>
IJMES	: <i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
GEN	: <i>Genesis (Berē šīt)</i>
EXOD	: <i>Exodus (Shemot)</i>
DEUT	: <i>Deuteronomy (Dəvārīm)</i>

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

The wilderness, a recurring domain of sacred interaction within Abrahamic faiths, is frequently conceptualized through the narratives of male prophets, such as Moses at Sinai or Jesus in the desert. However, Hagar's wilderness journey, as narrated in Genesis 16 and 21, as well as Qur'an 14:37, shifts this conventional paradigm. Her wilderness experience transformed the barren desert from a neglected site into a locus of unmediated revelation to women. While prominent male figures such as Elijah the Prophet/*Ilyās* (1 Kings 19:3-9),¹ Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (the author of *Zohar*),² and even a particular saint, such as Sunan Kalijaga,³ pursued solitude in the wilderness for the sake of spiritual elevation, Hagar's obedience and struggle for survival in the desolate desert emerge as an unintentional spiritual elevation, thereby revealing wilderness as a sacred terrain where divine communication transcends established male prophet hierarchies.

Classical and recent academic scholarship often portrays the wilderness journey as a sign of male prophetic authority,⁴ whether in the covenant account of the Torah or the practices surrounding mystic asceticism.⁵ In the Islamic tradition, for example, the Qur'an's reference to the arid valley of Mecca in Surah Ibrāhīm (14):37 is typically examined through the lens of Abraham's supplications. The Sufī commentator al-Qushayrī (d. 1072 CE) interprets this verse by proposing that Abraham, *khalīlullāh*, performed profound obedience to God's command.⁶ Whereas, Jewish exegesis focuses on Moses and Israel's trials in the desert, as narrated in the books of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The sojourn of Moses elucidates the wilderness as a setting where divine protection,

¹ *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text* (The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917), 508–9.

² Michael Laitman, *The Zohar: Annotations to the Ashlag Commentary*, 1st ed (Laitman Kabbalah Publishers, 2009), 8.

³ Iman Anom, "Pupuh Darma (22 Bait)," in *Suluk Linglung Sunan Kalijaga (Syeh Melaya)* (Balai Pustaka, 1884), 13.

⁴ George H. Stankey, "Beyond the Campfire's Light: Historical Roots of the Wilderness Concept," *Natural Resources Journal* 29 (Winter 1989): 10.

⁵ Won W. Lee, "The Concept of the Wilderness in the Pentateuch," in *Israel in the Wilderness*, ed. Kenneth E. Pomykala (BRILL, 2008), 1, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004164246.I-247.6>.

⁶ Abū al-Abbās Aḥmad ibn 'Aḡbah Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd* (Dr. Ḥasan 'Abbās Zakī, 1419), 3:68; The majority of classical exegetes (mufasssīrūn) interpret this verse as referring to the instance when Abraham (Ibrāhīm) departed from Hagar (Hājar) and their son Ishmael (Ismā'īl) in the wilderness, a critical juncture that delineates the inception of the sacred geography of Mecca. See Abū al-Faḍl Rashīd al-Dīn Maybadī, *Kashf Al-Asrār Wa 'Uddat al-Abrār* (Intishārāt Amīr Kabīr, 1371), 270.

guidance, and the establishment of covenants occur,⁷ contrasting with the traditional portrayal of an inhospitable and barren landscape, and symbolically associated with sin.⁸ Interestingly, Hagar's narrative mirrors these established interpretations, but is often overlooked. Her encounter with the divine in the wilderness through angelic intervention, as narrated in Genesis 16 and 21 and in Islamic tafsir and hadith, challenges prevailing assumptions regarding the qualifications for receiving revelation.

Although contemporary scholarship recognizes Hagar's anthropological role as the matriarch of the Arabs⁹ and her sociological symbolism as an enslaved woman of African descent,¹⁰ her spiritual agency remains inadequately explored. She was, in fact, the first woman in the Torah to name God *El Ro'i*, "The God Who Sees me" (Gen 16:13),¹¹ yet her spiritual influences are frequently overshadowed by her husband's and her son's story, Abraham and Ishmael. In a remarkable excerpt from the Talmud, even the prophet Moses references her extraordinary encounter with the Divine in the wilderness: "...To redeem Lot, his brother's son, Thou (Lord) didst send angels; To Hagar Thou didst send five angels when she fled from Sarah, her mistress..."¹² Further, one of the Prophet David's prayers, as narrated in Psalm 39:13, he says, "O Lord, You did not keep silent Hagar's cry; will You keep silent my cry? And if you say, "Because she is a stranger, she is dearer," so do I, I am a stranger before You..."¹³

⁷ William Evans, *The Books of the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1916), 257.

⁸ T. Desmond Alexander, ed., *Pentateuch*, Nachdr., Dictionary of the Old Testament (InterVarsity Press, 2008), 489; In the book of Genesis, the wilderness is depicted as a repercussion of estrangement from God: "...Sin drives man from God's presence; and when man banishes God from his world, he dwells in a wilderness instead of a Garden of Eden." See J.H. Hertz, ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary: Genesis* (Oxford University Press, 1929), 33; Commenting on Vayikra (ויקרא/Leviticus), particularly in the chapter of Aharei Mot (אֲחֵרֵי מוֹת), the medieval commentator Ibn Ezra (d. 1167 CE) characterizes the wilderness as an uninhabited, purifying domain, where individuals afflicted with tzara'at (צרעת/leprosy), a condition symbolically correlated with sin, are relegated for purification. See Jay F. Schachter, tran., *The Commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra on the Pentateuch*, 3: Leviticus (Ktav Publishing House, 1986), 81.

⁹ Abdurrahman Sheha, *Muhammad The Messenger of Allah* (King Fahd National Library Cataloging in Publication Data, 2005), 67.

¹⁰ David Tuesday Adamo and Erivwierho Francis Eghwubare, "The African Wife of Abraham (Gn 16:1-16; 21:8-21)," *OTE* 18, no. 3 (2005): 468.

¹¹ "...And the angel of the LORD said unto her: 'I will greatly multiply thy seed, that it shall not be numbered for multitude (Gen 16: 10)... because the LORD hath heard thy affliction (Gen 16: 11). And she called the name of the LORD that spoke unto her, Thou art a God of seeing; for she said: 'Have I even here seen Him that seeth Me?' ...Wherefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi (Gen 16: 13). See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 18; Daniel Royo, "A God Who Sees and Hears the 'Other': Hagar's Theophany as an Illustration of the Lord's Benevolence Toward Those Outside the Covenant," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 30, nos. 1-2 (2019): 103.

¹² H. Polano, tran., *The Talmud Selections from the Contents of That Ancient Book, Its Commentaries, Teachings, Poetry and Legends* (Frederick Warne and Co, n.d.), 145.

¹³ Freedman and Maurice Simon, trans., *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1 (The Soncino Press, 1961), 473.

In the Islamic tradition, Hagar's act of running between the hills (Ṣafā and Marwah) is ritualized during *Hajj*; yet, the mystical dimensions of her surrender and how she maintained a pure heart amidst her extreme situation in the desert, which preceded the miracle of Zamzam, are seldom scrutinized within a mystical or philosophical framework. Limited scholarship explores her experiences in the wilderness as a manifestation of *hijrah*, a spiritual migration that embodies profound submission to the divine will.¹⁴ Moreover, her submissive state becomes particularly pronounced when contrasted with the narrative of the Israelites, who, during their wilderness sojourn, wavered in their faith¹⁵ and longed to return to Egypt (Exod 16:3).¹⁶

This study asserts that Hagar's experience in the wilderness reconfigures the essence of divine revelation. Hagar's reception of divine vision or angelic revelation, articulated in Genesis and Hadith, is a rare phenomenon and typically reserved for individuals of prophetic significance. Such a figure does not acquire knowledge through conventional means but through a divine illumination that surpasses rational comprehension.¹⁷ Hagar is acknowledged as the inaugural woman in the Torah to undergo a theophany, a direct encounter with the Divine. Within Islamic spiritual traditions, women such as Hagar, juxtaposed with Eve (*Hawwā'*), Yocheved (the mother of Moses), Mary (Maryam), and Sarah are venerated as carriers of divine knowledge. They are even regarded as possessing prophet-like spiritual stature,¹⁸ as explained by Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064 CE), that some female figures in history possess distinguished qualities that resonate with the essence of prophethood, and they may be classified as having female prophecy (*Nubuwwat al-Nisā'*) on account of the divine revelations granted to them.¹⁹

Hagar's isolation, characterized by the absence of social privilege, becomes the foundational condition for a theology of immediacy, wherein God's presence is revealed not only to male prophets who are considered spiritually elite but to those in liminal circumstances, especially women. Through the lenses of Jewish and Islamic mystical

¹⁴ Riffat Hasan, *Islamic Hagar and Her Family*, in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children* (Westminster Knox Press, 2006), 155.

¹⁵ Alexander, *Pentateuch*, 897.

¹⁶ and the children of Israel said unto them: 'Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh-pots, when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.' (Exodus 16:3), see *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 98.

¹⁷ Maha Elkaisy-Friemuth, *God and Humans in Islamic Thought: Abd Al-Jabbar, Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali*, Culture and Civilization in the Middle East Series (Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 133.

¹⁸ Birgivi Mehmet Efendi and Tosun Bayrak, *The Path of Muhammad: A Book on Islamic Morals and Ethics & the Last Will and Testament (Vasiyyetname)*, The Library of Perennial Philosophy (World Wisdom, 2005), 7.

¹⁹ Abū Muḥammad 'Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd ibn Ḥazm Andalusī, *Al-Fiṣal Fī al-Mīlāl Wa al-Aḥwā' Wa al-Niḥāl* (Dār al-Jīl, 1985), 5:17–19.

thought, this study elucidates how Hagar's exile and ordeal reorient the wilderness from a mere barren valley and testing ground into a realm of divine encounter, specifically for women.

1.2 Research Objectives

The modest aim of this study is to analyze the narrative of Hagar within the frameworks of both Jewish and Islamic traditions, reflecting how female experiences of divine revelation are facilitated through the wilderness. The study conceptualizes Hagar's exile as a metaphorical journey, delineating how the wilderness serves as a bridge between the human (Anthropos) and the divine (Theos). By scrutinizing Hagar's spiritual state in her isolation in the wilderness, this study employs a mystical perspective, firmly anchored in a comparative and intertextual examination of selected medieval Jewish and Islamic primary and esoteric texts. Through this lens, Hagar's narrative transcends mere survival; it also manifests as a symbolic narrative of spiritual agency emanating from the margins, wherein wilderness and exile serve as fertile ground for revelation and spiritual metamorphosis.

1.3 Research Questions

This study endeavors to tackle the following pivotal inquiries:

1. In what manner does the wilderness serve as a space for divine revelation within the experience of Hagar?
2. What is the theological significance of reading Hagar's experience of divine revelation in the wilderness through the mystical frameworks of Judaism and Islam?

This study constructs its analysis upon two foundational premises to investigate these inquiries. First, the wilderness is conceptualized not merely as a physical location but as a symbolic and theological motif within Jewish and Islamic intellectual traditions, representing a space of purification and spiritual ascendance, particularly pertinent to the figure of Hagar.

Second, the exploration of the nexus between wilderness and divine revelation within Hagar's account unveils a recurring paradigm that resonates with the spiritual trajectories of subsequent prophets and female holy figures, thereby establishing Hagar as a seminal archetype of the divine-human interaction within the Abrahamic theological framework.

1.4 Literature Review

Over the ages, the discourse surrounding divine communication with women in the Jewish and Islamic traditions, particularly concerning their institutional exclusion as lacking the spiritual capacity to receive divine revelation equal to that of male prophets, has been a long-debated topic. However, while mainstream Jewish and Islamic theology often restricts formal prophecy to men, alternative channels of revelation, such as dreams, divine inspiration (*ilham*), and encounters with God experienced by women, are also recognized by esoteric texts and are central themes in emphasizing how women have equal access to connection with God as men. Although most of these works do not explicitly discuss Hagar as a figure who receives divine revelation, a brief overview of women's experience of God encounter is necessary to provide context before delving further into recent scholarly works on Hagar.

Jewish scholars concede that classical literature, both exoteric and esoteric texts, is predominantly shaped by the influence of male interpreters and authors.²⁰ While women may attain divine encounters or mystical spiritual experiences, such access is primarily mediated through male authority. Classical scholars posit that the perceived inferior spiritual capacity of women to engage with the divine, relative to men, is attributable to their periodic menstruation, which is considered impure and obstructive to spiritual elevation. Consequently, the spiritual experiences of women are frequently overlooked.²¹ Despite the acknowledgement within Jewish tradition of the existence of female prophets who experienced divine revelation, a majority of classical scholars persist in questioning the validity of women's capacity to occupy such prophetic roles, citing cognitive and emotional weakness in women compared to men. Medieval Jewish philosophers maintained that women's spiritual experiences are subordinate to those of men and are improbable without antecedent male spiritual guidance.²² However, contemporary scholars, particularly feminists, highlight the existence of female prophets as receivers of divine revelation, claiming that their spiritual experiences are unique from those of their male counterparts.²³ Jewish feminists contend that spiritualism is fundamentally neutral, thus advocating for a more progressive interpretation that positions spiritualism as a proper lens to analyze the supernatural experiences of Jewish women that have been overlooked

²⁰ Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Shoken Books, 1961), 38.

²¹ Sharon Faye Koren, *Forsaken: The Menstruant in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, HBI Series on Jewish Women (Brandeis University Press University Press of New England, 2011), xiii.

²² Julia Schwartzmann, "The Attitude of Medieval Jewish Philosophers to the Phenomenon of Female Prophecy," *Purdue University Press*, *Shofar*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2017): 64.

²³ Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Gendering Revealed Knowledge? Prophecy, Positionality, and Perspective in Ancient Jewish Apocalyptic and Related Literatures," *10 Th Nangeroni Meeting, Rome*, n.d., 11.

due to patriarchal constraints.²⁴ Feminist scholars seek to contest established gender norms associated with women's revelatory experiences and to interact with these narratives in a critical and subversive way.²⁵

Within the Islamic realm itself, the discussion of women's potential as recipients of revelation has been a central debate. Contemporary scholars believe that women's spiritual experiences are often sidelined and receive less attention than accounts of men's experiences. One study, for example, notes that in mysticism, most people tend to identify female mystics only with Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah. However, many other equally significant female mystics tend to be overlooked, such as Umm 'Ali, a ninth-century female mystic from Balkh.²⁶ Furthermore, contemporary Islamic studies also explore how female figures in the Qur'an often speak with authority, insight, and intelligence. Many women utter pious words and supplications to God, similar to those of male prophetic figures, such as Maryam or the Mother of Moses,²⁷ indicating that women are also capable of being direct recipients of divine revelation. The debate over the existence of female prophets has long been a topic of discussion in classical Islamic texts. This debate stems from the interpretation about prominent women in the Qur'an who received miracles, such as the mother of Moses, who saved her son from Pharaoh, and Maryam, who became pregnant without a husband and received a meal from God.²⁸ The controversy surrounding the prophethood of women, citing scholars who believe women can be prophets (such as Maryam) and those who disagree, highlights that the debate often centers on *nubuwwah* (prophecy) rather than *risalah* (message).²⁹ Hagar is another example of a female figure in the Islamic discussion, where her role in Islamic history is often seen as evidence of her elevation to sainthood or prophethood.³⁰ Nevertheless, there exists a paucity of discourse regarding her in comparison to other female figures depicted in the Qur'an.

The account of Hagar has been shared among the texts of Jewish and Islamic traditions, leaving a notable mark on the intellectual inquiries of various scholars. The dialogue surrounding her odyssey in the wilderness has engendered substantial theological

²⁴ Raḥel Eli'or, *Dybbuks and Jewish Women in Social History, Mysticism and Folklore* (Urim Publications, 2008), 46.

²⁵ Esther J. Hamori, *Women's Divination in Biblical Literature: Prophecy, Necromancy, and Other Arts of Knowledge*, The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (Yale University press, 2015), 36.

²⁶ Arezou Azad, "Female Mystics in Mediaeval Islam: The Quiet Legacy," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 56, no. 1 (2013): 74, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685209-12341277>.

²⁷ Celene Ibrahim, *Women and Gender in the Qur'an* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 102.

²⁸ Hepni Hepni, *Perempuan Dalam Perdebatan: Mulai Asal-Usul Penciptaan, Kepemimpinan, Kesetaraan Gender Hingga Wacana Nabi Perempuan* (IAIN Jember Press, 2021), 239.

²⁹ Nasaruddin Umar, "Konstruksi Pemaknaan Kosakata Al-Qur'an: Kasus Ayat-Ayat Gender," *JSQ* II, no. 2 (2007): 390.

³⁰ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito, eds., *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (University Press of Florida, 2001), 100.

interpretations, thereby shaping the comprehension of her narrative. In modern scholarship, particularly since the 18th and 19th centuries, Hagar has gained increased attention, primarily through feminist and postcolonial lenses. Recent comparative scholarship has concentrated on Hagar's status as a marginalized Egyptian woman within Jewish and Islamic traditions. Christian feminist scholars such as Delores S. Williams (1993),³¹ Renita J. Weems (1988),³² and Phyllis Trible (1984)³³ have developed a theology of Hagar as a figure of resistance within the Bible. African feminist scholars, in particular, interpret her as an emblem of African female resilience within the postcolonial framework; a black enslaved woman whose narrative echoes broader postcolonial struggles. She is also venerated as the African foremother and celebrated as a figure exemplifying surrogacy, maternal sacrifice, and divine trust.³⁴ Despite Hagar's acknowledgement as a paradigmatic figure in the African context, however, the reading of her spiritual agency amidst her liminal situation, in a broader sense across Jewish and Islamic traditions, remains inadequately scrutinized.

A subsequent wave of contemporary scholarship has examined the parallels between Hagar's journey, the experiences of Potiphar's wife in Egypt (Zulaikha), and the wilderness experiences of Moses and the Israelites. These scholars identify a recurring motif of the exile of female Egyptians and miraculous salvation, establishing a connection among these figures' shared experiences as Egyptians. Furthermore, certain scholars argue that Hagar's narrative provides a theological framework for understanding the broader wilderness theme as a historical space of salvation and the Lord's benevolence to the marginalized.³⁵ Shi'ite

³¹ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Orbis Books, 1993).

³² Renita J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (LuraMedia, 1988).

³³ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, Overtures to Biblical Theology 13 (Fortress Press, 1984).

³⁴ Jibrail Bin Yusuf, "From Hebrew 'Slave' to Arabian 'Sage': Linking the Jewish and Muslim Narratives in the Story of Hagar, the African in Pre-Islamic Arab History," *CJR*, 2017, 3; Adamo and Eghwubare, "The African Wife of Abraham (Gn 16:1-16; 21:8-21)," 2005, 468; Marcel Poorthuis, "Hagar's Wanderings: Between Judaism and Islam," *Der Islam* 90, no. 2 (2013): 213, <https://doi.org/10.1515/islam-2013-0008>; Afolarin Olutunde Ojewole, "Hagar: African Foremother and Biblical Matriarch," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 7, no. 10 (2017): 81; Abraham I. Katsh, *Judaism and the Koran: Biblical and Talmudic Backgrounds of the Koran and Its Commentaries* (A Perpetua Book, 1962), 130; S'lindile Thabede, *Navigating the Threshold: An African-Feminist Reading of the Hagar Narrative in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Dissertation (Stellenbosch University, 2022); Solomon O. Ademiluka, "Sexual Exploitation or Legitimate Surrogacy: Reading the Hagar Narrative (Gn 16:1-4a) in African Context," *Theologia Viatorum* 43, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.4102/tv.v43i1.2>; Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, "Reproductive Salvation and Slavery," *New Testament Society of Southern Africa*, Neotestamentica, Vol. 50, no. No. 1 (2016): 89-104; Xolani Maseko and Thandi Soko-de-Jong, "Hagar's Spirituality Prior to and after Captivity: An African and Gendered Perspective," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9705>.

³⁵ Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story," *The Society of Biblical Literature*, Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. 117, no. No. 1 (1998): 30; Nardine Attia, "Hagar and Potiphar's Wife: A Representation of Egypt in Judaism and Islam," *Capstone and Graduation Projects*, 2021; Aryeh Cohen, "Hagar and Ishmael: A Commentary," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 68, no. 3 (2014):

perspective also recognizes Hagar as one of the significant female figures and a symbol of Islamic identity, attributing to her a pioneering accomplishment that has undeniably cemented her role as an essential component in one of Islam's pillars, the *sa'i* ritual in Hajj.³⁶ Nevertheless, many of these interpretations predominantly concentrate on Hagar as a passive figure within the sacred texts, without deeply engaging with her as an active subject of spiritual transformation, as evident through her experience of divine revelation.

Recent comparative analyses highlight substantial parallels and interpretations regarding Hagar's resilience as a marginalized entity, or a slave, alongside her exile in the wilderness, grounded in an intertextual examination of the sacred scriptures, which concurrently employs feminist and postcolonial theoretical frameworks. Nevertheless, a poignant scrutiny of her narratives within Jewish and Islamic traditions as a metaphorical odyssey of spiritual elevation, which underscores the profound relationship between Hagar and the Divine, remains inadequately explored. This study aspires to fill this gap by offering a symbolic interpretation of Hagar's experience of divine revelation in the wilderness, scrutinized through a comparative mystical perspective in both Judaism and Islam. The application of mystical frameworks aims to examine women's religious experiences and divine revelation in general, as exemplified by Hagar in this context.³⁷ Although most scholarly works do not explicitly engage with the figure of Hagar, the utilization of mystical frameworks is perceived as a more neutral approach for interpreting women's spiritual functions within a religious tradition. Through the application of mystical lenses, women are conceptualized not merely as passive recipients of religious doctrines but also as active agents who engage with divine knowledge in unconventional ways.³⁸

In addition, this study endeavours to enhance the discourse by juxtaposing Hagar's experience of divine revelation in the wilderness with other notable female figures within the Abrahamic traditions, such as Yocheved (the mother of Moses), Virgin Mary (Maryam), and Fāṭimah al-Zahrā'. This juxtaposition is grounded in women who likewise

253, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964314528877>; Royo, "A God Who Sees and Hears the 'Other': Hagar's Theophany as an Illustration of the Lord's Benevolence Toward Those Outside the Covenant," 103; John Barton and John Muddiman, eds., *The Pentateuch*, Oxford Bible Commentary (Oxford University Press, 2010), 55; Harald Motzki, *Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael at Mecca: A Contribution to the Problem of Dating Muslim Traditions* (Books and Written Culture of the Islamic World. Studies Presented to Claude Gilliot on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday, 2015); Fachrizal Halim, "Rereading the Biblical Story of Sarah and Hagar: A Note for Interfaith Activists," *IJUM Journal of Religion and Civilisational Studies (IJRCS)* 7, no. 1 (2024): 25; Fithri Dzakiyyah Hafizah, "A Comparison of Jewish and Islamic Views on The Banishment of Hagar," *Islamic Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (2024): 299, <https://doi.org/10.56529/isr.v3i2.327>.

³⁶ Mahjabeen Dhala, "Five Foundational Women in the Qur'an: Reading Their Stories from a Shia Female Perspective," *Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2019): 5.

³⁷ Eli'or, *Dybbuks and Jewish Women in Social History, Mysticism and Folklore*, 65.

³⁸ Timothy K. Beal and D. M. Gunn, *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book* (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003), 61.

exemplify analogous experiences of divine interaction and wilderness journey, both in a tangible and metaphorical sense. The analysis is also conducted within the mystical lens to deconstruct narrative biases that frequently categorize women as transgressors of established religious doctrines, and to comprehend women's revelatory practices as essential elements of a more expansive and intricate religious tapestry.³⁹ Through this methodological framework, this study aspires to cultivate a more nuanced understanding of how female figures undergo spiritual transformations that facilitate intimacy with the Divine, particularly during their experiences of liminality in the wilderness.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

This study aims to integrate mystical and philosophical frameworks in examining Hagar's narrative, particularly about her experience of divine revelation in the wilderness. The mystical framework serves as a foundation for constructing a spiritual interpretation of Hagar's narrative, whereas philosophical hermeneutics is employed to evaluate the symbolic coherence of the mystical interpretation. The initial theoretical framework of mysticism is derived from Kabbalah within Jewish tradition, while the subsequent framework pertains to Tasawwuf in the Islamic context. The application of the mystical framework is pertinent due to its alignment with the theme of 'divine revelation,' which emphasizes the exploration of Hagar's transcendent experience. Meanwhile, the philosophical hermeneutics is employed secondarily to enrich the philosophical dimensions of the analysis concerning wilderness as a symbol pertinent to Hagar's revelatory experience.

In the realm of Kabbalistic mysticism, the narrative of Hagar is examined through the theoretical lens of God's emanation known as the *Sefirot* (סְפִירוֹת), which encompasses the ten Divine attributes as they are manifested within created beings.⁴⁰ Within the scope of this analysis, Hagar's experience is interpreted through the lowest attribute of God, referred to as *Shekhinah* (שְׁכִינָה/ the feminine aspect of God), which signifies a state of separation or exile from the other sefirot, while simultaneously serving as a conduit between the transcendent and the immanent realms. As posited by Jewish scholarly discourse, the *Shekhinah* is not merely understood as the presence of God residing within creatures (the

³⁹ Schwartzmann, "The Attitude of Medieval Jewish Philosophers to the Phenomenon of Female Prophecy," 59; Hamori, *Women's Divination in Biblical Literature*, 8; Reed, "Gendering Revealed Knowledge? Prophecy, Positionality, and Perspective in Ancient Jewish Apocalyptic and Related Literatures," 7.

⁴⁰ The ten attributes encompass: Keter (קֶטֶר/Crown), Hokhmah (חֻכְמָה/Wisdom), Binah (בִּינָה/Understanding), Hesed (חֶסֶד/Mercy), Gevurah (גְּבוּרָה/Justice), Tiferet (תִּפְעָרֶת/Beauty), Netzach (נֶצַח/Eternity), Hod (הוֹד/Glory), Yesod (יְסוֹד/Foundation), and Shekhinah (שְׁכִינָה/the feminine aspect of God) or Malkhut (מַלְכוּת/Royalty). See "Sefirot | Sefaria," accessed May 9, 2025, https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/158035?lang=bi&_x_tr_hist=true.

immanent); rather, it encompasses a more extensive symbolic framework that includes gender dynamics and the historical progression pertinent to comprehending and engaging experientially with the Divine.⁴¹ This particular facet of the *sefirot* has been selected as a theoretical paradigm due to its implicit representation of Hagar's experience of alienation, while also establishing a connection to the supernatural realm through the phenomenon of divine revelation.

The subsequent mystical framework is Tasawwuf, which pertains to the concept of spiritual elevation (*Mi'rāj*), a theme extensively elaborated upon by Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240 CE) and to a lesser extent by al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE) concerning the revelation encountered by Hagar in the wilderness. Although both of these scholars do not directly address Hagar in their respective treatises, within the mystical framework, the wilderness can be interpreted metaphorically as a domain of self-purification (*tazkiyyatun nafs*) from earthly attachments, and Hagar may be perceived as a spiritually prepared individual (possessing *isti'dād*) to receive revelation (*waḥy*) or inspiration (*ilhām*) as articulated by al-Ghazālī,⁴² or alternatively, in the terminology of Ibn 'Arabī, Hagar can be construed as undergoing Divine revelation (*kashf*) and experiencing the manifestation of the Divine (*Tajallī*).⁴³ Further elucidations are provided by other eminent Islamic thinkers, such as Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064 CE) and Imām al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1180 CE), whose insights significantly contextualize the phenomenon of Divine revelation (*waḥy*) to women as both a metaphysical occurrence and an existential reality.⁴⁴

This investigation further employs the hermeneutic framework articulated by Paul Ricoeur (d. 2005 CE) and Mircea Eliade (d. 1986 CE) as a supplementary analytical instrument to substantiate the symbolic interpretation conducted through the mystical perspective, particularly in the examination of pivotal symbols within Hagar's narrative that pertain to the articulation of human encounters with the Divine. Ricoeur posits that the cosmos and the human psyche represent two interdependent modalities of expression. Each component or entity within the natural world serves as a symbol endowed with dual significance, both literal and sacred.⁴⁵ Consequently, within Hagar's narrative, the wilderness is constructed as a symbol imbued with profound meaning, signifying not

⁴¹ Frederick E. Greenspahn, ed., *Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah: New Insights and Scholarship*, Jewish Studies in the Twenty-First Century 2 (New York University Press, 2011), 194–95, <https://doi.org/10.18574/9780814732885>.

⁴² Abou Hamed Muhammad Ghazali, *Majmū'at Rasā'il Al-Imām al-Ghazālī* (Dar al-Fikr, 1995), 1:280.

⁴³ Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* (Dār al-Sādir, n.d.), 3:181.

⁴⁴ Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Al-Mufradāt Fī Ḡharīb al-Qur'ān* (Maktabat Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, n.d.), 1:668; Andalusī, *Al-Fiṣal Fī al-Milal Wa al-Ahwā' Wa al-Niḥal*, vol. 5.

⁴⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Beacon Press, 1967), 15.

merely a physical expanse but also a sacred domain where Hagar encounters the transcendent.

In the same vein, Eliade's theoretical framework elucidates the conception of the world as an expansive domain imbued with profound spiritual significance. Eliade posits that the world transcends mere physicality, serving instead as a locus for interaction with the Divine and the manifestation of sacredness, as exemplified by the instance in which God instructed Moses to remove his footwear due to the sanctity of the ground upon which he stood (Exod 3:5). This illustrates the presence of a sacred realm that stands in stark contrast to the mundane environment.⁴⁶ Consequently, it is intriguing to apply this theoretical perspective concerning the wilderness space encountered by Hagar, portrayed as sacred land (*al-Ḥarām*) in the eyes of God as articulated in Surah Ibrahim (14):37, or the well *Be'er Lahai Ro'i* (He Who Lives and Sees me) as referenced in Gen 16:14.

These two theoretical frameworks were selected due to their inherent complementarity. The framework of mysticism offers a specialized lexicon for comprehending Hagar's spiritual experience, which is inadequately addressed by the historical-critical paradigm. Simultaneously, the philosophical hermeneutic framework guarantees that the interpretation of wilderness symbols and Divine revelation within Hagar's narrative remains intrinsically connected to the textual architecture of the sacred scriptures of Judaism and Islam, thereby eschewing speculative interpretations.

1.6 Research Significance

This study proposes an alternative framework for understanding the spiritual experiences of women through the lens of Hagar's journey in the wilderness, employing mystical and philosophical perspectives. Prior scholarly discussions have predominantly analyzed Hagar through postcolonial or feminist paradigms, emphasizing her marginalization as an enslaved black woman. Whereas this study redirects attention to her spiritual state, underscoring her active role in her interaction with the Divine. This facet has garnered relatively scant scholarly exploration.

A significant portion of the existing scholarship has scrutinized Hagar's social identity by delineating her connection with Egyptian figures such as Zulaikha, or by contrasting her wilderness experience with those of male prophets, including Moses. This study extends these findings by proposing a theological framework for women's spiritual agency through a detailed examination of Hagar's spiritual stature. By contrasting Hagar's journey with

⁴⁶ Mircea Eliade and Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* ; [the Groundbreaking Work by One of the Greatest Authorities on Myth, Symbol, and Ritual], trans. Willard R. Trask, A Harvest Book (Harcourt, Brace, 1987), 20.

those of other notable women within the Abrahamic tradition, such as Yocheved (the mother of Moses), the Virgin Mary (Maryam), and Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', this analysis offers a distinctive perspective on the manifestations and perceptions of divine revelation and spiritual authority as experienced and embodied by women. Furthermore, it enriches the comprehension of the wilderness, not merely as a site of exile but also as a hallowed space for divine transformation and encounters.

1.7 Methods

This study employs qualitative methodology to explore the correlation between wilderness and female divine revelation through a comparative analysis of the narrative of Hagar within the understanding of Judaism and Islam. As articulated by Barbara A. Holdrege (2000), comparative analysis engages key conceptual frameworks, including myth, symbol, ritual, scripture, and mysticism, to comprehend and categorize religious phenomena.⁴⁷ Regarding Hagar, wilderness, and Divine revelation as the principal themes and symbols within this inquiry, the study juxtaposes texts such as the Hebrew Bible, the Qur'an, the Midrash, Tafsir, Hadith, and Zohar, which serve to highlight not only similarities and disparities, but also foster a nuanced comprehension of how these symbols are manifested and hold significance within their respective religious traditions. Consequently, this study is predicated upon several methodological phases. The initial phase involves compiling primary texts that address the figure of Hagar. The subsequent phase involves analyzing symbols and key concepts derived from these primary texts, and the final phase consists of a comparative examination through the lens of mystical concepts.

The preliminary phase involved an exhaustive collection of primary texts rooted in the Jewish tradition, which included the Torah (Pentateuch), selected passages from the Talmud and Midrash, along with commentaries on the Pentateuch by Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi, d.1105 CE)⁴⁸ and Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (d. 1167 CE). These commentaries serve as exemplars of the *peshat* (פְּשָׁט),⁴⁹ representing the literal interpretation that is emblematic of the biblical exegesis tradition. The corpus of these texts predominantly engages in discourses regarding Hagar and the wilderness as illustrated in the book of Genesis, as well as addressing broader themes of wilderness found within the

⁴⁷ Barbara A. Holdrege, "Comparative Analysis as Critical Method," in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, ed. Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (University of California Press, 2000), 83.

⁴⁸ Rashi, "Rashi on Genesis," accessed April 16, 2025, https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Genesis?tab=contents.

⁴⁹ Moshe Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, SUNY Series in Judaica (State University of New York Press, 1989), 83.

texts of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Despite the existence of Hebrew and Aramaic medieval Jewish documents, given the author's restricted proficiency in these languages, scholarly translations were utilized for an extensive analysis and comprehension, which covered the Tanakh,⁵⁰ Targum Onkelos,⁵¹ The Pentateuch and Haftorahs,⁵² The New Edition of the Babylonian Talmud,⁵³ *Sefer Ha-Aggadah*,⁵⁴ Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch,⁵⁵ and Rashi Commentaries on the Pentateuch.⁵⁶

In Islamic tradition, the foundational materials encompass the Qur'ān alongside traditional commentaries (*tafsīr*), which include noteworthy works like *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āyāt al-Qur'ān* by al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE),⁵⁷ *Jāmi' Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān Wa-l-Mubayyin Limā Taḍammanahu Mina al-Sunnati Wa-Āyi al-Furqān* by al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273 CE),⁵⁸ and *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr Fī Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* by Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373 CE).⁵⁹ For a more thorough inquiry, the study also includes early Shi'ite interpretations, such as *Tafsīr Al-Qummī* by 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 919 M),⁶⁰ *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī* by Muḥammad ibn Ma'sūd ibn 'Ayyāsh (d. 932 CE),⁶¹ and *al-Tibyān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067 CE).⁶² These texts illuminate the theological ramifications of Hagar's narrative, particularly concerning Surah Ibrāhīm (14:37), and her association with themes of faith, exile, and divine proximity. The investigation further relies on hadith compilations, especially those compiled by Imām al-Bukhārī,⁶³ which provide narrative specifics and emotional depth regarding Hagar's experiences in the wilderness. Supplementary historical documents, such as early Islamic biographical accounts (*sīrah*), encompass works like *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*

⁵⁰ *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text.*

⁵¹ "Tanakh, Targum, Onkelos | Sefaria," accessed April 26, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Tanakh/Targum/Onkelos>.

⁵² Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary: Genesis*.

⁵³ Michael L. Rodkinson, tran., *New Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*, vol. 1 (The Talmud Society, 1918).

⁵⁴ Gerald Friedlander, *Seppher Haggadah, Parables and Legends from Talmud and Medrash* (P. Valentine and Sons, 1914).

⁵⁵ H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver, trans., *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis (Bereshit)* (Menorah Publishing Company, Inc., 1988).

⁵⁶ Chaim Pearl, tran., *Rashi Commentaries on the Pentateuch* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1970).

⁵⁷ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1 (Markaz al-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-'Arabīyyah wa-l-Islāmiyyah, 2001).

⁵⁸ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Abī Bakr Qurṭubī, *Jāmi' Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān Wa-l-Mubayyin Limā Taḍammanahu Mina al-Sunnati Wa-Āyi al-Furqān*, vol. 12 (Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2006).

⁵⁹ Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr al-Qurashī Dimashqī, *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr Fī Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Dār al-Salām, 2012).

⁶⁰ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm Qummī, *Tafsīr Al-Qummī*, vol. 1 (Mu'assasat Dār al-Kitāb li-l-Ṭibā'ah wa-l-Nashr, 1404).

⁶¹ Abū al-Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Ma'sūd ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Salamī al-Samarqandī 'Ayyāshī al-Ma'rūf, *Tafsīr Al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 2 (Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li-l-Maṭbū'āt, 1991).

⁶² Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 6 (Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1950).

⁶³ Muḥammad Ibn Ismā'il Bukhari, "Kitāb Al-Aḥādīth al-Anbiyā," in *Sahīh Al-Bukhārī*, trans. Muḥammad Muhsin Khan, vol. 4 (Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 1997).

(d. 923 CE) and the writings of al-Ta'labī (d. 1035 CE),⁶⁴ which contextualize Hagar's narrative within a broader framework of sacred history.

The subsequent phase, referred to as a symbol analysis, is conducted using the philosophical hermeneutics articulated by Paul Ricoeur, as elucidated in his seminal work, "The Symbolism of Evil," alongside insights from Mircea Eliade, derived from his influential text, "The Sacred and the Profane." This conceptual framework serves as a basis for examining the discrepancies and consistencies of symbols within Hagar's narrative across Jewish and Islamic traditions, specifically about the wilderness setting, Hagar's emotional reactions to her banishment, the miraculous spring that inexplicably emerges in the desolate landscape, the occurrences surrounding Hagar's interaction with the angel, and the concealed symbols of Hagar's positioning in the wilderness as interpreted through sacred texts within Judaism and Islam.

The third phase, specifically the analysis of Hagar's revelatory encounter through the lens of mystical frameworks, was executed by employing Kabbalistic mystical literature,⁶⁵ including the *Zohar*, composed by Rabbi Shimeon Bar Yochai (Rashbi), a second-century CE mystic believed to have attained profound divine wisdom.⁶⁶ The *Zohar* (Book of Radiance) explicates the narratives of the Torah utilizing the esoteric schema of the *Sefirot*.⁶⁷ This investigation utilizes Hagar's journey in the wilderness as a mystical epiphany of divine revelation framed within the symbolic construct of Divine emanation. Concurrently, within the framework of Islamic mysticism, the primary text employed is Ibn 'Arabi's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* (The Meccan Revelation), which delineates a cosmological framework grounded in *tajallī* (divine manifestation). His concepts of *isti'dād* (spiritual preparedness)⁶⁸ and *mi'rāj* (spiritual ascension) provide interpretative constructs for understanding Hagar's experience of divine revelation in the wilderness as a spiritual elevation rather than a mere state of dislocation. The analysis also engages with al-Ghazālī's (d. 1111 CE) interpretation of prophecy (*nubuwwah*) as a modality of Hagar's divine intervention that subverts natural causation (*khāriq lil-ādah*), thereby elucidating the miracle of Zamzam and the inspiration (*ilhām*) bestowed upon Hagar, alongside the

⁶⁴ Abū Ishāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ta'labī, "*Arā'is al-Majālis Fī Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* or "Lives of the Prophets": As Recounted by Abu Ishaq Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim Al-Tha'labi, trans. William Michael Brinner, *Studies in Arabic Literature* 24 (Brill, 2002).

⁶⁵ Kabbalah represents the esoteric dimension (mystical branch) of Jewish philosophy that endeavors to comprehend the transcendent mysteries, the intricate mechanisms of creation, and the correlation between the divine (Ein Sof) and the cosmos. See Mac Gregor Mathers, tran., *The Kabbala Unveiled* (Theosophical Publishing Company, 1907), viii.

⁶⁶ Laitman, *The Zohar*, 7.

⁶⁷ Mathers, *The Kabbala Unveiled*, 2.

⁶⁸ Kristin Zahra Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam*, *Routledge Studies in the Qur'an* (Routledge, 2006), 17.

contributions of Ibn Ḥazm and Imām al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, whose perspectives further substantiate the mystical contextualization of the narrative. This phase involves a contextual analysis that seeks to elucidate the dimensions of revelation encountered by Hagar in the wilderness, interpreted symbolically or metaphorically as an embodiment of spiritual metamorphosis, which denotes her closeness to the Divine.

1.8 Outline

This study is systematically organized into six discrete chapters. The first chapter provides the necessary context, articulates the identified problems, sets the research objectives, conducts a literature review, establishes the study's importance, and outlines the methodological framework applied in this examination.

The second chapter prepares the definition of wilderness that will be used in chapters four and five, conceptualized as a liminal space wherein the boundaries of the self are deconstructed, while reflecting on specific passages from the Torah and verses from the Qur'ān, supplemented by illustrative examples from the Prophet and interpretations situated within both theological and mystical contexts, and its correlation to Hagar's narrative.

The third chapter highlights the foundational narrative of Hagar, which consists of symbols that will be read mystically in chapter five. It involves a close reading of Genesis 16 and 21 in the Torah, which narrate Hagar's experiences. It is paired with Surah Ibrāhīm (14:37) for a comparative analysis of her encounters in the wilderness.

The fourth chapter emphasizes that Hagar's narrative within this investigation is not presented in isolation; it further explores the interconnectedness of related female figures that manifest a recurrent motif illustrating how wilderness or liminal spaces function as arenas conducive to divine intervention.

The fifth chapter offers a mystical and philosophical contemplation on the interwoven dynamics of wilderness and the spiritual experience of divine encounter, accompanied by an examination of Hagar as a spiritual archetype across various traditions.

The concluding chapters synthesize the theological insights derived from the wilderness and elucidate the significance of Hagar's narrative in formulating an alternative theological paradigm of female spiritual agency within the Abrahamic traditions.

CHAPTER II

THEOLOGICAL RE-INTERPRETATION OF THE WILDERNESS

2.1 Wilderness within Sacred Traditions: Torah and Qur'an

The narrative concerning Hagar, which illustrates the intersection of her story within the Jewish and Islamic traditions, serves as the primary focal point of this study, centering on her experience of exile in the wilderness and her experience of divine revelation (Gen 16 and 21 and Surah Ibrāhīm (14):37), particularly moments when she is divinely rescued in the desolate environment and engages in dialogue with angel. In the widely recognized account familiar to the broader populace, Hagar is delivered from her plight through the miraculous emergence of a spring amidst the arid landscape. God assures her of a formidable nation that will arise through her progeny. This account implicitly suggests that the wilderness encountered by Hagar functions as both a threshold and a nexus that intertwines her existence in the corporeal realm with that of the spiritual domain.

Nevertheless, this suggestion necessitates a more profound examination of the wilderness concept itself from the vantage point of both the Jewish and Islamic traditions to unveil distinct patterns and interrelations pertinent to Hagar's revelatory experiences. This chapter is dedicated to a meticulous examination of the representations of wilderness as articulated in the two revered texts of the Torah and the Qur'an. Following this analysis, the findings derived from these sacred scriptures will be juxtaposed with the experiences of the Prophets and mystics who have traversed the wilderness, aiming to identify relevant patterns of connectivity that may be employed in analyzing the interplay between wilderness and the revelatory experiences encountered by Hagar.

In the Abrahamic sacred texts, wilderness fundamentally constitutes a significant concept associated with the narrative of creation and the development of human civilisation. This concept frequently serves as a focal point for theological⁶⁹ contemplation in retelling the accounts involving the Prophets, their adherents, and other virtuous individuals (saints). For example, this term is primarily utilised in relation to the Israelites' sojourn through the wilderness, during which they encountered challenges ordained by God on their journey to the promised land; nevertheless, a considerable portion of the Israelites regarded themselves as trapped, undergoing the wilderness as a distressing experience that

⁶⁹ Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story," 1998, 32.

threatened their very survival (Exod 15: 22-27).⁷⁰ From this account, the wilderness is implicitly characterised by dual aspects. On one side, it is portrayed as a perilous, precarious, and deceptive environment. Conversely, for select individuals, the wilderness represents a domain where divine assistance is manifested.⁷¹

The Hebrew tradition extensively incorporates the term ‘wilderness.’ The most prevalent Hebrew term translated as “wilderness, steppe, desert” is *midbār* (מִדְבָּר). This term appears 271 times in the Old Testament, with 105 occurrences within the Pentateuch. Essentially, the term denotes “uninhabited land,” conjuring the recognisable image of a desolate expanse characterised by sand and rocks. However, it may also refer to a flat terrain suitable for grazing animals.⁷² The word ‘*ārāvāh* (עֲרָבָה)⁷³ holds the position of the second term and is noted 60 times in the Old Testament, of which 19 instances are within the Pentateuch. The third term is *yeshīmōn* (יְשִׁמּוֹן), which appears three times in the Old Testament and thrice within the Pentateuch. This term is derived from the Hebrew root *ysm* (יִשַּׁם), which serves as an alternate form alongside two roots: *smm* (שָׁמַם) and *ysm*. Both roots convey meanings associated with desolation, semantically akin to English term ‘desert.’⁷⁴

Biblical scholars elucidate that the uninhabited and uninhabitable wilderness constitutes an integral aspect of the creation narrative. In Deut 32:10, the text presents a dichotomy between “desert” (*midbār*) and the “barrend land” (*yeshīmōn*) alongside the term “barrend” *tōhū* (תֹּהוּ), a designation that characterizes the primordial state of God’s creative endeavour as detailed in Gen 1:2, which is rendered as “without form.” Ibn Ezra

⁷⁰ Onkelos Exodus 15: 22] Moshe led [B’nei] Yisrael away from the Reed Sea, and they went out into the desert of Shur [Cheger], they traveled for three days in the desert and they did not find any water. 23) They came to Marah but they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. The place was therefore called Marah [bitter]. 24] The people complained to Moshe saying, “What shall we drink?” 25) He [Moshe] cried out to [prayed before] Adonoy, Adonoy showed him [instructed him concerning] a tree and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet [pleasing]. There He set before [established for] them statutes and ordinances, and there He tested them. 26] He said [to them,] “If you vigilantly obey the voice [Word] of Adonoy, your God, and do what is upright in His eyes [before Him], give ear to His commandments, and preserve all His statutes; [then], every sickness that I brought upon Egypt, I will not bring upon you, for I am Adonoy, Who heals you. 27) Then they came to Eilim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms. and they camped by the water. See “Onkelos Exodus,” accessed May 19, 2025, https://www.sefaria.org/Onkelos_Exodus.

⁷¹ Cohen, “Hagar and Ishmael,” 2014, 253.

⁷² Wesley Nottingham, “An Old Testament Biblical Theology of Wilderness: From Simple Setting to Cosmic Context,” *Eleutheria: John W. Rawlings School of Divinity Academic Journal* 6, no. 1 (2022): 16, <https://doi.org/10.70623/YVQQ2832>.

⁷³ Today, the term ‘*ārāvāh* or commonly called Araba is only used for the southern part of this valley, namely between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea; while the northern part, between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee, is called el-Ghor. However, according to Abulfeda (Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Alī Abū al-Fidā’), Ibn Hauqal (Muḥammad Abū al-Qāsim ibn Hawqal al-Naṣībī), and other Arab geographers, the name Ghor includes the area from the Sea of Gennesaret (Galilee) to Aila. See C.F. Keil D.D. and F. Dilitzsch D.D., *Biblical Commentary on The Old Testament*, 3. The Pentateuch (Murray and Gibb, n.d.), 278.

⁷⁴ Alexander, *Pentateuch*, 893.

(d. 1167 CE), in the *Sefer Yetzirah*, explicates the phrase *tohu wa bohu* (תהו ובהו) found in Gen 1:2.⁷⁵ Interpreting it as a formless and devoid of substance.⁷⁶ This terminology suggests that just as God has resolved in Genesis to transform the uninhabitable into a habitable realm, His intent for the generation wandering in the wilderness was that they would ultimately attain fertile territory.⁷⁷

A notable illustration can be discerned in the narrative of Hagar in Genesis 16 and 21, which chronicles her flight and meandering through a desolate region that was once uninhabited but is presently the site of a significant human civilization. The location of her exile *El Paran* (אֵיל פָּאֶרָן), is geographically posited as a port situated at the northern extremity of the Gulf of Akaba, adjacent to the Red Sea. The desert of *Shur* (שׁוּר), from which she initially fled due to Sarah's oppression, is recognized as the barren limestone plateau that lies between Canaan and Egypt.⁷⁸ The term *Shur* literally signifies "wall," or a fortress designed to safeguard Egypt from eastern adversaries.⁷⁹ The subsequent locale of her wandering, following her exile and disorientation, is identified as the desert of *Be'er Sheva* (בְּעֵר שְׁבַע), which is associated with the southernmost point of Palestine, positioned at the periphery of the desert.⁸⁰ The trajectory of Hagar's odyssey in the wilderness underscores the framework of salvation history afforded by God and establishes Hagar as a Matriarch of the Ishmaelites.⁸¹

In a similar vein, within the Christian tradition, the wilderness symbolizes the land in its primordial state as ordained by God. When contemplated through a spiritual lens, the wilderness imparts lessons regarding God's role as Creator, wherein individuals may encounter the divine presence. In the words of an African American minister, "Yo' Wan'na Fin' Jesus, Go in de Wilderness with God." This assertion suggests that the wilderness serves as the backdrop for numerous pivotal events chronicled within the scriptures. It is "a stage that brightly illuminates the power of God." The wilderness emerges as a locus of spiritual examination.⁸² The New Testament, particularly noted in Luke 3: 1-12 and Luke 4:1-2, illustrates the time John the Baptist spent in the wilderness, where he passionately sought to revive the journey of God's salvation and confronted the desolate aspects of the

⁷⁵ Onkelos Bereshit 1: 2: "The earth was unformed and desolate, and (there was) darkness [was spread] over the surface of the abyss. The breath of [from before] Elohim hovered [blew] above the surface of the water. See "Onkelos Genesis 1," accessed May 19, 2025, https://www.sefaria.org/Onkelos_Genesis.1.

⁷⁶ Strickman and Silver, *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis (Bereshit)*, 180.

⁷⁷ Alexander, *Pentateuch*, 897.

⁷⁸ Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary: Genesis*, 127.

⁷⁹ Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary: Genesis*, 142.

⁸⁰ Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary: Genesis*, 175.

⁸¹ Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story," 1998, 28.

⁸² John Copeland Nagle, "The Spiritual Values of Wilderness," *Environmental Law* 35, no. 4 (2005): 989.

wilderness,⁸³ just like Jesus' forty days in the wilderness, where He faced unending trials from Satan.⁸⁴

In Islamic tradition, wilderness narratives are frequently reinterpreted to align with Islamic values, objectives, and geographical contexts pertinent to Islam or the Arabian Peninsula. For instance, the site of the binding of Abraham's sons as depicted in the Bible is transitioned from the territory of Canaan to the Kaaba, which serves as the Islamic Qibla located in Mecca. Likewise, the biblical Abraham expels Hagar and Ishmael from their domicile to traverse the desert of *Be'er Sheva*, situated in the Land of Israel (Gen. 21); however, Islamic tradition recontextualizes their journey to the hills of Safa and Marwa, alongside the well of Zamzam.⁸⁵

Within the framework of the Qur'ān, the notion of wilderness as a desolate, empty, and unproductive locals is most accurately encapsulated by the term *biwādin ghayri dhī zar'in*, which translates to "uninhabited valley," a phrase originating from Abraham's supplication in sura 14:37.⁸⁶ This valley is identified as Mecca, which during the era of Abraham was an arid expanse incapable of sustaining flora.⁸⁷ An additional interpretation suggests it refers to a valley devoid of water and vegetation,⁸⁸ as analysed through the

⁸³ Luke 3, 1] In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, 2) during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3] He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4) as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5] Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; 6) and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'" See Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament New Revised Standard Version* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 104.

⁸⁴ Luke 4, 1] Jesus, from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit full of the Holy Spirit, returned in the wilderness, 2) where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. See Levine and Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament New Revised Standard Version*, 106.

⁸⁵ Shari L. Lowin, *The Making of a Forefather: Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives*, Islamic History and Civilization, volume 65 (Brill, 2006), 52. Further, another scholar mention that in medieval Arabic sources, the routes of travel through the wilderness receive little detailed attention. "Faran" is a Hebrew word that was adapted into Arabic. This word is mentioned in the Torah with the following phrase: "The Lord came from Sinai, He appeared from Seir, and He manifested Himself from Paran." Seir refers to the mountains of Palestine, the place of the Gospel revelation to Jesus. Paran is Mecca or its surrounding mountains, according to the testimony of the Torah. His manifestation from there refers to His revelation in the Qur'an to His Messenger, Muhammad. See David Tuesday Adamo and Erivwierho Francis Eghwubare, "The African Wife of Abraham (Gn 16:1-16; 21:8-21)," OTE 18, no. 3 (2005): 461.

⁸⁶ Surah Ibrahim (14): 37: "O our Lord! I have made some of my offspring to dwell in an uncultivable valley by Your Sacred House in order, O our Lord, that they may perform As-salah. So fill some hearts among men with love towards them, and (O Allah) provide them with fruits so that they may give thanks." See Muhammad Taqī ud-Dīn Al-Hilālī and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, trans., *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in The English Language* (King Fahd Complex for The Printing of The Holy Qur'an, 1999), 285.

⁸⁷ Muḥammad Aḥmad Qāsim Dīb al-Duktūr Muḥyī Dīn, *Ulūm Al-Balāghah: Al-Badī' Wa al-Bayān Wa al-Ma'ānī* (Mu'assasah al-Ḥadīthah li al-Kitāb, 2003), 130.

⁸⁸ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥaqq al-'Umarī Ṭarābulusī, *Durar Al-Farā'id al-Mustaḥsanah Fī Sharḥ Manẓūmat Ibn al-Shīḥnah* (Fī 'Ulūm al-Ma'ānī Wa al-Bayān Wa al-Badī') (Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2018), 471.

lexicon of (*nahw*), wherein *bi-wādī ghayri dhī zar'* is characterized as an indefinite entity (*nakirah*), further described as lacking flora⁸⁹ due to the inclusion of the term *ghayr* preceding an undefined noun (*nakirah*).⁹⁰ In Arabic, the term *wādī* (valley) denotes a geographical formation situated between two mountains, although it may lack of water source. Given that Mecca lacked vegetation, Abraham beseeched God to grant them sustenance from other regions to aid the inhabitants and visitors who could come to revere Allah and adhere to His commands.⁹¹

Classical Islamic exegetes frequently interpret this verse to delineate the uninhabited valley associated with Mecca as referenced in the Qur'ān. Abū Ḥafṣ al-Nasafī (d. 1142 CE) elucidates in his commentary on sura 14:37 that “in a valley devoid of vegetation” pertains to the valley of Mecca, specifically *al-Abṭaḥ*, wherein “valley” signifies the base of the foothill of a mountain. The phrase “which is devoid of vegetation” implies the absence of water necessary for agricultural cultivation. “Near Your venerated (sacred) House” indicates the Kaaba.⁹² Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 922 CE) posits that the valley referenced is substantiated by the Prophet's assertion that upon Hagar and Ishmael's arrival, the area lacked a water source; for it water had been present, Abraham would not have characterised it as a location “devoid of vegetation” adjacent to Your House, which You have prohibited all Your creations from contaminating.⁹³ Abū al-Barakāt al-Nasafī (d. 1310 CE) clarifies that “in the valley” refers to Mecca, “which has no vegetation,” indicating the absence of any form of plant life, and “Near Your Honourable House,” the Kaaba, a site which Allah has decreed all to refrain from disturbing.⁹⁴

Muḥammad bin Naṣr al-Marwazī (d. 907 CE) posited that Abraham transported Hagar and Ishmael to a desolate valley of habitation.⁹⁵ Al-Māwardī (d. 1059 CE) construed the phrase *bi-wādī ghayri dhī zar'* as a reference to Mecca, characterized as a sterile valley lacking inhabitants, which epitomizes reliance and faith in Allah amidst desolation.⁹⁶ Jalāl

⁸⁹ Fāḍil Ṣāliḥ Sāmīrā'ī, *Ma'ānī Al-Naḥw* (Dār al-Fikr li-Ṭibā'ah wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 2000), 3:129.

⁹⁰ Muḥammad 'Abd al-Khālīq 'Azīmah, *Dirāsāt Li Asūb Al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Dār al-Ḥadīth, n.d.), 2:221.

⁹¹ Muḥammad al-Makkī Nāṣirī, *Al-Taysīr Fī Aḥādīth al-Tafsīr* (Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, n.d.), 3:270.

⁹² Najm al-Dīn 'Umar ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Nasafī Ḥanafī, *Al-Taysīr Fī al-Tafsīr* (Dār al-Lubāb li al-Dirāsāt wa-Taḥqīq al-Turāth, 2019), 9:145.

⁹³ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* (Dār Hajr li-al-Ṭibā'ah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī' wa-al-I'lān, 2001), 13:696.

⁹⁴ Abū al-Barakāt 'Abdullāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Maḥmūd Ḥafiz al-Dīn Nasafī, *Tafsīr Al-Nasafī (Madarik al-Tanzīl Wa Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl)* (Dār al-Kalīm al-Ṭayyib, 1998), 2:175.

⁹⁵ Muḥammad bin Naṣr Marwazī, *Ta'zīm Qadr Al-Ṣalāh* (Maktabat al-Dār, n.d.), 1:98.

⁹⁶ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb al-Baṣrī al-Baghdādī Māwardī al-Shahīr, *Tafsīr Al-Māwardī (al-Nukat Wa al-'Uyūn)* (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, n.d.), 3:138. However, citing Qadhī Abu Bakr ibn al-'Arabī in interpreting this verse, an-Nāṣirī (d. 1994 CE) stated that “It is not permissible for anyone to use this verse as a proof in leaving his wife and children in a lonely and dangerous place, then relying on the Almighty, the Most Merciful, and postulating with the deeds of Abraham...” See Muḥammad al-Makkī Nāṣirī, *At-Taysīr Fī Ḥadīth at-Tafsīr*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1985), 271.

al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1506 CE) interpreted the valley as a sanctified abode cleansed by Allah from all malevolence, designated as the qibla, and transformed into a venerated site, wherein Prophet Abraham purposefully selected this location for his progeny.⁹⁷ Contemporary scholars generally interpret Abraham's supplication as a plea for God to establish a secure haven for some of his descendants in a barren valley devoid of vegetation, in proximity to the esteemed house of God (the Kaaba). He (Abraham) for this locale to evolve into a center for worship, beseeching Allah to draw numerous individuals to inhabit it and bestow upon them bountiful agricultural yields as a manifestation of gratitude towards Him.⁹⁸

Shiite *mufasssir* of the tenth century further nuanced the interpretation of this verse, particularly in relation to desolate valleys or wilderness. Al-Qummī (d. 919 CE) provided an interpretation congruent with the fragment of the *bi-wādī ghayri dhī zar'* verse, which pertains to the Kaaba. Nevertheless, he accentuated the phrase "O our Lord, indeed I have placed some of my descendants," thereby indicating that the term 'descendants' specifically refers to *ahl bayt*, as substantiated by the hadith reported by Abu Ja'far (al-Baqir).⁹⁹ Another exegete, 'Ayyāshī (d. 932 CE), similarly interpreted the aforementioned hadith, underscoring the *Ahl Bait* as the lineage of the Prophet Abraham.¹⁰⁰ However, Ayyashi elaborated more specifically on the emotional circumstances surrounding Abraham's intent to abandon Hagar in the arid valley.

From al-Faḍl bin Mūsā al-Kātib dari Abū al-Ḥasan Mūsā bin Ja'far (al-Kāẓim), it is reported that he articulated: "Indeed, when Abraham entrusted Ishmael and Hagar to the confines of Mecca, he bid farewell to both individuals, leading them to weep. Subsequently, Abraham inquired of them: "What provokes your tears? Have I not placed you in the land most cherished by Allah and within His sacred precincts?" Hagar then responded: "O Abraham, I did not anticipate that a prophet of your stature would undertake such an action." To which he (Abraham) replied: "What transgression have I committed?" Hagar retorted: "You have abandoned a vulnerable woman and a feeble child, devoid of any human companionship, lacking visible water sources, absent of flora for cultivation, and without cow to milk?"

⁹⁷ 'Abd al-Rahmān bin Abī Bakr Suyūṭī Jalāl al-Dīn, *Al-Durr al-Manthūr* (Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 5:47.

⁹⁸ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muṣṭafā ibn Aḥmad al-Ma'rūf bi Abī Zahrah, *Zahrah Al-Tafāsīr* (Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, n.d.), 8:4037.

⁹⁹ Qummī, *Tafsīr Al-Qummī*, 1:371.

¹⁰⁰ Abu Ja'far (al-Bāqir) regarding surah 14:37: "Indeed, I have placed some of my descendants in a valley where there are no plants" until His words: 'So that they will be grateful.' He (Abu Ja'far) said: "We are they, and we are the remainder of those descendants." And in another narration from Hannān bin Sadīr from him (also from Abu Ja'far): "We are the remainder of that family, the 'itrah (close family or direct descendants of Prophet Muhammad, known as ahl bayt)." See 'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr Al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 2.

From Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Abī Naṣr, relaying the words of Abū al-Ḥasan ar-Riḍā (Imam Ali ar-Riḍā), it is narrated: “I received an account of him stating: Indeed, Ibrahim Khalil ar-Raḥmān (the beloved of Allah) implored his Lord when he positioned his progeny in the sacred territory: “O Lord, bestow upon them sustenance from fruits they may express gratitude.” Consequently, Allah commanded a segment of land from Jordan to encircle the Kaaba seven times. Thereafter, Allah instructed that it serve as a designated tawaf area. Thus, the city acquired the appellation ‘Ṭā’if’ due to its performance of tawaf around the Kaaba.” Subsequently, Abraham ascended (Hill) and proclaimed to the populace with utmost volume: “O all creatures, Allah has indeed mandated you to undertake pilgrimage (Hajj) to this house located in Mecca, in a state of *ihram*, for those possessing the capability to traverse the journey there. This constitutes an obligation from Allah.” “Thus, O Faḍl, the Hajj is obligatory for all beings. Hence, the *talbiyah* (the utterance ‘*Labbaik*’) of the pilgrims during the Hajj days serves as the response to Abraham’s summons. Therefore, recognise that on that day, you are engaging in the Hajj in accordance with divine directives from Allah.”¹⁰¹ Consequently, the barren valley evolved into a significant human civilisation following the settlement of Hagar and Ishmael therein.¹⁰²

The final classical Shiite exegete, al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067 CE), provides a more comprehensive interpretation of this verse, particularly concerning the uninhabited valley (*bi-wādī ghayri dhī zar*). Al-Ṭūsī elucidates the term valley (*al-wādī*) as denoting the incline or base of an extensive mountain range. From this perspective, substantial rivers are occasionally referred to as *awdiyah* (the plural form of *wādī*), owing to the resemblance of their banks to the inclines of mountains. Concurrently, the expression *ghayr dzī zar* connotes an absence of flora or vegetative life. *Al-zar* encompasses any form of vegetation proliferating without a trunk (i.e., distinctly not a large tree), with the plural form being *zurū*. Furthermore, the phrase ‘*inda baytika al-muḥarram*’ is understood as a domicile wherein God prohibits all that is permissible in other contexts, including marital relations, matters pertaining to blood, impurity, and similar concerns.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ ‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr Al-‘Ayyāshī*, 2:249.

¹⁰² And in another narration from him (Abu Ja‘far), he said: “Do you know which place is the most honorable in the sight of Allah?” No one answered, so he himself answered his question: “That is Mecca al-Ḥarām which He has approved for Himself as a sacred land, and He has made His house in it.” Then he said: ‘Do you know which place is better than Mecca?’ No one answered, so he himself answered again: “(That is) the area between the Black Stone and the door of the Ka‘bah. That is the Ḥaṭīm of Ibrahim, where Ibrahim used to graze his goats and perform his prayers there.” And in another narration it is mentioned: “Do you know which place is the most honorable in the sight of Allah?” No one answered, so he himself answered: “(That is) the area between Rukun Aswad and Maqām (of Abraham) to the door of the Ka‘bah. That is Ḥaṭīm Ismail, the place where Ismail grazed his goats.” Then he mentioned the continuation of the hadith. See ‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr Al-‘Ayyāshī*, 2:251.

¹⁰³ Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*, 6:300.

It is thus ascertainable that within the Abrahamic tradition, as reflected in both the Torah and the Qur'ān, the concept of wilderness is endowed with a congruent definition and fundamental nature, specifically as a desolate and uninhabited locale, yet simultaneously as a site where divine benevolence is bestowed upon those who adhere to and fulfill God's directive. The wilderness may also be viewed as a liminal space, serving concurrently as a historical setting where prophets and the elect encounter divine grace. The subsequent section will delve further into the narratives of prophets and the chosen individuals who embarked on expeditions in the wilderness, enhancing the understanding of the theological implications of this wilderness.

2.2 Wilderness as a Context for Divine-Human Interaction exemplified by Prophetic Figures

The preceding discourse has elucidated the theological significance of wilderness within the Torah and the Qur'an. This segment aims to succinctly investigate the narratives of various prophetic figures who encountered such desolate terrains, thereby offering a more profound understanding of the concept and elucidating the potential for establishing a link to the experiences of Hagar. This exploration encompasses the tribulations endured by Prophet Moses and Jesus in the desert, as well as those faced by Prophet Muhammad, who sought solace in the Cave of Hira, a site enshrined in sacred texts as the locus of prophethood. The accounts found within the Torah, Bible, and Qur'ān ultimately unveil recurring themes of wandering, isolation, vulnerability, and the trials confronted by these prophets in the wilderness, which collectively highlight the divine care extended by God.¹⁰⁴

Within the Pentateuch and the New Testament, it is articulated that God emerged from Mount Sinai,¹⁰⁵ manifested upon the High Mountain,¹⁰⁶ and appeared from Mount Faran.¹⁰⁷ Mount Sinai refers to the locale of the dialogue between Moses and God, the High Mountain signifies the site associated with Jesus, and Faran corresponds to Mecca, the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁰⁸ These three geographical sites are characterised in both the Pentateuch and the New Testament as desolate, uninhabited valleys or plains;

¹⁰⁴ Evans, *The Books of the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, 257.

¹⁰⁵ Exodus 19:11: Let them be ready for the third day; for on the third day יהוה (YHWH) will come down, in the sight of all the people, on Mount Sinai. See "Exodus 19," accessed May 19, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.19>.

¹⁰⁶ Matthew 17: 1] Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2) And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. See Levine and Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament New Revised Standard Version*, 31.

¹⁰⁷ Genesis 21: 21: He (Ishmael) lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt. See "Genesis 21," accessed May 19, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.21>.

¹⁰⁸ Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn ‘Ajībāh Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd* (Dr. Ḥasan ‘Abbās Zakī, 1419), 2:265.

nonetheless, they serve as the venues for the divine encounters of three eminent Abrahamic prophets.

Throughout Moses' odyssey, his prolonged solitude in the wilderness profoundly transformed his character. "When Moses ascended the mountain and remained there for forty days, he became wholly engrossed in the most sacred matters, to the extent that he neither consumed food nor drink, as he ascended to receive the tablets of the law, inscribed by the finger of God."¹⁰⁹ Similarly, the commencement of Jesus' ministry is interpreted through the narrative of the temptation in the desert (Luke 4:1-2),¹¹⁰ which is understood as the assertion that "the renewal of the exodus into the desert is imperative for the restoration of Israel's identity as the son of God."¹¹¹ In the examination of the Tanakh, Muslim scholars also interpret various verses therein pertaining to the Paran desert as directives for revelation to the Arabs, including Isaiah 42:11-12¹¹² and Habakkuk 3:3,¹¹³ thereby connecting these passages to God's prophecy concerning the Prophet Muhammad. The term *Kedar* in Isaiah 42:11 is linked to the descendants of Ishmael within the Arabian region, and Prophet Muhammad is recognised as a descendant of Prophet Ishmael, having been born in Mecca, which has historically been identified as the Paran desert.¹¹⁴

The Pentateuch substantiate the divine governance exercised through Moses during the four decades of wilderness sojourn over the Israelites, as articulated in Deut 29:4-5.¹¹⁵ Rabbi Judah further elucidated this passage to signify that the Israelites endured a forty-year period in the wilderness during which they provoked divine displeasure; nevertheless, God sustained them throughout this duration. This is demonstrated by the citation: "and in the barren land, where you have experienced how the Lord your God upheld you, as a man would carry his offspring, in every way you journeyed, until you came to this location" (Deut 1:31).¹¹⁶ At that juncture, the entire nation expressed discontent against their leaders,

¹⁰⁹ D.D. and D.D., *Biblical Commentary on The Old Testament*, 3. The Pentateuch, 336.

¹¹⁰ R. W. L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 52.

¹¹¹ Nagle, "The Spiritual Values of Wilderness," 990.

¹¹² Isaiah 42: 11] Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, The villages that Kedar doth inhabit; Let the inhabitants of Sela exult, Let them shout from the top of the mountains, 12) Let them give glory unto the LORD, And declare His praise in the islands. See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 623.

¹¹³ Habakkuk 3:3: God cometh from Teman, And the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah His glory cover the heavens, And the earth is full of His praise. See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 890.

¹¹⁴ Sheha, *Muhammad The Messenger of Allah*, 67.

¹¹⁵ Deuteronomy 29: 4] I led you through the wilderness forty years; the clothes on your back did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet; 5) you had no bread to eat and no wine or other intoxicant to drink—that you might know that I יהוה am your God. See "Deuteronomy 29," accessed May 19, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.29>.

¹¹⁶ *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 251.

Moses and Aaron, articulating their lament: “Would that we had died in Egypt or in this wilderness! Why has the Lord brought us into this land, to fall by the sword, and our wives and our children to be plundered (enslaved by the enemy)?” They reflected that it would have been preferable to return to Egypt! They resolved among themselves to appoint a leader and retrace their steps to Egypt.” In response to this discontent, which escalated into outright insurrection, Moses and Aaron prostrated themselves before the gathered assembly, seeking to articulate their anguish before God in hopes of invoking divine intervention.¹¹⁷

In accordance with Rashi’s commentaries (d. 1105 CE), it is posited that God had “intended to punish” the Israelites since their transgression involving the golden calf¹¹⁸ and their subsequent refusal to enter Canaan during the initial year of their wilderness journey; however, divine mercy compelled Him to postpone the imposition of punishment until their transgressions had reached a more grievous state, at which point He mandated the complete penalization. Consequently, they traversed the wilderness for forty years, as, according to the stipulations of the law, the threshold age for accountability was established at 20, and they were destined to perish at the age of 60, which necessitated a forty-year duration for the entirety of that sinful generation to gradually pass away in the wilderness,¹¹⁹ thereby making way for a new generation of Israelites prepared to enter the Promised Land.¹²⁰

Rashi’s interpretation accentuates the notion that the wilderness in the Pentateuch is perceived as a corrective environment wherein the prior generation that revolted against Moses is entirely obliterated. The wilderness motif recurs in the discourse surrounding the Pentateuch, extending its significance through the ritual of transferring the sins of the Israelites, orchestrated by the Prophet Aaron, into the corporeal form of a goat that was subsequently exiled from the sacred realm (Canaan) to the wilderness.¹²¹ Hence, according

¹¹⁷ D.D. and D.D., *Biblical Commentary on The Old Testament*, 3. The Pentateuch, 91.

¹¹⁸ Exodus 32: 1] And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him: ‘Up, make us a god who shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him.’ 2) And Aaron said unto them: ‘Break off the golden rings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me.’ See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 122–23.

¹¹⁹ Numbers 14: 33: And your children shall be wanderers in the wilderness forty years, and shall bear your strayings, until your carcasses be consumed in the wilderness. See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 211.

¹²⁰ Pearl, *Rashi Commentaries on the Pentateuch*, 146.

¹²¹ Leviticus 16: 21] And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of an appointed man into the wilderness. 22) And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land which is cut off; and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness. *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 164.

to Ibn Ezra, the wilderness is construed in this context as a domain designated for the expulsion of sins.¹²²

In the context of Islamic scholarship, the exegete elucidates the narrative of the Prophet Moses' sojourns, particularly during his expedition through the desolate valley, which is commonly interpreted as the wilderness described in Sura al-Qaṣaṣ (28): 15-46. According to the exegesis of Ḥusayn Vā'iz Kāshifī (d. 1504 CE), it is recounted that Moses took the life of an individual (an Egyptian man) who had solicited assistance from the Children of Israel, leading to the Egyptians discovering the act, which prompted them to attempt to take Moses' life. Subsequently, God provided solace to Prophet Moses from this distress and commanded him to migrate to Madyan.¹²³ Moses underwent a profound trial, intending to evolve into a purified and sanctified individual. It is further indicated that Moses resided among the inhabitants of Madyan for a duration ranging from ten to twenty-eight years.

Moses was ordained to arrive at the revered valley,¹²⁴ where God communicated with him and designated him as a Messenger, subsequently, Moses was instructed to confront Pharaoh, who had committed egregious transgressions. He was directed to address Pharaoh with benevolent discourse, so that he might be receptive to counsel and develop a consciousness of Allah. When Allah summoned Moses in the sacred valley and dispatched him to Pharaoh, granting him his petitions, he proceeded to Pharaoh, accompanied by angels who extended their hands to him. In the meantime, his family remained in the location from which he had departed. It is noted in al-Taysīr that Moses' family awaited his return throughout the night.¹²⁵

The following day, his kin, with no updates from him, were enveloped in confusion and uncertainty amidst the wilderness. Nevertheless, specific individuals from Maydan arrived and recognised Şaffūra (the spouse of Moses), subsequently escorting her to her paternal home. Following the demise of Pharaoh, information regarding Moses reached them. As Moses journeyed toward Egypt, a divine revelation was imparted to Aaron,

¹²² Schachter, *The Commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra on the Pentateuch*, 3: Leviticus, 84.

¹²³ Surah al-Qaṣaṣ (28): 15: And he (Mūsā) entered the city at a time of unawareness of its people: and he found there two men fighting, one of his party (his religion, from the children of Israel), and the other of his foes. The man of his (own) party asked him for help against his foe, so Mūsā struck him with his fist and killed him. He said: "This is of Shayṭān's (Satan) doing: verily, he is a plain misleading enemy." ... Surah al-Qaṣaṣ (28): 20: And there came a man running, from the farthest end of the city. He said: "O Mūsā! Verily, the chiefs are taking counsel together about you, to kill you, so escape. Truly, I am one of those who do right." See Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in The English Language*, 432.

¹²⁴ The valley referred to here is at-Ṭūr which refers to the side of a mountain. This information is found in Surat al-Qaṣaṣ: 29: Then, when Mūsā had fulfilled the term, and was travelling with his family, he saw a fire in the direction of Ṭūr (Mount)... See Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in The English Language*, 433.

¹²⁵ Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī Burūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān* (Dār al-Fikr, 1957), 5:386.

instructing him to meet his brother and route to Madyan.¹²⁶ An exegete interprets Moses' life trajectory in a spiritual context, positing that when Allah intends to elevate one of His creations to a superior status (spiritual echelon), He instils a sense of trepidation within them, prompting them to flee from creation towards Him, thereby allowing Allah to unveil to them His profound secrets. This phenomenon is exemplified in Moses' experiences.¹²⁷

The subsequent topic pertains to the journey of Jesus within the wilderness. It is widely reported that Jesus traversed the Judean desert, during which he encountered temptations posed by Satan. Subsequently, he undertook a period of fasting that lasted for 40 days and 40 nights. Nestled within the elevated dry landscape, the Judean Desert is located to the east of Jerusalem and northwest of the Dead Sea.¹²⁸ The narrative concerning his wanderings has elicited critical analyses from Jewish scholars, culminating in the emergence of a Jewish polemical text during the Middle Ages, which recounts the life of Jesus from a critical standpoint, known as *Toledot Yeshu* (תולדות ישו). This text claims that Jesus roamed the desert accompanied by his disciples, engaging with various individuals and offering incisive remarks. Eventually, the ruler, specifically Herod in this context, acquiesced to the execution of Jesus after a considerable duration. He faced execution by hanging, devoid of stoning, despite the fact that his disciples suffered stoning.¹²⁹ A divergence in the narrative is observable in the New Testament, which does not contain any assertion indicating that Herod executed Jesus alongside his disciples. In the New Testament, it is reported that Jesus was detained and put on trial by the *Sanhedrin* (סנהדרין), a Jewish council of that age, before being transferred to Pontius Pilatus, a governor of Rome, since the jurisdiction to perform executions was exclusively with the Romans.¹³⁰

Mufasssīr within the Islamic tradition elucidates the trial faced by Jesus (Prophet Isa as.) in relation to the children of Israel. Upon his arrival among the children of Israel,

¹²⁶ Kāshifī Sabzawārī Ḥusayn 'Alī, *Mawāhibu 'alayh* (Sāzmān Chāp wa Intishārāt Iqbāl, 1369), 684.

¹²⁷ Ismā'īl Haqqī Burūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān* (Dār al-Fikr, 1957), 6:268.

¹²⁸ Mark 1: ¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. See Levine and Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament New Revised Standard Version*, 57–58.

¹²⁹ Peter Schäfer et al., *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 143 (Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 64.

¹³⁰ Matthew 17: ¹¹ Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." ¹² But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. ¹³ Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" ¹⁴ But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.... ²⁰ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. ²¹ The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." ²² Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" ²³ Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" See Levine and Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament New Revised Standard Version*, 51.

Prophet Jesus performed miracles,¹³¹ including resurrecting the deceased and curing the blind and infirm; however, the majority of the Children of Israel dismissed these acts as mere sorcery.¹³² Upon recognising that a substantial portion of the Jewish populace rejected the divine revelation and actively opposed his teachings, they even conspired to take his life.¹³³ Consequently, Jesus (Prophet Isa as.) sought refuge by fleeing from the region of Syria to Egypt. On the banks of the Nile, he encountered a contingent of fishermen engaged in their trade. Jesus invited them to partake in a “more substantial catch.” When they inquired about the nature of this catch, he responded, “Come, let us catch people, let us entice them towards the comprehension of monotheism.” In certain accounts, Jesus articulated, “Come, let us capture individuals,” thereby entreating them to embrace the doctrines of God.¹³⁴

The narrative about the final prophet who embarked on solitary sojourns within the wilderness is the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). While immersed in his spiritual reflections in a quiet area near Mecca, the Prophet Muhammad encountered a significant occurrence that reshaped his life and greatly affected the unfolding of human events henceforth. According to the account provided by Ibn Ishaq, this momentous event transpired during Ramadhan while Muhammad resided at his customary place of repose within a mountain cave near Mecca. He was in a state of slumber when the Angel Gabriel manifested, enveloping him with a covering that bore an inscription, commanding him to “Read!”¹³⁵

Ahmad b. Uthmān, recognised as Abū al-Jawzā, along with Wahb b. Jarir, his progenitor, al-Nu'man b. Rāshid, al-Zuhrī, 'Urwah, and 'Aishah elucidate that the initial form of divine revelation imparted to the Messenger of Allah was through true visions; such visions would descend upon him (the Prophet Muhammad), akin to the onset of dawn. Subsequently, he developed an affinity for solitude, often retreating to a cave in Ḥirā' to engage in various acts of devotion for several days prior to returning to his familial obligations. Following this, he would revert to his family and provision himself for an equivalent duration. This cyclical routine persisted until the moment of divine truth

¹³¹ It is said in surah Āl 'Imrān (3): 50: And I have come confirming that which was before me of that Tawrah (Torah), and to make lawful to you part of what was forbidden to you, and I have come to you with a proof from your Lord. So fear Allah and obey me. See Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in The English Language*, 68.

¹³² 'Alī, *Mawāhibu 'alayh*, 1251.

¹³³ It is said in surah Āl 'Imrān (3): 54: And they (disbelievers) plotted [to kill 'Īsā, and Allah plotted too. And Allah is the Best of those who plot. See Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in The English Language*, 68.

¹³⁴ 'Alī, *Mawāhibu 'alayh*, 118.

¹³⁵ F. E. Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad: Parallel Tracks, Parallel Lives* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 106.

approached him unexpectedly, proclaiming, “Muhammad, you are the Messenger of Allah.” The vision alluded to corresponds to the Qur’an (53:1-18), which Muslims interpret as a vision involving Gabriel.¹³⁶

Al-Tabari (d. 923 CE) recounts that the Messenger of Allah articulated, “I rose, but then fell to my knees, retreating as my shoulders trembled. I approached Khadijah and implored, “Cover me! Cover me!” and proclaimed, “Muhammad, I am Jibril, and you are the Messenger of Allah.” He then instructed, “Read it!” I inquired, “What shall I read?” He grasped me firmly and constrained me three times with intensity to the brink of asphyxiation and utter exhaustion; thereafter, he declared: “Recite in the name of your Lord who created,” and I complied. Subsequently, I went to Khadijah and expressed, “I fear for my safety.” Upon recounting the occurrence, she reassured me, saying, “Rejoice, for Allah will not disgrace you, for you have been benevolent to your family, upheld the truth, delivered what was entrusted to you, preserved through adversity, provided support to those who sought it, and aided individuals in distress.”¹³⁷

The concluding verses of Gabriel’s revelation comprise the initial lines of what is subsequently regarded as the ninety-sixth surah of the “*Iqra*,”¹³⁸ and within this surah, these are credibly proposed as Muhammad’s earliest revelation. The Prophet awoke and discerned Gabriel, “in the form of a man,” on the periphery. The angel proclaimed, “Muhammad, you are Allah’s Apostle, and I am Gabriel.” Muhammad remained transfixed, observing that wherever he directed his gaze, Gabriel was present in the celestial expanse.¹³⁹

Sheikh Abū Madyan elucidated the solitary disposition of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) during his retreat into the wilderness, articulating: “The hallmark of a student’s sincerity in his intentions is his withdrawal from the mundane. The indication of sincerity in this retreat from the mundane is his proximity to *al-Ḥaqq* (Allah). Furthermore, the manifestation of honesty in approaching Allah is signified by his return to the mundane. This delineates the state of the authentic heir of the Prophet: he experienced solitude (*khalwat*) in the Cave of Ḥirā (*Kāna yakhlu bi-ghāri Ḥirā*), forsaking domestic ties and familial bonds, in pursuit of the Divine until the truth unveiled itself and Allah designated

¹³⁶ Muḥammad ibn Ḡarīr ibn Yazīd al-Ṭabarī et al., *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, VI, Bibliotheca Persica (State university of New York press, 1988), 67.

¹³⁷ Ṭabarī et al., *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, VI, 68.

¹³⁸ It is said in Surah al-ʿAlaq (96): 1] Read! In the Name of your Lord Who has created (all that exists]. 2) He has created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood). 3] Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous. 4) Who has taught (the writing) by the pen. 5] He has taught man that which he knew not. See Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur’an in The English Language*, 682.

¹³⁹ Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad*, 107.

him as a messenger to guide His servants. These three phases are bequeathed to those whom Allah selects from the Prophet's community. Therefore, those who inherit the knowledge, actions, and state of the Prophet are designated as *wārith kāmīl* (perfect heirs).¹⁴⁰

Within that cave, the essence of Prophet Muhammad was ensnared due to the profound matters that had descended upon him, residing in the concealed and shadowy recesses of his heart. Subsequently, an image emerged within his heart amalgamated from diverse forms of knowledge (manifestations), a surah akin to a metrical composition that resonated, encapsulating the secrets and observations therein. Prophet Muhammad, accompanied by a woman, approached trembling with trepidation until he attained composure. He was inquired of: "What is it that causes your unrest?" He responded: "A matter that has deprived me of sleep." Allah has conferred upon me the honour of what He has granted to the possessors of *lisān* (revelation/*wahy*)," the apostles and the elect prophets, in terms of knowledge, trials, and tribulations.¹⁴¹ Thus unfolds the narrative of the journey within the wilderness of the esteemed Prophets throughout the Abrahamic tradition. In light of the preceding exposition, it may be inferred that a convergence exists in the conceptualisation of wilderness as derived from the experiences encountered by each of the three prophets, which can be systematically categorised in the following table:

Table 2.1. *Thematic intersection of wilderness among the three Abrahamic prophets*

Theme	Moses	Jesus	Muhammad Saw.
Wilderness	Sinai Desert	Judean Desert	<i>Hirā</i> Cave
Period	40 years	40 days	When Prophet Muhammad was 40 years old
Experience of Divine Revelation	Burning Bush (Fire) at Sinai	Led by the Holy Spirit, the transfiguration	First Revelation (<i>wahy</i>) by Jibril
Spiritual Function	Formation of the nation of Israel to enter the Promised Land	Preparation for ministry	Divine Revelation, prophetic sign

¹⁴⁰ Mohamed Haj Yousef, "الأخلاء الذين لهم مقام الاتحاد - الفتوحات المكية," The Single Monad Model of the Cosmos, accessed May 19, 2025, <https://www.ibnalarabi.com/futuhath/pages.php?id=785>.

¹⁴¹ Mohamed Haj Yousef, "الباب الحادي عشر وثلاثمائة في معرفة منزل النواشي الاختصاصية الغيبية من الحضرة المحمدية," The Single Monad Model of the Cosmos, accessed May 19, 2025, <https://www.ibnalarabi.com/futuhath/pages.php?id=1497>.

Wilderness as liminal space	From slavery to Covenant	From baptism to Ministry	From solitude to Prophecy
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The exegesis of the Pentateuch and the Qur'ān reveals significant parallels in the conceptualisation of the wilderness as an embodiment of divine testing experienced by Prophets. As a liminal space, the wilderness is characterised by an arid expanse lacking both human habitation and flora, which necessitates that every person who enters this domain yield to their Sovereign. This analysis enables the exploration of a more representative and universally relevant interpretation of the wilderness as a sacred space in the narrative of Hagar. An additional inquiry into this topic will be elaborated upon in the following section, which explores the wilderness as understood through the experiences of mystics in general.

2.3 Wilderness as a Sacred Threshold within the Perspectives of Saints and Ascetics

Concerning the prior discourse concerning the trials faced by the Prophets during their period of exile in the wilderness, this section concisely articulates a parallel wilderness experience encountered by mystics or ascetics within the framework of the Abrahamic traditions. Examination from this vantage point enhances the comprehension of the wilderness, not merely as a liminal space, but also as a conduit for spiritual metamorphosis, which later becomes intricately connected to the interpretation of Hagar's spiritual states during her sojourn in the wilderness. Each of the Abrahamic faiths, namely Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, possesses its distinctive mystical current and is characterised by notable mystical personages, encompassing both male and female representatives. Whereas a divine mandate characterizes the wilderness odyssey of the prophets, the pilgrimage of the mystics and ascetics is conceptualized as the soul's yearning for annihilation and subsequent rebirth in the divine presence of God, facilitated through withdrawal from societal engagements and a traversal into the wilderness to sever all worldly attachments.

A salient figure within Judaic mysticism, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Halevi Ashlag (d. 1954 CE), commonly referred to as *Baal HaSulam* (בעל הסולם), which translates to "owner of the ladder,"¹⁴² exemplifies the mystic's journey in the wilderness. He articulated: "There is an allegory about friends who were lost in the desert, hungry and thirsty. One of them had found a dwelling filled with all pleasures. He recalled his destitute brothers, although he

¹⁴² Rabbi Yehuda Leib HaLevi Ashlag (aka Ba'al HaSulam) is the author of the 20th century Hebrew translation and commentary on the Zohar called the Sulam. He is writing with the goal of making Kabbalah more accessible to the public. Kabbalah is a well-known system of religious philosophy or theosophy in Judaism. See <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/461956.249?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>. See also Mathers, *The Kabbala Unveiled*, 4.

had drifted away from them and was oblivious to their location. What did he do? He began to shout loudly and blow the trumpet; perhaps his poor and hungry friends would hear his voice, come closer, and come to the dwelling filled with all pleasures.”¹⁴³

HaSulam interpreted this allegory to narrate the futile pursuit of individuals within the worldly realm. In his view, this world was instantiated in a condition of lack and void. Consequently, humanity is propelled toward the acquisition of material goods and the attainment of gratification. Regrettably, numerous individuals engage in the relentless quest for possessions for their own benefit, leading to a perpetual state of dissatisfaction. Thus, it is not uncommon for individuals to perish amidst their pursuits, remaining in a condition of anguish due to their failure to attain any form of fulfillment. Conversely, if one endeavours to traverse the desolate expanse of the empty desert, they will encounter a ‘dwelling full of pleasures,’ which serves as a metaphor for enlightenment. Subsequently, those who achieve this enlightenment will ‘shout loudly’ and ‘blow the trumpet,’ symbolizing the enlightened individuals endeavouring to summon others to return to God.¹⁴⁴

One of the salient features of Jewish mysticism is its profound emphasis on an immediate and personal encounter with the Divine, frequently characterized as an exceptional and transformative experience that transcends conventional intellectual comprehension. This direct engagement is occasionally articulated as a mystical communion with the Divine, wherein the individual perceives a profound connection that surpasses traditional religious narratives.¹⁴⁵ This spiritual affiliation is indicative of the traveler’s lamentations. In the spiritual realm, the condition of “weeping” constitutes the most efficacious state for activating all mechanisms of self-correction and enhancement requisite for spiritual metamorphosis.¹⁴⁶ The act of weeping serves as a form of supplication or prayer to attain likeness to the Creator, with tears functioning as the medium that maintains the portal ajar. Consequently, tears represent an action that facilitates the individual’s aspiration to emulate the Creator.¹⁴⁷

The Jewish theosophical viewpoint is termed Kabbalah (קַבְּלָה). Kabbalah, in its lexical definition, signifies ‘reception.’ This doctrine is recognized as the principal stream of Jewish mysticism that has been perpetuated over centuries. Due to its spiritual intricacies, the assertions of Kabbalah are not solely accessible to authors and philosophers but

¹⁴³ Michael Laitman, *Unlocking the Zohar* (Laitman Kabbalah Publishers ; Bnei Baruch USA, 2011), 21.

¹⁴⁴ Laitman, *Unlocking the Zohar*, 102.

¹⁴⁵ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 4.

¹⁴⁶ Laitman, *Unlocking the Zohar*, 104.

¹⁴⁷ Laitman, *Unlocking the Zohar*, 105.

resonate profoundly with poets as well. Historical accounts suggest that the Kabbalah was initially imparted by God Himself to a select assembly of angels, who subsequently established a theosophical school in Paradise. Following the Fall, these angels benevolently disseminated this celestial doctrine to the wayward progeny of Earth, thereby providing a pathway for their reversion to unadulterated glory and happiness. The transmission of this knowledge commenced with Adam, and proceeded to Noah, and subsequently to Abraham, the beloved of God, who migrated with Him to Egypt, where the patriarch permitted a portion of this enigmatic doctrine to be revealed. In this manner, the Egyptians acquired a fragmented understanding of it, and other Eastern civilizations were able to integrate it into their philosophical frameworks. Moses, who was well-versed in the entirety of Egyptian wisdom, was initially initiated into the Kabbalah within his homeland, but attained profound mastery during his sojourn in the wilderness.¹⁴⁸

Moses also conveyed the secrets of this doctrine to seventy elders, who perpetuated it through a chain of oral transmission. Amongst those who constituted an unbroken lineage of tradition, David and Solomon exhibited the most profound comprehension of the Kabbalah. Nevertheless, writing it down was not undertaken until Rabbi Shimeon Ben Jochai, who lived contemporaneously with the destruction of the Second Temple, intentionally severed social connections to fully embrace solitude. Escaping to Galilee with his son, he concealed himself in a cave for thirteen years, shielded from worldly distractions, until he attained spiritual enlightenment. Subsequent to his passing, his son, Rabi Eleazar, along with his secretary Rabi Abba and his disciples, compiled the treatises of Rabi Simon Ben Jochai, from which emerged the illustrious work known as the *Zohar*, the splendor, which serves as the grand repository of the Kabbalah.¹⁴⁹

Meanwhile, within the Christian paradigm, the ascetic movement towards the wilderness exhibits a comparable pattern, namely the reflective and symbolic engagement with the Old Testament and New Testament as a means to attain spiritual metamorphosis. It is posited that during the ascetic movement of the third and fourth centuries, desert ascetics exchanged their corporeal existence for a renewed spiritual essence. A notable figure who examined this phenomenon was Saint Anthanasius, the Patriarch of Alexandria, Egypt (d. 373 CE). He articulated this theme in his seminal work “Life of Anthony,”¹⁵⁰ which serves as a pivotal prototype for Western hagiographic literature.

¹⁴⁸ Mathers, *The Kabbala Unveiled*, 5.

¹⁴⁹ Mathers, *The Kabbala Unveiled*, 6.

¹⁵⁰ Athanasius et al., *The Life of Antony: The Greek Life of Antony, the Coptic Life of Antony*, Cistercian Studies Series 202 (Cistercian Publ, 2003).

The book highlights Athanasius's attempt to integrate the Old Testament representation of desert asceticism with the New Testament's narrative surrounding Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. He emerged as the new Elijah, who discovered solace and divine providence within the wilderness,¹⁵¹ as well as embodying the image of Christ's resurrected form following his entombment and struggle against his inner demons. Athanasius manifested to his adherents in the guise of a transformed spiritual entity. He became a tangible representation of Paul's assertion: "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body."¹⁵² Athanasius and the ascetics inhabiting the Egyptian and Syrian deserts reclaimed their paradisiacal essence, emancipated from corporeal subjugation, and presented themselves as more akin to angels than mere mortals.

A female figure within Christianity similarly encountered this ascetic experience. Previously identified as a prostitute, she underwent a transformation into a sanctified woman as a result of her struggle against her carnal desires and ultimately redeemed her flesh through seclusion in caves and the practice of extreme penance. An illustrative example is Pelagia of Antioch.¹⁵³ Her transformation into a divine woman represents God's saving grace, as she altered her physical existence from that of Eve (the prototype of original sin) to the faultless Virgin Mary. The cave, serving as the ascetic haven for the erstwhile prostitute, functioned as a symbolic replica of Mary's impenetrable womb, thereby compelling women to transcend the diminished nature inherited from Eve the seductress.¹⁵⁴

Another ascetic individual recognized within the classical Christian tradition is St. Christina the Astonishing (Christina Mirabilis), who resided in Belgium during the 12th century.¹⁵⁵ Christina is renowned for her extraordinary conduct involving self-isolation,

¹⁵¹ 1 Kings 19: 4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." 5 And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." See "1 Kings 19:4-8 ESV - But He Himself Went a Day's - Bible Gateway," accessed May 20, 2025, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Kings+19%3A4-8&version=ESV>.

¹⁵² 1 Corinthians 15: 4 It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. See Levine and Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament New Revised Standard Version*, 312.

¹⁵³ Pelagia, a penitent from Antioch, continued to be harassed by a demon even after she had been baptized. Bishop Nonnus advised her: "Bless yourself with the Cross of Christ and renounce him." This she did and the demon left her at once. But when during the night the demon began to molest her again, Pelagia rid herself of him in the following manner: Then Pelagia, the servant maid of God, blessed herself with the Sign of the Cross and blew a breath at the demon, saying: 'May my God who has liberated me from your teeth and who has led me into His heavenly bridal chamber, resist you for me.' And the Devil disappeared instantly.' See Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe, eds., *Ancient Christian Writers, the Works of the Fathers in Translation* (The Newman Press, 1950), 10:116.

¹⁵⁴ Mary F. Thurlkill, *Chosen among Women: Mary and Fatima in Medieval Christianity and Shi'ite Islam* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 47.

¹⁵⁵ *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints' Lives*, with Barbara Jane Newman (Brepols (éditions), 2008).

avoidance of societal interactions, concealment within wooded areas, or seclusion in daunting environments. Yet, her deeds should not be mistaken for symptoms of a psychological ailment. Instead, these unusual locales served as sites for her profound mystical encounters. The wilderness, to her, was transformed into a sanctified space for purification, allowing her to detach from the moral failings of the world. Her alienation manifested as a unique form of communion with the divine reality. Christina is documented to have retreated from human society out of profound trepidation, seeking refuge in the desert, among trees, atop ecclesiastical towers, or within other elevated structures. She frequently evaded individuals whose sinful behaviors assailed her sensory perceptions, particularly her olfactory sense. Additionally, she sought seclusion from those who persecuted her due to her peculiar behaviors or who endeavored to compel her into performing various prayers on their behalf. Consequently, the term wilderness in this context pertains to a state of exile, signifying both a physical locale and a paradigm of spiritual engagement. Christina's pilgrimage to the desert and the treetops resonates with the rhythm of Christ's life, as she ventured there prior to the commencement of her public ministry.¹⁵⁶

It is further elucidated that the impetus for Christina's withdrawal from the masses was rooted in her acute awareness of the miracles she experienced. In *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints' Lives*, it is articulated that: "Then, fearing that these most sublime miracles might exceed the limits of human senses and that the human carnal mind might see in these divine acts an occasion for evil, she (Christina) fled from human existence and ascended to high places like a bird, and remained in the water for a long time like a fish." In this instance, her retreat exemplified an exercise in humility, safeguarding her from the perception of arrogance that might arise from the attention garnered by her extraordinary gifts bestowed by God. This humility illustrates that Christina did not act to emulate Christ or assert divine authority. She returned to the desert to create a space conducive to fulfilling the will of Christ.¹⁵⁷

The Sufi tradition signifies the final element in this segment of mysticism, with its foundations in the principles of Islam. The previous section has discussed the Prophet's experience in the wilderness, elucidating that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) engaged in *khalwah*, or solitude, within the cave of *Hirā*. This practice of *khalwah* was similarly embraced by Sufis in serene valleys, distanced from the throngs of humanity, in

¹⁵⁶ Andrea Janelle Dickens, *The Female Mystic: Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages*, International Library of Historical Studies 60 (I. B. Tauris, 2009), 43.

¹⁵⁷ Dickens, *The Female Mystic*, 44.

pursuit of a deeper connection with the divine. Al-Sha‘rānī (d. 1565 CE) articulated that the Sufi masters embarked upon the path of *khalwah* (notated with the letter *kha* accompanied by the vowel *fathah*) to liberate themselves from the ailments and imperfections that afflicted their hearts and comportment, thus purifying themselves from the impurities of worldly existence, enabling their minds and hearts to attain clarity, with the ultimate objective of reaching Allah and accessing the divine secrets and *Rabbani* revelations that were bestowed upon them through their practice of *khalwah*. Subsequently, revelations were imparted to them, augmenting their knowledge beyond what they had previously acquired from their mentors or textual sources. These represent *Rabbani* inspirations and revelations that are devoid of the need for interpretation or modification.¹⁵⁸

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 1166 CE) once expressed, “I yearn for the tranquility of the open fields and deserts, where I could exist unseen and not behold others; however, Allah decreed otherwise, to serve the greater benefit of creation.”¹⁵⁹ Al-Sha‘rānī further elucidated that the practice of *khalwah* is not a novel concept introduced by the Sufis, but rather is referenced in both the Qur’ān and Sunnah, as exemplified by the Prophet Ibrahim’s experience of *khalwah*, in which he distanced himself from his non-believing compatriots.¹⁶⁰ Hadith literature also articulates the practice of *khalwah* in solitude, conveying the concept of *uzlah* (seclusion).¹⁶¹

Thus, the practice of seclusion, isolation, or *khalwah* from the masses is a recognized and explicitly articulated principle within the Qur’ān and Sunnah, wherein the terms share closely related meanings; *khalwah* represents a form of ‘*uzlah*. Nonetheless, some scholars delineate a distinction between *khalwah* and ‘*uzlah*, positing that *khalwah* pertains to seclusion from entities other than Allah (*al-aghyar*), whereas ‘*uzlah* denotes seclusion from the self and its desires, as well as distractions that divert the individual from Allah, rendering ‘*uzlah* a more prevalent concept than *khalwah*. while *khalwah* may frequently

¹⁵⁸ ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Sha‘rānī, *Al-Jawhar al-Maṣūn Wa al-Sirr al-Maq‘ūm Fīmā Tuntijuhu al-Khalwa Min al-Asrār Wa al-‘Ulūm* (Dār Jawāmi‘ al-Kalīm, 2007), 3.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī, *Al-Safīnah al-Qādirīyyah* (Dār al-Albāb, 1412), 16. In his daily activities he used to say: “I have researched all the deeds, and I have not found anything better than feeding others. If the whole world were in my hands, I would not choose anything above feeding the hungry.” He used to order his servant, Muḥaffarān, to bring a tray of bread, in case someone needed dinner, so he could give it to them.

¹⁶⁰ Surah Maryam (19): 49: So when he (Ibrāhīm) turned away from them and from those whom they worshipped besides Allah, We gave him Ishāq (Isaac) and Ya‘qūb (Jacob), and each one of them We made a Prophet. See Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur‘an in The English Language*, 347.

¹⁶¹ It has been narrated on the authority of Abu Sa‘īd Khudri that a man came to the Prophet (may peace be upon him) and said: Who is the best of men? He replied: A man who fights in the way of Allah spending his wealth and staking his life. The man then asked: Who is next to him (in excellence)? He said: Next to him is a believer who lives in a mountain gorge worshipping hid Lord and sparing men from his mischief. See “Sahih Muslim 1888a - The Book on Government - كتاب الإمارة - Sunnah.Com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم),” accessed May 20, 2025, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:1888a>.

occur, *'uzlah* is considered a rarity. Nevertheless, their meanings remain unified, and their ultimate purpose is singular: to achieve seclusion from society and to purify the mind and heart.¹⁶²

Muslim Sufis (*sālīk*) frequently employ the concept of “valley” in the context of their spiritual odyssey. This valley not only signifies a physical expanse remote from human accessibility, but it also embodies a metaphorical significance that denotes an individual’s spiritual status. Sheikh Uftadah Efendi symbolically referred to this valley as *Wādī al-Ḥayrah*, translating to the valley of perplexity. Within this valley, a *sālīk* possesses an awareness of his ultimate pursuit (the encounter with the Divine), yet he finds himself incapable of attaining it. Consequently, he traverses the valley engulfed in disorientation and intense fervor. He experiences torment from the heat to the point where his very essence is consumed. It is designated *Wādī al-Ḥayrah* due to the *sālīk*’s profound bewilderment, as he encounters an impasse that prevents both progression and retreat. Furthermore, this *maqam* (station) is not readily accessible to most individuals.¹⁶³

Al-Rāfi‘ī (d. 1226 CE) composed a poetic reflection on his spiritual expedition within the wilderness, articulating: “Myself, through my adherence, has been positioned in a valley devoid of flora. Yet, my Lord’s generosity is boundless. Should He safeguard me, there shall be no deficiency. And I find solace in His kindness, akin to a mother finding comfort in the presence of a father.”¹⁶⁴ Abū Bakr al-Khwārizmī (d. 993 CE) also provided a metaphorical interpretation of the term ‘valley,’ as illustrated in the couplet, “I descended from a man in a valley where there is no vegetation,” which denotes a state of unfruitfulness or lack of yield.¹⁶⁵ The phrase “in a valley where there is no vegetation” within the couplets draws inspiration from verse 37 of Surah Ibrahim.¹⁶⁶

Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240 CE), in his seminal work *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah*, categorizes spiritual seekers who have encountered the Divine under the designation *Rijāl al-Ghayb*.¹⁶⁷ Referencing the perspective of Sahl bin ‘Abd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 815 CE), *Rijāl al-Ghayb* is characterized as an individual who finds himself isolated in the wilderness (*al-falāh*) and subsequently engages in *ṣalāh* (prayer). Upon the conclusion of his prayer, he perceives

¹⁶² Sha‘rānī, *Al-Jawhar al-Maṣūn Wa al-Sirr al-Maq‘ūm Fīmā Tuntijuhu al-Khalwa Min al-Asrār Wa al-‘Ulūm*, 3.

¹⁶³ Ismā‘īl Haqqī Burūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān* (Dār al-Fikr, 1957), 3:262.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm Shāfi‘ī Abū al-Qāsim al-Rāfi‘ī al-Qazwīnī, *Durrah Al-Dara’ Li Hadīth Umm Zar’* (Dār Ibn Ḥazm li-al-Ṭibā‘ah wa-al-Naṣr wa-al-Tawzī‘, 1991), 76.

¹⁶⁵ Muḥammad ibn al-‘Abbās Khwārizmī, *Al-Amthāl al-Mawladah* (Al-Majma‘ al-Thaqāfi, 1424), 139.

¹⁶⁶ Ibrāhīm bin Sulaymān Ba‘īmī, *Al-Manṣūb ‘alā Naṣ‘ al-Khāfiq Fī al-Qur‘ān* (Al-Jāmi‘ah al-Islāmīyah, n.d.), 285 “O our Lord! I have made some of my offspring to dwell in an “uncultivable valley...” (Surah 14:37).

¹⁶⁷ Muhyi al-Din ibn ‘Arabi, *Al-Futuhat al-Makiyyah (Arba’ Mujalladat)*, II (Dar al-Sadir, n.d.), 16.

angels in numbers akin to mountains retreating alongside him, as he directly witnesses their presence. This experience is referred to as *shahadah*.

Ibn ‘Arabī elucidated al-Tustarī’s assertions by asserting that a genuine individual is one who, while engaged in *ṣalāh*, remains solitary in the wilderness (*al-falāh*), and upon completion, persists in the same condition as during his prayer. Not a single angel departs with him, as they are oblivious to his intended direction. Hence, this encapsulates the authentic essence of being genuinely *ghayb* in His presence. The *Rijāl al-Ghayb* is bifurcated into two categories regarding their hiddenness: 1) *Rijāl al-Ghayb* embodying the supreme spirit, yet apparent to Allah, and 2) *Rijāl al-Ghayb* originating from the domain of testimony (‘*ālam al-shahādah*’), yet manifest in the elevated realms. Consequently, these *Rijāl al-Ghayb* are those who are manifest, albeit not within the corporeal realm. They are rendered evident by the decree of God, perceiving nothing within creation except for God Himself. For them, the cosmos represents a manifestation (*tajallī*) of *al-Ḥaqq*.¹⁶⁸

2.4 Hagar’s Wilderness Journey: Prophetic Revelation or Ascetic Transformation?

The series of explorations undertaken in the preceding sub-chapter served to elucidate the notion of wilderness as a locus possessing a theological dimension, specifically as a domain for testing and engagement with the Divine. This comprehension is further reinforced through particular interpretations of the experiences of the Prophet and mystics within the Abrahamic faiths, both of which transpired in wilderness settings. These insights, derived from this analysis, contribute to the significance of the discourse surrounding wilderness in relation to the Divine vision or revelation imparted to the Prophet or mystic, while simultaneously establishing a resonant connection to the wilderness and the revelation encountered by Hagar, who constitutes the primary focus of this investigation.

The examination of wilderness within the context of diverse prophetic and mystical encounters in this chapter serves to elucidate the profound connection established through the recurring motif of God frequently engaging with His chosen individuals in settings removed from the throngs of humanity. Analysing the wilderness experiences of prophetic and mystical figures is essential, given the absence of textual evidence from either tradition that directly addresses the intersection of these two manifestations, particularly concerning the wilderness in relation to Hagar’s revelatory encounter. This analysis facilitates the exploration of the intimate relationship between God and Hagar during her wilderness wanderings, drawing upon her narratives within both Jewish and Islamic traditions. This

¹⁶⁸ Mohamed Haj Yousef, “[رجال القوة الإلهية] - الفتوحات المكية,” The Single Monad Model of the Cosmos, accessed May 19, 2025, <https://www.ibnalarabi.com/futuhat/pages.php?id=775>.

methodology, aligned with the philosophical hermeneutics espoused by Paul Ricoeur (d. 2005 CE), positions Hagar's narrative as a myth (a narrative imbued with multiple layers of significance) in order to impart meaning and direction to her spiritual journey in the wilderness. The account of Hagar's revelation via the angel in the wilderness has the potential to yield insights into the spiritual metamorphosis she undergoes when contextualised alongside the revelatory experiences of prophets and the divine insights of mystics, as previously articulated. Notable parallels can be discerned from these narratives, encompassing the crisis-solution framework, the demonstration of faith and resilience amid tribulations in the desert, followed by a divine vision, which collectively suggest that in the wilderness experience of the prophets, mystics, and Hagar, a dynamic interplay exists between humanity and the sacred. In the absence of a comparative analysis with these experiences, Hagar's revelation in the wilderness may be regarded as lacking a robust foundation of meaning.¹⁶⁹

Hagar represents a compelling subject for analysis from a nuanced spiritual standpoint, as she is a female character documented in the Torah as the inaugural woman to undergo a theophany amidst her flight and subsequent wandering in the wilderness (Gen 16 and 21).¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, a more profound investigation into her theophany as a catalyst for spiritual metamorphosis is often constrained within the Jewish tradition, primarily due to Hagar's designation as Sarah's slave and her origins from a foreign territory. While historically recognised as Abraham's secondary spouse who bore his first offspring, this gestation did not inherently enhance Hagar's standing to that of an Israelite matriarch, as her lineage was not of pure descent, or in other words, she was not of Hebrew ancestry.¹⁷¹ In the midrashic literature on Genesis 16, the Rabbis assert that Hagar did not genuinely engage with the Divine, positing that her character lacked the piety exemplified by Sarah, thereby rendering direct communication from God to her implausible. The rationale for Hagar's capacity to perceive angels can be mainly attributed to her prior proximity to two righteous individuals, Abraham and Sarah, a circumstance that rendered such experiences commonplace rather than extraordinary.¹⁷²

However, a comprehensive analysis of the narrative on Hagar in Genesis 16 and 21 reveals that the structural composition of the account distinctly embodies a crisis-solution paradigm, as articulated in Ricoeur's theoretical framework, initiating with themes of

¹⁶⁹ Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 6.

¹⁷⁰ Royo, "A God Who Sees and Hears the 'Other': Hagar's Theophany as an Illustration of the Lord's Benevolence Toward Those Outside the Covenant," 103.

¹⁷¹ Katherine Woolstenhulme, *The Matriarchs in Genesis Rabbah*, Paperback edition, with University of Durham, Library of Second Temple Studies 96 (T&T Clark, 2022), 35.

¹⁷² Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1, 388.

expulsion and solitude, culminating in an encounter with an angelic figure. These patterns suggest that the narrative of Hagar encapsulates a supernatural experience that possesses symbolic significance concerning her connection to the sacred.¹⁷³ Such implications are undeniably absent in the Midrashic texts, which explicitly exclude Hagar from the principal covenant. Consequently, the spiritual ramifications inherent in the narrative of Hagar are most plausibly interpreted through an alternative framework that encompasses a worldview addressing the interplay between humanity and the sacred, wherein both men and women possess equitable access to engage in reciprocal relationships with the Divine, and which grounds its interpretation in the Torah. The intellectual paradigm that aligns most closely with these characteristics is that of Jewish mystical thought, particularly Kabbalah. Kabbalists assert that each human being is the recipient of divine love and that any human who adheres to divine commandments will achieve unity with the Divine.¹⁷⁴ This framework is particularly pertinent for analysing Hagar's revelatory experience in the wilderness, suggesting that Hagar's narrative within the Torah may indeed reflect a prophetic and mystical motif.

Kabbalists assert that the Lord was predominantly perceived in an anthropomorphic form, including the form of an angel, as narrated in Hosea 12:11: "I (Lord) have also spoken to the prophets, and I have multiplied visions; and by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes."¹⁷⁵ Abraham Maimonides (d. 1237 CE), on the other hand, argued that anyone who experiences a divine encounter in any form indicates that they possess spiritual and cognitive capacity.¹⁷⁶ He provides illustrations of the most prominent male prophets and their experiences of divine encounters, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. However, examining the pattern of this analysis, Hagar's experience of divine encounters reveals a pattern almost identical to that of the male prophets mentioned, even though he is not recognized as a prophet in Jewish tradition. This shared pattern can be observed in the following table,

Table 2.2. *Hagar's Experience of Divine Encounter: A Prophetic Pattern*

Prophet Figures	The Encounter of Divine Names
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen 17:1, Gen 28:3, Gen 35:11)	God the Almighty (<i>El Shaddai</i> /אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי)
Moses at Mount Sinai	I will be that I will be

¹⁷³ Eli'or, *Dybbuks and Jewish Women in Social History, Mysticism and Folklore*, 46.

¹⁷⁴ Koren, *Forsaken*, 64.

¹⁷⁵ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 8.

¹⁷⁶ Diana Lobel, *Moses and Abraham Maimonides: Encountering the Divine*, 1st ed, Emunot: Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah Series (Academic Studies Press, 2021), 131.

(Exod 3:14, Exod 6:2-3)	(<i>Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh</i> /אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה), Sacred Name Tetragrammaton (YHWH/יהוה-י-ו-ה)
*Hagar (Gen 16:13, not a prophet)	You are the Lord Who Sees me (<i>Attah El-Ro'i</i> /אַתָּה אֵל רֹאִי)

The aforementioned table highlights how Hagar's divine encounter uniquely operates outside established prophetic structures, but still offers an alternative model of divine intimacy. Furthermore, if one were to conduct a more nuanced comparison between Hagar's experience and the revelatory encounters attributed to the seven female prophets acknowledged by Jewish tradition in the Talmud: Megillah 14a,¹⁷⁷ one may discern a comparable pattern of revelation emerging from this analysis, as illustrated in the subsequent table.

Table 2.3. *Hagar's Experience of Divine Encounter: A Prophetic Pattern*

Jewish Prophetesses (Talmud; Megillah 14a)	Form of Divine Disclosure
Sarah	Angel in human form (Gen 18)
Miriam	YHWH descends in a pillar of cloud (Num 12)
Deborah	God's Word Verbally (Judges 4-5)
Hannah	Prophetic prayer (1 Sam. 1-2)
Abigail	Prophetic wisdom (1 Sam. 25)
Hulda	The direct word of YHWH (2 Kings 22)
Esther	Hidden Providence
*Hagar (excluded)	Direct appearance of the Angel of YHWH (Gen. 16:7-13)

Based on the table above, while Hagar is excluded from the seven prophetesses due to her foreign bloodline, her experience of naming God, *El Ro'i* (Gen 16:13), mirrors a form of revelation granted to the Jewish prophetesses. Parallels to this, Hagar's suffering in the wilderness embodies two forms of unintentional asceticism that lead to divine revelation: 1) Total dependence on God, 2) Self-ego annihilation. The close relationship and differences between Hagar's wilderness journey and the ascetics' in receiving divine revelation are explained in the following table.

¹⁷⁷ Eliezer L. Segal, *Vol. 2 The Babylonian Esther Midrash: A Critical Commentary* (Brown Judaic Studies, 2020), 214, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvzpv59d>.

Table 2.4. *Hagar's Wilderness Journey: Between Prophetic Revelation and Ascetic Transformation*

Hagar	Ascetics
Went into the physical wilderness against her will	Purposely enters the wilderness to live a solitary life
Involved in abandonment and vulnerability	Practice asceticism to annihilate the ego
Experienced divine revelation amidst her profound submissive state	Seeks spiritual unveiling through gradual purification
The chosen one for the divine promise	Chooses a spiritual path

The aforementioned table does not corroborate Hagar's identification as an ascetic because of the differing motivations that drive her spiritual advancement. However, Hagar's attitude of submission exemplifies a trait analogous to asceticism, which results in the annihilation of her sense of ego. Furthermore, Hagar's solitary life in the wilderness, albeit not instigated by her own volition as is characteristic of traditional ascetics, suggests that the profound experience of divine encounter in the wilderness, stemming from the exile shared by both Hagar and ascetics, underscores the wilderness's significant function as a conduit for divine interactions.

In the context of Islamic tradition, the Qur'an's narratives about women receiving divine messages reinforce the idea that women play pivotal roles in sacred history and the revelation of divine truth, often serving to confirm God's promises.¹⁷⁸ Ibn Hazm states that women can receive divine revelation and possess the qualities of prophets, much like Hagar. Revelation, which embodies the essence of prophecy, signifies the divine intent of the Almighty to directly impart to the individual receiving the message what He desires them to comprehend. At the moment of revelation, God endows the recipient with an unequivocal understanding of its authenticity, akin to an individual's certainty regarding their sensory perceptions and rational deductions, leaving no scope for doubt or skepticism.¹⁷⁹

Albeit the Qur'an does not make a direct reference to Hagar's name. Hagar is widely known, both implicitly and explicitly, in the Surah Ibrāhīm (14):37 and extra-Qur'anic sources, such as hadith and tafsir.¹⁸⁰ Hagar is highlighted as being of central importance to rituals related to God's 'sacred house' (*al-bayt al-harām*) in Mecca.¹⁸¹ Her deep faith and God-consciousness (*tawakkul* and *taqwā*) are presented as the source of her strength and perseverance, enabling her to carve out an active female role within Islam.¹⁸² The wilderness setting of her journey indicates that it is not merely a barren valley, but also

¹⁷⁸ Ibrahim, *Women and Gender in the Qur'an*, 159.

¹⁷⁹ Andalusī, *Al-Fiṣal Fī al-Milal Wa al-Ahwā' Wa al-Niḥal*, 5:17.

¹⁸⁰ Ibrahim, *Women and Gender in the Qur'an*, 3.

¹⁸¹ 'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr Al-'Ayyāshī*, 2:249; Ibrahim, *Women and Gender in the Qur'an*, 5.

¹⁸² Haddad and Esposito, *Daughters of Abraham*, 16.

symbolizes a sacred land. This interpretation can be further substantiated by Mircea Eliade's (d. 1986 CE) theory regarding 'the Sacred and the Profane,' which posits that open spaces encompass not merely a physical locality but also serve as a domain for communion with the Divine and the manifestation of holiness.¹⁸³ This perspective becomes particularly compelling when reconsidered in relation to Hagar's wilderness experience, wherein she encountered an angel and was bestowed with the Zamzam well in the wilderness, a site subsequently revered as the Holy Land.

Nevertheless, the predominant segments of classical Islamic exegesis regarding Surah Ibrāhīm (14):37 underscore the odyssey of Abraham and Ishmael, rather than focusing on Hagar's solitary tribulation in the wilderness. As articulated by al-Makkī al-Nāṣirī (d.1993 CE), the interpretation of Surah Ibrāhīm (14): 37 narrates the account of 'Ismail ibn Ibrahim,' during which his father transported him along with his mother, Hājar (Hagar), from Syria to Mecca during his infancy. Abraham committed both individuals to the care of God, under divine instructions, as the location designated for the construction of the Kaaba on the sanctified terrain (Haram land).¹⁸⁴ And yet, had Hagar not been amenable to her placement in that area, the *Sa'i* ritual integral to the *Hajj* pilgrimage would not have materialised, nor would the Zamzam well, which continues to flow to the present day. In addition, the narratives regarding Hagar's persona are less pronounced compared to other noteworthy female figures who receive considerable recognition and citation in the Qur'an, such as Maryam (Surah Maryam (19):16-34), the mother of Prophet Moses (Surah al-Qaṣaṣ (28):7-13), or Sarah (Surah Hūd (11):69-73).¹⁸⁵

The contextual gap of the aforementioned framework invites a more profound investigation into how the narrative surrounding Hagar's experience can symbolise a more profound spiritual journey, particularly evident in her readiness to embrace a life of isolation in the wilderness, which subsequently results in her being visited by angels and bearing a son who emerges as a prophet and the progenitor of the Arab nation in solitude, all stemming from her unwavering faith in divine protection. To engage in this contextual analysis, it is essential to establish a conceptual framework that accommodates an understanding of how women may encounter the divine amidst circumstances of separation and solitude. This particular worldview is frequently aligned with the tenets of Islamic mysticism, also referred to as *taṣawwuf*, which posits that both men and women possess an equal potential to attain profound intimacy with the Divine and to receive divine knowledge

¹⁸³ Eliade and Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 173.

¹⁸⁴ Nāṣirī, *Al-Taysīr Fī Aḥādīth al-Tafsīr*, 3:270.

¹⁸⁵ Andalusī, *Al-Fiṣal Fī al-Milal Wa al-Ahwā' Wa al-Nihāl*, 5:19.

(*ma'rifatullāh*).¹⁸⁶ This mystical framework helps to emphasize that Hagar's agency and self-initiation, exhibited through traversing between the hills of Safa and Marwah, are integral aspects of profound submission to God's will (*tawakkul*), not merely passive faith. God's answer to Hagar's prayer, as revealed through the Zamzam spring, is seen as evidence of her steadfast faith and its divine acceptance.¹⁸⁷ Hagar's story in the wilderness, therefore, symbolizes the spiritual strength, courage, and self-initiative of God's chosen agents, providing a spiritual model for women.

Although Sufis do not explicitly engage with Hagar's narrative in a broader context, this theoretical framework can be employed to assess Hagar's spiritual condition during her sojourn in the wilderness, which ultimately led to her being addressed by an angel and receiving divine revelation. The inquiry can be further enriched through a comparative analysis of Hagar's revelation in the wilderness alongside other female figures who undergo analogous experiences to Hagar, within both Jewish and Islamic religious traditions. Consequently, Hagar's narrative emerges as an illustrative case study pertinent to mystical themes in Islam, particularly in relation to the perseverance of faith, spiritual exploration through solitude, and the divine favour conferred by God upon His chosen individuals. Interpreting Hagar's story through this approach revitalizes her image, considering her not simply as a historical personage, but also as a soul with spiritual independence, as drawn from her narrative both explicitly and implicitly in the Torah and the Qur'an.

The account of Hagar in the wilderness stands as the main case study analysed in this investigation to provide a wide-ranging exploration of the dynamics between the wilderness and women's experiences of divine revelation; consequently, a thorough assessment of Hagar's narrative as documented in the Torah (Genesis 16 and 21), and the Qur'an (Surah Ibrāhīm (14):37) will be the central theme of chapter three, where a comparative textual analysis will be conducted to scrutinize how Jewish and Islamic traditions convey Hagar's experience in the wilderness. The interpretation of these sacred texts will also underpin the analytical framework employed in the ensuing chapters.

¹⁸⁶ Spiritual perfection has also happened to women, even though hierarchically women are one degree below men. See Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makiyyah*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, n.d.), 708.

¹⁸⁷ Haddad and Esposito, *Daughters of Abraham*, 86.

CHAPTER III

HAGAR IN THE WILDERNESS: COMPARATIVE SCRIPTURAL ANALYSIS

3.1 Close Reading of Genesis 16 and 21

Genesis 16 and 21 most vividly articulate the narrative concerning Hagar and her experience in the wilderness. In these particular chapters, Hagar is depicted as having undergone two instances of exile in the wilderness, in addition to two significant encounters with angelic beings. This segment provides a textual analysis of the account of Hagar as represented in the book of Genesis, particularly within chapters 16 and 21, while also referencing traditional Jewish commentaries, including Midrash Aggadah (Bereshit Rabba),¹⁸⁸ Sepher ha Aggadah (legends derived from Talmud and Midrash),¹⁸⁹ and the commentaries on the Pentateuch authored by Rashi (d. 1105 CE)¹⁹⁰ and Ibn Ezra (d. 1167 CE),¹⁹¹ to investigate how the interpretative frameworks of Jewish scriptures shaped Hagar's trajectory within Abraham's household towards her subsequent exile in the wilderness.

The precise full name of Hagar and the etymological implications of the designation "Hagar" remain uncertain. Some scholars correlate her name with the Arabic term denoting "migration." In the Pentateuch, Hagar is introduced as Sarah's Egyptian slave, who

¹⁸⁸ The word Midrash comes from the verb דָּרַשׁ (darash), which means to seek, search, or investigate. Thus, midrash is defined as seeking the meaning of a text and refers to the process of interpretation. Usually, the interpreter determines the meaning of the text in the Pentateuch based on context, logic, or prior knowledge. The more complex the text, the greater the number of possible interpretations, and this is especially true when dealing with texts from the legal portion of the Torah, commonly known as Midrash Halakha. However, in the context of interpreting the story of Hagar in Genesis, this falls into the category of Midrash Aggadah, which only includes text-based interpretations of the narrative portion of the Torah. Meanwhile, Bereshit Rabbah is a Talmudic midrash that interprets verse by verse from Genesis. See https://www.sefaria.org/Bereshit_Rabbah?tab=contents. See also "Introduction to Midrash | Sefaria," accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/475308.2?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>.

¹⁸⁹ The author of the Sepher ha Aggadah directs the seekers of the inherent meaning of the Torah by expressing: If you wish to know Him through whose words the world was made, study (the interpretation of the Torah in the Aggadah; then you will know the Most Holy One, praise Him, and hold fast to His ways. See Hayyim Nahman Bialik et al., *The Book of Legends: Sefer Ha-Aggadah Legends from the Talmud and Midrash* [Schocken books, 1992], 3.

¹⁹⁰ Rabbi Shlomo Itshaki (Rashi) is known for one of the most outstanding Jewish works in the entire post-Talmudic era, namely "the commentaries of Rashi. He utilized the Aramaic translations of Onkelos and Jonathan in explaining the meaning of difficult Biblical expressions. Rashi was a typically pious French Jew of the eleventh century. His knowledge of the Bible, Talmud, and Midrash was encyclopedic, and he was known for the accuracy, precision, and exactness of his comments. See Pearl, *Rashi Commentaries on the Pentateuch*, 17.

¹⁹¹ Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra was one of the outstanding scholars of medieval Jewry. He was a poet, mathematician, astronomer, astrologer, grammarian, physician, and philosopher. His commentary on the Bible, especially on the Pentateuch, constitutes a major contribution to Biblical exegesis. One cannot be considered a true student of the Bible without studying it. Even Maimonides says: "How true and authentic are the interpretations of the wise scholar Abraham ibn Ezra..." See Strickman and Silver, *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis (Bereshit)*, vii.

subsequently attempted to flee due to the harsh treatment she received from Sarah (Gen 16:1-6). She reemerges in the narrative of her expulsion alongside her son Ishmael in Gen 21:8-21.¹⁹²

The narrative of Hagar in Genesis 16 commences by presenting the circumstances of Sarah, who, being advanced in age and barren, enticed Abraham with the aspiration of producing a surrogate heir through Hagar, an Egyptian slave (Gen 16:1).¹⁹³ Rashi elucidates this verse by characterizing Hagar as an Egyptian servitor. He posits that Hagar was originally the daughter of Pharaoh. When Pharaoh witnessed the miraculous events associated with Sarah, he declared, “My daughter should serve as a slave in this man’s household rather than occupy the position of a mistress in another man’s establishment.”¹⁹⁴

In Genesis 16:3, it is articulated that Abraham and Sarah had resided in Canaan for a decade, yet they had not been graced with progeny. Concerned about her infertility, Sarah resolved to persuade Abraham to establish a lineage through Hagar, who, should conception occur, would be regarded as the possession of her mistress, Sarah.¹⁹⁵ Rashi comments that in this verse, Sarah not only persuaded Abraham but also influenced Hagar by proclaiming, “Blessed are you because you will have the privilege of having relations with such a holy person.”¹⁹⁶ Ibn Ezra contextualizes Sarah’s rationale in persuading Hagar to engage in a relationship with Abraham. He states that, given the customs, traditions, and

¹⁹² Alexander, *Pentateuch*, 376.

¹⁹³ Genesis 16: 1: Now Sarai Abram’s wife bore him no children; and she had a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 18.

¹⁹⁴ Rashi refers to Midrashic Rabbah; Rabbi Simeon ben Johai said: Hagar was Pharaoh’s daughter. When Pharaoh saw what was happening for Sarah’s sake in his own house, he took his daughter and gave her to Sarah, saying, “It is better for my daughter to be a slave girl in this house than for her to be a mistress in another house;” and it is written, “And she had an Egyptian slave girl named Hagar,” to which (Pharaoh) said, “This is your reward (Hagar).” Abimelech also, when he saw the miracles that were happening in his house for Sarah’s sake, gave his daughter to Sarah, saying, “It is better for my daughter to be a slave girl in this house than for her to be a mistress in another house.” See Freedman and Maurice Simon, trans., *Midrash Rabbah*, vol. Genesis 1 (London: The Soncino Press, 1961), 380. See also “Genesis 16:1,” accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.16.1?lang=bi&with=Rashi&lang2=en>. In the Torah, Hagar’s origin from Egypt as Sarah’s slave is told in Genesis 12: 10-20. It is said that in Canaan there was a famine that prompted Abraham and Sarah to travel to Egypt (Gen 12: 10). Arriving in Egypt, the guards saw Sarah’s beauty and wanted to take her for Pharaoh. Abraham then asked Sarah to claim to be his sister (not his wife), so that he would not be killed by the Egyptians (Gen 12: 11-13). Sarah was then taken by palace officials and taken to Pharaoh’s house (Gen 12:14-15). Pharaoh then gave Abraham many gifts; sheep, oxen, donkeys, and a female slave (assumed to be Hagar) (Gen 12:16). However, God inflicted a plague on Pharaoh because Sarah was Abraham’s wife. Pharaoh became angry and threw Abraham and his entire entourage out of Egypt (Gen 12: 17-20). See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917), 14-16.

¹⁹⁵ Genesis 16: 3: And Sarai Abram’s wife took Hagar the Egyptian, her handmaid, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to Abram her husband to be his wife. See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 18.

¹⁹⁶ Rashi’s Commentary on the Pentateuch. See “Genesis 16:3,” accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.16.3?lang=bi&with=Rashi&lang2=en>.

laws that prevailed in Canaan during that time, a man could not remain married to a woman for over ten years without her having given him children.¹⁹⁷

Furthermore, within the exact scriptural text (Genesis), it is implicitly suggested that procreation is perceived as a fundamental human nature and obligation. For instance, in the priestly tradition of the creation narrative, the directive to reproduce directly follows the creation of humanity (Gen 1:28). In fact, “to be fruitful and multiply” constitutes the inaugural words God explicitly conveyed to humankind. According to the priestly writings, God reiterated this command on two separate occasions to the deluge survivors (Noah’s flood) (Gen 9:1,7). The significance of human fertility is underscored by its recurrent and close association with divine benediction. In both mythic accounts, the creation and the flood, the injunction to multiply is invariably preceded by the assertion that God bestows a blessing (Gen 9:1).¹⁹⁸

Thus, this contextual backdrop sufficiently elucidates the motivations underlying Sarah’s decision. Rabbi Ammi in *Midrash Rabbah*, quoting Resh Lakish, states: “If a man takes a wife and shares a life with her for ten years without offspring, ought she not to stay unfruitful?” The scripture supports this: “Once Abraham had been in Canaan for ten years,” which shows that the time beyond Canaan does not count. Consequently, Sarah designated Hagar to Abraham, her spouse, to serve as his wife, but not to any other; to be a wife, yet not in the capacity of a concubine.¹⁹⁹

Following Sarah’s entreaty, Abraham approached Hagar, and ultimately Hagar conceived (Gen 16: 4).²⁰⁰ In this instance, *Midrash Rabbah* elucidates Hagar’s status as a slave who is available for consortship with Abraham. According to Rabbi Simeon b. Lakish, Hagar was classified as a slave girl of the “*plucking*” type, indicating one who can be “plucked” or utilized for benefit. This implies that the husband (Abraham), concurrently

¹⁹⁷ Ibn Ezra’s Commentary on the Pentateuch. See “Genesis 16:3,” accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.16.3?lang=bi&with=Ibn%20Ezra&lang2=en>. Contemporary scholar argues that Sarah’s action was justified, since, in ancient Near Eastern tradition, when a slave girl gave birth to a baby, the baby automatically became the property of the slave’s master, who could treat the child as his own and enjoy every bit of biological hereditary status. Surrogacy is attested throughout the ancient East from the third to the first millennium BCE, from Babylonia to Egypt. Given the social mores of the ancient Near East, Sarai’s suggestion was a perfectly appropriate and honorable one. See ; Yusuf, “From Hebrew ‘Slave’ to Arabian ‘Sage’: Linking the Jewish and Muslim Narratives in the Story of Hagar, the African in Pre-Islamic Arab History,” 9.

¹⁹⁸ Beal and Gunn, *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies*, 39. Look at Genesis 1: 28: ‘... and God said unto them: ‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it....’ Genesis 9: 1: ‘And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth. 7: ‘And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; swarm in the earth, and multiply therein.’ See Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917), 2, 10.

¹⁹⁹ Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1, 381.

²⁰⁰ *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 18.

a master, can derive advantages from the *usufruct*²⁰¹ of his slave by providing her, while being prohibited from selling her.

Rabbi Levi ben Haytha articulated that Hagar experienced conception immediately following her inaugural sexual encounter with Abraham. In opposition to this assertion, Rabbi Eleazar contended that “a woman never conceives from her initial sexual intercourse.” Nevertheless, through an analogy of contrasting the statuses of Sarah and Hagar, Rabbi Hanina ben Pazzi elucidated the swiftness of Hagar’s gestation with a metaphor: “The thorns do not require weeding or planting, but instead grow and manifest independently; conversely, how much anguish and toil are requisite prior to the cultivation of wheat!”²⁰² This metaphor insinuates that, according to rabbinic exegesis, despite Abraham’s marriage to Hagar and the conception of her offspring, it did not intrinsically elevate Hagar’s status to that of an Israelite matriarch, since Hagar’s identity was that of a slave girl originating from a foreign territory, namely Egypt.²⁰³ In contrast, Sarah was the duly recognized Matriarch. Her tribulations are commemorated because she endeavored to provide progeny for her husband (Abraham the Patriarch) through the proposal of her maidservant, Hagar, as an alternative consort.²⁰⁴

In Genesis 16:4, it is mentioned that after Hagar became pregnant, her attitude changed, and she looked at Sarah with less respect. Midrashic texts describe the narrative of Hagar’s shifted attitude and Sarah’s emotional response.²⁰⁵ Rabbi Huna and Rabbi Jeremiah quote Rabbi Hiyya ben Abba, commenting on Sarah’s barrenness by arguing that a woman does not become pregnant immediately so that she can enjoy most of her life without being burdened by the responsibility of pregnancy. Sarah is an example, where she did not conceive for 90 years, and during that time, she still looked beautiful and attractive like a newlywed. Women often came to see her, and Sarah would tell them to visit Hagar, her slave. However, it turned out that Hagar embarrassed Sarah. She said, “Lady Sarah is not as good as she seems. If she is truly a pious woman, then why has she not been able to have children for years, while I can get pregnant in just one night?” After hearing that,

²⁰¹ The term usufruct comes from Latin, a combination of the words usus (use) and fructus (result or fruit). Historically, usufruct was a law that was applied in ancient Roman times. Usufruct is defined as a personal servitude in the sense that they are “attached to the person for whose benefit they are established, and terminate with his life.” See A. N. Yiannopoulos, “Usufruct: General Principles - Louisiana and Comparative Law,” *Louisiana Law Review* 27, no. 3 (1967): 371.

²⁰² Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1, 381.

²⁰³ Woolstenhulme, *The Matriarchs in Genesis Rabbah*, 35.

²⁰⁴ Woolstenhulme, *The Matriarchs in Genesis Rabbah*, 34.

²⁰⁵ Genesis 16: 4: And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 18.

Sarah felt it was inappropriate to argue directly with Hagar. She said, “Why should I serve that woman? I will face her master (Abraham) directly!”²⁰⁶

Sarah then complained about Hagar’s disrespectful attitude towards Abraham.²⁰⁷ However, when Sarah complained about this problem, Abraham replied, “Hagar is your servant; do to her whatever seems good to you” (Gen 16:6). The midrash interpretation interprets that Abraham’s statement was based on his feeling that he no longer had power over Hagar, because he said: “I can no longer treat her well or badly.”²⁰⁸ Finally, because Abraham felt he could not treat Hagar in any way, Sarah treated her harshly, so Hagar ran away (Gen 16:6) because she was afraid.²⁰⁹ Rashi interprets the fragment of the verse “And Sarah assaulted her,” namely that Sarah forced Hagar to work hard even though she was pregnant.²¹⁰ Tammi J. Schneider (2004) in her book “Sarah: Mother of Nations”²¹¹ explains the motive for Sarah’s bad treatment of Hagar. She explains that Hagar’s Egyptian heritage as a slave girl reminded Sarah of the ordeal she had previously experienced in Egypt, when she was taken to Pharaoh’s house (Gen 12:10-20).²¹²

This momentum marks Hagar’s inaugural flight into the desolate wilderness. It is recorded that Hagar sought refuge in her native region, *Shur* (Gen 16:7).²¹³ In a literal sense, *Shur* denotes “wall,” or a fortified structure that safeguarded Egypt to the East against incursions by Bedouin marauders engaged in thievery. It was in the wilderness that

²⁰⁶ Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1, 384.

²⁰⁷ Genesis 16: 5: And Sarai said unto Abram: ‘My wrong be upon thee: I gave my handmaid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee. See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 18. Rabbi Tanhuma said in the name of Rabbi Hiyya the Elder, and Rabbi Berekiah said in the name of Rabbi Eleazar: Whoever enthusiastically plunges into legal disputes will not escape unscathed. Sarah should have reached the age of Abraham, but because she said, “The LORD will judge between me and you,” her life was shortened by forty-eight years (Midrash Rabbah). See Freedman and Maurice Simon, trans., *Midrash Rabbah*, vol. Genesis 1 (London: The Soncino Press, 1961), 384.

²⁰⁸ Because according to the law (for example in Deuteronomy 21:14), if someone has been humiliated or treated unfairly, then no one can treat them as a slave anymore. This means that after Hagar suffered, Abraham did not feel it was right to treat her like a slave anymore. There is also another verse (Exodus 21:8) that states that a person cannot sell a woman to a foreign nation if she has been unfaithful or hurt her, so this adds to the reason that Hagar could not be treated as a slave anymore. See Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1, 384.

²⁰⁹ Genesis 16:6: And Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her face. See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 18.

²¹⁰ Rashi Commentaries on the Pentateuch “Genesis 16:6,” accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.16.6?lang=bi&with=Rashi&lang2=en>. In Midrash Rabbah, Rabbi Abba said: She (Sarah) restrained her (Hagar) from having sexual intercourse. Rabbi Berekiah said: She (Sarah) slapped her face with her sandal. Rabbi Berekiah said in the name of Rabbi Abba: She (Sarah) ordered her (Hagar) to carry a water bucket and a bath towel to the bathhouse. See Freedman and Maurice Simon, trans., *Midrash Rabbah*, vol. Genesis 1 (London: The Soncino Press, 1961), 384.

²¹¹ Tammi J. Schneider, *Sarah: Mother of Nations* (Continuum, 2004).

²¹² Schneider further emphasized that the biblical text clearly shows that Hagar as an Egyptian was not worthy of being an ancestor of Israel. See Woolstenhulme, *The Matriarchs in Genesis Rabbah*, 37.

²¹³ Genesis 16:7: And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur. See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 18.

the angel encountered her at a spring and communicated with her.²¹⁴ The angel inquired, “Hagar, Sarah’s servant, from whence do you come, and to what destination do you proceed?” to which Hagar replied, “I am escaping from my mistress Sarah” (Gen 16:8). Subsequently, the angel instructed Hagar to return to Sarah and to submit to her authority (Gen 16:9), and further proclaimed, “I shall greatly increase your progeny so that they shall be innumerable” (Gen 16:10). The angel reiterated to her, “Lo, you are with child and shall bear a son, and you shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has attentively regarded your suffering” (Gen 16:11).²¹⁵ Ibn Ezra interprets the phrase “Truly You,” or in Hebrew *Hinnakh* (הִנֵּנִי), as a linguistic form employed when addressing a woman.²¹⁶ According to Rashi, each pronouncement of the angel across these three verses is purportedly delivered by distinct angels. This accounts for the repeated use of the phrase “and an angel said to her.”²¹⁷ In the Talmudic discourse, referencing the pronouncement of the prophet Moses during his dialogue with the Divine, it is noted that God dispatched five angels at the time Hagar’s departure from Sarah.²¹⁸

In response to the angel’s inquiry, Hagar stated, *Attah El Ro’i* (אַתָּה אֵל רֹאִי), which translates to “You are the God Who Sees” (Gen 16:13). This moment signifies a theophany (divine encounter) that Hagar underwent directly in the wilderness. Nonetheless, in the Midrash Rabah, Rabbinic scholars further deliberate on the potentiality of Hagar having had a direct confrontation with the Divine. Some Rabbis contest this notion. For instance, Rabbi Yehuda b. R. Simon and Rabbi Yohanan (on behalf of Rabbi Eleazar b. Simeon) contend that God does not communicate directly with women, save for exceptionally devout women such as Sarah. To elucidate the Genesis verse explicitly stating *Attah El Ro’i*, Rabbi Yehoshua b. Nehemiah posits that it was, in fact, an angel who addressed Hagar, rather than God himself. Rabbi Samuel endeavors to illustrate Hagar’s theophany through an analogy of a noblewoman commanded to walk before the king. She relies on her attendant and remains oblivious to the king’s presence in proximity, while her servant

²¹⁴ Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary: Genesis*, 142.

²¹⁵ Tanakh: *The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 18.

²¹⁶ Ibn Ezra’s Commentaries on the Pentateuch “Genesis 16:11,” accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.16.11?lang=bi&with=Ibn%20Ezra&lang2=en>.

²¹⁷ Rashi’s Commentaries on the Pentateuch “Genesis 16:9,” accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.16.9?lang=bi&with=Rashi&lang2=en>. Within the interpretation of the Midrash Rabbah, Rabbi Ilama ibn Rabbi Ijanina said that there were five angels who spoke to Hagar. Other rabbis said there were four angels according to the word “angels” that appears in each verse. Rabbi Eliya mentioned, “Hagar, a slave, saw five angels and was not afraid of them.” Rabbi Isaac quoted that Abraham’s family were people who saw supernatural things, so Hagar was used to seeing them (including angels). See Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1:385.

²¹⁸ Polano, *The Talmud Selections from the Contents of That Ancient Book, Its Commentaries, Teachings, Poetry and Legends*, 145.

perceives the king. Similarly, Hagar “sees,” albeit not in the direct manner of beholding the Divine face²¹⁹

The interpretation of *El Ro'i* within this verse signifies that the Divine observes individuals subjected to oppression, exemplified by Hagar.²²⁰ Ibn Ezra elucidates that the term *Ro'i* (sees) within this verse adheres to the linguistic framework of *oni* (עֲנִי), which denotes suffering.²²¹ Rashi articulates the phrase *Attah El Ro'i*, or “God Who Sees” in the context of the Divine witness to the indignities endured by others.²²² Consequently, Hagar’s declaration in Genesis 16:13, *ha-gam halom ra'iti achare ro'i* (הִגַּם הָלֹם רָאִיתִי אַחֲרַי רֹאִי), translates to “have I here seen Him who sees me?” and, according to Ibn Ezra, implies “have I here beheld the angel of God after God observing my affliction, for God perpetually observes me (*ra'i*).”²²³ Hagar’s proclamation of *Attah El Ro'i* subsequently led to the designation of the spring in which she conversed with the angel, referred to as *Be'er-Lahai-Ro'i* (בְּעַר לְהֵי רֹאִי), which Rashi, drawing upon Targum Onkelos, posits as a well where the angel manifested to Hagar (Gen 16:14).²²⁴ Nevertheless, in accordance with Ibn Ezra’s interpretation, *Be'er-Lahai* denotes a well that is anticipated to be rejuvenated in the forthcoming year. This well was so named due to the annual festivities held by the Ishmaelites at the location. Presently, the well continues to exist and is designated as *Zamum*.²²⁵

Consequently, Hagar returned to Sarah and bore a son whom she named Ishmael. At Ishmael’s arrival into the world, Abraham was 86 years old (Gen 16:15-16). Rashi asserts that although Abraham did not receive the angel’s directive to Hagar instructing her to name the child Ishmael, the Divine Spirit had descended upon him, prompting him to name the child Ishmael.²²⁶ Thus, the narrative of Hagar’s initial exodus is chronicled in Genesis 16. In this chapter, Hagar is depicted as the sole woman who receives the promise of

²¹⁹ Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1, 388.

²²⁰ Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1, 387.

²²¹ Strickman and Silver, *Ibn Ezra’s Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis (Bereshit)*, 181.

²²² Rashi’s Commentary on the Pentateuch “Genesis 16:13,” accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.16.13?lang=bi&with=Rashi&lang2=en>.

²²³ Strickman and Silver, *Ibn Ezra’s Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis (Bereshit)*, 181.

²²⁴ Rashi’s commentary on the Pentateuch “Genesis 16:14,” accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.16.14?lang=bi&with=Rashi&lang2=en>.

²²⁵ Strickman and Silver, *Ibn Ezra’s Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis (Bereshit)*, 181. According to Bachya, I.E., the Ishmaelites met every year at this well; they called it by this name (Zamum), which most likely refers to the well of Zamzam (visited during the annual ritual of pilgrimage in Islam). Although according to Biblical interpretation, this well is geographically located between Kadesh and Bered. Modern geographers identified it as located in the Negev region, a desert area in the southern part of ancient Canaan (See https://biblehub.com/topical/b/beer-lahai-roi.htm?utm_). This area is physically far from the location of the Zamzam well, which is visited by Muslims every year, and is located in Mecca, the Arabian Peninsula. This implies that the Be’er-Lahai-Ro’i and Zamzam wells are two different well entities.

²²⁶ Rashi’s Commentary on the Pentateuch “Genesis 16:15 with Rashi,” accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.16.15?lang=bi&with=Rashi&lang2=en>.

progeny through an interaction with an angel. She bears Abraham's first son and is also the first woman to invoke the name of God (*El Ro'i*) within the Hebrew Bible. Hagar's account in this chapter has been linked to her position as the progenitor of Abraham's first son.²²⁷

The complexity of Hagar's narrative escalates when God declares that His covenant will be sustained through Abraham's distinguished lineage, specifically through Sarah's son, Isaac (Gen 17: 19-21),²²⁸ which promises blessings not solely for the nation descended from Abraham but also for other nations, of which Abraham himself is the spiritual progenitor.²²⁹ Eventually, Sarah conceives and delivers a son in her advanced years, in accordance with God's promise,²³⁰ and Abraham designates the child as Isaac.²³¹ Upon Isaac's birth, Abraham was 100 years old (Gen 21:5). Consequently, Isaac grew up and was weaned. On the occasion of Isaac's weaning, Abraham hosted a substantial celebration. However, Sarah perceived Hagar's son, Ishmael, engaging in playing sport or derision (*metzachek*/מִצַּחֵק) towards Isaac (Gen 21:8-9). At this juncture, the discord between Sarah and Hagar intensifies, catalyzing Hagar's subsequent journey into the wilderness.

Numerous interpretations of the term *metzachek* exist, which incited ire in Sarah. In the midrash Rabbah, for instance, Rabbi Akiba elucidates that when Sarah observed Ishmael "playing sport," the implication was not mere childlike playfulness, but rather engaging in conduct deemed reprehensible. Within this framework, Rabbi Akiba asserts that Ishmael engaged in acts of sexual violence against minors, seduced married women, and violated their dignity. An alternative interpretation is provided by Rabbi Ishmael, who asserts that the phrase "playing sport" within this scriptural context signifies the act of idol worship. He interprets Sarah's observation as Ishmael constructing an altar or *mezbah* (מִזְבֵּחַ), specifically by capturing grasshoppers and subsequently presenting them as sacrifice offerings. Rabbi Eleazar interprets the term *metzachek* in relation to violence, and even homicide. This interpretation is corroborated by the account of Rabbi Azariah (on behalf of Rabbi Levi), who recounts an incident in which Ishmael lured Isaac to the fields

²²⁷ Woolstenhulme, *The Matriarchs in Genesis Rabbah*, 36.

²²⁸ Then Abraham said to God, "May Ishmael live before You" (Gen 17:18). But the Lord answered, "No. Your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will name him Isaac. I will establish My covenant with her, as an everlasting covenant for her descendants (Gen 17:19). Concerning Ishmael, I have heard your prayer. I will bless him also: he will have many children and be very great. He will be the father of twelve leaders, and I will make him into a great nation Gen 17:20]. But I will confirm My covenant with Isaac, the child that Sarah will give birth to at the time I have appointed, next year" (Gen 17:21]. See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 19–20.

²²⁹ Alexander, *Pentateuch*, 10.

²³⁰ According to Ibn Ezra the phrase "The Promised One" refers to the angel who asked, "Where is your wife, Sarah?" (Gen 18:9). The same angel returned to Abraham because he had promised to come again. See "Genesis 21:2," accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.21.2?lang=bi&with=Ibn%20Ezra&lang2=en>.

²³¹ According to Ibn Ezra, God never added any letters to Isaac's name, and never changed it, because God himself commanded Abraham to name his son Isaac. See "Genesis 21:3," accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.21.3?lang=bi&with=Ibn%20Ezra&lang2=en>.

under the pretence of playful antics, yet intended to assassinate Isaac with an arrow.²³² A further interpretation posits that the *metzachek* in question pertains to issues of inheritance. Upon the birth of Isaac, which brought elation to all, Ishmael derisively remarked, “You fools, I am the firstborn and am entitled to a double portion of the inheritance.” Consequently, Sarah implored Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael, asserting that Ishmael ought not to share in the inheritance with Isaac, either as her son or as Abraham’s progeny.²³³

The latter interpretation aligns with Rashi’s articulated interpretation. In his commentary, an indignant Sarah declared, “If he (Ishmael) is merely my son, yet he is inferior to Isaac, even if he were equal to Isaac, but he is not my son, he remains undeserving of a shared inheritance with Isaac. Thus, it is evident that he does not merit to inherit alongside Isaac (Gen 21:10).²³⁴ Nevertheless, of all the midrashic interpretations, Ibn Ezra presents the most straightforward elucidation of the term *metzachek* (making sport). He contends that Ishmael was merely exhibiting typical behaviour of a youthful male. Consequently, Sarah experienced jealousy due to his elder status compared to her son,²³⁵ prompting her to request that Abraham expel Hagar and her son Ishmael from their household, asserting that neither Hagar nor Ishmael would qualify as heirs alongside her son Isaac.

In light of the circumstances, Abraham experienced profound sadness (Gen 21:11) upon receiving Sarah’s entreaty to cast out Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21:12). Subsequently, God instructed Abraham not to lament over Hagar and Ishmael, asserting that only the progeny of Isaac would be recognised as Abraham’s descendants (Gen 21:12). Rabbi Judan ben Shilum posited that this verse does not merely denote “Isaac,” but instead employs the phrase *b’Yitzhaq* (בְּיִצְחָק), which signifies “in Isaac.” Rabbi Azariah further elucidated that the letter *b’* (בְּ) in this context means two aspects: Abraham’s genuine heirs embrace the

²³² Ishmael was very fond of hunting and field sports. He always carried his bow with him, and on one occasion, when Isaac was about five years old, Ishmael aimed his arrow at the child, shouting, “Now I will shoot you.” Sarah witnessed this act, and fearing for her son’s safety, and disliking the son of her maidservant, she complained much to Abraham about the boy’s conduct, and urged him to drive Hagar and Ishmael out of his tent, and send them to live elsewhere. See Polano, *The Talmud Selections from the Contents of That Ancient Book, Its Commentaries, Teachings, Poetry and Legends*, 50.

²³³ Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1, 470.

²³⁴ Rashi Commentaries on the Pentateuch “Genesis 21:10,” accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.21.10?lang=bi&with=Rashi&lang2=en>.

²³⁵ Ibn Ezra Commentaries on the Pentateuch “Genesis 21:9,” accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.21.9?lang=bi&with=Ibn%20Ezra&lang2=en>. In Genesis, it is mentioned that when Ishmael was born, Abraham was 86 years old (Gen 16:16). Then when Isaac was born, Abraham was 100 years old (Gen 21:5). So the age difference between Abraham when his two children were born was 14 years, which implies that Ishmael was 14 years older than Isaac. Then, assuming weaning was done at the age of 2-3 years, the age gap between Ishmael and Isaac is 16-17 years.

belief in both this world and the world to come.²³⁶ Although the biblical narrative depicts Ishmael as partaking in specific promised blessings (Gen 21:13 and Gen 17:20), Isaac will exclusively inherit the covenant (Gen 21:12 and Gen 17:19, 21). Thus, Hagar and Ishmael were expelled from Abraham's household.²³⁷

The following morning, Abraham arose early, procured bread and a jug of water, and presented them to Hagar, placing the child (Ishmael) upon her shoulder (Gen 21:14). According to Rashi's interpretation, Abraham distinguished his provision of bread and water from gold or silver, as he disapproved of Ishmael leading a morally corrupt existence. Abraham's act of placing Ishmael on Hagar's shoulder was necessitated by the effects of the malevolent gaze (*ayin hara*/עֵיִן הָרָעָה) that Sarah had cast upon Ishmael, resulting in him suffering from fever and incapacity to walk.²³⁸ Hagar subsequently traversed into the desert of Beersheba. Midrash suggests that her disorientation in the desert signifies a regression to idolatry reminiscent of her father's household.²³⁹

Concurrently, Ezra presents a more nuanced interpretation in his commentary on this verse. He asserts that the ensuing morning, Abraham bestowed upon Hagar a vessel of water (crafted from animal skin or wood) and bread, which was subsequently positioned on her shoulder. He then instructed Hagar to depart with Ishmael. Ezra further posits that it is plausible that Abraham was also allotted gold or silver, albeit this is not explicitly delineated in the biblical text. Abraham ensured that the provisions were adequate at least until Beer Sheba. Nevertheless, Hagar found herself lost in the desert of Beer Sheba, while Ishmael succumbed to illness due to thirst.²⁴⁰ Ezra additionally elucidated the astonishment exhibited by the populace regarding Abraham's demeanour, which was perceived as cruel for merely expelling Hagar, his wife, and Ishmael, his son, providing them only with bread

²³⁶ Rabbi Judan also quotes the Psalms: God gave a sign that the true descendants of Abraham are those who believe in God's law and decrees, and in the existence of two worlds. Conversely, those who do not believe in two worlds are not true descendants of Abraham. See Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1, 471.

²³⁷ Alexander, *Pentateuch*, 11.

²³⁸ Pearl, *Rashi Commentaries on the Pentateuch*, 48. In the midrash, the rabbis differ regarding Ishmael's age at the time of this expulsion. Some rabbis explain that Ishmael was twenty-seven years old at the time (by assuming that Ishmael was fourteen when Isaac was born), thus Isaac was already thirteen at the time. However, the Genesis narrative states that Ishmael was placed on Hagar's shoulders. So how could a 27-year-old boy be placed on his mother's shoulders? Furthermore, the previous narrative states that Sarah's request to Abraham to expel Hagar and Ishmael was at the time Isaac was weaned. So other rabbis interpret that Ishmael was seventeen years old at the time. Isaac was three years old. However, why was Ishmael placed on Hagar's shoulders at that age? The answer according to the rabbis is that Sarah had looked at him with the evil eye (*ayin hara*), so that he was struck with fever and pain, and could not walk. See Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1: 472.

²³⁹ Pearl, *Rashi Commentaries on the Pentateuch*, 48.

²⁴⁰ Ibn Ezra's Commentaries on the Pentateuch. See "Genesis 21:14," accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.21.14?lang=bi&with=Ibn%20Ezra&lang2=en>.

and water for sustenance. However, Ezra underscored that Abraham's actions were dictated by a divine command from his God, as conveyed through Sarah.²⁴¹

Rashi elucidates that Hagar found herself in the desolate wilderness of Beersheba, where the water supply was depleted due to Ishmael's incessant drinking while suffering from illness.²⁴² As per Ezra, Ishmael's affliction was attributed to water scarcity. Consequently, Hagar resolved to bear him. Upon realising that Ishmael was succumbing to dehydration, she placed him beneath one of the bushes (*sihim*/שִׁיחַים) (Gen 21:15).²⁴³ Then, Hagar positioned herself at a distance from him (*mi neged*/מִנֶּגֶד), not far away (*harhek*/הֶרְחֵק) but rather at a distance commensurate to the flight of an arrow (Gen 21:16). According to Ezra, the interpretation of the phrase "as far as an arrow's throw" in this context refers to the distance Hagar distanced herself from Ishmael to avoid witnessing his demise.²⁴⁴ Rabbi Berekiah posits that this phrase also signifies a woman expressing doubt regarding divine justice, articulating: "Yesterday You assured me that 'I will multiply your descendants' (Gen 16:10), and now he (Ishmael) is on the brink of death from thirst!"²⁴⁵ Additionally, some interpretations suggest that Ishmael uttered a cry (whimpered) to Hagar for water amidst the arid desert, prompting Hagar to offer a prayer.²⁴⁶

In reply, the Almighty recognized the wails of the child (Ishmael), thereafter an angel cried out to Hagar, asking, "What distressing you, Hagar?" (Gen 21:17).²⁴⁷ Rashi observes that although the Scriptures assert that Hagar initiated the prayer, the biblical text indicates that "God heard the voice of the boy." This demonstrates that the supplications of those who are ill possess greater efficacy than those of others and are prioritised in divine

²⁴¹ Ibn Ezra's Commentaries on the Pentateuch "Genesis 21." Sarah realized that without the expulsion, Ishmael, not her son, would inherit from Abraham. God agreed to her plan. Hagar was a clear outsider, who threatened the covenant line from the start by bearing a son before Sarah. Such foreign influences had to be removed to ensure the purity of Israel's lineage. See Woolstenhulme, *The Matriarchs in Genesis Rabbah*, 36.

²⁴² Rashi's Commentaries on the Pentateuch "Genesis 21:15 with Rashi," accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.21.15?lang=bi&with=Rashi&lang2=en>.

²⁴³ Rabbi Meir interpreted the *sihim* as a juniper tree (a type of desert cypress). Rabbi Ammi said: [The expression "under one of the bushes (*sihim*)" suggests] that it was there that the ministering angels spoke (*hesihu*) to him. See Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1:472. See "Genesis 21."

²⁴⁴ Ibn Ezra Commentaries on the Pentateuch "Genesis 21:16," accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.21.16?lang=bi&with=Ibn%20Ezra&lang2=en>.

²⁴⁵ Rabbi Berekiah parallels Hagar's lamentation to her God amidst the wilderness with the prayer offered by David in Psalms 56:9: "You have numbered my wanderings" (Psalm 56:9), which means: "You have numbered my lost journeys." "Gather my tears into Your bottle," [Measure their value against] the woman who also had a bottle (i.e., Hagar). "Is it not written in Your book?" (same verse), as it is written in the Book of Psalms: "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and attend to my cry; do not keep silent my tears" (Psalm 39:13). You did not keep silent Hagar's cry; will You keep silent my cry? And if you say, "Because she is a stranger, she is dearer," so do I, "For I am a stranger before You, a sojourner like all my fathers." (Psalm 39:13, last part). See Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1, 473.

²⁴⁶ Polano, *The Talmud Selections from the Contents of That Ancient Book, Its Commentaries, Teachings, Poetry and Legends*, 144.

²⁴⁷ Polano, *The Talmud Selections from the Contents of That Ancient Book, Its Commentaries, Teachings, Poetry and Legends*, 144.

response.²⁴⁸ In the midrash, Rabbi Simon interprets that the ministering angels, upon hearing Ishmael's lamentations, hastened to accuse him, questioning God, "Lord of the universe! Will You provide an open well for one whose descendants will (in the future)²⁴⁹ harm Your children by neglecting to quench their thirst?" God inquired, "What is his current status, a virtuous individual or a transgressor?" They affirmed, "He is a virtuous individual." God responded, "I render judgment based solely on an individual's present actions (literally, based on their time)."²⁵⁰

Consequently, the holy writing advances with the call to action: "Stand up, raise the boy, for I will create a prominent nation from him" (Gen 21:18), and "The Lord made Hagar aware, and she discovered a well; and she filled her jar and sustained her child" (Gen 21:19).²⁵¹ The narrative advances in Gen 21:20, detailing the existence of Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness. It is noted that divine providence accompanied the boy (Ishmael), who matured into a formidable archer (*Robeh Kashoth*/רֹבֵה קִשְׁתוֹת). The Midrash interprets this verse by asserting that as he matured (*rabbah*/רַבָּה), so too did his propensity for cruelty (*kashiuth*/קָשִׁיוּת) intensify. Conversely, an alternative interpretation posits that in his youth (*robeh*/רֶבֶה), Ishmael adeptly trained himself in the art of archery.²⁵² Rashi's scholarly view indicates that Ishmael was indeed a notable archer. Having adapted to the exigencies of wilderness life, Ishmael leveraged his skills to plunder travellers. This interpretation correlates with Gen 16:12, articulating Ishmael's prophetic characterisation: "His hand will be against everyone."²⁵³

Ultimately, Hagar and Ishmael were divinely rescued from peril by an angelic being and received divine protection, notwithstanding the midrashic claim that Ishmael did not represent the child of the covenant.²⁵⁴ For an interval, Ishmael cohabited with his mother in the arid expanse of Paran,²⁵⁵ continuously indulging in his profound affinity for hunting;

²⁴⁸ Pearl, *Rashi Commentaries on the Pentateuch*, 48.

²⁴⁹ Gerald Friedlande, *Sepher Haaggadah Consiting of Parables and Legends from Talmud and Medrash* (P. Valentine and Sons, 1914), 65.

²⁵⁰ Friedlande, *Sepher Haaggadah Consiting of Parables and Legends from Talmud and Medrash*, 67.

²⁵¹ Benjamin ben Levi and Rabbi Jonathan ben Amram interpret that all people can be considered blind, until the Holy One opens their eyes; an example is Hagar. So when Hagar opened her eyes, she saw a spring and immediately filled her bottle because she was afraid that the well would disappear again. Both rabbis concluded that it is a sign that Hagar lacked faith. See Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1, 474.

²⁵² Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1, 474.

²⁵³ Rashi's Commentaries on the Pentateuch "Genesis 21:20," accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.21.20?lang=bi&with=Rashi&lang2=en>. Gen 16: 12: And he (Ishmael) shall be a wild ass of a man: his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the face of all his brethren. See Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917), 18.

²⁵⁴ Alexander, *Pentateuch*, 373.

²⁵⁵ El Paran was probably a port at the northern end of the Gulf of Akaba, Red Sea. See Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Hafiorahs, Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary: Genesis*, 127.

subsequently, they migrated to Egypt, where Ishmael entered into matrimony (Gen 21:21), and fathered four sons and a daughter.²⁵⁶ Nevertheless, he soon returned to his cherished abode in the wilderness,²⁵⁷ establishing encampments for himself, his kin, and his progeny. God had bestowed upon him abundant blessings, rendering him the proprietor of extensive flocks and herds.²⁵⁸

After an extended absence in the wilderness, Hagar and Ishmael received permission from Sarah, thanks to Abraham's successful persuasion efforts. Initially, Sarah was resistant to this idea. Nevertheless, Abraham was ultimately granted permission to proceed on the stipulation Sarah had articulated, specifically that he remain seated on his camel. As Abraham then called upon his daughter-in-law, requesting a drink of water. However, she declined to refresh him and refused to acknowledge his presence. She even chastised the children and directed curses towards them as well as her spouse, Ishmael. This provoked Abraham's anger, prompting him to leave a message for his son: "An elderly man from the land of Canaan has visited, and requests that you remove the principal support of your tent and substitute it with a superior one." Upon Ishmael's return and receipt of the message, he comprehended that his father had come to visit him and that he was experiencing maltreatment from his wife. Consequently, he divorced his wife and took another woman as his spouse.²⁵⁹ Three years later, Abraham made a subsequent visit to see his son, but found Ishmael absent once more. He addressed Ishmael's wife, asking, "Please provide me with a small amount of water." Promptly, she offered him bread and water, extending him a warm welcome. Abraham then rose and prayed for his son's welfare, after which Ishmael's household experienced abundant worldly blessings. Upon arriving home, his partner recounted the occurrences that had unfolded. Thus, he realised that his father retained affection for him; hence it is stated, "As a father pities his children."²⁶⁰

Such is the narrative interpretation concerning Hagar and her journey through the wilderness as recounted in Genesis 16 and 21. While the Genesis account offers a foundational understanding of Hagar's exile and divine encounter, it is not the sole biblical

²⁵⁶ The Midrash explains that since Hagar was from Egypt, Ishmael eventually married an Egyptian woman. Rabbi Isaac said: "Throw a stick in the air and it will fall to its native land." That is, Ishmael eventually returned to his roots. Since his mother was Hagar, an Egyptian woman (Genesis 16:1), it was natural that his mother would find him a wife from Egypt. Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 1, 474.

²⁵⁷ Abraham's family lived "between Kadesh and Shur" (Gen 20:1), in the northern Sinai Peninsula, and when Hagar and Ishmael were initially expelled, they were in the wilderness of Beersheba (Gen 21:14), which seems to have been between Beersheba and Kadesh, about forty miles south of it. Both had wandered northeast from their original home and then moved directly south to settle. See Alexander, *Pentateuch*, 893.

²⁵⁸ Polano, *The Talmud Selections from the Contents of That Ancient Book, Its Commentaries, Teachings, Poetry and Legends*, 50.

²⁵⁹ Katsh, *Judaism and the Koran: Biblical and Talmudic Backgrounds of the Koran and Its Commentaries*, 102.

²⁶⁰ Friedlande, *Sepher Haaggadah Consiting of Parables and Legends from Talmud and Medrash*, 67.

account that highlights her existence and experiences. In the Islamic tradition, although lacking in extensive narrative detail, the Qur'an encompasses theological and emotional nuances pertaining to Hagar's journey in the wilderness. To exemplify this parallel, the subsequent section will examine Surah Ibrahim: 37, a verse frequently interpreted in relation to Hagar's journey in the wilderness or the desert of Mecca.

3.2 Close Reading of Surah Ibrahim (14): 37

In the Islamic tradition, the appellation of Hagar does not appear explicitly within the sacred text of the Qur'an. Nevertheless, her narrative can be discerned within a specific verse found in Surah Ibrahim (14): 37, which encapsulates the supplication of the Prophet Ibrahim to his Lord after he departs from his progeny in a desolate valley.²⁶¹ Numerous classical exegetical works have construed this verse as intricately connected to the incident wherein the prophet Ibrahim situated Hagar and Ishmael in an arid expanse adjacent to the House of God. This section explores the verse while referencing classical commentaries, hadith literature, and the biographical accounts of the Prophet to elucidate the framework of Islamic tradition concerning Hagar.

Unlike the Judaic tradition, the Qur'an does not overtly reference Hagar's identification. Nevertheless, her story is frequently detailed in the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (hadith) and investigated by classical *mufasssir*.²⁶² Ibn Ḥadīdah (d. 1382 CE) articulated the lineage of Hagar. He relayed a statement from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "Upon your conquest of Egypt, extend kindness to its inhabitants, for

²⁶¹ Although the full story of Hagar is only implicitly found in the Qur'ān, this does not mean that Hagar's story is not significant in Islamic tradition. According to Muhammad Ahmad Khalafullah (d. 1998 CE) in his work *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, he revealed that the Qur'ān rarely presents stories related to certain historical events. It is as if the Qur'ān deliberately hides the historical elements of a story, be it the time, place, and actors. He further concluded that this happens because the main purpose of the narrative in the Qur'ān is to explain the moral, social, and religious messages implied by the story. In other words, historicity is not the main purpose of the stories in the Qur'ān. However, Khalafullah continues to emphasize that the stories told in the Qur'ān contain truth (al-ḥaqq). What is meant by the truth of the story is the goals that the Qur'ān wants to achieve, not justification for the historical elements in the story. Thus, the moral, religious, and good messages are actually the main purpose of the Qur'ān in telling a story. See Muhammad Ahmad Khalafullah, *Al-Qur'an Bukan "Kitab Sejarah": Seni, Sastra, Dan Moralitas Dalam Kisah-Kisah al-Qur'an* (Paramadina, 2002), 9, 15.

²⁶² Khalil 'Athamina (1998), a historian and academic known for his research in early Islamic history and the relationship between the Judeo-Christian tradition and Islamic literature, argues that classical Muslim scholars, including Ibn Kathīr, considered the Torah (Taurāt) as the basis for validating information about Hagar. Pioneers of classical Qur'anic interpretation, such as Ibn 'Abbas, often engaged and referred to his colleagues among the ahl al-kitab in the elaborate investigation of the story of Hagar on her journey with Abraham, utilizing the insights of Jewish and Christian scholars who had converted to Islam. See Khalil 'Athamina, "Biblical Quotations in Muslim Religious Literature: A Perspective of Dogma and Politics," *Purdue University Press*, Shofar, Vol. 16, no. No. 3 (1998): 85–86. Further, a contemporary cleric named Shabir Ally (2020), in his online lecture, emphasized that Muslims from the past to the present would not have known the name Hagar if it were not for the presence of stories from the Bible. See also Shabir Ally, "Hagar in the Bible & Quran | Dr. Shabir Ally - YouTube," 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axNeZEkLUBU>.

they possess a covenant and familial ties with us.” Then, Ibn Ishaq remarked, “I inquired of Muhammad ibn Muslim az-Zuhri: “What familial ties did the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) refer to?” He responded: “Hagar, the progenitor of Prophet Ishmael, was indeed one of them (Egyptians).”²⁶³

Ibn Hisham (d. 833 CE) asserted, “All Arabs are descendants of Ishmael and Qahtan. Certain scholars from Yemen assert that Qahtan descends from Ishmael. They further claim that Ishmael is the patriarch of all Arabs.”²⁶⁴ In a separate hadith, it is noted that the Messenger of Allah proclaimed: “Safeguard the rights of the protected individuals (*Ahl al-Dhimma*), specifically those who are of darker complexion, robust physique, and curly hair, for they share blood ties and marital connections (with us).” Umar Mawla Ghufrah stated: “Their blood relations stem from Ishmael’s mother, who was the maternal figure of the Prophet, and their marital connections arise because the Messenger of Allah espoused one of them.” Ibnu Lahiah remarked: “Ishmael’s mother, Hagar (Hājar), was the matriarch of an Arab from a settlement directly opposite the *Faramah* in Egypt.”²⁶⁵

Taqī al-Fāsī (d. 1429 CE) elucidates the etymology of the name Hājar through the exegesis of Ibn Hisham. It is maintained that the Arabs designated her as *Hājar* and *Ajar*,²⁶⁶ switching the *alif* with the *ha*, as illustrated in their sayings, such as “*ḥaraq al-mā’a*” (flowing water) and “*Araq al-mā’a*” (spilling water), among several others.²⁶⁷ Conversely, an alternative interpretation provided by Mullā ‘Alī al-Qārī (d. 1606 CE) indicates that Hājar was designated as such due to her migratory journey, specifically her transit from *Sham* (Syria) to Mecca.²⁶⁸ Hājar, in accordance with her provenance, is recognised as a

²⁶³ Muḥammad (aw ‘Abd Allāh) ibn ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ḥasan al-Anṣārī Ḥadīdah Abū ‘Abd Allāh, Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn, *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Muḍī Fī Kitāb al-Nabī al-Ummī Wa-Rusulih Ilā Mulūk al-Arḍ Min ‘Arabī Wa-‘Ajamī* (‘Ālam al-Kutub, n.d.), 2:142.

²⁶⁴ Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Hishām ibn Ayūb al-Ḥamīrī Mu‘āfarī, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyah Li Ibn Hishām* (Sharikat al-Ṭabā‘ah al-Fannīyah al-Muttaḥidah, n.d.), 1:8. Ibn Hisham explained that the entire Arab nation is descended from the descendants of Ismail and Qahtan (the father of the southern Arab nation, the original Arab). The Arabs used to call the mother of the Prophet Ishmael as Hajar and Ajar, just as they called them Haraq al-mā’ and Araqahu. Hajar was from the people of Egypt; she was the mother of the Arab nation. The village where she came from was in the region of Al-Firma. In Futūḥ Miṣr by Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, Hajar’s village is called “the village that is near Umm Dunayn”, and Hajar was buried in Hijr, namely Hijr Ismail ‘alayhis-salām. See Muḥammad (aw ‘Abd Allāh) ibn ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ḥasan al-Anṣārī Ḥadīdah Abū ‘Abd Allāh, Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn, *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Muḍī Fī Kitāb al-Nabī al-Ummī Wa-Rusulih Ilā Mulūk al-Arḍ Min ‘Arabī Wa-‘Ajamī*, vol. 2 (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, n.d.), 142.

²⁶⁵ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī Fāsī Taqī al-Dīn, Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Makkī al-Ḥasanī, *Shifā’ Al-Gharām Bi-Akḥbār al-Balad al-Ḥarām* (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2000), 2:19.

²⁶⁶ Hajar, with jīm pronounced fathah (Haajar), is the name of the mother of Prophet Ismail ‘alayhis-salām. Also called Ājar, as in al-Qāmūs. See Abū Ḥatīm Muḥammad bin Ḥibbān bin Aḥmad al-Tamīmī Bustī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān: Al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ ‘alā al-Taqāsīm Wa al-Anwā’ Min Ghayr Wujūd Qaṭ’ Fī Sanadihā Wa Lā Thubūt Jarḥ Fī Nāqilihā* (Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2012), 4:62.

²⁶⁷ Taqī al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥasanī al-Fāsī Makkī, *Al-‘Iqd al-Thamīn Fī Tārīkh al-Balad al-Amīn* (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1998), 1:297.

²⁶⁸ ‘Alī ibn (Sulṭān) Muḥammad Qārī Abū al-Ḥasan Nūr al-Dīn al-Mullā al-Harawī, *Mirqāt Al-Mafātīḥ Sharḥ Mishkāṭ al-Maṣābīḥ* (Dār al-Fikr, 2002), 9:3640.

woman of Qibṭī descent who was bestowed upon Sārah by the Egyptian monarch, who had previously sought to wed Sārah, but Divine intervention thwarted his intentions.²⁶⁹ A somewhat divergent account is presented by al-Suhayli, who posits that Hājar was once an enslaved individual under a Jordanian sovereign named Sadouq, who transferred her to Sārah after being captivated by her beauty.²⁷⁰ It is noted that Hājar was originally the offspring of a king from the Egyptian dynasty.²⁷¹

Ibn Hibbān (d. 965 CE) provides a succinct narration regarding Hājar being conferred to Sārah in servitude. It is reported that a despotic ruler, who initially sought to approach Sārah, was struck with fear (having experienced paralysis on multiple occasions in her proximity), and remarked to his attendant, “You have not presented a human being, but a devil!” Consequently, he liberated Sārah and bestowed Hājar as a servant. Upon observing Hājar, Ibrahīm inquired, “*Mahyam?*”²⁷² which translates to “What transpired?” *Mahyam?* is articulated as *mīm fathāh, hā’ sukun, and yā’ fathāh*. This constitutes an interrogative phrase signifying: How are you? What is your purpose? or what has occurred to you?²⁷³ Bukhārī further elucidates, “She (Hājar) approached him (Abraham) while he was engaged in prayer, and she signalled with her hand.”²⁷⁴

Thus, this delineates the commencement of Hājar’s existence within Abraham’s household as Sārah’s servant. Hājar was a bequest from a tyrannical monarch who

²⁶⁹ Faysal ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Faysal ibn Ḥamad al-Mubārak al-Ḥarīmī Najdī, *Taṭrīz Riyāḍ Al-Ṣāliḥīn* (Dār al-‘Āshimah li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī, 2002), 1064.

²⁷⁰ Imam al-Bukhārī explained, narrated by Abu Hurairah, the Prophet Muhammad saw. said: Prophet Ibrahim as. migrated with Sarah and entered a region where there was a king or tyrant. The King received news that Abraham had entered his territory, and a charming woman accompanied him. So the king met Abraham and asked, “O Abraham! Who is this woman accompanying you?” Abraham answered, “She is my sister (in religion).” Then Abraham approached Sarah and said, “Do not contradict my statement, for I told them you are my sister. By Allah, there are no believers in this land except you and me.” So Abraham sent Sarah to the King. When the King was about to approach her, Sarah got up and took ablution, while praying, “O Allah, if I have believed in You and Your Messenger, and have guarded my private parts from everyone except my husband, then do not let this infidel control me.” Hearing that, the king became restless and started moving his feet. Seeing the condition of the king, Sarah said, “O Allah! If he dies, people will say that I have killed him.” The king regained his strength and walked back to Sarah, but she got up again and performed ablution, praying and saying, “O Allah! If I have believed in You and Your Messenger and have kept my private parts safe from anyone except my husband, then please do not let this infidel defeat me.” The king became restless again and started moving his feet. Seeing the condition of the king, Sarah said, “O Allah! If he dies, people will say that I have killed him.” The king received two or three attacks, and after recovering from the last attack, he said, “By God! You have sent Satan upon me. Take her back to Abraham and give her Ajar!” So Sarah went back to Abraham and said, “Allah humiliated the infidel and gave us a slave girl to serve him.” See “Sahih Al-Bukhari 2217 - Sales and Trade - كتاب البيوع - Sunnah.Com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم)”, accessed May 25, 2025, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:2217>.

²⁷¹ Fāsī, *Shifā’ Al-Gharām Bi-Akhbār al-Balad al-Ḥarām*, 2:19.

²⁷² Buṣṭī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibbān: Al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ ‘alā al-Taḳāsīm Wa al-Anwā’ Min Ghayr Wujūd Qaṭ’ Fī Sanadihā Wa Lā Thubūt Jarḥ Fī Nāqilihā*, 4:62.

²⁷³ ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn Sayf al-Dīn ibn Sa’d Allāh al-Bukhārī al-Dihlawī Ḥanafī, *Lam’āt Al-Tanqīḥ Fī Sharḥ Mishkāṭ al-Maṣābīḥ* (Dār al-Nawādir, 2014), 9:179.

²⁷⁴ Hamzah Muḥammad Qāsim, *Minār Al-Qārī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Maktabah Dār al-Bayān, 1990), 4:187.

harboured aspirations of possessing and subjugating Sārah. However, due to Sārah's supplication to Allah, the ruler suffered paralysis thrice whenever he endeavoured to perpetrate malevolence against Sārah. Ultimately, the monarch liberated Sārah and granted Hājar as a substitute. Hājar was under the servitude of the oppressive king. Upon her return to Ibrāhīm, Sārah articulated: "May Allah humiliate the malevolent, and let Hājar be your servant."²⁷⁵

The presence of Hājar introduced a significant dynamic within Ibrāhīm's existence. She functioned not merely as a domestic servant but as a pivotal component in a succession of spiritual trials that contributed to the formation of Ibrāhīm's prophethood. Among the most arduous challenges faced by Ibrāhīm was his endurance in the absence of progeny until he and his spouse Sārah reached an advanced age. Ultimately, Allah gave him descendants through Hājar, who became pregnant with a son named Ismā'īl.²⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the sight of Hājar in a state of pregnancy induced feelings of restlessness and despondency in Sārah, particularly in light of her advanced age, her hair having greyed, and her body having become frail due to the passage of time,²⁷⁷ all while she remained childless. She commenced expressing her discontent to Ibrāhīm, driven by her profound jealousy of Hājar, and voiced her discomfort regarding Hājar to him.²⁷⁸ According to the exegesis of al-Tha'labī (d. 1036), Ibrāhīm found it increasingly difficult to bear the weight of his advancing age, coupled with Sārah's harshness and scorn, prompting him to contemplate voicing his grievances concerning Sārah's conduct. He admonished himself, reasoning, "*Sārah lacks rationality, whereas you are endowed with wisdom; therefore, one ought to exercise patience in the face of the actions of an erratic individual, akin to a noble and sagacious man.*" Consequently, he resolved to maintain his silence.²⁷⁹

The majority of Islamic tafsīr provide a similar perspective on the root of Sārah's jealousy, asserting that Hājar's ability to conceive and bear a son for Ibrāhīm served as the catalyst. As articulated by Shahāb al-Dīn al-Nuwairī (d. 1333 CE), Sārah harbored deep affection for Ibrāhīm throughout her life. Thus, Sārah experienced jealousy and was unable

²⁷⁵ Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Munajjid, *Durūs Li-l-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Munajjid (Min Durūs Ṣawtiyyah Qāma Bi-Tafrīghihā Mawqī' al-Shabakah al-Islāmiyyah)* (n.d.), 189:5.

²⁷⁶ Prophet Ibrahim (‘alayhi as-salām) attained the maqām al-imāmah, the highest spiritual leadership, as a gift from Allah, and that was not before, but after he had gone through many great trials: after attaining prophethood, destroying the idols in the temple of Babylon, being thrown into the fire, challenging the authority of Namrūd, being expelled from his homeland to Palestine, and carrying the burden of prophethood in that new land. After all that, he also endured the long patience of not being blessed with children with Sarah until old age. See Allamah S. Muhammad Husayn Tehrani, *Ma'rifat al-Imam* (Dar al-Mahajjah al-Bayda', 1995), 1:32.

²⁷⁷ Allamah S. Muhammad Husayn Tehrani, *Ma'rifat al-Ma'ad* (Dar al-Mahajjah al-Bayda', 1995), 7:95.

²⁷⁸ Sulṭān Muḥammad Gunābādī, *Tafsīr Bayān Al-Sa'ādah Fī Maqāmāt al-'Ibādah* (Mu'assasat al-A'lamī lil-Maṭbū'āt, 1408), 3:299.

²⁷⁹ Abū Ishāq Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm Tha'labī, *Al-Kashf Wa al-Bayān 'an Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Dār al-Tafsīr, 2015), 5:185.

to endure witnessing Ibrāhīm's association with Hājar, leading her to declare, "O Prophet of Allah, I object to Hājar residing with me in my household."²⁸⁰ However, the narrative concerning Sārah's jealousy within Islamic interpretations exists in various versions, specifically before Sārah's delivery of Ishāq and Hājar has birthed Ismā'īl.²⁸¹ The second version occurs post Sārah's birth of Ishāq while Hājar and Ismā'īl still resided under the same roof.²⁸²

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1506 CE) asserts that Sārah's jealousy towards Hājar was so intense that she swore to inflict bodily harm upon her. However, subsequently, Sārah expressed remorse for her vow. Thereafter, Ibrāhīm advised Sārah, "Pierce her ears and reduce her through circumcision."²⁸³ Thus Sārah complied. Following this, Hājar adorned her pierced ears with earrings that enhanced her allure. Sārah, Ibrāhīm's wife, became increasingly envious, lamenting, "I perceive that I merely augment her beauty," until she ultimately could no longer tolerate Hājar's presence in their shared household, leading Ibrāhīm to perceive her profound jealousy. Consequently, Ibrāhīm relocated Hājar and her son to Mecca, maintaining a practice of visiting them daily from Syria while riding Buraq,²⁸⁴ driven by his affection for Hājar and his inability to remain separated from her and Ismā'īl.²⁸⁵

The narrative condenses the account of Hājar's flight from Sārah, who vowed to dismember her. It is asserted that Hājar was taken directly by Ibrāhīm and his son, Ismā'īl, to Mecca, a locale that had yet to be constructed with the Kaaba and remained an uninhabitable expanse at that juncture. During the migratory events, different hadith

²⁸⁰ Aḥmad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb bin Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Dā'im al-Qurashī al-Taymī al-Bakrī Nuwairī Shahāb al-Dīn, *Nihāyat Al-Arb Fī Funūn al-Adab* (Dār al-Kutub wa al-Wathā'iq al-Qawmīyah, 1423), 13:116.

²⁸¹ According to Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373 CE), Ibrāhīm prayed to Allah to grant him (offspring) from righteous people (Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt [37]:100). So Allah gave him good news about a patient son (Sūrah 37:101). This child was Ismā'īl, because he was the first child to whom Ibrāhīm gave the good news, and he was older than Ishāq. Muslims and People of the Book agree, and it is indeed stated in their Books, that Ismā'īl was born when Ibrāhīm was eighty-six years old, and Ishāq was born when Ibrāhīm was ninety-nine years old. See Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr: (Abridged)*, 2nd ed (Darussalam, 2003), 271.

²⁸² It is also stated that the time interval between the good news about Ismā'īl and the news about Ishāq was about five years. As for the order of the good news given to Ibrahim, the first was about the birth of Ismā'īl from Hajar, then after that about Ishāq from Sārā. See Gunābādī, *Tafsīr Bayān Al-Sa'adah Fī Maqāmāt al-'Ibādah*, 3:299.

²⁸³ Hājar was the first woman in Islamic history to have her ears pierced, the first woman to be circumcised (part of her body was removed), and the first woman to have her clothes pulled up by the tail (running away from Sārah's). This happened because Sārah was angry with her, then vowed to cut off three parts of her body, so Ibrāhīm ordered Sārah to fulfill her oath by having Hājar's ears pierced and circumcised. So later it becomes sunnah among women. See Makkī, *Al-Iqd al-Thamīn Fī Tārīkh al-Balad al-Amīn*, 1:297.

²⁸⁴ Buraq frequently refers to the horse from paradise. According to Shahāb al-Dīn al-Nuwairī (d. 1333 CE), Jibrīl came with a horse from heaven and said to Ibrahim, "O Ibrahim, raise Hajar and Ismail on this horse." Ibrahim carried Hajar and Ismail behind him, then walked until they reached the haram area. See 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tehrānī, *Ma'rifat Al-Ma'ād* (Dār al-Maḥajjah al-Baydā', 1416), 7:95.

²⁸⁵ Suyūṭī, *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, 5:47.

scholars and interpreters, like al-Bukhārī (d. 870 CE),²⁸⁶ al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE),²⁸⁷ and al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273 CE),²⁸⁸ expressed and communicated that Ismā‘īl maintained an infant²⁸⁹ at that time, suckling from his mother, Hājar.

The different version relates to Hājar’s fleeing, triggered by her concern regarding Sārah’s pledge, which echoes the biblical version, though with dissimilar contextual details. This interpretation was articulated by al-Tha‘labī (d. 1036). It is reported that on a particular day, Hājar departed from the household (away from Sārah) towards a valley (currently identified as ‘Arafah) during Ibrāhīm’s absence. Citing the narration of ‘Alī ibn ‘Alī, from Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī, from al-Suddī, it is stated that “*Indeed it was termed ‘Arafat’ because Hājar had conceived Ismā‘īl and subsequently removed her from Sārah, while Ibrāhīm was absent at that time.*” Upon Ibrāhīm’s return, he did not locate Hājar at their residence. Therefore, Sārah informed him of Hājar’s actions. Then, Ibrāhīm searched for her and discovered her at ‘Arafat. Thus, he (Ibrāhīm) recognized her (*ta‘arafa ‘alayh*), leading to the designation of the location as ‘Arafat.’²⁹⁰

An Ottoman scholar, Ayūb Ṣabrī Bāshā (d. 1890 CE), also presented an alternative narrative concerning the origins of Sārah’s ire and jealousy towards Hājar. The distinction in this version lies in the portrayal of Ismā‘īl as being elder than Ishāq, and he is no longer depicted as an infant, contrary to the descriptions provided by previous classical commentators. He elucidates that on one occasion, Ibrāhīm openly expressed his affection

²⁸⁶ Imam al-Bukhārī narrated that the first woman to wear a girdle was Ismā‘īl’s mother. She wore a girdle so that Sārah would not see her footsteps. Ibrāhīm took Hājar and their son Ismā‘īl while Hājar was breastfeeding him to a place near the Ka‘bah under a tree in the place of Zamzam, at the highest place in the mosque. At that time, there was no one in Mecca, nor was there any water. Ibrāhīm made them sit there, placed a leather bag containing some dates and a small waterskin containing water near them, then he set out for home. See “Sahih Al-Bukhari 3364 - Prophets - كتاب أحاديث الأنبياء - Sunnah.Com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم),” accessed May 26, 2025, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3364>.

²⁸⁷ Al-Ṭabarī quoted a narration from Ibn ‘Abbas, saying that indeed the first person who ran between Safa and Marwah was the mother of Ismā‘īl (umm Ismā‘īl). When she (Hājar) ran away from Sārah, she dragged the hem of her garment to erase her tracks. Then Ibrāhīm came and brought her and Ismā‘īl, until he brought them to the place (which would later become) the House of Allah (Ka‘bah), then he left them both and went back. With her (Hājar) was a waterskin, then the water ran out, so she became thirsty and her milk dried up. So, the baby (Ismā‘īl) became thirsty. See Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, 13:690.

²⁸⁸ Al-Qurṭubī quoted from both Bukhārī and Ibn ‘Abbas, narrated that the first time a woman wore a belt was because of Ismā‘īl’s mother, Hājar. She wore a belt so that her traces would be erased from Sārah. Then Ibrahim took Hājar with her son Ismā‘īl, who was still a suckling, until he (Ibrāhīm) placed them both near the house (Ka‘bah), under a large tree above the Zamzam well at the top of the Grand Mosque. At that time there was no one in Mecca, and there was no water. See Qurṭubī, *Jāmi‘ Ahkām Al-Qur’ān Wa-l-Mubayyin Limā Taḍammanahu Mina al-Sunnati Wa-Āyi al-Furqān*, 12:147.

²⁸⁹ Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Husaynī Tehrānī (d. 1995 CE), a prominent scholar and philosopher in the 20th-century Shia intellectual tradition, stated that the dispute between Hājar and Sārah was one of the events that caused Ibrāhīm to take Hājar and her infant son from the land of the Philistines to the middle of the Hijāz desert (i.e., Mecca). After that, he left them there and returned to the Philistines. See Tehrani, *Ma’refat al-Ma’ad*, 7:95.

²⁹⁰ The word ‘Arafat comes from the root word ‘a-ra-fa (ع-ر-ف), which means “to know” or “to recognize.” So, according to this narration, the land was named so because Ibrāhīm “recognized” Hajar, who had conceived Ismā‘īl, in that place. See Tha‘labī, *Al-Kashf Wa al-Bayān ‘an Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 5:185.

for Ismā‘īl in the presence of his younger sibling, Ishāq. Observing this, Ishāq experienced jealousy stemming from his tender age and harbored resentment towards his father, leading to antagonism. This incited the wrath of his mother, Sārah. Thus, Sārah vowed to inflict harm upon her servant, Hājar, by severing a portion of her flesh. Upon hearing this oath, Hājar was engulfed by profound fear. Consequently, she promptly ventured into the valley and resolved to escape to a place of safety for herself. Thereafter, she secured a rope (*mintaqah*) around her waist and trailed the hem of her garment upon the ground to ensure that her footprints would remain concealed.

When Sārah’s feelings of jealousy diminished over time, she reflected upon and regretted her vow against Hājar. Consequently, Sārah concentrated all her cognitive resources and endeavours on devising a strategy to fulfill her oath while minimizing harm to Hājar. Her husband, Ibrāhīm, advised her: “*O Sārah, remove a portion of the superfluous flesh from the concealed area of Hājar’s body, thereby effectuating a circumcision, and create perforations in the soft tissue of her ears. Thus, you will have satisfied your pledge if you adorn her with an earring.*” So Sārah proceeded to circumcise Hājar and pierce her ears, then attach an earring. In this manner, she achieved the fulfillment of her vow.²⁹¹

Nevertheless, the discord between Sārah and Hājar persisted unabated. Sārah’s ire intensified, and her jealousy became increasingly consuming.²⁹² She found it intolerable to witness Hājar and her son, Ismā‘īl, cohabiting within her household. Therefore, she articulated her sentiments to her husband, Ibrāhīm, imploring him to relocate Hājar and her child to a distant locale to prevent further encounters. Ibrāhīm experienced hesitation due to his affection for his young son; however, divine revelation prompted him to acquiesce to Sārah’s wishes. Consequently, Ibrāhīm led Hājar and their son following divine instruction to the Arabian Peninsula, a desolate expanse devoid of flora or sustenance.²⁹³

The exile and isolation of Hājar and Ismā‘īl in an arid and unproductive landscape represent a significant occurrence warranting examination of the relationship between their tribulation in the wilderness and the divine assistance that enveloped them both. In contrast to the biblical account, Islamic tradition narrates that when Sārah implored Ibrāhīm to expel Hājar and Ismā‘īl, he transported the two to a remote site in the Arabian Peninsula, specifically in Mecca. It was only at this juncture that Ibrāhīm departed from them,

²⁹¹ Ayūb Ṣabrī Bāshā, *Mawsū‘at Mir’āt Al-Ḥaramayn al-Sharīfayn Wa Jazīrat al-‘Arab* (Dār al-Āfāq al-‘Arabīyah, 2004), 1:209.

²⁹² Jealousy is a natural trait of a woman. In a hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah, Rasulullah Saw. said: “A woman is like a rib; if you try to straighten it, you will break it. But if you leave it alone, you can benefit from it.” See Gunābādī, *Tafsīr Bayān Al-Sa‘ādah Fī Maqāmāt al-‘Ibādah*, 3:299.

²⁹³ Muḥammad al-Tayyib Najjār, *Al-Qawl al-Mubīn Fī Sīrat Sayyid al-Mursalīn* (Dār al-Nadwah al-Jadīdah, n.d.), 46.

returning alone to offer prayers, as articulated in Surah 14:37. During this journey, Hājar and Ismāʿīl did not meander aimlessly. Still, they were intentionally situated in a location predetermined by Ibrāhīm (in obedience to divine command), and subsequently abandoned there. Furthermore, a notable distinction arises in the dialogue between Hājar and Ibrāhīm as he prepared to depart from them, suggesting that their exile was not solely a consequence of Sārah's jealousy but rather encompassed a divine purpose underlying the situation.²⁹⁴

After the discord between Hājar and Sārah, Ibrāhīm escorted Hājar and her nursing infant son to the desolate and barren region of Mecca, which was devoid of inhabitants and water sources. At that juncture, their provisions were limited to a leather water container and a small pouch containing dates. Upon reaching a location adjacent to a substantial tree, Ibrāhīm left Hājar and her son and departed. Hājar promptly pursued him, inquiring with great anxiety, "To whom have you abandoned us?" Ibrāhīm responded, "To Allah the Almighty." In an alternative narration, after Hājar's repeated inquiries yielded no response, she questioned: "Is this the command of Allah?" Ibrāhīm affirmed, "Yes." Subsequently, Hājar composed herself and articulated: "Then, Allah shall not forsake us."²⁹⁵

The 10th-century Shi'ite exegesis offers a more poignant depiction of Hājar and Ismāʿīl's exile in the wilderness. In the interpretation of Ibrāhīm's supplication as stated in 14:37, he is portrayed as not hastily departing from Hājar and Ismāʿīl without communication until Hājar pursued him, but rather engaging in a compassionate dialogue with them. Al-ʿAyyāshī (d. 932 CE), for instance, referencing a hadith from al-Faḍl ibn Mūsā al-Kātib attributed to Abū al-Ḥasan Mūsā ibn Jaʿfar (al-Kāẓim), elucidated that when Ibrāhīm positioned Ismāʿīl and Hājar in Mecca, he bid farewell to them before his departure. Thereafter, both individuals were overcome with tears. Ibrāhīm inquired, "What causes you to weep? Have I not established you in the land most cherished by Allah and in His sacred locale?" Hājar responded, "O Ibrāhīm, I did not anticipate that a prophet of your stature would treat us in such a manner." Ibrāhīm questioned, "What have I done?" She

²⁹⁴ According to Muḥammad al-Makkī al-Nāṣirī (d.1993 CE), the meaning of Surah Ibrahim (14): 37 relates to Ismail bin Ibrahim, when his father took him as a baby with his mother, Hajar, from Syria to Mecca. Ibrahim left the two of them as entrusted to Allah's care, on Allah's orders, in the exact place that would be built as a holy house (Kaaba) in a glorified land (Land of Haram). See Nāṣirī, *Al-Taysir Fi Ahādīth al-Tafsir*, 3:270.

²⁹⁵ This standard narrative is known by Muslims, which parallels the account transmitted by Imam al-Bukhārī. For a similar description, see Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn al-Diyā' Muḥammad al-Qurashī al-ʿUmarī al-Makkī Ḥanafī, *Tārīkh Makkah Al-Musharrafah Wa al-Masjid al-Ḥarām Wa al-Madīnah al-Sharīfah Wa al-Qabr al-Sharīf* (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2004), 132; Ṭabarī, *Tafsir Al-Ṭabarī Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾān*, 13:690; Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī Burūsawī, *Tafsir Rūḥ al-Bayān* (Dār al-Fikr, 1957), 4:426; Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd*, 3:64; Abū Ghazwān Rifāʿī Muḥammad Nasīb bin ʿAbd al-Razzāq bin Muḥyī al-Dīn, *Al-Tawassul Ilā Ḥaqīqat al-Tawassul - al-Mashrūʿ Wa al-Mamnūʿ* (Dār Lubnān li al-Tibāʿah wa al-Nashr, n.d.), 91; Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī bin Abī al-Karm Muḥammad bin Muḥammad bin ʿAbd al-Karīm bin ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Shaybānī al-Jazarī Athīr ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn, *Al-Kāmil Fī al-Tārīkh* (Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1997), 1:93; Nuwairī, *Nihāyat al-Arb Fī Funūn al-Adab*, 13:116; Qāsim, *Minār Al-Qārī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4:187; Qurṭubī, *Jāmiʿ Ahkām Al-Qurʾān Wa-l-Mubayyin Limā Taḍammanahu Mina al-Sunnati Wa-Āyi al-Furqān*, 12:147.

replied, “You have abandoned a frail woman and a vulnerable child, devoid of strength, without a single companion, without visible water, without vegetation, and without the means to obtain milk?” This stirred Ibrāhīm’s compassion, and tears welled in his eyes. He turned away from them and proceeded until he reached the threshold of the *Baitullah* (Kaaba). Grasping both sides of the Kaaba door, he implored: “O Allah, indeed I have positioned some of my progeny in a valley devoid of vegetation, adjacent to Your revered house, O our Lord, that they may engage in prayer. Thus, incline the people’s hearts towards them and provide them sustenance from fruits so they may express gratitude.”²⁹⁶

Another historical account derived from the exegesis of 20th-century Shiite scholars elucidates that when Ibrāhīm deposited Hājar and Ismā‘īl from the conveyance in proximity to the Kaaba, on a promontory that at that juncture comprised red soil reminiscent of the elevated terrain resulting from the cataclysmic deluge, Ibrāhīm articulated to Hājar, “Remain here with your offspring, for I shall return. This constitutes the directive of my Lord.” As Ibrāhīm prepared to depart, he implored, “Our Lord, verily I have situated a portion of my progeny in a valley devoid of vegetation, adjacent to Your esteemed abode..” (Surah. Ibrahim (14): 37).²⁹⁷

Upon Ibrāhīm’s departure, Hājar returned with her child. As the sun ascended, the temperature increased, and their water reserves were depleted.²⁹⁸ She also nursed Ismā‘īl until the milk ceased to flow from her. Consequently, Ismā‘īl experienced profound hunger to the extent that his mother perceived him staggering (in distress). Hājar, apprehensive that her child might perish, lamented: “I wish I had distanced myself from him until he succumbed, and I had not witnessed his demise.” Hājar observed the hill of Safa as the nearest elevation within her vicinity. Thus, she ascended it, orienting herself toward the valley, and gazed (with her vision) to ascertain if she discerned anyone; however, she encountered no one.²⁹⁹ She descended and sprinted to Marwah, scanning her surroundings, yet found no presence. This act was repeated seven times.³⁰⁰

Upon her return from Marwah, she perceived a sound. She uttered: “Be silent!” suspecting it might be her voice. Hājar maintained silence for a brief period, only to hear the sound again, after which she proclaimed: “I have heard; if assistance is available, then

²⁹⁶ ‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr Al-‘Ayyāshī*, 2:249. When Ibrāhīm had reached the top of Thaniyah Kuddā’ (a high place in Mecca), he faced the valley, raised his hands and prayed: “O our Lord, indeed I have placed some of my descendants in a valley where there are no plants...” (Surah Ibrāhīm [14]: 37).

²⁹⁷ Tehrānī, *Ma‘rifat Al-Ma‘ād*, 7:95.

²⁹⁸ Nuwairī, *Nihāyat Al-Arb Fī Funūn al-Adab*, 13:116.

²⁹⁹ Hanafī, *Tārīkh Makkah Al-Musharrafah Wa al-Masjid al-Ḥarām Wa al-Madīnah al-Sharīfah Wa al-Qabr al-Sharīf*, 132.

³⁰⁰ Burūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān*, 4:426.

aid us!”³⁰¹ It was revealed that the sound originated from an angel excavating with his heel or wing until water emerged. Hājar approached and began to gather the water with her hands, and the water continued to flow following what she had collected.³⁰²

Al-‘Asqalānī (d. 1448 CE) elucidates in hadith no. 79 (transmitted from ‘Amr Hubayb) that when Gabriel struck the earth with his heel, Hājar commenced the collection of pebbles or gravel. Then, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) proclaimed: “May Allah bestow mercy upon Hājar, the progenitor of Ismā‘īl. Had she abandoned her search for water, it would have transformed into a spring of perpetual flow.”³⁰³ An alternative narration asserts that Hājar endeavoured seven times to locate water amidst the two elevations of Safa and Marwah,³⁰⁴ and with each unsuccessful attempt, she returned in despondency, racing towards the illusion presented by the opposite hill. Ultimately, after becoming fatigued from her unproductive pursuits, she returned to her son, observing that he was so parched that he struck the ground forcefully, forming a cavity from which clear and fresh water gushed forth.³⁰⁵ Hājar then prostrated before Allah, commencing the collection of stones surrounding the spring to prevent the water from dispersing, uttering, “*Zamzam*”³⁰⁶ ...*zamzam*, O blessed one.”³⁰⁷

Thereafter, the angel Jibril (Gabriel) addressed Hājar, stating, “Do not harbour fear and rejoice, for Allah shall cause this location to flourish.”³⁰⁸ Then, assuring her not to fret over hunger, stating, “For this is the abode of Allah. This son and his father shall construct it, and Allah shall not abandon his family.” Abu Hurairah remarked, “That is your mother, O descendant of rainwater (*yā banī al-mā’i as-samā’*).”³⁰⁹ As recorded by al-Ḥanafī (d. 1450 CE), it is reported that when Allah released the Zamzam water for Hājar, a caravan

³⁰¹ Qurṭubī, *Jāmi‘ Aḥkām Al-Qur’ān Wa-l-Mubayyin Limā Taḍammanahu Mina al-Sunnati Wa-Āyi al-Furqān*, 12:148.

³⁰² Qāsim, *Minār Al-Qārī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4:187.

³⁰³ Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ‘Asqalānī Ibn Hajar, *Iḥāf Al-Mahrah Bi-l-Fawā’id al-Mubtakirah Min Atrāf al-‘Asharah* (Majma‘ al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭabā‘at al-Miṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 1994), 1:232.

³⁰⁴ Ibn ‘Abbas said: Rasūlullah SAW. said: “That is why people do sa’i (running between Shafā and Marwah).” See Qāsim, *Minār Al-Qārī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4:187.

³⁰⁵ Awhad al-Dīn Kermani, *Dīwān Rubā‘iyyāt Awhad Al-Dīn Kirmānī* (Soroush Publishers, 1366), 381.

³⁰⁶ According to al-Suhaylī (d. 1186 CE), referring to Ibn ‘Abbās, the spring is called Zamzam because it is buried with earth, so its water does not flow to the right and left. If it were not buried, its water would overflow over the entire surface of the ground until it filled everything. Ibn Hishām said: “Zamzama among the Arabs means many or gathered.” A poet said: ‘And has touched its lush green place... and he directs his many Zamzams.’ See ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Suhaylī, *Al-Rawḍ al-Anf Fī Sharḥ al-Sirah al-Nabawīyah* (Maktabat Ibn Taymīyah, 1990), 2:13.

³⁰⁷ Tehrānī, *Ma‘rifat Al-Ma‘ād*, 7:95.

³⁰⁸ See Nuwairī, *Nihāyat Al-Arb Fī Funūn al-Adab*, 13:116; and Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, 13:691.

³⁰⁹ The meaning of the phrase “O descendants of rain water” (*yā banī al-mā’i as-samā’*) refers to the Arab nation who are descendants of Ismail, including the prophet Muhammad SAW. who settled in the holy house. This is because the holy house (Makkah) is located on high ground, and rain water comes from the left and right. See Qāsim, *Minār Al-Qārī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4:187.

from the Jurhum tribe traversing the lower route, returning from Syria, came across this phenomenon. They observed birds soaring above the water. One remarked, “No water exists in this valley, nor any inhabitants.” Thus, they dispatched two young men to engage with Hājar. The two conversed with her, returned to Hājar’s vicinity, and extended their greetings. They inquired, “Who possesses this water?” Hājar responded, “This is mine.” They further asked, “May we reside here with you?” Hājar acquiesced, stating, “Yes.” The Prophet remarked, “Thus, Hājar experienced joy, as she harbored a profound desire for social interaction with others.”³¹⁰

This caravan later communicated with their respective families, and ultimately, they resided with Hājar beneath a tree adjacent to the Zamzam spring. Ismā‘īl matured and acquired proficiency in Arabic through their instruction. Upon reaching adulthood, he was united in marriage³¹¹ with a woman from their tribe.³¹² According to Tehrani, following the exile of Hājar and Ismā‘īl in the valley of Mecca, Prophet Ibrāhīm did not promptly sever ties. He would visit them in Mecca periodically, typically once or twice annually, to assess their well-being before returning.³¹³ As noted by At-Taqī al-Fāsī (d.1429 CE), there exists a tradition suggesting that Hājar outlived Sārah. However, he posits that the more credible historical account indicates that Hājar passed away prior to Sārah.³¹⁴ Upon Hājar’s demise, Ibrāhīm visited after Ismā‘īl’s marriage to ascertain their circumstances.³¹⁵ Ultimately, when Ismā‘īl was deemed to have attained maturity, the initiation of the Kaaba’s construction, the House of Allah, commenced,³¹⁶ executed collaboratively by father and son.³¹⁷

Ultimately, this encapsulates the succinct narrative of Hagar within the Islamic tradition, which is elaborated upon in various *tafsīr*, *hadīth*, and *sīrah* Nabawīyah texts. A comparative analysis becomes imperative by scrutinizing both the Genesis and Qur’anic portrayals of Hagar’s ordeal in the wilderness. By contrasting these traditions, one begins

³¹⁰ Ḥanafī, *Tārīkh Makkah Al-Musharrafah Wa al-Masjid al-Ḥarām Wa al-Madīnah al-Sharīfah Wa al-Qabr al-Sharīf*, 34.

³¹¹ According to some reports, Ismail’s marriage took place after the death of Hagar. See Burūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān*, 4:426.

³¹² Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad ibn Shu‘ayb Nasā’ī, *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā* (Mu’assasah al-Risālah, 2001), 7:399.

³¹³ Tehrani, *Ma’refat al-Ma’ad*, 7:95.

³¹⁴ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī Fāsī Taqī al-Dīn, Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Makkī al-Ḥasanī, *Shifā’ al-Gharām Bi-Akḥbār al-Balad al-Ḥarām* (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2000), 2:22.

³¹⁵ Muḥammad Ṣuwaīyānī, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyah Kamā Jā’at Fī al-Aḥādīth al-Ṣaḥīḥah (Qirā’ah Jadīdah)* (Maktabat al-‘Ubaykān, 2004), 1:15.

³¹⁶ Qurṭubī explains that when Allah wanted to establish the basic conditions (foundations), prepare the places, and mark the locations for the glorified House (Ka’bah) and the forbidden city (Mecca), He sent angels, who then brought out water as a substitute for food. See Qurṭubī, *Jāmi’ Aḥkām Al-Qur’ān Wa-l-Mubayyin Limā Taḍammanahu Mina al-Sunnati Wa-Āyi al-Furqān*, 12:148.

³¹⁷ Tehrānī, *Ma’rifat Al-Ma’ad*, 7:95.

to uncover the theological divergences and the common symbolic significance that elevates Hagar from a position of marginality to one of spiritual prominence. The subsequent sections provide a comparative examination that investigates these two narratives, delineating their interpretive parallels and distinctions.

3.3 Comparative Analysis of Hagar's Journey in Jewish and Islamic Narratives

Based on the close reading of Hagar's narrative as presented in both the Torah and the Qur'an, as articulated in the preceding sub-chapters, it becomes evident that the characterisation of the figure of Hagar is interpreted in markedly different manners across the two religious traditions, alongside the parallel themes that emerge. In order to elaborate on these parallels and disparities, the comparative analytical framework posited by Barbara A. Holdrege³¹⁸ is employed to delineate the points of convergence and divergence on the Hagar narrative in Jewish and Islamic scriptures, to articulate the significance of the identified differences in the portrayal of the figure of Hagar, and to establish connections to the overarching contexts of the two faith traditions concerning the themes of wilderness and the revelation experienced by Hagar.

This section argues that both Judaism and Islam exhibit four notable parallels and distinct aspects within the narrative of Hagar. These aspects encapsulate Hagar's maternal intuition, divine protection, her agency as a woman, and the metaphorical importance of the wilderness as experienced by Hagar. Furthermore, this section highlights these parallels and notable aspects, which are not isolated; instead, they coalesce into a cohesive and integrated viewpoint regarding Hagar's narrative, comprehensively grounded in the scriptural texts of both Islamic and Jewish traditions.

The most salient point of convergence in Hagar's narrative across both scriptural texts pertains to her identification as a slave originating from Egypt, her status as the second wife of Abraham, her role as the mother of Ishmael, her subsequent separation from Abraham's household due to Sarah's envy, and her solitary journey through the wilderness alongside her young son. Conversely, the most pronounced distinction observable within both traditions lies in the characterisation of Hagar as a marginal figure within Jewish exegesis. In stark contrast, Hagar is accorded a considerably more esteemed status and position within Islamic perspectives. The midrashic literature predominantly refers to Hagar not by her given name, but through epithets that underscore the disparity in her social standing relative to the primary covenant, specifically designations such as "slave," "servant," "concubine," "foreigner from Egypt," and "idolater," many of which are imbued with

³¹⁸ Holdrege, "Comparative Analysis as Critical Method," 83.

pejorative connotations that characterise her.³¹⁹ This negative connotation is derived from the interpretation of Hagar's pregnancy with Abraham's son as a perceived threat or source of discord that engenders the initial tension regarding the lineage promised to Israel.³²⁰

In the context of Islamic tradition, the portrayal of Hagar is significantly more affirmative and highlights an alternative historical framework. This assertion is substantiated by the tafsir of Surah 14:37, which indicates that Hagar was situated in a sacred territory that is presently recognised as Mecca, the qibla for Muslims globally. Her distinction is derived from her progeny, who gave rise to a notable prophet, the Prophet Muhammad, a figure whose impact has permeated numerous continents within a mere two centuries following his emergence and the dissemination of Islam.³²¹ Furthermore, the persona of Hagar, who initially inhabited the desolate region of Mecca, is annually honoured during the Hajj pilgrimage through a ritual known as *sa'i*, which involves traversing between the hills of Safa and Marwah.³²²

Nevertheless, within a more expansive framework, the theological implications embedded in Hagar's narrative can be discerned in her odyssey through the wilderness, particularly illustrated by her interaction with an angel and the miraculous emergence of a spring in the arid desert, which serves as a divine act of salvation bestowed by God. In the book of Genesis, Hagar is characterised as the first female figure to name God, *El Ro'i*, signifying "The Lord Who Sees Me," and was granted God's promise of founding a significant nation through her progeny, as also promised to Abraham (Gen 17: 15-19). Thus, a well situated in the desert where she encountered the angel, eternally commemorated by the designation *Beer Lahai Ro'i* (Gen 16:14). This account serves as a foundation for Hagar's experience of a supernatural phenomenon known as a theophany, which transpired in the wilderness.

In parallel, the hadith of Bukhārī recounts the encounter of Hagar with an angel amidst the desolate desert expanse, which culminated in the divine endowment of the Zamzam spring—a life-saving provision for her and her son Ishmael. Furthermore, Surah 14:37 corroborates the account of Hagar and Ishmael being entrusted to the barren valley by Abraham. This site would subsequently be the location for the construction of the House of God (Ka'bah). In his exegetical commentary on this verse, al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE) interprets Hagar's proactive response in the desert as an embodiment of her unwavering

³¹⁹ Attia, "Hagar and Potiphar's Wife: A Representation of Egypt in Judaism and Islam," 3.

³²⁰ Attia, "Hagar and Potiphar's Wife: A Representation of Egypt in Judaism and Islam," 4.

³²¹ Sheha, *Muhammad The Messenger of Allah*, 93.

³²² Yusuf, "From Hebrew 'Slave' to Arabian 'Sage': Linking the Jewish and Muslim Narratives in the Story of Hagar, the African in Pre-Islamic Arab History," 3.

faith in the Almighty.³²³ Al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273 CE) endeavours to correlate the physical desolation of the valley with the prospective spiritual significance of Mecca. He accentuates that Hagar's existence in such an inhospitable environment was integral to God's overarching design to establish Mecca as a locus of worship.³²⁴ Meanwhile, Ibn Kathir (d. 1373 CE) highlights the resilience of Hagar's faith, which empowered her to endure the most extreme circumstances in the wilderness.³²⁵ Consequently, Islamic literary texts predominantly affirm Hagar's extraordinary experiences, including her interaction with the angel and the emergence of the Zamzam spring. The subsequent table presents a concise comparative analysis of the salient elements present in each textual tradition regarding the narrative of Hagar, thereby facilitating an examination of the narrative, theological, and symbolic distinctions and resonances embedded within the Hagar narrative.

Table 3.1. *Comparative Analysis of the Narrative of Hagar in Jewish and Islamic Sacred Texts*

Comparative Aspect	Genesis 16 & 21 (Pentateuch)	Surah 14: 37 (Qur'an)
Hagar as a Figure	Explicitly mentioned	Implicitly narrated through Abraham's supplication
Hagar's relation to Abraham	Slave, Concubine; secondary wife	Second wife and <i>Umm Isma'il</i> (Mother of Ishmael, the eldest son of Abraham)
Motif of Exile	Sarah's jealousy	Divine instruction
The birth of Isaac	Before Hagar's exile	After Hagar's exile
Hagar's emotional state	Crying desperately to God, hopeless	▪ <i>Sunni tafsir</i>: Questioning & following Abraham first, then being submissive to God's Will (<i>tawakkul</i>) ▪ <i>Shi'ite tafsir</i>: Crying and questioning first, then submitting to God's Will (<i>tawakkul</i>)

³²³ Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1.

³²⁴ Qurṭubī, *Jāmi' Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān Wa-l-Mubayyin Limā Taḍammanahu Mina al-Sunnati Wa-Āyi al-Furqān*, vol. 12.

³²⁵ Dimashqī, *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr Fī Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*.

Hagar's Experience of Divine Revelation	Angel appeared twice; God Hears Ishmael (not Hagar)	Angel appeared once and spoke to Hagar
Divine Intervention	God's Promise, the well of <i>Beer Lahai Ro'i</i> , and Ishmael were saved from death.	The well of Zamzam, and God's Promise to build Ka'ba
Wilderness Location	Shur and Beersheba, a barren desert	An uncultivated valley in Paran (Makkah), a sacred land (<i>al-Harām</i>)
Hagar's theological role	Peripheral figure, but recognised for her divine vision (<i>El-Ro'i</i>)	Matriarch of Arabs, and a Symbolic figure of the <i>Sa'i</i> ritual during <i>Hajj</i>

Based on the data presented in the table above, both traditions exhibit significant patterns that highlight similarities while also revealing divergences. Utilising Holdrege's theoretical framework, which elucidates the underlying meaning inherent in textual discrepancies,³²⁶ the initial pattern is evident in the way both traditions portray Hagar. In the commentaries on Genesis 16 and 21, regardless of Hagar's theological significance in the act of naming God and bearing Abraham's first offspring, her status remains relegated to that of a servant and concubine. This paradox highlights Hagar's theological significance while simultaneously underscoring her marginalised position. Conversely, the Islamic tradition characterises her as the progenitor of the Arab nation, thereby underscoring her more prominent spiritual standing within the *sa'i* ritual heritage. However, it still acknowledges her prior condition as a slave.

A salient element worthy of consideration regarding the comparative analysis of Hagar's spiritual condition within her wilderness narrative is that Islamic tafsir narrates a personal dialogue between Hagar and Abraham before his departure, wherein she inquired about the motivations behind her abandonment, as well as the potential divine nature of the decision. Upon Abraham's affirmation that it was indeed a command from God, Hagar's acceptance of this circumstance in a state of complete submission (*tawakkul*)³²⁷ illustrates her devout character within the Islamic narrative, given her position as Abraham's wife and the mother of Ishmael, his son. In stark contrast, this particular dialogue is notably absent from the Genesis account. The depiction of Abraham rising early to prepare bread and water, subsequently placing it upon Hagar's shoulder (Gen 21:14), implies his failure to

³²⁶ Holdrege, "Comparative Analysis as Critical Method," 82.

³²⁷ Abū al-Turāb Sayyid ibn Ḥusayn ibn 'Abd Allāh 'Afānī, *Durūs Al-Shaykh Sayyid Ḥusayn al-'Afānī* (Durūs Sawtiyah qāma bi-Tafrīghihā Mawqī' al-Shabakah al-Islāmīyah, n.d.), 3:31.

accompany her, thereby leaving her to navigate the wilderness in solitude, disoriented and nursing, which suggests Hagar's expulsion and marginalization, accentuating her vulnerable state of faith characterized by hopelessness (Gen 21: 15-16). The ancient rabbinic manuscript of *Pirke Avot*, which pertains to the expulsion of Hagar, neglects to elucidate Hagar's ensuing fate and her societal status in the aftermath of her banishment to the wilderness. Instead, it highlights the concept that Hagar's expulsion marked one of the most significant spiritual trials Abraham faced.³²⁸

The subsequent pattern pertains to the interaction between Hagar and the angelic figure. In the biblical texts of Genesis 16 and 21, Hagar is portrayed as encountering an angel after her flight (Gen 16) and her expressions of anguish seeing the dying Ishmael (Gen 21) within the desolate landscape. Conversely, within the Islamic narrative, Hagar is depicted as having cultivated a profound sense of *tawakkul*³²⁹ prior to Abraham's departure, as she was already cognizant that her banishment into the wilderness was a directive from the Divine. Consequently, the two traditions underscore the fundamental disparities regarding Hagar's agency and the nature of Divine intervention on her behalf. In the Jewish scriptural account, Divine intervention appears to be predominantly concerned with the destinies of her progeny, rather than with Hagar herself. In contrast, within the Islamic perspective, Divine intervention is perceived as a consequence of God's orchestration of a unique fate for Hagar, attributed to her esteemed faith, as well as for her descendants.

The principal patterns delineated above indicate that the divergences in Hagar's narratives across the two traditions are not merely superficial variations of the storyline but also signify underlying distinctions in theological frameworks. In the Genesis account, Hagar's ordeal in the wilderness is interpreted through the lens of her suffering, culminating in a narrative of salvation facilitated by Divine intervention. Conversely, within Islamic literature, Hagar's wilderness experience embodies the principle of faith, which is coupled with human endeavour and ultimately rewarded by Divine assistance. This juxtaposition elucidates how both traditions contextualise Hagar's narrative within the broader paradigm of the human-God relationship, wherein the Jewish tradition accentuates the Divine's attentiveness to suffering, particularly as Hagar occupies a marginalised position. In comparison, the Islamic tradition highlights the ideals of surrender (*tawakkul*) and faith, which serve to invoke Divine assistance, given Hagar's role as the progenitor of the Arab nation.

³²⁸ Katarzyna Miriam Kaczorowska, "Abraham's Trials in Ancient and Medieval Jewish Writings," *Verbum Vitae* 39, no. 4 (2021): 1362, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.12973>.

³²⁹ Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥassān, *Silsilat Al-Dār al-Ākhirah (Min Durūs Sawtiyah Qām Bi-Tafrīghihā Mawqī' al-Shabakah al-Islāmīyah)* (n.d.), 10:14, <http://www.islamweb.net>.

Accordingly, the discourses related to Hagar’s expulsion in both Islamic and Jewish narratives are intricately connected within detailed intertextual frameworks. In Judaism, a wide array of interpretive approaches is applied to the Torah, resulting in a range of translations and commentaries, which are methodically organized into distinct categories: Targum, Midrashic, and non-Midrashic interpretations. Concerning the Islamic tradition, the complexity lies in examining the intersection between tafsir and hadith, as well as various biblical or Midrashic texts, to formulate a holistic narrative of Hagar, while analyzing the progression of her depiction in juxtaposition to her representation in the Bible. Historians of religion widely employ this framework to describe parallels, as Islam also borrows ideas from the narrative in the Torah, which is considered an older literary tradition.³³⁰ This exploration must also incorporate the cultural contexts of Hagar’s period to fully appreciate the expansive historical framework that influences the portrayal of Hagar’s banishment in the wilderness within each tradition, thereby enabling a profound understanding of their interpretations and consequences.³³¹

The findings of this comparative examination consequently delineate notable aspects of both convergence and divergence³³² within the accounts of Hagar’s expulsion as depicted in Jewish and Islamic traditions, as well as how Hagar’s narrative influences the conceptualization of wilderness in a symbolically spiritual context within each tradition. These aspects of convergence and divergence are illustrated in the table that follows.

Table 3.2. *Notable Aspects of Convergence and Divergence of Hagar’s Wilderness Experience in Jewish and Islamic Perspectives*

Key Aspects	Jewish Perspective	Islamic Perspective
Maternal Intuition	Hagar wept and moved away from Ishmael because she could not bear to see Ishmael dying (Gen 21: 16-18)	Hagar traversed the distance between Safa and Marwa seven times in an attempt to solicit assistance to rescue the infant Ishmael, who was in pain of thirst (Tafsir Surah 14:37)
Divine Protection	God intervened to rescue Hagar during her flight into the desolate wilderness and bestowed upon her the divine promise of a great nation through her progeny, who	The emergence of the Zamzam spring, and God’s explicit promise addressed by the angel to Hagar (Shahih Bukhārī)

³³⁰ Aria Nakissa, “Comparing Islam with Other Late Antique Religions: Examining Theological Parallels with Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Manichaeism,” *Islamic Studies Review* 2, no. 2 (2023): 130, <https://doi.org/10.56529/isr.v2i2.210>.

³³¹ Hafizah, “A Comparison of Jewish and Islamic Views on The Banishment of Hagar,” 319.

³³² Holdrege, “Comparative Analysis as Critical Method,” 82.

	was destined to be named ‘Ishmael’ (Gen 16:10-11). ▪ God commanded the angel to create a fountain next to Ishmael (Gen 21:19)	
Role of Woman	The first female figure in the Pentateuch (Torah) to speak directly to angels and receive God’s promise as given to Abraham	The devoted woman of God’s command, wife of Abraham and mother of Ishmael, who established the Ka’bah, a pivotal event, preceded the Prophet Muhammad (Saw).
Wilderness	Liminal space of danger and a place for Hagar’s banishment and atonement	Sacred space of Mecca (<i>al-Ḥarām</i>), the site where the miraculous well of Zamzam happened to Hagar, also the site where Abraham and Ishmael built the Ka’bah.

According to the aforementioned table, while there exist resonances between the two traditions, notable distinctions are also present. Within the Islamic tradition, the miraculous emergence of Zamzam serves as a poignant symbol of the enduring significance of Hagar’s narrative within the framework of *Ḥajj*. A greater theological dynamism characterizes Hagar’s role within Islam, as her actions are integral to the formulation of the sacred rites associated with one of the five pillars of Islam. Conversely, in Jewish literature, Hagar is portrayed in a more passive manner, primarily centered on her sorrow and the efforts to rescue her child.

The wilderness, on the other hand, contains sacred symbolism from an Islamic perspective, whereas in Jewish tradition, it is interpreted as a realm of emptiness or a place of redemption. This difference stems from how each tradition interprets the story of Hagar. Nevertheless, her wilderness experience is equally central to portraying her presence in Judaism and Islam. Jewish scholars interpret Hagar’s wilderness journey as a journey of suffering and purification from sin. This is because Hagar is often portrayed as alien and rejected, different from Sarah, who is seen as desirable and legitimate.³³³ In contrast, Islam views Hagar’s experience in the wilderness as the origin of the *sa’i* ritual during the *Ḥajj* as well as the historical event that initiated the formation of Islamic civilization, founded by the Prophet Muhammad, that is connected to her lineage.³³⁴

³³³ Haddad and Esposito, *Daughters of Abraham*, 86.

³³⁴ Yusuf, “From Hebrew ‘Slave’ to Arabian ‘Sage’: Linking the Jewish and Muslim Narratives in the Story of Hagar, the African in Pre-Islamic Arab History,” 3.

The narrative of Hagar's expulsion suggests a dynamic interplay between established traditions and progressive interpretations, indicating that the discussion of Hagar's story within religious contexts is ongoing and the narrative evolves. In a contemporary scholarly investigation revisiting the narrative of Hagar in Torah, for instance, scholars contend that the Lord fundamentally acknowledges both of Abraham spouses and his offspring, wherein the divine intervention encountered by Hagar in the wilderness suggests that His benevolence is devoid of any hierarchical superiority, and is liberated from interpretations associated with the preeminence of one demographic group (whether delineated by ethnicity, gender, or spiritual status) over another.³³⁵ Liberationists employ Hagar's wilderness experience as a paradigm, as she receives a heavenly message and the promise of a great nation, demonstrating her strength and independence.³³⁶

While Hagar is not a central named figure in the Qur'an, her historical and ritualistic significance in Islam is acknowledged, particularly in relation to Abraham and the foundational rituals of Mecca.³³⁷ Hagar's deep faith and God-consciousness (*tawakkul* and *taqwā*) are presented as the source of her strength and perseverance, enabling her to carve out an active female role within Islam.³³⁸ Her story primarily serves as a moral lesson, offering valuable insights for contemporary Muslim women.³³⁹ This analytical perspective invites further exploration of Hagar's wilderness experience in conjunction with the episode of her divine revelation, a significant aspect of Hagar's extraordinary spiritual state, which will be elaborated upon in the subsequent chapter, particularly through a philosophical and mystical lens. This elaboration not only explores Hagar's narrative across Islamic and Jewish literatures but also examines how her divine experience provides a potent spiritual model for women that challenges the system of spiritual elites, which is predominantly attributed to male figures.

³³⁵ Cohen, "Hagar and Ishmael," 2014, 256.

³³⁶ Haddad and Esposito, *Daughters of Abraham*, 99.

³³⁷ Ibrahim, *Women and Gender in the Qur'an*, 122.

³³⁸ Haddad and Esposito, *Daughters of Abraham*, 16.

³³⁹ Haddad and Esposito, *Daughters of Abraham*, 81.

CHAPTER IV

WOMEN, WILDERNESS, AND DIVINE REVELATION IN JEWISH AND ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

4.1 Hagar: God's Promise and the Sacred Geography of *Hajj*

The previous chapter has explored the narrative of Hagar's journey in the wilderness as conveyed in both Torah and the Qur'an, clarifying the remarkable parallels and differences between these two religious beliefs, particularly in relation to Hagar's deeds in the deserted area when she runs out of water and Ishmael faces hardship, culminating in the instance when the angel ultimately brings God's communication to her during this desperate crisis. Exegetical interpretations of the Torah and midrash illuminate Hagar's emotional response in the wilderness by accentuating her profound sorrow and her plea (lamentation) to God, expressing her inability to witness the demise of her son Ishmael, followed by the angel, serving as God's emissary, who addresses her and instigates the emergence of a spring of water (Gen 21:16-17).³⁴⁰ There exists a notable disparity in the interpretations of the Qur'an and hadith within the Islamic tradition, wherein Hagar, amidst her tribulation, is portrayed as exhibiting a greater degree of agency through her act of traversing the hills of Safa and Marwah seven times in pursuit of water and assistance. Al-Kufi (d. 850 CE) asserts that the inaugural woman to engage in ṭawāf between Safa and Marwah was the mother of Ishmael.³⁴¹

The variance in emotional responses and actions during this crisis underscores the profundity of Hagar's faith and her spiritual agency, particularly from an Islamic viewpoint. This chapter undertakes a comprehensive analysis of Hagar's experience of revelation within the liminal space by juxtaposing her narrative with the experiences of other prominent female figures, such as Yocheved, Maryam, and Fāṭimah. This comparative analysis serves as a reflective methodology, utilizing a selective array of contexts to construct a meticulously designed contextual framework.³⁴² to illuminate Hagar's singularity as a female figure who, in her state of crisis and suffering in the wilderness, manifests a spiritual experience replete with symbols.

³⁴⁰ Polano, *The Talmud Selections from the Contents of That Ancient Book, Its Commentaries, Teachings, Poetry and Legends*, 144. See again chapter 3 in sub section 3.1.

³⁴¹ Abū Bakr 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Shaybah al-Kūfī 'Absī, *Al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf Fī al-Aḥādīth Wa al-Āthār* (Dār al-Tāj, 1989), 7:249.

³⁴² Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray, eds., *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age* (University of California Press, 2000), 98.

By utilizing Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework for analysis, the narrative of Hagar, situated in the wilderness, reveals several significant occurrences that possess not only historical significance but can also be construed as sacred symbols imbued with profound meaning. Ricoeur articulated in his seminal work, "The Symbolism of Evil," that every individual has the capacity to initially comprehend the sacred by interpreting the phenomena associated with natural entities, such as the sky, moon, stones, water, and flora, even wilderness, all of which transcend mere empty space and signify the majesty, power, and order of the Divine. Thus, there exists an intrinsic connection between human consciousness and the cosmos, which manifests a sense of cosmic resonance.³⁴³ The aforementioned components are adeptly exemplified within the narrative framework of Hagar.

The relationship between the wilderness and divine intervention in the narrative of Hagar is, in fact, not overtly articulated by classical exegeses. Nevertheless, the implicit correlation between these two concepts can be discerned through various indicators within traditional interpretations across both Jewish and Islamic paradigms. In the Jewish tradition, particularly in the exegesis of Rashi and Ibn Ezra, it is articulated that God perceives Hagar's anguish and responds to her supplications,³⁴⁴ and Hagar is commemorated as the inaugural woman in the Biblical canon to engage in dialogue with an angel and invoke the name of God.³⁴⁵ This event illustrates a crisis-resolution framework within Hagar's narrative, which encompasses multifaceted symbolic significations pertaining to faith, resilience, divine intervention, and elucidates its role in fortifying the connection between humanity and the sacred. Hagar's exile emerges as an emblem akin to the existential plight of humanity thrust into inexplicable suffering (paralleling the narrative of Adam and Eve's expulsion from Paradise), yet from her state of vulnerability arises revelation, wherein an angel addresses her, a spring manifests, and divine assurance is proclaimed. Consequently, the wilderness, initially perceived as a locus of solitude, undergoes a metamorphosis into a hallowed domain, congruent with the interpretative significance of symbols as articulated by Ricoeur, who posits that a symbol possesses dual significations, encompassing both a literal interpretation and a spiritual connotation.³⁴⁶

³⁴³ Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 13.

³⁴⁴ According to Rashi (d. 1105 CE), the prayer of a sick person (Hagar's affliction) is more effective than anyone else's and is answered first. See Pearl, *Rashi Commentaries on the Pentateuch*, 48.

³⁴⁵ Hagar says (Gen 16:13), "Ha-gam ha-lom ra'iti acharei ro'i (הַגַּם הַלֹּם רָאִיתִי אַחֲרַי רֹאִי), means, 'Have I even here seen Him that seeth Me?' at the moment Hagar saw the angel of God, after God had seen her affliction through her expression. See Strickman and Silver, *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis (Bereshit)*, 181. See chapter 3.

³⁴⁶ Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 15.

Meanwhile, the classical Islamic tradition, encompassing both Sunni and Shia perspectives, provides an elucidation of Hagar's emotional response that is intricately connected to the profundity of her spirituality. For instance, Al-Ṭabarī conducts a detailed study of the historical environment and Hagar's spontaneous reaction, which reinforces her unshakeable faith in God as the center piece of her spiritual trek in the wilderness. Her inquiry directed towards Abraham should not be constructed as an indication of skepticism; rather, it is a plea for affirmation that propels her towards an enhanced faith.³⁴⁷ Concurrently, al-Qurṭubī endeavors to establish a connection between the physical desolation of the valley and the prospective spiritual significance of Mecca. He underscores that Hagar's existence in such a formidable environment is integral to God's overarching scheme to elevate Mecca into a pivotal center of worship. His interpretation imbues Hagar's experience in the desert with theological profundity, positing that her tribulation transcends mere individual adversity and is, in fact, a component of the divine blueprint to establish a principal site of veneration.³⁴⁸ Moreover, Ibn Kathīr accentuates the profound faith exhibited by Hagar when she asserts, "If so, then God will not forsake us." Ibn Kathīr further elucidates the human dimension of Hagar's ordeal, illustrating her trepidation as a mother alongside her steadfast faith, when she is relegated to the status of an outcast with limited resources. His narrative vivifies Hagar's account (as Ricoeur describes it, a re-enactment of meaning) by portraying faith as the foundation of her endurance under the most dire conditions.³⁴⁹

The 10th-century Shi'ite exegetes had underscored that the desolate valley where Abraham left Hagar and Ishmael constituted sacred territory safeguarded by God, as delineated by al-ʿAyyāshī.³⁵⁰ Upon Hagar's completion of seven rounds between Safa and Marwah, the angel Gabriel greeted her with the proclamation, "Rejoice, and do not harbor fear, for Allah shall render this locale prosperous." Subsequently, he alleviated her concerns regarding hunger by stating, "This is indeed the domicile of Allah. This progeny and his progenitor will construct it, and Allah shall not forsake his kin."³⁵¹ How Allah delivered Hagar through Gabriel exemplifies her profound faith, wherein, despite facing dire circumstances and critical life decisions, Hagar steadfastly opted to adhere to the Divine Command, akin to Moses, who did not falter when instructed to confront Pharaoh,

³⁴⁷ Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾān*, vol. 1. See Chapter 3.

³⁴⁸ Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Abī Bakr Qurṭubī, *Jāmiʿ Ahkām Al-Qurʾān Wa-l-Mubayyin Limā Taḍammanahu Mina al-Sunnati Wa-Āyi al-Furqān*, vol. 12 (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 2006). See chapter 3.

³⁴⁹ Dimashqī, *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr Fī Tafṣīr Ibn Kathīr*. See chapter 3.

³⁵⁰ ʿAyyāshī, *Tafṣīr Al-ʿAyyāshī*, 2:249. See chapter 3.

³⁵¹ Qāsim, *Minār Al-Qārī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4:187.

and Abraham, who departed from Ishmael and his mother, Hagar, in the desolate expanse of Mecca, which at that juncture was devoid of vegetation and water, solely to fulfill the divine directive.³⁵² Entrusting Hagar and Ishmael to a barren valley as mandated by the Almighty serves as a significant symbol, for Abraham held the conviction that divine protection outweighs personal safeguarding.³⁵³ An interpretation echoed by Muhammad Nasīb al-Rifā'ī (d. 1993 CE) in surah 14:27 says,

“O our Lord, verily I have fulfilled Your directive, O my Lord, when You instructed me to place the mother of my offspring, Hagar, alongside my son Ishmael in this desolate and arid territory. Were it not for Your explicit command, I would assuredly not have undertaken this action. Furthermore, upon receiving Your directive, I possess the conviction that You will undoubtedly ensure their sustenance and safeguard them with Your vigilant care and attention. Thus, I comply with Your will and wholly entrust the mother of my child and my child to your hands.” Consequently, when Hagar inquired of Abraham for the third time as he was departing from them: “To whom have you consigned us, O Abraham? Did Allah command you to undertake this?” Abraham turned to her and replied: “Indeed, He did.” To this, Hagar responded: “then He will not forsake us.” This statement exemplifies Hagar’s profound faith in Allah, coupled with her tranquility and assurance that Allah will not abandon them.³⁵⁴

Ibn ‘Arabī, in the context of Hagar’s faith, offers a profound interpretation derived from the narrative of Hagar, positing that human perfection can be attained not solely by men but equally by women. He asserted that despite the notion that women occupy a position one degree inferior to men (due to their creation from men), this does not diminish the potential for perfection among women. In this way, when Allah contemplated this factor in relation to women, He instituted a foundation for women within the realm of Islamic law, as highlighted by Hagar, who undertook the task of circling between Safa and Marwah and traversed the valley seven times searching for anyone who could furnish water to relieve her son’s thirst. Subsequently, Allah rendered Hagar’s actions, specifically the *sa’i* between Safa and Marwah, as integral to *Shari’a*, designating it as one of the *manāsik al-ḥajj* (rituals of pilgrimage).³⁵⁵ Annermarie Schimmel, similarly, has highlighted Hagar’s significant role within the *ḥajj* tradition. Her narrative of running between the hills of Safa and Marwah seven times has been immortalized in contemporary *ḥajj* practices, wherein pilgrims replicate Hagar’s journey by walking or jogging seven times between the two hills, which are presently linked by an extensive corridor within the Grand Mosque in Mecca (*Masjidil Harām*).³⁵⁶

³⁵² Burūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān*, 5:386.

³⁵³ Adham Uzlati Khalkhali, *Risā’il-i Fārsī-Yi Adham Khalkhālī* (Anjuman-e Athar wa Mafakher-e Farhangi, 2002), 729.

³⁵⁴ Rifā’ī, *Al-Tawassul Ilā Ḥaqīqat al-Tawassul - al-Mashrū‘ Wa al-Mamnū‘*, 91.

³⁵⁵ ‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1:708.

³⁵⁶ Annemarie Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam* (American University in Cairo Press, 1998), 58.

The esoteric exegesis articulated by Ibn ‘Arabī delineates how Hagar’s response to adversity and anguish in an arid expanse devoid of human presence exemplified a profound level of faith that transcended the mundane, thereby invoking miraculous interventions and divine salvation from God manifested through the emergence of the Zamzam spring. Furthermore, her act of traversing between Shafa and Marwah seven times has been institutionalized as an integral component of the *shari’a* within the *hajj* rites for adherents of Islam. In the text of al-Fākihī, a historical account is presented that recounts that several distinguished women were recipients of divine revelation,³⁵⁷ which states, “Allah has revealed it to three women: to Maryam binti ‘Imrān, to Umm Mūsā, and to Hājar (Hagar), the mother of Ismā‘īl (Ishmael), may Allah bless them all.”³⁵⁸ Jirār Jihāmī (1998), in his comprehensive scholarly work, elucidates that prophecy (*nubuwwah*) is esoterically interconnected to the sacred essence that governs the entirety of the grand cosmos, analogous to the relationship between the human soul and its corporeal form. He presents miracles that surpass ordinary character and behavior, and the reflective essence of his soul remains impervious to corrosion from that which is inscribed in the *Lauh Mahfūz* (Preserved Tablet), and is capable of receiving revelations from celestial beings who serve as God’s emissaries. The overarching purpose of *nubuwwah* and *sharia* is to purify the human spirit, enhance its condition, deliver it from the inferno of the material existence and obliteration, and elevate the soul towards celestial realms, thereby facilitating the enjoyment of the spiritual essence and fragrances articulated in the Qur’an. This aspiration constitutes the ultimate objective of all knowledge pertaining to wisdom and prophetic jurisprudence.³⁵⁹

However, the aforementioned discussion remains polemical as it has provoked criticism from scholars who dispute the premise that women (such as Hagar) possess the capacity to receive divine revelations, describing the language utilized in the account as “unusual” while maintaining that the function of prophethood is strictly reserved for men, based on the claim that women lack the necessary qualities despite being acknowledged as esteemed figures. They argue that the spiritual experiences attributed to certain esteemed women, such as Maryam, Mother of Moses, Asiyah, and Hagar, do not inherently substantiate the claim of prophethood, since revelations can manifest in diverse forms, or experiences of communication with angels, may be conferred upon individuals who are not Prophets.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁷ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ishāq ibn al-‘Abbās al-Fākihī Makkī, *Akhhbāru Makkah Fī Qadīm Al-Dahr Wa Ḥadīthih* (Maktabat al-Asadī, 2003).

³⁵⁸ Rifā‘ī, *Al-Tawassul Ilā Ḥaqīqat al-Tawassul - al-Mashrū‘ Wa al-Mamnū‘*, 91.

³⁵⁹ Jirār Jihāmī, *Mawsū‘ah Muṣṭalahāt al-Falsafah* (Maktabah Lubnān Nāshirūn, 1998), 898.

³⁶⁰ ‘Umar S. Ashqar, *The Messengers and The Messages in the Light of the Qur’an and Sunnah*, Islamic Creed Series (International Islamic Publishing House, n.d.), 4:132.

Moreover, women are deemed to be inadequately positioned to undertake the responsibilities of prophethood owing to their physical constraints, including menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum recovery, which ostensibly impede their mobility and physical stability. Several Muslim scholars contend that these considerations render women less equipped to confront the arduous challenges associated with being a prophet or messenger, despite their continued reverence in alternative spiritual and societal capacities.³⁶¹

A significant number of scholars maintain that female prophets did not exist. They assert that the term “*rijālan*” in Surah al-Naḥl (16): 43 pertains exclusively to male prophets. Although Allah designates specific individuals and women, it is essential to note that not all such individuals are inherently prophets.³⁶² However, Ibn Hazm argues that the Qur’an states that Allah has sent angels to women, such as Maryam, Sarah, and the mother of Moses. These angels conveyed good news through authentic revelations from Allah. It is unequivocally implausible that the dialogue with the angel could have been intended for any individual other than a prophet in any conceivable manner.³⁶³ This debate underscores how religious understanding can be influenced by social and cultural contexts, and how sacred texts can be interpreted in various ways.³⁶⁴

Annemarie Schimmel (d. 2003 CE), on the other hand, posits that the perception of women’s unworthiness to assume the prophetic role, as elucidated earlier, constitutes an imaginative construction by the interpreters, which is derived from the exegesis of the narrative concerning the expulsion of Adam and Eve (Hawa) from paradise. In this account, Eve is frequently portrayed as the primary agent responsible for their banishment, as she inquired of God regarding her punishment. Subsequently, various interpretations of God’s response to Eve have arisen; however, the prevailing interpretation asserts that ‘God declared that Eve would experience menstruation, encounter challenges during gestation, and would not be bestowed the prophetic or sagacious status.’ Nevertheless, Schimmel underscores that the concept of divine retribution directed at Eve is not explicitly articulated within the Qur’an.³⁶⁵ It is probable that the interpretation asserting that the prophetic vocation is inherently reserved for men is predicated on several hadiths that accentuate women’s perceived deficiencies, such as the hadith indicating that the Messenger of Allah

³⁶¹ Ashqar, *The Messengers and The Messages in the Light of the Qur’an and Sunnah*, 4:128.

³⁶² Hepni, *Perempuan Dalam Perdebatan: Mulai Asal-Usul Penciptaan, Kepemimpinan, Kesetaraan Gender Hingga Wacana Nabi Perempuan*, 239.

³⁶³ Andalusī, *Al-Fiṣal Fī al-Milal Wa al-Ahwā’ Wa al-Niḥal*, 5:18–19.

³⁶⁴ Hepni, *Perempuan Dalam Perdebatan: Mulai Asal-Usul Penciptaan, Kepemimpinan, Kesetaraan Gender Hingga Wacana Nabi Perempuan*, 254.

³⁶⁵ Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman*, 57.

did not observe anyone possessing lesser intelligence or religiosity than women,³⁶⁶ alongside the hadith asserting that a nation shall not prosper if a woman is designated as their sovereign.³⁶⁷

Irrespective of the debate surrounding the interpretation of the essence of prophethood as it pertains to gender, it is unequivocally established that the narrative of Hagar in the desolate wilderness, underpinned by her unwavering faith, exemplifies her extraordinary proximity to the Divine. Schimmel elucidated that numerous Islamic texts recount the miraculous occurrences attributed to saints, such as the extraordinary provision of water or sustenance in the scorching and arid desert, thereby illustrating the unique endowments bestowed upon saints as a result of their closeness to God.³⁶⁸ In this context, the account of Hagar mirrors this same archetype; despite her name not being explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an, her identity and narrative continue to be augmented through scholarly reinterpretation, thereby establishing her as a paradigm for women across various epochs.³⁶⁹ Her odyssey through the wilderness epitomizes her metamorphosis from a foreign enslaved individual serving Siti Sarah to the progenitor of a prophet who fathered the Arab nation, from whom emerged the eminent prophet Muhammad saw.³⁷⁰

The narrative of Hagar's existence and metamorphosis within the wilderness is particularly compelling when analyzed through the theoretical framework posited by Mircea Eliade concerning 'the Sacred and the Profane,' notably with respect to the wilderness as a domain conducive to the emergence of divine revelation. Hagar's encounter, characterized by her capability to perceive, engage in discourse with celestial beings, and attain salvation through the miraculous provision of a spring by the Divine, can be encapsulated, in Eliade's terminology, as an exceptional religious phenomenon that stands in stark contrast to mundane worldly experiences. This phenomenon exemplifies the

³⁶⁶ Narrated by Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri: One day Rasulullah saw. go out to the prayer room (to perform shalah) for Eid al-Adha or Eid al-Fitr. Then he passed by the women and said, "O women! Give charity, for I have seen that most of the inhabitants of hell are you (women)." They asked, "Why is that, O Rasulullah?" He answered, "You swear a lot and are ungrateful to your husbands. I don't see anyone who is less intelligent and religious than you. A cautious and wise man could be led astray by some of you." The women asked, "O Messenger of Allah! What is lacking in reason and religion?" He said, "Isn't the testimony of two women the same as the testimony of one man?" They said yes. He said, "This is a lack of reason. Isn't it true that a woman cannot pray and fast when she is menstruating?" The women said yes. He said, "This is the deficiency of her religion." See "Sahih Al-Bukhari 304 - Menstrual Periods - كتاب الحيض - Sunnah.Com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم)," accessed June 17, 2025, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:304>.

³⁶⁷ Narrated by Abu Bakr: During the battle of Al-Jamal, Allah blessed me with a word (which I heard from the Prophet). When the Prophet heard the news that the Persians had appointed the daughter of Khosrau as their Queen (ruler), he said, "Never will a nation succeed who appoints a woman as their ruler." See "Sahih Al-Bukhari 7099 - Afflictions and the End of the World - كتاب الفتن - Sunnah.Com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم)," accessed June 17, 2025, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:7099>.

³⁶⁸ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 207.

³⁶⁹ Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman*, 55.

³⁷⁰ Tehrani, *Ma'refat al-Imam*, 1:178.

manner in which the wilderness, perceived by Hagar as a profane realm, converges with a sacred experience, thereby enriching her existential comprehension as an individual engaged in religious life.³⁷¹

Mircea Eliade posits that every spatial expanse within the universe encompasses not merely a void or a monotonous materiality, but also consists of distinct segments that vary in qualitative essence. For instance, in the narrative of the Prophet Moses, the divine directive instructs him to remove his footwear, signifying that the terrain upon which he treads is sanctified (Exod 3:5).³⁷² This narrative underscores the presence of a significant sacred space within the cosmos that stands in stark contrast to the mundane realm.³⁷³ Eliade further asserts that when the sacred emerges within the profane domain, a phenomenon referred to as hierophany, it transmutes into a sacred space, establishing a “fixed point” that serves as a pivotal axis of orientation amidst the amorphous void of space.³⁷⁴ This central point evolves into a consecrated locale that imparts orientation and significance of human existence.³⁷⁵

In contrast to profane space, which is contingent and fluctuates according to quotidian exigencies, sacred space establishes a definitive absolute reference point and engenders a world imbued with significance.³⁷⁶ It attains the status of a consecrated locale due to the manifestation of the Divine (hierophany), which endows the space with distinctive meaning in relation to other locales. This phenomenon transfigures an ordinary site into a nexus connecting humanity with the Divine, serving as a transition between the profane and the sacred.³⁷⁷ Utilizing Eliade’s theoretical framework, a cohesive pattern emerges within the wilderness, which serves as the site of Hagar’s theophanic encounter, evolving from a desolate, uninhabited region into a pivotal locus of human civilization. Jewish tradition identifies this significant site as being located at the Harbor at the northern extremity of the Gulf of Akaba, adjacent to the Red Sea,³⁷⁸ while Islamic tradition designates the wilderness

³⁷¹ Eliade and Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 14.

³⁷² Exodus 3:5: "And He said: 'Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 78.

³⁷³ Eliade and Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 20.

³⁷⁴ Eliade and Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 21.

³⁷⁵ Eliade and Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 22.

³⁷⁶ Eliade and Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 23.

³⁷⁷ The sanctity of a place or location does not always require a grand divine manifestation. For example, in the legend of the founder of El-Hamelat (J. E. Hanauer, 1907): when his stick grew into a tree overnight, he took it as God’s guidance to settle there. This simple sign, full of religious meaning, was enough to provide certainty of the location as sacred. See Eliade and Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 26.

³⁷⁸ Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary: Genesis*, 127. See again chapter 2 in the subsection 2.1. Wilderness within Sacred Traditions: Torah and Qur’an.

of Hagar's exile as Mecca al-Ḥarām. Ayyashi (d. 932 CE) references a hadith that elucidates the merits of Mecca:

“And in another narration from Abu Ja‘far, he said: “Do you know which place is the most honorable in the sight of Allah?” No one answered, so he himself answered his question: “That is Mecca al-Ḥarām which He has approved for Himself as a sacred land, and He has made His house in it.”³⁷⁹

Mecca has presently emerged as a venerated locus frequented by millions annually to fulfill the *ḥajj*, a pivotal juncture bridging the mundane realm with the sacred, The Ultimate Reality, God. Eliade designates this pivotal juncture as the *axis mundi*, a notion positing that authentic reality is perpetually situated at the central point that interlinks the three cosmic domains: terrestrial, celestial, and infernal. Eliade cites Palestine as a singular illustration regarded as the epicenter of the earth, with Jerusalem serving as the nucleus of the holy city. Consequently, within this framework, the existence of Mecca *al-Ḥarām* fulfills an analogous role in accordance with Eliade's theoretical parameters. Mecca is thus elevated to the status of a sanctified site or *axis mundi par excellence* (the primary axis of the cosmos) that facilitates communion with the transcendent domain, or the Divine,³⁸⁰ and every traditional individual endeavors to remain in proximity to this *axis mundi*,³⁸¹ akin to the millions of Muslims undertaking the *ḥajj* to Mecca, a site that was formerly an isolated, desolate, and uninhabited locale, wherein Hagar and her son Ishmael were initially placed by Abraham at the behest of God.³⁸²

The examination of Hagar's experience in the wilderness through the theoretical framework proposed by Eliade elucidates the singularity of Hagar's character, as the wilderness, which served as the site of her exile, evolved into a perpetual focal point (Mecca). In the absence of Hagar's existence, the consecration of the wilderness into Mecca al-Ḥarām would not have been realized, since the *ḥajj* pilgrimage at this site necessitated preliminary physical symbols inherent in Hagar's odyssey, specifically the act of running between Safa and Marwa, as well as the emergence of the Zamzam spring. Regrettably, Hagar's spiritual influence is infrequently emphasized, primarily being articulated through the narrative of her husband and son, Abraham and Ishmael. Indeed,

³⁷⁹ ‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr Al-‘Ayyāshī*, 2:251. See again chapter 2 in the subsection 2.1. Wilderness within Sacred Traditions: Torah and Qur’an.

³⁸⁰ Eliade and Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 42.

³⁸¹ Eliade and Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 43.

³⁸² When Hajar was breastfeeding Ismā‘īl and eating dates and drinking water. However, the dates and water ran out, so both of them felt thirsty. Hajar then walked to find water and climbed to Shafā, but did not see anyone. Then she came down and ran to Marwah, looked around, but did not find anyone. She did this seven times, and that is why Muslims perform sa’y (running between Shafā and Marwah) seven times in the Hajj. See Burūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān*, 4:426.

her name is seldom referenced in hadith literature in comparison to the names of other esteemed women. For instance, in a hadith cited by Al-Qusayrī (d. 1072 CE) as follows:

“Subsequently, we attained the fourth celestial realm. It was revealed that this realm was constituted of lustrous yellow gold, designated as al-Mā‘ūn, with its custodian identified as Mu‘min Yālīl. Furthermore, it was disclosed that within this domain were allocated for Maryam bint ‘Imrān seventy palatial structures constructed of pearls, while for the mother of the Prophet Mūsā, seventy palatial edifices crafted from verdant emeralds, and for Āsiyah binti Muzāhim, the spouse of Fir‘aun, seventy palatial formations composed of rubies, and for Khadīja binti Khuwaylid, the progenitor of the Prophet’s saw offspring, seventy palatial structures fashioned from red rubies. Additionally, for Fāṭimah binti Muḥammad, seventy palatial edifices constructed from red coral adorned with pearls.”³⁸³

The omission of Hagar’s designation within the celestial hierarchies as referenced in the hadith underscores the notion that her spiritual authority remains less pronounced than that of other esteemed female figures within the Islamic tradition. Moreover, in Jewish tradition, her name is almost forgotten. Although Hagar is uniquely recognized as the sole individual who encountered revelation whilst situated in the tangible wilderness, a Jewish feminist posited that the majority of the narrators of the Hebrew Bible were male, who recounted narratives primarily for a male audience. These narrators frequently levied accusations against women for engaging in non-monotheistic religious practice. When the women in question hailed from a foreign lineage, such accusations morphed into entrenched stereotypes.³⁸⁴ This perspective is corroborated by the research of other scholars who assert that the recognition of the concept of the prophetess³⁸⁵ within the Jewish tradition disrupted the theoretical paradigms held by medieval scholars, who equated prophecy with intellectual superiority, a trait they predominantly ascribed to men. This discord illuminated the pervasive gender bias embedded within the intellectual traditions of that era.³⁸⁶

The objective of this chapter is consequently to reexamine Hagar’s sojourn in the wilderness, aiming to cultivate a more expansive comprehension of women, the wilderness, and the phenomenon of revelation from both Jewish and Islamic viewpoints. As previously articulated, Hagar’s narrative exemplifies the motif that corresponds to the classification of myth, specifically a classification that elucidates profound insights into human existence. Myths possess significant meaning and serve as guiding frameworks for human experience, as they pertain to encounters that transcend mere narrative or abstract cognition, akin to the

³⁸³ Abū al-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Karīm Qushayrī, *Kitāb Al-Mī‘rāj* (Dār al-Maktabah Bībilyūn, 2007), 120.

³⁸⁴ Beal and Gunn, *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies*, 61.

³⁸⁵ Female prophets in Jewish tradition are associated with noble female figures who are in the lineage of the covenant and are said to have experienced encounters with the Holy Spirit. The seven female prophet figures are: Sarah (שָׂרָה), Miriam (מִרְיָם), Deborah (דְּבוֹרָה), Hannah (חַנָּה), Abigail (אַבְיָגַיִל), Huldah (חֻלְדָּה), and Eshter (אֶסְתֵּר). See Segal, *Vol. 2 The Babylonian Esther Midrash*, 162.

³⁸⁶ Schwartzmann, “The Attitude of Medieval Jewish Philosophers to the Phenomenon of Female Prophecy,” 59–60.

account of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the celestial realm to terrestrial existence.³⁸⁷

To attain this comprehension, the investigation presented in this chapter employs the framework of comparative analysis as articulated by Barbara A. Holdrege. Holdrege argues that in the domain of religious studies, researchers explore a range of essential ideas, which encompass symbols, myths, scriptures, and mysticism, to clarify and classify religious experiences. Consequently, the methodology of comparative analysis is inherently integral to the application of these categories in scholarly research, particularly in juxtaposing texts such as the Hebrew Bible, the Qur'an, and the analogous narratives (specifically concerning the figure of Hagar) across diverse traditions to ascertain their adherence to established criteria.³⁸⁸ In this context, categories serve as instruments for the inclusion or exclusion of a phenomenon predicated upon specific attributes it possesses. By employing the comparative analysis framework, the narrative of Hagar in the wilderness is juxtaposed with the accounts of other esteemed female figures in both traditions who encountered revelation and wilderness, namely Yocheved (Mother of Moses), Maryam (Virgin Mary), and Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', thereby not only accentuating the parallels among the narratives of each of these female figures with Hagar but also elucidating the distinctions that exist between the various narratives.³⁸⁹ Thus, for the preliminary analysis, several pivotal categories for comparative examination between Hagar's narrative and those of other significant female figures are delineated in the subsequent table:

Table 4.1. *Comparative Analysis of Wilderness and Divine Revelation to Women: Hagar as Paradigm*

Key Aspects	Hagar	Yocheved	Maryam	Fatimah
Wilderness location	- Torah: Beersheba (Gen 21), - Qur'an & Tafsīr: Mecca, Shafa and Marwah (Surah 14:37)	- Torah: Nile River (Exod 2:1-3), - Qur'an: River (Surah 28:7)	Qur'an: Bethlehem valley, about 4-6 miles from Jerusalem³⁹⁰ (Surah 19:22-26)	Shi'ite Ḥadīth and Tafsīr: Symbolic wilderness shaped by the experience of constant suffering

³⁸⁷ Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 6.

³⁸⁸ Holdrege, "Comparative Analysis as Critical Method," 83.

³⁸⁹ Holdrege, "Comparative Analysis as Critical Method," 78.

³⁹⁰ Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in The English Language*, 344.

Form of Revelation	- Torah: Angel (Gen 16 and 21), - Tafsīr and Ḥadīth: Angel (Bukhārī Ḥadīth and Classical Tafsir)	- Torah: Revelation to put Moses into the river (Exod 2:3), - Qur’ān: Revelation to put Moses into the river (Surah 28:7)	- New Testament: Angel (Luke 1:30-35) - Qur’ān: Surah Maryam (19):23-24)	Shi’ite Ḥadīth and Tafsīr: Angel spoke to her (because she is the source of divine light (nūr))
Gender Agency	Praying and searching for a solution to save her baby, Ishmael	Following the revelation to save the baby (Moses) by throwing him to the river	Living a solitary life	Martyrdom
Symbol of Water	Fountain of Zamzam	Nile river	Water stream beneath Maryam	Tears (mostly in Shiite narration)
Social Context	Banished, exiled	Pharaoh’s threat	Accused of adultery	Political conflict after the death of the Prophet

The table above outlines the significant elements that highlight both the resonances and distinctions within the narratives of each female figure examined across the two traditions. The divergences within each narrative elucidate how each prominent female figure engages with the wilderness and the reception of divine revelation in diverse manifestations. For instance, Hagar and Mary encounter the wilderness in a geographical sense, albeit within disparate social contexts. Mary is constrained to the parameters of the Qur’an, as her name is scarcely referenced in the Jewish tradition, which frequently adopts a negative perspective towards her,³⁹¹ whereas the Christian tradition presents a geographical framework that is markedly distinct from that of the Qur’an and does not culminate in a wilderness experience.

The subsequent figure under consideration is Yocheved. Although she did not undergo wilderness in a physical or geographical sense, the political circumstances prevailing

³⁹¹ Christians view Mary as the perfect woman and mother of God; while the Jews viewed her as an adulterer. See Daniel J. Lasker, “Mary in Jewish Tradition,” *Veritas*, Porto Alegre, vol. 63, no. 1 (2018): 27.

during the reign of pharaoh, which posed a significant threat to the life of her infant son, inspired her to take the drastic measure of placing him in the Nile to ensure his salvation. In a similar vein, the figure of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', who is prominently recognized within Islamic tradition, also did not encounter wilderness in a physical or geographical context. Nonetheless, Shia literature portrays her as a character who symbolically endured wilderness, characterized by poverty and profound suffering. Furthermore, she is acknowledged as a conduit of divine revelation due to her direct lineage to the Prophet Muhammad, earning her the epithet of a source of light (*nūr*) and bestowing upon her a distinguished spiritual status. A more comprehensive exploration of the comparative analysis between the narratives of Hagar and each of these female figures is presented in the subsequent sub-chapters.

4.2 Hagar vis-à-vis Yocheved (*Umm Mūsā*): Female Agency amidst Crisis

Yocheved, more commonly recognized as Mother of Prophet Moses, constitutes one of the pivotal figures whose experiences within liminal space are articulated in both Jewish and Islamic theological frameworks. Although the trajectory of her life narrative diverges from that of Hagar, who underwent a sojourn in the tangible wilderness, Yocheved is documented as a female entity who confronted existential boundaries when she received the divine injunction to cast her infant into the Nile River. In this critical juncture, Yocheved occupies a liminal position between annihilation and preservation, wherein she grapples with an internal conflict between maternal trepidation and adherence to a revelation that eludes rational comprehension. The divine communication bestowed upon her was not imparted directly by an angel, as in the case of Hagar; nonetheless, akin to Hagar's emergence as the matriarch of the Arab nation, Yocheved's agency, manifested through her act of relinquishing her child to the Nile, rendered her a pivotal figure in the salvation narrative, propelling Moses toward his prophetic vocation as the emancipator of the Israelites from the bonds of servitude in Egypt.³⁹² Jewish exegetes articulate that the mother of the Prophet Moses epitomizes a significant female figure instrumental in the liberation events chronicled in Exodus 1-2, alongside her daughter Miriam, who is venerated as a female prophet³⁹³ within Jewish tradition.³⁹⁴

³⁹² The Pentateuch substantiate the divine governance exercised through Moses during the four decades of wilderness sojourn over the Israelites, as articulated in Deut 29:4-5. See "Deuteronomy 29." See again chapter 2 in subsection 2.2. Wilderness as a Context for Divine-Human Interaction exemplified by Prophetic Figures.

³⁹³ The beginning of Miriam's prophecy is explained by R. Nachman in the name Rab. He said: Miriam, when she was only Aaron's sister, prophesied, saying: In the future my mother will have a son who will bring salvation to Israel. See Friedlande, *Sepher Haaggadah Consiting of Parables and Legends from Talmud and Medrash*, 137.

³⁹⁴ Woolstenhulme, *The Matriarchs in Genesis Rabbah*, 3.

If the Zamzam spring represents a metaphorical embodiment of water that initiates a new universal paradigm commencing with the hierophanic event in the narrative of Hagar, as delineated through the theoretical frameworks of Eliade³⁹⁵ and Ricoeur,³⁹⁶ then the symbol of water within the narrative of Yocheved is epitomized by the Nile River, which serves as its liminal space. Within mystical thought, the river is seen as a boundary that has the power to create both havoc and salvation, indicating a movement from one existential phase to another.³⁹⁷ In the prophetic texts and rituals of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean, water is emblematic of life, serving as a metaphor for divine benevolence, a conduit for the emergence of prophetic inspiration, while concurrently embodying destructive potential alongside salvific qualities.³⁹⁸

The liminal phase experienced by Hagar and Yocheved commences with the narrative of the birth of their offspring, a pivotal moment that catalyzes a profound spiritual and existential metamorphosis, notwithstanding the fact that both women emerge from distinct historical contexts and societal frameworks. As elaborated in the preceding chapter three, Hagar encountered her transitional phase after her expulsion from Abraham's household, prompted by Sarah's jealousy concerning the presence of her son, Ishmael (Gen 21).³⁹⁹ Concurrently, Yocheved encountered her liminal phase after successfully concealing her son for a duration of three months to prevent his execution by Pharaoh (Exod 2:2).⁴⁰⁰ Nevertheless, once the knowledge of her childbirth became apparent and she could no longer conceal her infant, Yocheved promptly presented the child prior to the arrival of Pharaoh's emissaries, concealed him within a vessel constructed from reeds, and delicately positioned him amidst the flax that proliferated along the Nile. Subsequently, she dispatched Miriam, her daughter, to monitor the vessel from a distance and to ascertain the potential outcomes for her infant (Exod 2: 3-4).

The Nile River serves as a vital source of life for numerous individuals. On the day the infant prophet Moses was carried away by the river, Bathia, the daughter of Pharaoh, along with her attendant, approached the Nile during a particularly hot day. Upon her entry

³⁹⁵ Hierophany is an event when the sacred is manifested in earthly elements. See Eliade and Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 21.

³⁹⁶ Hierophany shows the manifestation of human relationship with the sacred. See Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 13.

³⁹⁷ Martti Nissinen, "Sacred Springs and Liminal Rivers: Water and Prophecy in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean," *E Ben Zvi & C Levin* 461 (2014): 42.

³⁹⁸ Nissinen, "Sacred Springs and Liminal Rivers: Water and Prophecy in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean," 47.

³⁹⁹ Ibn Ezra Commentaries on the Pentateuch "Genesis 21." See again Chapter 3 in subsection 3.1 Close Reading of Genesis 16 and 21.

⁴⁰⁰ Exodus 2:2: "And the woman conceived, and bore a son; and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months." See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 77.

into the water, she found a reed box that contained an infant. Driven by compassion, she rescued the child from particular peril. Bathia subsequently designated the infant as *Mosheh* (מֹשֶׁה), which translates to “I drew him out of water.” Nevertheless, various Jewish texts also highlight several names associated with this child; for example, his biological father referred to him as *Heber* (חֶבֶר), due to his eventual reunion with his family after being cared for by Bathia; his biological mother (Yocheved) named him *Yekuthiel* (יְקֻתִּיאֵל), signifying ‘I place my hope in the Lord,’ while his sister referred to him as *Yarad* (יָרַד), meaning “I approached the river to observe it;” and his brother Aaron designated him *Abigedore* (אַבִּיגְדוֹר), which translates to ‘The Lord has restored the integrity of the household of Jacob.’ Nevertheless, he is more widely recognized by the name *Mosheh* or Moses, the son of Bathiah, who was nurtured within the Egyptian palace.⁴⁰¹

In the biblical narrative, the character of Yocheved is consistently placed with the name of her daughter, Miriam, signifying the moral integrity and elevated status of both individuals. This juxtaposition arises from the fact that both Yocheved and Miriam are emphasized for their agency in preserving Moses’ life. While Yocheved is noted for her successful efforts to safeguard Moses, inspired by divine revelation, Miriam is recognized as a prophetess who foretold Moses’ birth and also played a crucial role in reuniting him with his biological mother when the infant Moses was unable to be nursed by any woman in Egypt.⁴⁰² It is documented that Miriam, as a vigilant sister, monitored her brother to guarantee that Pharaoh’s daughter, Bathia, selected Moses’ biological mother as his wet nurse (Exod 2: 4-9).

One Talmudic compilation referencing tannaitic midrash links Yocheved and Miriam to the appellations Shiprah and Puah as delineated in Exod 1: 15,⁴⁰³ positing that Shiprah is indeed Yocheved due to her act of beautifying the newborn, alongside the burgeoning growth of the Children of Israel during her epoch. Conversely, Puah is identified with Miriam, as she was known to vocalize prophetic utterances, proclaiming: “In the future, my mother shall give birth to a son who will deliver Israel.”⁴⁰⁴ Given the significant

⁴⁰¹ Polano, *The Talmud Selections from the Contents of That Ancient Book, Its Commentaries, Teachings, Poetry and Legends*, 126.

⁴⁰² The Rabbis interpreted that it was forbidden for the baby Prophet Moses to breastfeed from anyone other than his biological mother, who was purely Hebrew, through the Word of God: Will the mouth of one destined to be in communion with the Shechinah drink the milk of an unclean person (Egypt)? See Friedlande, *Sepher Haaggadah Consiting of Parables and Legends from Talmud and Medrash*, 137.

⁴⁰³ Exod 1: 15: “And the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the one was Shiprah, and the name of the other Puah.” See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoteric Text*, 76.

⁴⁰⁴ Devora Steinmetz, “A Portrait of Miriam in Rabbinic Midrash,” *Indiana University Press*, The Representation of Women in Jewish Literature, vol. 8, no. 1 (1988): 41. Further explanation about Musa please see again chapter 2 in subsection 2.2. Wilderness as a Context for Divine-Human Interaction exemplified by Prophetic Figures.

representation of these two female figures within the biblical narrative, several contemporary Jewish feminists have conceptualized the journeys of both as paradigmatic exemplars who played an instrumental role in the emancipation of women from slavery and oppression.⁴⁰⁵ This interpretation resonates with feminist analyses of Hagar, particularly within the African context, which situates her as an African female figure who liberates herself from enslavement through her steadfastness. However, when examined within a more expansive social framework, it is not exclusively directed towards Jewish women.⁴⁰⁶

In Islamic scholarly discourse, in contrast to Hagar, the Mother of Moses (*Yuhāna*,⁴⁰⁷ whose name is presented in various forms, including *Nūkhānd* with the letter *nun* or *Yūkhānd* with *ya*⁴⁰⁸) is explicitly referenced in the Qur'an, which directly recounts the divine revelation she received prior to the release of her infant into the Nile River. In the verse al-Qaṣaṣ (28):7, Allah says:

And we inspired the mother of Moses: (telling): “Suckle him (Moses), but when you fear for him, then cast him into the river and fear not, nor grieve. Verily, We shall bring him back to you, and shall make him one of (Our) Messengers.”⁴⁰⁹

Although the mother of Moses did not encounter a genuine wilderness akin to that experienced by Hagar, an examination of the aforementioned verses in the Qur'an reveals several analogous patterns that elucidate the descent of revelation amidst the thresholds or crises confronted by these two female figures. When Abraham took Hagar to an uninhabited valley at the behest of God, the Bukhari hadith indicates that Hagar was in the act of breastfeeding the infant Ishmael; thereafter, Abraham left Hagar in a valley adjacent to the Kaaba, where at that time, sustenance and water were conspicuously absent.⁴¹⁰ This

⁴⁰⁵ Woolstenhulme, *The Matriarchs in Genesis Rabbah*, 3.

⁴⁰⁶ See David Tuesday Adamo and Erivwierho Francis Eghwubare, “The African Wife of Abraham (Gn 16:1-16; 21:8-21),” *OTE* 18, no. 3 (2005): 455–71; Ademiluka, “Sexual Exploitation or Legitimate Surrogacy”; Maseko and Soko-de-Jong, “Hagar’s Spirituality Prior to and after Captivity”; Thabede, *Navigating the Threshold: An African-Feminist Reading of the Hagar Narrative in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*; Afolarin Olotunde Ojewole, “Hagar: African Foremother and Biblical Matriarch,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 7 7, no. 10 (2017).

⁴⁰⁷ Musa’s mother’s name was Yuhāna, some also say Yukhābadh binti Ishār bin Lawi bin Ya’qub, or Yārikhā, as mentioned in the book al-Itqān. See Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn ‘Ajībah Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd* (Dr. Ḥasan ‘Abbās Zakī, 1419), 4:231.

⁴⁰⁸ ‘Alī, *Mawāhibu ‘alayh*, 853; Her name was Yarkhā, and some say Ayyārakht as in al-Ta’rīf by al-Suhaylī, and also called Nūḥāyidh (with nun) or Yūḥānidh (with yā’ below) in the book ‘Ayn al-Ma’ānī. She was from the lineage of Lawī bin Ya’qūb ‘alaihis-salām. See Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī Burūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān* (Dār al-Fikr, 1957), 2:33.

⁴⁰⁹ Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur’an in The English Language*, 431.

⁴¹⁰ Imam al-Bukhārī narrated that Ibrāhīm took Hājar and their son Ismā‘īl while Hājar was breastfeeding him to a place near the Ka’bah under a tree in the place of Zamzam, at the highest place in the mosque. At that time, there was no one in Mecca, nor was there any water. Ibrāhīm made them sit there, placed a leather bag containing some dates and a small waterskin containing water near them, then he set out for home. See “Sahih Al-Bukhari 3364 - Prophets - كتاب أحاديث الأنبياء - Sunnah.Com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم).” See again Chapter 3 in subsection 3.2 Close Reading of Surah Ibrahim (14): 37.

circumstance appears to evoke a similar reflection upon the plight of the mother of Moses, wherein revelation was imparted to her, instructing her to breastfeed Ishmael and to release the infant prophet Moses into the river. In this regard, both of these female figures assume the role of a mother confronted with an extraordinary existential dilemma, yet demonstrate a willingness to act; specifically, Hagar consents to being left with her infant son in an uninhabited valley in obedience to God's command, while the mother of Moses consents to throw her cherished infant in the river, also in compliance with divine instruction. Scholars within the Islamic tradition reach a consensus regarding the characterization of the open-mindedness exhibited by these two women during this crisis as one of the most profound instances of *tawakkul*, which signifies reliance upon Allah.⁴¹¹

The subsequent parallel motif identified is present within the verses that depict the divine revelation imparted to the mother of Moses, which shares thematic elements with the narrative concerning Hagar, as elucidated in the Bukhari hadith. This hadith encompasses not only divine commands but also conveys a promise from God. In this context, God mandated both women to adhere to His directives while simultaneously bestowing upon them messages of hope; specifically, both Hagar and the mother of Moses received assurances of a future reunion following their respective separations, along with the prophecy that their sons would attain the status of prophets or messengers.⁴¹² An illustrative instance can be observed in the revelation granted to Hagar through an angel after the emergence of the Zamzam spring, wherein she was reassured, "Do not be afraid and be joyful, for this valley shall flourish, as it is the sanctuary of God,⁴¹³ and your son (Ishmael) along with his father (Abraham) shall construct it."⁴¹⁴ In contrast to Hagar's experience, the revelation encountered by the mother of Moses did not occur through an angelic messenger, but rather manifested as inspiration or in a dream. Nevertheless, the commands and assurances encapsulated in the revelation reveal a congruent pattern, as Moses' mother was instructed not to fear that her infant would either perish or be lost, and was advised against sorrow following his placement to the Nile, for God assured her of the gentle return of her child, who would ultimately be cared for once again by his mother, with the further promise that her son would assume the role of a messenger.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹¹ Muḥammad bin Ibrāhīm bin Ibrāhīm bin Ḥassān, *Silsilat Al-Dār al-Ākhirah* (n.d.), 10:13.

⁴¹² Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd*, 4:231.

⁴¹³ See Nuwairī, *Nihāyat Al-Arb Fī Funūn al-Adab*, 13:116; and Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, 13:691.

⁴¹⁴ Qāsim, *Minār Al-Qārī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4:187. See again chapter 3 in subsection 3.2 Close Reading of Surah Ibrahim (14): 37.

⁴¹⁵ Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd*, 4:231.

Another compelling juxtaposition that can be discerned is the affective response of Hagar and the maternal figure of Moses in confronting the liminal circumstance that both individuals encounter. Both Hagar and the mother of Moses exhibit identical trepidation and concern regarding the potential demise of their offspring. Yet, they manifest agency to secure the well-being of their child. As previously elucidated, Hagar resolves to traverse between Safa and Marwah seven times in pursuit of water and assistance, as she is unable to endure witnessing Ishmael's suffering due to dehydration while imploring for Ishmael's protection.⁴¹⁶ This emotional reaction is similarly manifested by Moses' mother after she places her infant in the Nile, resulting in an emotional void (*fazi'a*)⁴¹⁷ and a state of mental disarray (*fāriḡan*).⁴¹⁸ Upon discovering that her child was in the custody of Pharaoh, she nearly disclosed the identity of the infant as her own (had it not been for Allah fortifying her resolve to remain unwavering (Surah 28: 10)).⁴¹⁹ To safeguard her son, the mother of Moses instructed her daughter, Maryam,⁴²⁰ to trace her little brother's path and ascertain his condition. Consequently, Maryam infiltrated Pharaoh's palace, where she observed the distress of Asiyah⁴²¹ (Pharaoh's wife who rescued Moses from the river), who was in search of a wet nurse, given that Moses refused to suckle from any of the wet nurses available in the palace. In response, Maryam proposed a wet nurse who would care for Moses with utmost affection. Subsequently, Pharaoh commanded her to retrieve the wet nurse. And Maryam returned with her mother.⁴²² At that juncture, Moses was cradled in

⁴¹⁶ Qurtubī, *Jāmi' Ahkām Al-Qur'ān Wa-l-Mubayyin Limā Taḍammanahu Mina al-Sunnati Wa-Āyi al-Furqān*, 12:148. See again chapter 3 in subsection 3.2 Close Reading of Surah Ibrahim (14): 37.

⁴¹⁷ In some readings, the word *fazi'a* (fear) indicates deep fear. But in the verse (Surah 28:10), the word that is used to describe the Mother of Moses' fear is *fāriḡan* (empty) which indicates an empty heart due to anxiety. See Gunābādī, *Tafsīr Bayān Al-Sa'ādah Fī Maqāmāt al-'Ibādah*, 3:184.

⁴¹⁸ Imam Malik interpreted the term "loss of reason" as a situation where the mother of Moses became so confused and shaken because of her son, that she did not care about anything other than him (Moses), like a seriously ill person who cannot think about anything except his pain. A person who is overwhelmed by such anxiety may forget to do anything other than think about the worrying thing. See Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Rushd Qurtubī, *Al-Bayān Wa al-Taḥṣīl Wa al-Sharḥ Wa al-Tawjīh Wa al-Ta'līl Li Masā'il al-Mustakhraja* (Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1988), 17:483.

⁴¹⁹ Surah 28:10: "And the heart of the mother of Moses became empty (from every thought, except the thought of Moses). She was very near to disclose his (case, i.e. the child is her son), had We not strengthened her heart (with Faith), so that she might remain as one of the believers." See Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in The English Language*, 431.

⁴²⁰ According to some narrations, her daughter was named Maryam, and according to others, Kulthūm, who married Ghālib bin Yūsha'. She obeyed her mother's order and entered the palace of Pharaoh, and from a distance saw Musa by Āsiyah's side, but no one realized that she was Mūsā's sister. See 'Alī, *Mawāhibu 'alayh*, 854.

⁴²¹ Pharaoh's wife, Āsiyah bint Muzāḥim, who according to some narrations was Musa's aunt and was from the descendants of Bani Israel, said to her husband when he found the baby Musa in the Nile, "This child is a comfort to my eyes and your eyes," because the child had been the cause of their son's healing. She begged Pharaoh not to kill him, on the grounds that perhaps the child would bring some benefit, or they could adopt him as their son. So Pharaoh gave the child to Āsiyah, and she raised and cared for him. See Muḥammad Maṭwālī Shā'irawī, *Kitāb Al-Tafsīr al-Shā'irawī* (Akhbar Al-Youm Printing Press, 1997), 9:5637.

⁴²² Surah 28: 11] And she said to his (Moses) sister: "Follow him." So she (his sister watched him from a far place secretly, while they perceived not. 12] and We had already forbidden (other) foster suckling mothers for

Pharaoh's embrace and exhibited reluctance to suckle from anyone who approached him. However, upon being held by his mother and detecting her familiar scent, he instinctively turned his head, accepted his mother's breast, and began to suckle.⁴²³

Although originating from disparate historical and social contexts, the distinct narratives and liminal experiences of Hagar and the Mother of Moses appear to resonate with one another in a profound manner. Hagar, an enslaved individual from Egypt, was estranged from the household of Abraham and Sarah due to her exclusion from the divine covenant established with the Israelites (Gen 17:19-21).⁴²⁴ Conversely, the mother of Moses faced significant challenges as a Hebrew enslaved in Egypt, striving to protect her son (Moses, who would ultimately emancipate the Israelites) from the decree of death imposed by Pharaoh.⁴²⁵

It has been narrated that the Pharaoh tasked an individual with determining whether the mother of Moses was exhibiting any signs of pregnancy. However, she demonstrated no discernible signs of pregnancy whatsoever.⁴²⁶ After the birth of Moses, upon the assigned individual's observation of the infant, she perceived a luminous presence between the child's eyes, which incited a profound affection within her. The woman articulated, "Exercise vigilance over this infant, for my affection for him is immense, and I believe he shall be the one to precipitate the downfall of the *Qibt* (the Ancient Egyptians)." Following the midwife's departure, several individuals arrived to check on the well-being of Moses' mother.⁴²⁷ Shortly thereafter, the Pharaoh's guards approached the entrance of her residence to interrogate Moses' mother. The sister of Moses, Maryam, remarked, "O my mother, there is a guard at the door." In a state of urgency, Moses' mother enveloped him in a cloth and concealed him within a heated oven. Her mental state became disordered, as

him, until she [his sister came up and] said: "Shall I direct you to a household who will rear him for you, and look after him in a good manner?" 13) So did We restore him to his mother, that her eye might be comforted, and that she might not grieve, and that she might know that the Promise of Allah is true. But most of them know not. See Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in The English Language*, 431.

⁴²³ 'Alī, *Mawāhibu 'alayh*, 854.

⁴²⁴ God declares that His covenant will be sustained through Abraham's distinguished lineage, specifically through Sarah's son, Isaac. See Alexander, *Pentateuch*, 10 See again Chapter 3 in subsection 3.1 Close Reading of Genesis 16 and 21.

⁴²⁵ Pharaoh is depicted as a cruel and destructive leader. In the Pentateuch, it is narrated that he gave orders to all his people that every male child born to a Hebrew woman should be killed (Exod 1:16). Meanwhile, in the Qur'an, it is explained that Pharaoh was a despotic, oppressive, and arbitrary man (*mufsidūn*). He oppressed the Children of Israel and slaughtered their sons and spared their daughters (Surah al-Qaṣaṣ [28]: 4). See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 76; Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in The English Language*, 430.

⁴²⁶ Musa's mother was actually pregnant with Musa, but there were no signs of pregnancy, such as an enlarged stomach, changes in skin color, or the release of breast milk. Until finally, she gave birth to Musa one night without anyone watching knowing. See Burūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān*, 6:382.

⁴²⁷ Muḥammad bin 'Umar Nawawī al-Jāwī al-Bantānī Iqlīmā Baladā al-Tanārī, *Muraḥ Labīd Li-Kashf Ma'na al-Qur'ān al-Majīd* (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1417), 2:188.

she was rendered uncertain regarding her next course of action at that moment. Then, the guards entered the domicile, and upon their examination of the heated oven, they also observed Moses's mother, whose countenance remained unaltered and exhibited no visible signs of lactation. So, they inquired, "What compelled you to summon the midwife into your residence?" The mother of Moses responded, "She is my companion; she came to pay me a visit." The guard then vacated the premises, and once they departed, Moses' mother regained her composure, prompting her to ask her daughter Maryam, "Then where is the baby?" She replied, "I do not know." Nevertheless, Moses' mother perceived the sound of the baby wailing from within the oven⁴²⁸ and hastened towards her child, discovering that the furnace had not harmed the infant Moses. Witnessing this miraculous event, she proclaimed, "Perhaps this is the messenger destined to bring about the destruction of Pharaoh and the Qibt through his agency."⁴²⁹

When the mother of Moses perceived the intense search conducted by Pharaoh's soldiers for the offspring of the Children of Israel, a divine revelation was imparted to her by Allah, stating, "And we inspired (*awḥā*) the mother of Moses: (telling): "Suckle him (Moses), but when you fear for him, then cast him into the river and fear not, nor grieve..." (Surah 28:7).⁴³⁰ According to Ḥafīz al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 1311 CE), the phrase "And we inspired (*awḥā*) to the mother of Moses" can be interpreted as a form of revelation manifested through diverse channels; whether via inspiration, a dream, or through the communication of an angel, akin to the experience of Maryam. Nonetheless, this phenomenon did not constitute a revelation akin to the prophetic treatise (*nubuwwah*), and thus, the mother of Moses was not recognized as a prophet.⁴³¹ Imām al-Ṭabarānī (d. 970 CE) similarly posited an interpretation, asserting that the divine communication he received from Allah did not constitute a prophetic revelation.⁴³² Consequently, the classification of Moses' mother as a prophet was precluded by the prevailing notion that women were deemed unsuitable for leadership or judicial roles, particularly in the context of prophethood. The liminal circumstance of Moses' mother is articulated in a discourse within *al-As'ilah al-Muḥamah*: "How could it be deemed permissible for Moses' mother

⁴²⁸ Abū Ishāq Aḥmad bin Ibrāhīm Tha'labī, *Al-Kashf Wa al-Bayān 'an Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Dār al-Tafsīr, 2015), 20:382.

⁴²⁹ 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Aḥmad Mahā'imī, *Khuṣūṣ Al-Ni'am Fī Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1428), 615; The belief that the child was an apostle was a conjecture and a shadow in the eyes of the Mother of Moses, but in reality, in the sight of Allah, it was definite knowledge. See Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm Qushayrī, *Sharḥ Asmā' Allāh al-Husnā* (Dār al-Haram li-l-Turāth, 1422), 258.

⁴³⁰ Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in The English Language*, 431.

⁴³¹ Nasafī, *Tafsīr Al-Nasafī (Madarik al-Tanzīl Wa Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl)*, 2:628.

⁴³² Hisham bin Abdul Karim al-Badrani Mawsili, ed., *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm, Li-l-Imām al-Ṭabarānī* (Dār al-Kitāb al-Thaqāfī, 2008), 5:53.

to cast her child into the river and jeopardize her own existence based solely on inspiration?"⁴³³ This predicament served as a profound test⁴³⁴ for Moses' mother regarding her willingness to comply with the Divine directive to breastfeed and subsequently relinquish her infant to the waters, either with unwavering faith and confidence or through a sense of coercion.⁴³⁵

Muslim scholars, encompassing both Sunni and Shia perspectives, concur that the revelation bestowed upon Moses' mother does not constitute a prophetic revelation, thereby negating the necessity for her to assume the role of an apostle.⁴³⁶ They underscore that within the framework of Islamic theology, women are not designated as prophets, in contrast to the Jewish tradition, which acknowledges the presence of female prophets. Thus, the revelation imparted to Moses' mother aligns more closely with a form of inspiration or divine guidance from God.⁴³⁷ The term *awḥā* (He Revealed) signifies that God provided a sign or symbol to Moses' mother. Certain scholars categorize revelation into two distinct forms: *ilhām* (inspiration) and *i'lām* (notification). Concerning this particular verse, they interpret it primarily through the lens of the former definition.⁴³⁸ From this analysis, it can be inferred that the term "Revelation" within the Qur'an encompasses diverse meanings, including that which is transmitted to the Prophet as a message, as well as that which manifests as Divine guidance or inspiration, akin to the experience of Moses' mother.⁴³⁹ Ibn 'Aḡbah (d.1809 CE) provided an esoteric interpretation of the revelation to Moses' mother, characterizing it as a vision.⁴⁴⁰

In a manner akin to Hagar, who discovered the Zamzam spring amidst the arid desert and was foretold to be the progenitor of a prophet who would become the patriarch of the Arab nation, scholars similarly interpret Moses' mother as a vessel for the precious existence of Moses. The inspiration (*ilhām*) bestowed upon her encompassed a unique state

⁴³³ Burūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān*, 5:382.

⁴³⁴ The test and trial (imtiḥān) faced by the mother of Moses served to reveal the qualities within her; both strengths and vulnerabilities. And she was among al-Karīmah (the noble ones). See Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī, *Sharḥ-i Mathnawī (Sabzavārī)* (Sāzmān-i Chāp va Intishārāt-i Vezārat-i Irshād-i Islāmī, 1374), 1:386.

⁴³⁵ Moḥammad Riḏā Lāhorī, *Mukāshafāt-i Raḏwā* (Intishārāt-i Rūzne, 1377), 431; Her liminal situation is revealed through her emotional state where she was confronted with deep unrest that Pharaoh would kill her son, so she threw her son into the river to save him. Watching (her baby drift away) with a mother's eyes was much more painful than not witnessing it at all. See Muṣṭafā ibn Sulaymān Bālīzādeḥ Ḥanafī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ Al-Ḥikam (Bālīzādeḥ)* (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1422), 297. This emotional state mirrors what Hagar experienced in the barren valley where she could no longer bear to see her baby, Ishmael, suffering from extreme thirst (as explained before in the Chapter 3).

⁴³⁶ Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd*, 4:231.

⁴³⁷ Muḥammad Matni, *Kitāb Sūrat Al-Qaṣaṣ, Dirāsāt Tahliḡiyah* (n.d.), 1:188.

⁴³⁸ Shaykh Jawād Karbalā'ī, *Al-Anwār al-Sāṡi'ah Fī Sharḥ al-Ziyārah al-Jāmi'ah* (Dār al-Ḥadīth, n.d.), 1:441.

⁴³⁹ Burūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān*, 2:33.

⁴⁴⁰ Ru'yah is a form of revelation (wahy), exemplified in God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son, and the revelation granted to the Moses' mother. See Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn 'Aḡbah Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd* (Dr. Ḥasan 'Abbās Zakī, 1419), 5:230.

attributed to individuals possessing a distinctive spiritual state (*ahl al-ḥāl*), characterized as a transient spiritual state; a divine gift from God, that cannot be attained through personal effort. The *mufasssir* elucidates the symbolism of the water (the Nile River) into which the Prophet Moses was cast as an indication of the salvation that God had ordained for the infant Prophet Moses. This is substantiated by the consensus among astrologers that once an object is cast into the water, it becomes impossible to trace its subsequent trajectory. Nevertheless, within the framework of the state (*lisān al-ḥāl*), the act of casting the infant Moses into the river represents a submission by Moses' mother to her Lord, aimed at preserving Moses from peril. Thus, both Hagar and Moses' mother executed two commandments from God, namely to remain unperturbed and to relinquish anxiety, and were bestowed with dual pieces of good news;⁴⁴¹ In Hagar's case, the barren territory she inhabited transformed into a flourishing land, and her offspring became the forebears of the Arab nation. Conversely, regarding Moses' mother, God assured her that she would be reunited with the infant Moses for nurturing, and that the infant Moses would emerge as a Prophet destined to liberate the nation of Israel.

The divine communication imparted by the angel to Hagar, alongside the revelation from God to Moses' mother, signifies that these two individuals have attained glory (*karamah*) due to their unwavering adherence to God's directives.⁴⁴² Similar to Hagar, who exhibited a willingness to be forsaken by Abraham in a desolate region in obedience to Allah's command, holding the conviction that "So He (Allah) will not forsake us,"⁴⁴³ when Moses' mother confronted her fears regarding Pharaoh, she complied with God's command by placing her infant Moses into the river, as if to express internally: "If this child is indeed blessed, then divine protection will ensure; however, if he is not, then nothing is left."⁴⁴⁴ This pivotal moment encapsulates not only theological significance but also an authentic, spiritual, and existential state.⁴⁴⁵ The two maternal figures exemplify the essence of motherhood imbued with profound moral consciousness (*nafs al-lawwāmah*). At the same time, their obedience manifests a readiness for spiritual engagement and a sanctified

⁴⁴¹ Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd*, 4:233.

⁴⁴² Goruhi az nevisandegān, *Jam' al-Maqāl* (Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyya li-l-Ṭibā'a wa al-Nashr, 2006), 70.

⁴⁴³ Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, 13:690; 'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr Al-'Ayyāshī*, 2:249; Qurṭubī, *Jāmi' al-Ḥikām Al-Qur'ān Wa-l-Mubayyin Limā Taḍammanahu Mina al-Sunnati Wa-Āyi al-Furqān*, 12:147. See again chapter 3 in subsection 3.2 Close Reading of Surah Ibrahim (14): 37.

⁴⁴⁴ 'Abd al-Ghanī Nābulusī, *Jawāhir Al-Nuṣūṣ Fī Sharḥ al-Fuṣūṣ* (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1429), 2:346; Ibn 'Arabi commented on this context by saying that when God revealed to the Mother of Moses to suckle her baby and throw him into the River, she did so without resisting. Even though the situation depicts her throwing the baby into danger of death, she does not oppose, does not hesitate, and does not consider that throwing the child into the water is an act that is dangerous in human terms. See Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabi, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah* ('Uthmān Yaḥyā), ed. 'Uthmān Yaḥyā, vol. 12 (Dar Ehya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1994), 332.

⁴⁴⁵ Tāj al-Dīn Ḥusayn Khwārazmī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ Al-Ḥikām (Khwārazmī / Āmulī)* (Būstān-e Kitāb, 1379), 1020.

soul.⁴⁴⁶ Due to this spiritual preparedness, their hearts are fortified by celestial inspiration, enabling them to remain resolute in their faith⁴⁴⁷ amidst a state of liminality, underrated by the turmoil of inner apprehension.⁴⁴⁸

Esoteric interpretation further posits that it was the spiritual preparedness exhibited by Hagar and the mother of Moses that rendered them suitable vessels to become the progenitors of a prophet, despite their concurrent social standing being akin to that of a slave. Without this spiritual readiness, an angel in the arid desert would not have directly communicated with Hagar, nor would the reality of Moses' prophethood as the *kalīm* (the one addressed directly by God) through the agency of Moses' mother have come to fruition. These two archetypal figures signify the culmination of knowledge as they attain a state of emptiness, specifically the desolate valley encountered by Hagar and the spiritual void (emptiness) experienced by the mother of Moses. Due to this state of emptiness, both figures are poised to embrace the liberation conferred by God through the prophetic or apostolic role of their offspring.⁴⁴⁹

Based on the preceding elucidation about the narratives of Hagar and Yocheved, as well as their encounters within the liminal space through an examination of scriptural literature and the interpretations emanating from both Jewish and Islamic traditions, a comparative analysis delineating the patterns and salient aspects that accentuate the spiritual agency of Hagar and Yocheved amid their acute circumstances of urgency (liminal situation) can be encapsulated in the following table:

Table 4.2. *Comparative Insight of Spiritual Agency between Hagar and Yocheved*

Key Aspect	Hagar	Yocheved	Comparative Insight
Divine Revelation	Through Angel (Gen 21)	Inspiration to throw Infant Moses into the River (Surah al- Qaṣaṣ (28):7)	Hagar experiences direct intervention with the angel, while the experience of Revelation in Yocheved is

⁴⁴⁶ Muḥyī ad-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī, *Tafsīr Ibn 'Arabī (Ta'Wīlāt 'Abd Ar-Razzāq)* (Dār Iḥyā' at-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1422), 115.

⁴⁴⁷ 'Arabī, *Tafsīr Ibn 'Arabī (Ta'Wīlāt 'Abd Ar-Razzāq)*, 116.

⁴⁴⁸ Some linguists argue that the meaning of the verse "Moses' mother's heart became empty" is that it was empty of sadness, because she knew that Moses had not been killed. For Allah, Glory be to Him, had revealed to him that He would return him to him and make him one of the apostles. See Abū Bakr Anbārī Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Bashār ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Bayān ibn Samā'ah ibn Farwah ibn Qaṭān ibn Dī'āmāh, *Kitāb Al-Idhdād Li Ibn al-Anbārī* (Al-Maktabah Al-'Asrīyah, 1987), 298.

⁴⁴⁹ Ṣā'in al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Turka, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ Al-Ḥikam (Ibn Turka)* (Intishārāt-i Bīdār, 1378), 2:873; Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī, *Al-Mathnawī al-Ma'nawī (Mu'arrab al-Dusūqī)* (Al-Majlis al-A'lā li'l-Thaqāfah, 1416), 2:540.

			implicit and without direct dialogue with the Divine.
Wilderness Experience	The barren desert as a liminal space (Surah Ibrāhīm (14): 37)	The Nile as a liminal space (Surah al-Qaṣaṣ (28):7)	Using Eliade’s theory in the analysis, Hagar’s experience has transformed the barren desert into an <i>axis mundi</i> (Mecca), while Yoḥved has utilized the river as a “path of salvation.”
Maternal Agency	Running back and forth (<i>Sa’i</i>) looking for water and help (Tafsīr and Ḥadīth)	Breastfeeding Moses in secret (Exod 2: 7-9)	Hagar is physically active in a crisis, while Yoḥved is strategically active.
Spiritual Legacy	Mother of Ishmael (Arab Ancestor) + Ḥajj ritual (<i>Sa’i</i>)	Mother of Moses (Mother of the Deliverer of the Israelites)	Hagar has a geographical legacy (Mecca), while Yoḥved has a historical legacy (Exodus).

The comparative table presented above does not imply that Hagar and Yoḥved underwent identical experiences within the liminal space. There exist numerous distinctions concerning the historical context, both socio-culturally and politically, during their individual lifetimes. Furthermore, within the framework of liminal space, the wilderness encountered by Yoḥved evidently differs from that experienced by Hagar. The disparity is also apparent in Jewish interpretations, where Hagar’s social standing as an ethnic Egyptian slave (Gen 16 dan 21) is not regarded as equivalent (and even perceived as that of a foreigner) to Yoḥved’s social position, who—despite her servitude in Egypt—is a Hebrew and the progenitor of the prophet who emancipated the Israelites (Exodus), alongside his siblings, who also possess prophetic significance (Moses with Aaron and Miriam). Even within Islamic tradition in the Qur’an, in stark contrast to the mother of Moses, whose name is explicitly cited in a verse (Surah 28:7), alongside prominent hadiths that highlight the esteemed role of women within Islam. These distinctions, as articulated by Holdrege, confer a distinctive character upon each tradition.⁴⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the pivotal elements (symbols) that delineate both similarities and disparities, as evidenced in the aforementioned comparative table, can be elucidated within

⁴⁵⁰ Holdrege, “Comparative Analysis as Critical Method,” 83.

a more expansive religio-cultural framework through the lens of spiritual agency as manifested by Hagar and Yocheved, which exhibit analogous paradigmatic proximity and transformative trajectories, thereby facilitating a more profound resonance and comprehension of women's experiences in liminal contexts and the reception of divine revelation.⁴⁵¹ In addition, to uncover more profound patterns and elucidations, the subsequent section will engage in a comparative analysis of the liminal experiences and divine revelations as they pertain to Hagar and Maryam (the Virgin Mary).

4.3 Hagar vis-à-vis Maryam (Virgin Mary): Wilderness as a Site of Divine Revelation

The figure of Mary is crucial in Christianity, known as the Virgin Mary or the Mother of God, highlighting her pivotal role as a central female figure. Early Christian scholars, such as St. Augustine, engaged in the interpretation of scriptural passages from the Gospels to establish Mary as a significant biblical figure, the conduit of celestial adoration.⁴⁵² Within the Islamic tradition, she is designated as *al-Batūl* (the unbound) and is venerated as an example of piety. Maryam bint Imran is recognized as an individual who diligently preserves her chastity, maintaining her purity in a manner that prevents any external violation.⁴⁵³ In contrast to the aforementioned traditions, the Jewish tradition presents a continuous discourse regarding the social and theological standing of Maryam or Miriam, particularly due to her premarital pregnancy and the assertion of her son, Jesus, as the Messiah, as articulated in a sixth-century Jewish polemical text known as the *Toledot Yeshu*,⁴⁵⁴ which serves as a parody or satirical rendition of the narrative surrounding Jesus. Nevertheless, it is this divergence in interpretative frameworks that subtly illuminates the liminal experience Miriam encounters.

Unlike Hagar, who belonged to Egyptian descent, Miriam (Maryam) was born as a female figure of Hebrew lineage during the era of Palestinian Judaism. Nonetheless, due to the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus, which occurred without a paternal figure, the majority of Rabbinic Judaism perceives the sequence of events that Miriam endured as disgraceful and heretical rather than regarding them as miraculous. The *Toledot* characterizes Miriam as a woman who engaged in an extramarital affair, despite being

⁴⁵¹ In this way, the key aspects categorized in the table serve as a tool to include or exclude a phenomenon based on certain characteristics it possesses. See Holdrege, "Comparative Analysis as Critical Method," 83.

⁴⁵² Ephraim Shoham-Steiner, "The Virgin Mary, Miriam, and Jewish Reactions to Marian Devotion in the High Middle Ages," *AJS Review* 37, no. 1 (2013): 83, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009413000044>.

⁴⁵³ 'Alī, *Mawāhibu 'alayh*, 721.

⁴⁵⁴ Yaacov Deutsch, *Toledot Yeshu: Two Volumes and Database. Vol. I: Introduction and Translation. Vol. II: Critical Edition*, 1st ed, with Michail Georgievič Aksenov-Meerson et al., Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, v. 159 (Mohr Siebeck, 2020).

betrothed. In the Jewish legal context, engagement is considered equivalent to marriage. Consequently, Miriam's pregnancy with a man other than her intended spouse is deemed an act of adultery. Thus, from a Jewish perspective, the offspring conceived through this act of adultery is classified as *Mamzēr* (מַמְזֵר), or illegitimate child, and is deemed unworthy of entering into matrimony with another Hebrew individual.⁴⁵⁵ It is said that Miriam gave birth to her child in Bethlehem, amidst straw meant for camels and donkeys, and named her son *Yeshua*.⁴⁵⁶ On the eighth day following his birth, Miriam presented the infant *Yeshua* to the sages, proclaiming that she had conceived without the involvement of a male. Yet, her declaration was met with laughter, and the sages regarded both her confession and the occurrence as peculiar. The *Toledot* further narrates that the sages harbored suspicions regarding *Yeshua*'s humble origins, for as *Yeshua* matured, they observed the disrespect exhibited by Miriam's son. Some among them disclosed that *Yeshua*'s father was Johanan (a rapist), shortly after Miriam's fiancé, Joseph,⁴⁵⁷ had departed for Babylon.⁴⁵⁸

The narrative concerning Mary represents a discourse notably absent from the accounts of noble women within the Jewish literary tradition. In juxtaposition to Hagar, who is depicted in the Pentateuch as the inaugural woman to engage in dialogue with an angel and to invoke the name of God, the persona of Mary is subjected to allegations of adultery and subsequently marginalized. Through the examination of Jewish literature on the interpretation of the narrative involving Mary and her progeny, *Yeshua*, as previously elucidated, one can deduce that Mary endured a profound existential predicament precipitated by public shaming and societal stigmatization, which accused her of infidelity during her gestation with *Yeshua*. Although the *Toledot* acknowledges that *Yeshua* matured into a remarkably gifted child, even exhibiting certain miraculous phenomena, the pervasive suspicion and stigma entrenched in the perceptions of Jewish sages regarding Mary during that epoch compelled them to repudiate the exceptional nature of Mary's offspring, deeming him a practitioner of witchcraft.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁵ Lasker, "Mary in Jewish Tradition," 28.

⁴⁵⁶ The *Toledot Yeshu* records several versions of Jesus' name. One version has Miriam name him Yehoshua, after a relative of his father's, or Yoshua, after his maternal uncle. The rabbis name him Yeshu, others Yishai. The rabbis usually call him Yeshu 'a ha-Notsri (Jesus from Nazareth), but in the middle of the narrative, the scribes change the name to Yezus. See Deutsch, *Toledot Yeshu*, 57.

⁴⁵⁷ In the New Testament, it is explained that Miriam was engaged to Joseph, but suddenly she became pregnant before they lived together. It is recorded in Matthew 1: 18: "Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit." See Levine and Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament New Revised Standard Version*, 4.

⁴⁵⁸ The fact that *Yeshu* was an illegitimate child is confirmed by the teacher of Miriam's husband or fiancé, whether it was Shimcon ben Shetah (in most versions), Shim'on ben Hillel (in some Long Italian manuscripts), or Rabbi Tanhuma (Slavic versions A, B, and C). See Deutsch, *Toledot Yeshu*, 57.

⁴⁵⁹ All versions of the *Toledot* agree that *Yeshua* grew up to be a gifted student, who could learn in a day what others would learn in a year. However, he was accused of using magic, and they called him a sorcerer and a

There is no account regarding Mary's engagement with an angel, except as found within the literary traditions of Christianity and Islam, wherein Mary is portrayed in both religious contexts as an embodiment of perfection and nobility. In this regard, Hagar and Maryam exhibit parallels concerning their encounters and dialogues with the angel Gabriel. Nevertheless, a distinction arises in the timing of their respective revelations and the liminal experiences that each individual underwent. As elaborated in the preceding chapter three, the revelation imparted to Hagar by Gabriel occurred after her own liminal experience within the desolate valley.⁴⁶⁰ Conversely, Maryam had foreseen the liminal circumstances that she would endure, specifically public humiliation and social ostracism, following her prior receipt of a revelation from Gabriel announcing her divine conception of a Son from God (Luke 1:30-35 and Surah Maryam (19):19-21).⁴⁶¹ This revelation validated that Maryam was destined to give birth to a son (Jesus/Isa) who would originate from God without the mediation of conventional biological processes (sexual relations with men).⁴⁶²

Although this moment of epiphany denotes the profound significance associated with the figure of Mary in an existential context, her pregnancy outside of marriage constituted a departure from societal norms. It provoked disparagement from the Jewish community in Jerusalem during that historical period, wherein she was accused of engaging in adultery. Consequently, Mary's tribulations commenced after her conception (Jesus/Isa) and persisted until his delivery. Moreover, not only throughout her earthly existence, but after the Christian tradition elevated her status as the Holy Mother of God, specific Jewish individuals derided the persona of Mary by referring to her not as Mary, but employing the term *heriyyāh* (הֲרִיָּיָה) in Aramaic, a rhythmic yet derogatory expression connoting

polytheist. They believed that Yeshua came from lowly origins, that he was "born in a Jewish village, to a poor woman (Miriam) of the village, who earned her living by spinning rope"; that his mother (Miriam) "when she was pregnant, was driven out of the house by the carpenter (Joseph) to whom she was engaged, because she was guilty of adultery"; and that "she bore a child to a soldier named Panthera"; that when he grew up, Yeshua went to Egypt, learned magic, and returned to his own country to proclaim himself a god. See Deutsch, *Toledot Yeshu*, 4,5,7.

⁴⁶⁰ Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1; *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 25. See again Chapter 3 in subsection 3.1 and 3.2.

⁴⁶¹ Luke 1: (30) The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. (31) And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. (32) He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. (33) He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (34) Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" (35) The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. See Levine and Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament New Revised Standard Version*, 99; And surah Maryam (19): (19) (The Angel) said: "I am only a messenger from your Lord, (to announce) to you the gift of a righteous son." (20) She (Maryam) said: "How can I have a son, when no man has touched me, nor am I unchaste?" (21) He said: "So (it will be), your Lord said: 'That is easy for Me (Allah): And (We wish) to appoint him as a sign to mankind and a mercy from Us (Allah), and it is a matter (already) decreed, (by Allah). See Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in The English Language*, 344.

⁴⁶² 'Alī, *Mawāhibu 'alayh*, 222.

excrement, refuse, or detritus.⁴⁶³ The representation of Mary continues to be frequently invoked in medieval anti-Jewish polemics, wherein her distinctive characteristics, such as the “Immaculate Conception and Birth” and “Virgin Birth,” emerged as predominant themes in discourses.⁴⁶⁴

The Christian tradition articulates the concept of Mary as the “Mary of Sorrows” or “Mary’s Tears,” highlighting her profound anguish due to the tribulations she faced during gestation, delivery, and the crucifixion of her son, Jesus Christ.⁴⁶⁵ Medieval Christian mystics, notably John Tauler (d. 1360 CE) and Henry Suso (d. 1366 CE), perceived Mary’s anguish and tears as emblematic of piety and spiritual elevation that predated the narrative found in Scripture. Numerous passages from the Gospels effectively delineate the adversities, grief, and afflictions that characterized Mary’s existence; foremost among these are the physical tribulations associated with the nativity of Jesus, the massacre of innocents aimed at eliminating Jesus, and the three-day absence of the child Jesus in Jerusalem, in addition to the various threats to his (Jesus’) existence.⁴⁶⁶ According to the established medieval Catholic perspective, Mary was conceptualized as a new Eve, who softened Eve’s childbirth pains (Gen 3:16),⁴⁶⁷ while her son, Jesus, was perceived as the savior of humanity from the sin of Adam.⁴⁶⁸

In light of an analysis of the narrative concerning Mary, who encountered her liminal phase after the divine revelation while exhibiting obedience to her Lord, it is pertinent to

⁴⁶³ Scholars have noted negative reactions toward Mary that some eighteenth-century Italian Jews ridiculed several aspects of Marian devotion. Jonah Rappaport (writing sometime in the second decade of the eighteenth century) provided an *Atlas Marianus* (a map of Marian shrines) as part of his mockery of Christian practices. A contemporary anonymous author recorded the popular Christian belief, intended, he argued, for the weak-minded and gullible, that the house of Mary was moved many times until it finally ended up in Loreto in Italy, where it served as a place of pilgrimage. Some Jews also questioned the authenticity of reports that statues and portraits of Mary performed miracles. See Lasker, “Mary in Jewish Tradition,” 29–30.

⁴⁶⁴ Shoham-Steiner, “The Virgin Mary, Miriam, and Jewish Reactions to Marian Devotion in the High Middle Ages,” 77.

⁴⁶⁵ Christopher Paul Clohessy, *Fâtima, Daughter of Muhammad: Second Edition* (Gorgias Press, 2018), 240, <https://doi.org/10.31826/9781463239435>.

⁴⁶⁶ Pope John Paul II, in his 1984 speech, asserted that, “The tears of Mary as a mother who weeps when she sees her children threatened by evil, whether spiritually or physically, when she shares in the tears of Christ in Jerusalem, or at the tomb of Lazarus or finally on the Way of the Cross, bear witness to her presence in the Church and in the world.” See Clohessy, *Fâtima, Daughter of Muhammad*, 240, 241.

⁴⁶⁷ Gen 3: 16: Unto the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy travail; in pain thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.’ See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 4. Normative Catholic belief in the Middle Ages viewed Mary as a theological figure who reversed Eve’s disobedience as depicted in the book of Genesis. In contrast to Eve who brought curses through her disobedience to God, Mary brought grace through her obedience to God’s will. Mary redeemed Eve’s suffering in childbirth through the birth of Jesus Christ as a symbol of victory over sin. As mentioned in Matthew 1: (21) She (Mary) will bear a son, and you (Joseph) are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (22) All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet. See ; Levine and Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament New Revised Standard Version*, 4.

⁴⁶⁸ Lasker, “Mary in Jewish Tradition,” 28.

note that, akin to Hagar, she similarly bequeathed a significant legacy. The distinction resides in the nature of the legacy bequeathed by each individual. Whereas Hagar bequeathed a spiritual legacy manifested through the *sa'i* ritual during the pilgrimage (*hajj*),⁴⁶⁹ Mary transmitted a theological legacy that early Christians represented through her corporeal form, which signified a hallowed vessel, illumination, and divine grace. Her corporeal embodiment transcended the constraints of physicality and sexuality, as Mary maintained her virginity despite having given birth.⁴⁷⁰ Although Jesus traversed through Mary's birth canal, this occurrence did not result in the dissolution of Mary's virginity. The significance of Mary's postpartum virginity would indeed be compromised if it were forfeited in the act of childbirth.⁴⁷¹

The sanctity, purity, and grandeur exemplified in Mary prompted Christian theologians to postulate that she could never experience death. Germanus (d. 733 CE) of Constantinople, a notable early Byzantine ecclesiastical figure, contended, for instance, that as the 'Mother of Life,' it was inconceivable for Mary to succumb to death; "death shall not make you proud, for you have borne Life in your womb." He additionally posited that due to the transformation of Mary's body into an exalted, incorruptible existence, it was inconceivable for her corporeal form to be subjected to the confinement of death within a sepulcher. His theological assertion is recognized as the "Divine Motherhood and Perpetual Virginity of Mary."⁴⁷² Mary served as a paradigm for Christian women, advocating for a lifestyle characterized by chastity, submission, and unwavering devotion to God.⁴⁷³

Another equally compelling interpretation of Mary is derived from the Islamic tradition. Although it resonates with the Christian tradition regarding her designation as *al-*

⁴⁶⁹ 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1:708; Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman*, 58. See again sub chapter 4.1 in chapter 4.

⁴⁷⁰ Thurlkill, *Chosen among Women*, 44.

⁴⁷¹ Lasker (2018) describes how Christian theologians have discussed Jesus' birth as being natural, like any other birth, yet miraculous, because it did not result in the loss of Mary's virginity, which, in their view, was the state of a closed womb (*utero clauso*). Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274 CE), for example, argued that God could cause two bodies, the infant Jesus and Mary's closed womb, to coexist simultaneously in one place. Others, such as Pope Innocent III (d. 1216 CE), argued that Jesus had what was called a "glorious body," that is, a body that did not have the standard physical properties, and therefore did not cause pain or damage to his mother's closed womb, her virginity, as he passed through the birth canal. See Lasker, "Mary in Jewish Tradition," 29.

⁴⁷² Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford University Press, 2006), 15, 16; Mary is seen as the nurturing and spiritual life-giving figure of the church, symbolizing both virginity and fertility. This paradoxical depiction emphasizes that, unlike the common view of women in society, Mary transcends the limitations of mere physical reproduction and becomes a source of divine inspiration for the faithful. See Thurlkill, *Chosen among Women*, 64.

⁴⁷³ Thurlkill, *Chosen among Women*, 122; Mary is also depicted as speaking directly to her people, specifically with the exclamation, "O Children of Israel! Behold!" This indicates her active role as a messenger of divine guidance and direction. See Clohessy, *Fāṭima, Daughter of Muhammad*, 59.

Batūl, which signifies her separation from men,⁴⁷⁴ Islamic literature presents a distinct perspective on the narrative surrounding Mary's pregnancy and childbirth. In contrast to the Christian tradition, which narrates that Mary gave birth to Jesus in a cattle trough in the presence of her husband, Joseph, the Islamic interpretation characterizes Mary as an unmarried woman who delivers Jesus in solitude at a remote site. This location is often linked to a desert environment, thus offering a partial physical resemblance, albeit not a complete one, to the liminal experience and wilderness setting encountered by Hagar. Just as Hagar traversed between Safa and Marwah in search of assistance due to her fear at the death of her infant (Ishmael), Maryam's anguish is articulated in the Qur'an, wherein she endures the torment of childbirth in isolation, to the extent that she expresses a desire for death and oblivion, a poignant reflection of her profound physical and social affliction (Surah Maryam (19): 23).⁴⁷⁵

The next parallel motif is observed in the manner in which the Qur'an articulates the presence of an angel who alleviates Mary's sorrow. Analogous to Hagar, who was bestowed with the Zamzam spring by an angel amidst her profound grief and anxiety concerning her infant's suffering and thirst in a desolate valley, the narrative of Maryam's childbirth in a secluded area exemplifies a similar pattern; specifically, the angel assuages her distress post-delivery by instructing her to shake the trunk of a proximate date palm, facilitating the descent of fresh dates, and providing a spring beneath her feet to enhance Maryam's joy, and assuring her of divine protection upon her encounter with those who observe her bearing the infant prophet Isa (Surah Maryam (19): 24-26).⁴⁷⁶ This event represents a pivotal moment in which Maryam successfully navigates her trial, marked by affliction and sorrow, and is fortified by her faith in the mandate of her God, ultimately receiving a *karāmah* (miracle) from the Divine.⁴⁷⁷ Furthermore, the narratives of both figures display not only parallels but also pronounced distinctions. The disparity in the wilderness experiences of Hagar and Maryam is rooted in the distinct circumstances that led each figure to their respective quietude. As previously elaborated, Hagar ventured into the wilderness as a consequence of exile, a separation incited by Sarah's envy, yet still

⁴⁷⁴ Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī Burūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān* (Dār al-Fikr, 1957), 10:210.

⁴⁷⁵ Surah Maryam (19): 23: "And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a date-palm. She said: "Would that I had died before this, and had been forgotten and out of sight!" See Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in The English Language*, 344.

⁴⁷⁶ Surah Maryam (19): (24) Then Jibril (Gabriel) cried to her from below her, saying: "Grieve not: your Lord has provided a water stream under you. (25) "And shake the trunk of the date-palm towards you, it will let fall fresh ripe-dates upon you." (26) "So eat and drink and be glad. And if you see any human being, say: "Verily, I have vowed a fast to the Most Gracious (Allah) so I shall not speak to any human being this day." See Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in The English Language*, 344.

⁴⁷⁷ 'Abd al-Qādir Shādhilī, *Al-Kawākib al-Zāhira* (Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 1431), 67.

within the purview of Divine decree. Conversely, Maryam intentionally opted to retreat to a remote location of her own volition. She resolved to journey alone to a distant place, distancing herself from the multitude, after receiving a revelation and conceiving the prophet Isa without paternal intervention.⁴⁷⁸ Scholars designate the entity of Isa within Maryam's womb as a fragment of the spirit that God infused into Adam's corporeal form.⁴⁷⁹

Al-Sha'rānī (d. 1565 CE) posited that the remarkable occurrence associated with Maryam constituted an extraordinary phenomenon or a supernatural event that transpired devoid of a conventional cause (*bi-kharqī al-ʿawāʾidi bi-ghayri sabab*). This event not only occurred during the gestation of the prophet Isa without any physical interaction with a male figure, but miraculous occurrences also marked Maryam's existence prior to this. From a genealogical perspective, Maryam was identified as the daughter of ʿImran, a descendant of the illustrious monarchs within the lineage of the Children of Israel, who are enumerated in the genealogies of the prophets.⁴⁸⁰ Nonetheless, her prominence is recognized not solely due to her paternal heritage but rather owing to the intrinsic nobility and the comprehensive nature of her devotion to the Divine that she exemplified.⁴⁸¹ Al-Qushayrī (d. 1072 CE) elucidated that Maryam had been in service within the sanctuary of God from a tender age, thereby resulting in an elevation of her status due to the devotion she sustained throughout her life.⁴⁸² Furthermore, another verse from the Qur'an delineates that Maryam's uncle, Zakariyya, was a devout individual entrusted with the guardianship of Maryam at the sacred place (*miḥrāb*), and each time he entered her *miḥrāb*, Zakariyya

⁴⁷⁸ ʿAlī, *Mawāhibu ʿalayh*, 665.

⁴⁷⁹ Esoteric interpretation explains that the presence of the Prophet ʿĪsā in Mary's womb can be metaphorically understood as His spirit and His words that God conveyed to Mary; then ʿĪsā became like Adam in the sight of Allah. See Qāzī Saʿīd Qummī, *Al-Arbaʿīnīyāt Li-Kashf Anwār al-Qudsīyāt* (Mīrāth-e Maktūb, 1381), 72, 226; This comparison between Jesus and Adam is not only because they both do not have a biological father, but to establish evidence of Mary's purity, that she is innocent. The parallel here is profound: as Eve was created from Adam without a mother, so Jesus was born from Mary without a father. Allah began the creation of man with Adam as the first father and concluded it by creating Jesus from Mary as the end of the cycle of creation. So, Jesus and Eve were sisters in the sense that they were created in a similar way, and Adam and Mary were their parents in a metaphorical sense. See ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Shaʿrānī, *Al-Yawāqūt Wa al-Jawāhir Fī Bayān ʿAqāʾid al-Akābir* (Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, Mūʾassasat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabī, 1418), 1:208.

⁴⁸⁰ In Islamic history, ʿImran was known as a good man from the descendants of Sulaimān (Solomon), and his wife was named Hanna, whose sister was married to Zakaria. They arrived at Baitul Maqdis in a state of worship, hoping to get what they wanted from Allah. See ʿAlī, *Mawāhibu ʿalayh*, 112.

⁴⁸¹ ʿAlī, *Mawāhibu ʿalayh*, 290.

⁴⁸² In the Qur'an (Surah Ali Imran [3]: 35-37), it is narrated that Maryam's mother (Hanna) finally became pregnant at an old age. So she prayed to her Lord: "O my Lord, indeed I have vowed to You what is in my womb as a free servant (of other than You), so please accept it from me, indeed You are All-Hearing, All-Knowing." When she gave birth to her and found the baby to be a girl, she (Hanna) felt ashamed, because women were not fit to serve in the mosque. But, her Lord accepted her (Maryam) with gracious favor, and elevated her rank to a noble station. See Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm Qushayrī, *Sharḥ Asmāʾ Allāh Al-Ḥusnā* (Dār al-Ḥaram li-l-Turāth, 1422), 369.

discovered provisions of fruits in proximity to Maryam (3): 37).⁴⁸³ Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240 CE) characterizes the supernatural event experienced by Maryam as *karāmah* (miracle), which, in linguistic terms, signifies an extraordinary event that transcends the commonplace, yet remains anchored in truth or manifests truth abruptly.⁴⁸⁴

In Islamic tradition, Maryam is regarded as an embodiment of divine omnipotence and is characterized as an individual of elevated spiritual stature (Surah at-Taḥrīm (66): 12),⁴⁸⁵ who transcends the limitations of ordinary humanity.⁴⁸⁶ Her uncle, Zakariyya, provided the affirmation of Maryam’s purity (*batūl*) and adherence to divine mandates. He was designated to oversee Maryam, who was engaged in worship within the *miḥrāb*. After witnessing Maryam’s exalted status as a virgin woman, he was encouraged to beseech Allah for the blessing of progeny possessing unblemished and virtuous morals akin to those of Maryam.⁴⁸⁷ Certain scholars posit that Zakariyya initially harbored apprehensions that Maryam’s extraordinary endowment (*karāmah*) might have been the result of satanic deception; however, upon inquiring further, he ultimately became convinced of its authenticity and expressed gratitude to Allah for assigning him the role of Maryam’s guardian.⁴⁸⁸ In the hadith literature, Maryam’s name is placed in juxtaposition with other

⁴⁸³ ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Sha‘rānī, *Al-Yawāqūt Wa al-Jawāhir Fī Bayān ‘Aqā’id al-Akābir* (Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, Mū’assasat al-Tārikh al-‘Arabī, 1418), 2:487; Allah brings out winter sustenance in the summer and summer sustenance in the winter as *karāmah* for Maryam. See nevisandegān, *Jam’ Al-Maqāl*, 70.

⁴⁸⁴ Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* (Dār al-Ṣādir, n.d.), 4:83; The argument regarding *Karāmah* for Maryam is stated in Surah Ali Imran (3): 37: So her Lord (Allah) accepted her (Maryam) with goodly acceptance. He made her grow in a good manner and put her under the care of Zakariya (Zechariah). Every time he entered al-miḥrāb to (visit) her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said: “O Maryam! From where have you got this?” She said, “This is from Allah.” See Sha‘rānī, *Al-Yawāqūt Wa al-Jawāhir Fī Bayān ‘Aqā’id al-Akābir*, 2:487.

⁴⁸⁵ Surah at-Taḥrīm (66): 12: “And Maryam, the daughter of ‘Imran who guarded her chastity. And we breathed into (the sleeve of her shirt or her garment) through Our Ruh (i.e. Jibril), and she testified to the truth of the Words of her Lord...” See Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur’an in The English Language*, 626.

⁴⁸⁶ nevisandegān, *Jam’ Al-Maqāl*, 461.

⁴⁸⁷ According to the esoteric interpretation, Allah has bestowed upon Zakariya a son from Himself, who is pious (‘waliyyan’), Yahya. He was born with a nature similar to Maryam, that is ḥaṣūran, cut off (restraining himself) from touching women, which means ‘anin (having no desire for women), as Maryam was also cut off from touching men. See Sha‘rānī, *Al-Yawāqūt Wa al-Jawāhir Fī Bayān ‘Aqā’id al-Akābir*, 1:468; Regarding this, Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240 CE) explicates: “Did you not see Zakariyā ‘alaiḥissalām when he entered the mihrab of Maryam who was a pure virgin and knew that, and saw the provision that Allah had given her, then he asked Allah to grant him a child, when he felt the extraordinary state of Maryam. He said, “O Lord, grant me from Yourself a good offspring, for You are the Hearer of prayer.” And Maryam, in his mind. Then the angel called him while he was standing in prayer. When he saw the provision that Allah had given him, the angel told him that Allah gave him good news about Yahya as a confirmation of Allah’s words, a leader, and a perfect prophet. Because Maryam was perfect, Yahya was also perfected with prophethood and protection from women; thus, he did not marry. Just as Maryam was protected from intercourse with men, so Yahya became a man who protected himself from women. See ‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 3:507.

⁴⁸⁸ Kristin Zahra Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur’ān in Classical Islam*, Routledge Studies in the Qur’an (Routledge, 2006), 101.

esteemed female figures, such as Khādirah, Fātimah bint Muhammad, and Asiyah, the wife of Pharaoh.⁴⁸⁹

Finally, just as God divinely appointed Hagar to assume the role of the progenitor of the Arab nation, an aspect evident through her unwavering obedience amid her liminal circumstances in the wilderness, the narrative of Maryam elucidates how her corporeal form became a sanctified conduit through which the divine essence was received. Absent the intervention of a male partner, Maryam was predestined to bring forth a Messiah, the ultimate custodian who would preside at the culmination of time.⁴⁹⁰ Were it not for her exceptional spiritual attributes, it is unlikely that God would have imparted the holy spirit into her womb, nor would He have designated Prophet Isa as a figure whose lineage is exclusively attributed to his mother, Maryam. This juxtaposition of the two figures illustrates Hagar's remarkable ability to endure in the liminal space independently, as the matriarch of the Arab nation, analogous to Maryam's capacity to become the mother of a Messiah, despite being devoid of the contact and presence of a husband. To encapsulate the salient features concerning the parallels and distinctions identified from the comparative analysis of the narrative of Hagar and Maryam as explored, this is succinctly represented in the following table,

Table 4.3. *Comparative Insight of Spiritual Authority between Hagar and Maryam*

Aspect	Hagar	Maryam	Comparative Insight
Divine Revelation	Through angel (Gabriel) in the wilderness (Gen 21)	Through angel (Gabriel) in an isolated place (Luke 1: 30-35, Surah Maryam (19): 17-26)	Hagar's experience of revelation comes before her liminal state; meanwhile, Maryam receives her revelation prior to entering her liminal state.
Wilderness Experience	A desert or barren valley as the site of the banishment	An isolated place (Bethlehem valley) as a site to escape from social stigmatisation	Using Eliade's theory, these two spaces are considered sacred thresholds. The difference

⁴⁸⁹ From Ibn Abbas, Rasulullah saw. said: Sayyidah Maryam is the best woman in the world, then Fatimah, then Khadijah, and then Asiyah. This hadith shows that Maryam is the best among all women in the world. From Anas, Rasulullah saw. said: Sufficient for you from the women of the world are Maryam bint Imran, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, Fatimah bint Muhammad, and Asiyah the wife of Pharaoh; This shows that these four women are the best among other women. Know that perfect people from among men are many, but among women, only these four women have achieved perfection. See Burūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān*, 2:33.

⁴⁹⁰ 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ḥasan Maḥmūd, *Min A'immat Al-Muwahḥidīn al-Imām Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī* (Maktabat 'Ālam al-Fikr, 1419), 99.

	(Gen 21, Surah Ibrāhīm (14): 37)	(Surah Maryam (19): 22-26)	is that Hagar establishes a new center in her isolation, while Mary finds shelter under a date palm tree that bows to her, and a spring emerges from beneath her feet.
Crisis (Suffering)	Loneliness, banishment, thirst (Gen 21, Sahih Bukhari no. 3365, Kitāb Aḥādīth al-Anbiyā')	Loneliness, social stigmatisation, public shame (Toledot Yeshu, Surah Maryam (19): 27-29)	Hagar was enduring physical suffering, while Maryam suffered from social stigmatisation as an alleged adulterer.
Spiritual Legacy	Mother of the rite of <i>Hajj</i> , <i>Sa'i</i> (Surah al-Baqarah (2): 158)	The holy virgin, Mother of Messiah (Matthew 1:18, Luke 1:35, Surah at-Tahrīm (66):12)	Hagar possesses a ritual legacy, while Maryam possesses a theological legacy.

The comparative table presented above elucidates an examination of how each salient aspects exhibit a parallel structure, while simultaneously delineating the distinctions inherent in Hagar and Maryam's experiences in the wilderness, which underscore not only the divergence of narratives concerning the two figures across various traditions but also how each tradition delineates the societal role and female spiritual agency. Through the juxtaposition of these two figures, it has been determined that Hagar acquired her spiritual authority via the rituals associated with the *Hajj* (*Sa'i*), whereas Maryam attained her spiritual authority through the doctrines enshrined in the sacred texts of both the Bible and the Qur'an, attributed to her exceptional nature and inherent perfection. Furthermore, both figures are recognized as the maternal figures of a prophet or apostle, who nurtured and reared their child from infancy without the companionship or presence of a husband, yet under the divine protection of God.

The concluding analysis presented in this chapter will juxtapose the character of Hagar with the esteemed female figure in Islamic tradition, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', in order to explore more profoundly the symbolic implications of wilderness in the context of a liminal experience. The following section will delve further into this topic.

4.4 Hagar vis-à-vis Fāṭimah al-Zahrā': The Wilderness of Grief and the Embodied Divine Femininity

Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' represents a distinct singular female entity within this discourse, as she does not undergo a direct corporeal experience of wilderness akin to that of Hagar. In contrast to earlier liminal figures, such as Yocheved and Maryam, who maintain a connection to sacred phenomena expressed via natural elements—a relationship explicable through the theoretical lens of Mircea Eliade—Fāṭimah's revelatory experience does not exhibit a direct correlation with natural sacred symbols. Nonetheless, the examination of her experience remains pertinent, as Fāṭimah is recognized as a liminal figure whose esteemed status is attained not through spatial displacement but rather through the profundity of worldly affliction she endures. Consequently, while Hagar's feminine divinity is evidenced through her corporeal survival in the wilderness (Gen 21:19), Fāṭimah al-Zahrā's spiritual authority emerges from her unwavering resilience in confronting the wounds and tribulations that she endures.

The biographical account of Fāṭimah is frequently employed as a paradigm of spiritual excellence by mystics and adherents of Islam, particularly among Shi'ite communities⁴⁹¹ who interpret her tears as an emblem of threshold experience, and the tribulations she endured as an allegorical wilderness. Analogous to Maryam, she is also referred to by the epithet *al-batūl* and is regarded as a conduit of divine presence, attributed to her sacred lineage that is directly linked to the Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁹² The pronouncements of the Prophet Muhammad further corroborate this esteemed position: "Among my followers there will exist individuals who are *muhaddathūn*. Among these, the preeminent of the holy individuals is Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', for she is the one to whom the angels communicate."⁴⁹³ Therefore, within this framework, despite the distinct differences in their historical contexts, both Hagar and Fāṭimah have experienced angelic communication in the context of revelation. Furthermore, if Hagar is perceived as the foundational figure in the development of Meccan civilization, transforming a desolate valley into a cosmic center,

⁴⁹¹ Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' is featured in Indo-Persian Shia religious literature as an extraordinary figure whose mystical qualities and intercessory powers played a significant role in shaping Shia spiritual practice. See Karen G. Ruffle, "May Fatimah Gather Our Tears: The Mystical and Intercessory Powers of Fatimah al-Zahra in Indo-Persian, Shi'i Devotional Literature and Performance," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (2010): 86, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2010-021>.

⁴⁹² The majority of Shia scholars state that Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' was a saint like Maryam, even superior to Maryam, the daughter of Imran. Her superiority over Maryam is a well-established fact among the holy Imams and their followers from among the Shia and others. See 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tehrānī, *Ma'rifat Al-Imām* (Dār al-Maḥajjah al-Bayḍā', 1416), 13:88.

⁴⁹³ The term *muhaddath* in the passive form is used to refer to a person whom angels speak to without seeing them, and through them (angels), various things from the unseen world are revealed. See 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tehrānī, *Ma'rifat Al-Imām* (Dār al-Maḥajjah al-Bayḍā', 1416), 16:272.

or, in Eliade's terminology, recognized as the *axis mundi par excellence* (the principal axis of the world),⁴⁹⁴ Then Fāṭimah, due to her exalted status, is designated as the first individual to receive *Qutbaniyya* from the Prophet. *Qutbaniyya* is a concept that signifies the spiritual axis of the universe or the eminent saint who serves as the nucleus of the spiritual order, acting as the intermediary between the Divine and creation. Alternatively, in contemporary terms, it may be referred to as cosmic motherhood.⁴⁹⁵

The Sufi perspective establishes a correlation between the name Fāṭimah and the term *al-Fawātim* (the plural form of Fāṭimah) as a significant symbolic reference. The term *fawātim* signifies a profound connection with the underlying essence of the cosmos, particularly in relation to the archetype of existence and the manifestation of Divine mercy. In this context, Fāṭimah is conceptualized as a symbolic embodiment of the Divine feminine energy and spiritual essence, serving as a conduit between the material and metaphysical realms. The characterization is predicated upon the persona of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', who committed her existence to the pursuit of devotion to her Lord, thereby epitomizing the pinnacle of spiritual realization. Within this framework, Fāṭimah is regarded not solely as the progeny of the Prophet but also as a cosmic and spiritual emblem of divine grace, whose stature surpasses the ordinary domain.⁴⁹⁶ She is frequently identified as a representation of prophetic legacy, spiritual sanctity, or cosmic femininity.⁴⁹⁷

In contrast to Hagar, who emerged from a socio-economic status characterized by enslavement, Fāṭimah has, since her inception, possessed a distinguished position attributable to her noble heritage, which is intrinsically linked to the Prophet Muhammad. Nonetheless, this is precisely where Hagar's uniqueness resides, as her progeny gave rise to the descendants who would subsequently give rise to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), thereby establishing her as the direct forebear of Fāṭimah herself.⁴⁹⁸ The prophetic lineage through the prophet Ishmael has intricately intertwined the destinies of these two women, both of whom navigated lives steeped in servitude to God while remaining tethered to the highest spiritual truths. Consequently, an examination of

⁴⁹⁴ Eliade and Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 42. See again sub chapter 4.1 in chapter 4.

⁴⁹⁵ Qutbaniyya is the highest level (maqām) in sainthood. After Fāṭimah died, the maqām passed to Abu Bakr, then Umar, then Uthman, then Ali, and then to her son, Hasan. See Gurūhī az Nāwīsandegān, *Jama' al-Maqāl* (Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmīyah liṭ-Ṭab'ah wa an-Nashr, 2006), 247.

⁴⁹⁶ 'Abd al-Bāqī Miftāḥ, *Al-Mafātīḥ al-Wujūdīyah Wa al-Qur'ānīyah Li-Kitāb Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (Dār al-Burāq, 1425), 186.

⁴⁹⁷ Dā'ūd Qaysarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam (al-Qaysarī)* (Sherkat-i Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī wa Farhangī, 1375), 1021.

⁴⁹⁸ Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) says: "Upon your conquest of Egypt, extend kindness to its inhabitants, for they possess a covenant and familial ties with us." Then, Ibn Ishaq remarked, "I inquired of Muhammad ibn Muslim az-Zuhri: "What familial ties did the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) refer to?" He responded: "Hagar, the progenitor of Prophet Ishmael, was indeed one of them (Egyptians)." See Ḥadīdah, *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Muḍī Fī Kitāb al-Nabī al-Ummī Wa-Rusulih Ilā Mulūk al-Ard Min 'Arabī Wa-'Ajamī*, 2:142. See again chapter 3 in subsection 3.2.

Fāṭimah's life narrative can elucidate parallel dimensions pertinent to the notion of spiritual metamorphosis encountered within liminal spaces.

Historical literature elucidates that at the moment Khadījah was on the verge of giving birth to Fāṭimah, Allah dispatched twenty houris endowed with exquisite eyes (*hūr al-ʿīn*) from the celestial realms, who arrived bearing basins, jugs, and water sourced from the *Kawthar* Lake. Additionally, Maryam bint ʿImrān, Sārah (the wife of the Prophet Ibrāhīm), dan Āsiyah binti Muzāḥim (the wife of Pharaoh) were divinely commissioned by Allah to assist her during the childbirth process. Upon the arrival of Fāṭimah, the world was engulfed in radiant luminosity; the cosmos was imbued with aromatic essence and illumination, as the scent of grandeur permeated the atmosphere, and the dwellings in Mecca were suffused with light. There existed no location in the eastern or western expanses of the earth that remained untouched by this resplendent light. In the heavens, a magnificent luminescence emerged that had never been witnessed prior. Subsequently, the women proclaimed: "Receive her, O Khadījah, one who is immaculate and safeguarded from transgression, the progeny of a prophet, the wife of a *washi* (spiritual heir), a luminous beacon, a pristine descendant, the matron of the devout, the cherished of the Almighty, the selected among the holy, the blessed (may blessings be upon her and her progeny)." ⁴⁹⁹

In the Shia theological framework, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' is characterized as an emblematic and sanctified entity, akin to an idealized vessel that embodies and safeguards the divine illumination of God. Her corporeal form is regarded as immaculate, a perception that is further reinforced by her appellations *al-batūl* (the virgin) and *al-Zahrā* (the radiant one). ⁵⁰⁰ Similar to the recognition of Hagar and Mary as key figures whose genealogies are esteemed, scholarly consensus posits that the same holds for Fāṭimah due to her elevated stature. ʿAbd al-Qādir Jīlānī (d. 1166 CE) articulated that the legitimacy of maternal honor is a verifiable fact, acknowledged within legal frameworks, and should be embraced in both legal and social contexts. Should it be established that a woman possesses nobility and untainted lineage, then her offspring, irrespective of gender, are deemed noble, with their honor derived from their maternal lineage, independent of their paternal lineage, whether their fathers are slaves or free individuals, as this does not detract from or impede their recognition as noble based on their mothers. A pertinent illustration of this principle is

⁴⁹⁹ Ḥāfiẓ Rajab Barsī, *Mashāriq Anwār Al-Yaqīn* (Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li'l-Maṭbū'āt, 1422), 133; One of the Shia hadith narrates that when the angels asked: "Our Lord, for whom are these virtues and lights?" He (God) replied: "These are the lights of My nation, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā'. Therefore, My nation is called 'al-Zahrā' because through her light, the heavens and the earth are illuminated. She is the daughter of a Prophet, the wife of the Wasi (successor), and My proof for My creation. I bear witness to you, O My angels, that I have made the reward of your tasbih and tahlil for this woman and her followers until the Day of Resurrection." See Karbalā'ī, *Al-Anwār al-Sāṭi'ah Fī Sharḥ al-Ziyārah al-Jāmi'ah*, 1:431.

⁵⁰⁰ Thurlkill, *Chosen among Women*, 18.

found in Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', whose two sons, Hassan and Hussain, derive their esteemed status through their mother, rather than through their father, Ali.⁵⁰¹

The subsequent parallel motif discernible in the narratives of Fāṭimah and Hagar is embodied in the physical and spiritual tribulations endured by both figures. As delineated in chapter three, Hagar encountered profound physical and spiritual anguish throughout her odyssey as a slave, her forcible dislocation instigated by Sarah, and her subsequent banishment in the desolate and uninhabited wilderness alongside her infant. Conversely, Fāṭimah faced trials of impoverishment and profound sorrow following the demise of her cherished father, the Prophet Muhammad, whose departure precipitated both a spiritual void and social disruption in her existence. Historians assert that Fāṭimah navigated her quotidian life amidst unyielding adversity. She is characterized as an individual who was compelled to engage in incessant labor, exemplified by the grinding of corn until her hands bore blisters, in addition to undertaking supplementary domestic responsibilities,⁵⁰² such as harvesting wheat with her ladder, baking bread for her sons, or rocking a cradle. Nevertheless, amidst her hardships, she consistently contributed the fruits of her garden (*Fadak*) to the destitute and remained committed to her prayers until her feet became swollen.⁵⁰³ This illustrates that Fāṭimah was not merely esteemed for her intrinsic human attributes; rather, she was esteemed for her perseverance in poverty, her sacrifices, and her moral resilience. She is also venerated for her role as a nurturing maternal figure and as a cosmic intercessor on the day of resurrection.⁵⁰⁴

The peak of emotional anguish and distress encountered by Fāṭimah transpired during the period of her father, the Prophet Muhammad's, illness, culminating in his death. It has been documented that during the Prophet Muhammad's terminal illness, manifestations of anxiety and agitation were prominently evident upon his countenance. Upon witnessing this, Fāṭimah, driven by profound empathy for her father, experienced her distress and wept. The Prophet, cognizant of her turmoil, sought to console her by stating: "This tribulation is solely for your father, and following this, there shall be no further

⁵⁰¹ Jīlānī, *Al-Safīnah al-Qādirīyyah*, 90. 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī asserted that a noble mother will inherit honor to their descendants and grandchildren, and they are included in the ranks of nobility. For example, all the nobles present today in the eastern and western hemispheres owe their nobility to their mother, Fatimah al-Zahra, through two famous saints, Hassan and Hussain.

⁵⁰² Ruffle, "May Fatimah Gather Our Tears," 89.

⁵⁰³ 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tehrānī, *Ma'rifat Al-Ma'ād* (Dār al-Maḥajjah al-Bayḍā'), 1416), 8:95. In addition, Fāṭimah was steadfast in her love for her husband, Ali ibn Abi Thalib. She protected the religion of Allah and defended the succession and guardianship until she was martyred for this purpose.

⁵⁰⁴ Ruffle, "May Fatimah Gather Our Tears," 87; Fāṭimah is not only known for her personal sanctity, but also for her central role in conveying the light of prophecy (nūr) from her father, the Prophet Muhammad, to subsequent leaders (Imams). This transmission of divine light symbolizes the eternal connection between the heavenly realm and earthly society, making her an indispensable link in the chain of spiritual authority for Shia Muslims. See Thurlkill, *Chosen among Women*, 57.

adversity.”⁵⁰⁵ Numerous hadiths within Shia literature articulate that subsequently, the Prophet Muhammad entrusted her with the directive that her spouse, ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib, should assume the role of his successor posthumously.⁵⁰⁶

After the demise of the Prophet, a significant political upheaval commenced, which, according to Shia literature, intensified the grief and distress experienced by Fāṭimah. This circumstance arose due to the skepticism surrounding Fāṭimah’s assertion regarding ‘Alī as the designated successor to leadership following the Prophet’s death (as decreed), a skepticism that Abū Bakr also held. The doubt arose from the acknowledgement that during the Prophet’s announcement, he was not in good health, leading to the thought that his comments might have been a result of mental confusion, which could potentially weaken the authenticity of his message.⁵⁰⁷ Shia scholars assert that there exists no doubt whatsoever pertaining to the testament of the Prophet Muhammad concerning ‘Alī as his successor.⁵⁰⁸ Nonetheless, the political discord was intensified due to Aisha, the wife of Prophet Muhammad and the daughter of Abū Bakr, being perceived as someone who also refuted Fāṭimah’s testimony.⁵⁰⁹ Based on the hadith literature within Shia scholarship, which is reported from the Prophet saw., it has been affirmed that the divine caliphate and absolute *walāyah* (leadership) constitute an unequivocal and legitimate inheritance for ‘Alī and his progeny, those who are the offspring of Fāṭimah az-Zahrā’.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁵ Aḥmad al-Fārūqī Sirhindī, *Al-Maktūbāt (al-Sirhindī)* (Maktabat al-Nīl, n.d.), 2:215.

⁵⁰⁶ Al-Khawārazmī narrated in his *Manāqib* [quoted from ‘Alī wa al-Washīya, p. 218], p. 67, with a chain of transmission from al-A‘mash, from Ibn Rabī‘ī, from Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, that he said: The Prophet fell ill with an illness, so Fāṭima al-Zahrā’, came to visit him. When she saw what had befallen the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, the exhaustion and weakness, she was overcome with emotion and cried until her tears rolled down her cheeks. So the Messenger of Allah said to her: O Fāṭima, as a sign of honor from Allah, the Almighty and the Most Glorious, He married you to the person who was the earliest to convert to Islam, the most knowledgeable and the most patient among them (‘Alī bin Abī Ṭalib). Indeed, Allah looked at the people of the earth with a glance, then He chose me from them and sent me as a Prophet and Messenger. Then He looked again and chose from them your husband, so He revealed to me that I should marry you to him and make him my successor and my brother. See ‘Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tehrānī, *Ma‘rifat Al-Imām* (Dār al-Maḥajjah al-Bayḍā’, 1416), 2:246.

⁵⁰⁷ The Prophet saw. was once accused of being “delirious” or “confused” when he was sick. And when that happened, all his statements during his illness were considered to no longer have any authority. Further, in Shia literature, Abū Bakr has accused Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ of lying about the will of leadership, then he demanded the ownership of Fadak (a fertile region rich in date palms and natural resources) from Fāṭimah on the pretext of a hadith that reads: “We, the Prophets, do not inherit. What we leave behind is charity for the Muslims.” See Tehrānī, *Ma‘rifat Al-Imām*, 13:129.

⁵⁰⁸ Rasūlullāh saw. said: Verily Allah has chosen me and made me the leader of the Muslims, and has chosen a minister from my family (Alī), and made him the leader of the successors. Living with him is happiness, and dying with him is happiness. The first person who believed in me and confirmed my message ... His wife was a great pious person, Fāṭima al-Zahrā’, my daughter. His two sons (Hasan and Ḥusayn) are the fragrant flowers of this world and the leaders of the youth of Paradise. The Imams from his progeny are evidence (hujjah) for His creation. Whoever follows them will be saved from the Fire, and whoever imitates them will be guided to the straight path. See Barsī, *Mashāriq Anwār Al-Yaqīn*, 85.

⁵⁰⁹ ‘Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tehrānī, *Ma‘rifat Al-Imām* (Dār al-Maḥajjah al-Bayḍā’, 1416), 8:177.

⁵¹⁰ Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ Al-Ḥikam (al-Qayṣarī)*, 1021; They said: Fatima bint Ja‘far bin Muhammad al-Sadiq, narrated to us: Fatima bint Muhammad bin Ali, narrated to us: Fatima bin Ali bin Husain, narrated to us: Sakinah and Fatima, daughters of Husain bin Ali, narrated to us from Umm Kulthum, daughter of Fatima,

In light of another Shia interpretation, there are claims that subsequent to the sorrowful passing of the Prophet Muhammad, Fāṭimah's residence was aggressively breached by forces sent by 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, under the direction of Abū Bakr, seeking to coerce 'Alī into supporting Abū Bakr's governance. This account asserts that 'Umar arrived accompanied by a contingent individual, bearing firewood and issuing threats to incinerate her abode should Fāṭimah fail to open the door. Nevertheless, Fāṭimah remained steadfast in her stance (recollecting her father's last wishes). Ultimately, the door was forcefully thrust against her person, and at that juncture, she was with child; thus, the violent impact against the door resulted in the fracturing of her ribs and the termination of her pregnancy (*Muḥsin*).⁵¹¹ It is reported that approximately 75 to 95 days after the Prophet's passing, Fāṭimah succumbed as a martyr. Shi'ite scholars interpret Fāṭimah's martyrdom as a result of her demise not only stemming from a common ailment but also from the profound anguish of bereavement for her father (Prophet Muhammad), the political coercion and injustice she endured, and the physical violence inflicted upon her during the unwarranted intrusion into her dwelling. Her burial site was intentionally concealed following her wishes, which, according to Shiite scholars, serves as a manifestation of spiritual and political dissent against the injustice she faced following the Prophet's death. Hence, due to the afflictions she endured, Fāṭimah was additionally designated as *al-Maẓlūmah* (the oppressed one).⁵¹²

Drawing upon the aforementioned elaboration, akin to Hagar who underwent a physical state of exile, the narrative concerning Fāṭimah delineates her transitional predicament manifested through her estrangement after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad, epitomized by the political marginalization faced by her lineage. Her unwavering commitment and fidelity to the directives of the Prophet Muhammad until her martyrdom epitomize the sanctity of her belief, which serves as the spiritual nucleus for adherents of Islam. Among Shia Muslims, Fāṭimah is venerated as a sacred vessel divinely

daughter of the Prophet, who said: "Have you forgotten the words of Rasūlullāh (saw) on the day of Ghadir Khumm, when he said: Whoever makes me his maula, then 'Alī is his maula? And the words (of the Prophet): You (O 'Alī) are to me as Hārūn was to Mūsā." See 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tehrānī, *Ma'rifat Al-Imām* (Dār al-Maḥajjah al-Bayḍā', 1416), 9:66.

⁵¹¹ Allamah S. Muhammad Husayn Tehrani, *Imam-Shenasi* (Allamah Tabatabaei Publishers, 1997), 16:71; The Shia Imams agree and state that Fāṭimah az-Zahrā' was pressed against the door (pinched between the door and the wall) until her ribs were broken, her child was miscarried, and she died with bruises on her stomach like bracelets. See 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tehrānī, *Ma'rifat Al-Imām* (Dār al-Maḥajjah al-Bayḍā', 1416), 15:258.

⁵¹² Shia scholars remember Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' as the holy daughter of the Prophet, the mother of the Prophet's grandsons, whose ribs were broken, whose grave remains hidden, a noble female who suffered oppression and injustice. She is honored as a martyr who devoted her life in defense of the word of Islam, striving to purify it from misguidance and mundane desire, and continues her legacy through the line of the infallible Imams. See Allamah S. Muhammad Husayn Tehrani, *Imam-Shenasi* (Allamah Tabatabaei Publishers, 1997), 8:176.

selected to uphold the principles of purity and faith, while simultaneously denouncing both religious and political innovations.⁵¹³ She is characterized as a luminous entity (Surah al-Nūr (24):35) within the Prophet's lineage, and indeed for the Muslim community in large, possessing the capacity to direct individuals toward spiritual advancement.⁵¹⁴

Upon reflecting on the comparative analysis of Hagar and Fāṭimah concerning their respective liminal experiences, it becomes evident that both figures are of equal significance. Considering the existential turmoil that Hagar underwent, which engendered a profound spiritual transformation and established a spiritual legacy through *sa'i* within the hajj pilgrimage, alongside the fact that her place of exile evolved into the cosmological focal point (*axis mundi*) that links countless individuals to their Lord (Mecca), it follows Fāṭimah's liminal condition, culminating in her martyrdom, rendered her an emblematic representation of femininity characterized by purity, faith, and illumination, thereby establishing her as the spiritual axis for humanity within the cosmos.⁵¹⁵ As articulated by al-Sha'rānī (d. 1565 CE), all happiness in the heavenly realm flows from the brightness of Fāṭimah az-Zahrā'.⁵¹⁶ Her persona is regarded as possessing spiritual authority that transmits the esteemed values of Islamic teachings and virtuous exemplars, which are inherently derived from her father, the Prophet Muhammad, to his successors. This spiritual authority is referred to as *the Ahl al-Bayt* or *Itrah*, denoting the descendants or familial lineage of the Prophet.⁵¹⁷ In summary, the similarities and distinctions between these two figures can be elucidated in the following table.

⁵¹³ Thurlkill, *Chosen among Women*, 124.

⁵¹⁴ Clohessy, *Fāṭima, Daughter of Muhammad*, 59; Fāṭimah az-Zahrā' is described as the main figure in the context of the verse al-Nūr (Verse of Light), which refers to her role in the divine light (Allah is the Light of the heavens and earth. The parable of His light is as a niche and within it a lamp) and the sacred space of the Prophet Muhammad's household. Fāṭimah az-Zahrā' is among the householders (Ahl al-Bayt) mentioned in the Al-Qurān verse al-Nūr (Surah al-Nūr [24]: 35). See Allamah S. Muhammad Husayn Tehrani, *Imam-Shenasi* (Allamah Tabatabaei Publishers, 1997), 7:73.

⁵¹⁵ In a Shia hadith, it is stated that the angels complained to Allah, asking Him to remove the darkness from them. So Allah spoke and created the spirit (rūḥ), then spoke again and created from the second word light (nūr). Then, Allah united the light with the spirit and placed it in front of the Throne, so that the east and the west shone. That is Fāṭima al-Zahrā'. See Sayyid Haydar Āmulī, *Tafsīr Al-Muḥīṭ al-A'zam* (Sāzmān-i Chāp wa Intishārāt-i Vezārat-i Irshād-i Islāmī, 1422), 1:509.

⁵¹⁶ According to al-Sha'rānī, the source of every happiness in Paradise and the share for the saints, comes from the light of Fatimah al-Zahrā' (saw), be it every branch that extends into a house, palace, or room that contains all the pleasures that servants seek in Paradise, including fruits, clothes, birds, houris, and other pleasures. See Sha'rānī, *Al-Yawāqūt Wa al-Jawāhir Fī Bayān 'Aqā'id al-Akābir*, 1:616.

⁵¹⁷ What Rasūlullah (saw) meant by "Ahlul Bayt" (Family of the Prophet) and "Itrah" (Descendants) in the Tsaqalayn Hadith is as follows: When he (saw) said: "My Itrah is my Ahlul Bayt", what he meant was: Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Alī, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (may peace be upon them), as well as nine people from the descendants of al-Ḥusayn (as), one after another, and the last of them was al-Mahdī. See Tehrānī, *Ma'rifat Al-Imām*, 13:375.

Table 4.4. *Comparative Insight of Spiritual Authority between Hagar and Fāṭimah*

Aspect	Hagar	Fāṭimah az-Zahrā'	Comparative Insight
Divine Revelation	Seeing angels, angels speak to her, and she speaks to the angel in the wilderness (Gen 16 and 21)	Angels speak to her without being seen by her (<i>Muhaddath</i>)	Hagar's experience is external, meanwhile Fāṭimah's is internal
Crisis (Suffering)	Exiled, Loneliness, Thirst	Poverty, political betrayal, and the sorrow of injustice	Both of them transform pain into a spiritual legacy
Spiritual Legacy	Mother of Arabs	Mother of Imamah	Maternal Symbolism as a Theological Basis

Through an examination of the comparative table juxtaposing Hagar with the aforementioned figures, one may deduce that each comparative analysis of Hagar alongside the three distinct individuals, Maryam, Yoḥeved, and Fāṭimah az-Zahrā', has illuminated a noteworthy pattern. The resonance that arises from the narratives surrounding these four figures suggests that they navigate experiences of marginalization across diverse social contexts, yet simultaneously exhibit resilience and spiritual consciousness, which positions them as female archetypes with a profound spiritual heritage. Whereas, the most salient distinction among all the figures in comparison to Hagar pertains to Hagar's lineage or ancestry.

The three esteemed figures, Maryam, Yoḥeved, and Fāṭimah az-Zahrā', possess a lineage that is characterized by noble ancestry derived from the Prophets or distinguished individuals who maintained proximity to the prophetic lineage, whereas Hagar stands as the sole figures regarded as an outsider, lacking the noble heritage associated with the prophets; she is a mother who nurtured a son destined for prophetic status in an arid desert, without the support of a husband recognized as an apostle. Her life commenced in a state of servitude or subjugation. However, she ultimately evolved into a devoted servant of God, having navigated her liminal phase in the wilderness with unwavering faith.

These findings are noteworthy, particularly when considering Hagar's position as a slave who is regarded as an ordinary woman, but able to acquiesced to Abraham's decision to leave her in a desolate, uninhabited valley alongside the offspring of her union with the prophet Abraham himself, a circumstance that was instigated by Sarah's initial request

rather than her own volition. Hagar undergoes an extraordinary life trajectory, yet she has also attained a spiritual consciousness that transcends conventional human reasoning. Consequently, to interpret Hagar's experience as a spiritual archetype, chapter five will delve into this subject further through the prism of mysticism, specifically within the Jewish and Islamic mystical tradition, to investigate the correlation between Hagar's odyssey in the wilderness and the revelation she receives in the locale, such that it evolves into a spiritual contemplation that elucidates implications concerning the relationship between the wilderness and the manifestation of revelatory experience in women.

CHAPTER V

WILDERNESS AND DIVINE REVELATION TO HAGAR: SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS IN THE JEWISH AND ISLAMIC MYSTICISM

5.1 Analysing Hagar's Experience of Divine Revelation in Jewish and Islamic Mysticism

The discourse presented in the preceding chapter regarding women, revelation, and wilderness has reinforced the notion that the concept of wilderness, as encountered by esteemed female figures, is multifaceted, signifying that it transcends mere physical deterioration. Instead, it embodies a domain (both corporeal and metaphysical) that epitomises the Divine reality inherent in the phenomena of the cosmos. This assertion aligns with the viewpoint of Paul Ricoeur, who symbolically interprets natural phenomena as an embodiment of Divine order in conjunction with human spiritual awareness,⁵¹⁸ and Mircea Eliade, who posits that every spatial configuration within the universe comprises not solely material constituents, but possesses an intrinsic sacred quality, particularly when the sacred is manifested within the profane domain.⁵¹⁹

In the narrative of Hagar, her lived experience serves as the most unequivocal illustration of the tangible wilderness encounter and the initial divine epiphany encountered by a female figure, analogous to the revelations experienced by the prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, as delineated in chapter two.⁵²⁰ Her odyssey within the wilderness not only encapsulates the narrative of her anguish but also signifies a deeply transformative spiritual experience. This spiritual journey facilitates the potential for a more expansive cosmological interpretation that mirrors the divine revelation bestowed upon Hagar, particularly when viewed through the lens of mysticism within both Jewish and Islamic paradigms. Consequently, this chapter endeavors to scrutinize the implications of Hagar's wilderness experience through this analytical framework, which, in alignment with Jonathan R.

⁵¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur emphasizes how the symbol gives rise to thought. See Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 13; Paul Ricoeur emphasized that by reading symbols, humans can understand and be understood through their expressions. See Don Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy (Northwestern University Press, 1971), 104.

⁵¹⁹ Eliade and Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 21. See again chapter 4 in subsection 4.1.

⁵²⁰ See again chapter 2 in subsection 2.2. discussing about God appearance in Mount Sinai (to Prophet Moses), High Mount (to Prophet Jesus), and Mount Faran (to Prophet Mohammad). See also Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd*, 2:265.

Herman's theory of Comparative Mysticism, serves to uncover diverse manifestations of resonance that may signify profound connections obscured within the narrative of Hagar.⁵²¹

From a more expansive viewpoint, Jewish mysticism, particularly the Kabbalistic framework that will be detailed in this chapter, and Islamic mysticism, often referred to as Sufism or Tasawwuf, illustrate the importance of an intimate and personal experience with the Divine. The encounter is frequently characterised as an extraordinary and transformative experience that transcends conventional intellectual comprehension. Gershom G. Scholem (d. 1982 CE), a prominent scholar of Jewish mysticism, argues that this immediate experience is occasionally described as a mystical union with the Divine, wherein the individual perceives a profound connection that transcends established religious narratives.⁵²² Concurrently, in the context of Sufism, as delineated by Annemarie Schimmel (d. 2003 CE), this profound connection is articulated as a journey of Divine love, wherein the heart of the 'arif (the one who possesses knowledge of God) evolves into a sanctuary of love, a haven of yearning (*shawq*), while the heart of the yearning individual transforms into a locus of intimacy (*uns*). Within this profound intimacy with the Divine, a Sufi does not experience loneliness (*wahshah*) even when encountered with physical or spiritual abandonment or exile, as the Divine presence and His benevolent essence (*jamāl*) envelop and saturate the heart of the devotee.⁵²³

The attributes of closeness to the Divine (the transcendent) are articulated within these two mystical traditions, alongside the tranquillity of the mind even amidst circumstances of isolation or solitude, exemplify the analogous pattern evident in Hagar's experience. This correlation does not imply that Hagar is a mystic or Sufi; instead, it offers a more nuanced understanding within the framework of mysticism concerning how the engagement with the angel and the reception of divine revelation that Hagar underwent can only be realised if she possesses the requisite spiritual preparedness or condition.

Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that fundamentally, the mysticism inherent in both traditions, particularly during the classical era, does not overtly address the correlation between Hagar's spiritual journey and the wilderness. Moreover, the majority of mystics scarcely exhibit any semblance of femininity (female mystics) within the corpus of Kabbalistic or Sufi literature. The pronounced masculinity emerges from the intrinsic predisposition of classical mystics, notably within the Kabbalistic framework, to construe

⁵²¹ Jonathan R. Herman, "Comparative Mysticism and Modernism," in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, ed. Benjamin C. Ray and Kimberley C. Patton (University of California Press, 2000), 98.

⁵²² Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 4.

⁵²³ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 132.

female essence as malevolent, wherein women do not embody the anticipated attribute of gentleness.⁵²⁴ Even within the realm of Sufism, the emblematic representation of masculinity is perpetually regarded as superior to femininity, epitomised by the adage “fathers are high and mothers are low.”⁵²⁵ This suggests that the predominant exegetes of the Bible and the Qur’an within both Kabbalistic and Sufi traditions are predominantly male.⁵²⁶

However, important differences can be identified in the interpretations of Kabbalists and Sufis, particularly concerning their concept of Hagar as a significant emblem. The Zohar, the principal text in Kabbalistic mysticism, for instance, characterises Hagar as an embodiment of negativity, impurity, and defilement within the domicile of Abraham and Sarah, or as a representation of violence that perpetually afflicts the Israelites.⁵²⁷ Conversely, in Sufism, particularly in the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī, Hagar is illustrated as a representation of how a female figure, despite her subordinate status relative to males, can attain distinction through her faith and emerge as a pivotal figure within Islamic jurisprudence.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁴ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 37.

⁵²⁵ In Sufism, especially as conceptualized by Ibn ‘Arabī, the father symbolizes Him as the Supreme Being, the Source of Reality. While the mother is “low” because she has no existence of her own, and completely receives the perfection that is derived from the father. See Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: Kitab Rujukan Tentang Relasi Gender Dalam Kosmologi Dan Teologi Islam* (MIZAN, 1998), 203.

⁵²⁶ Beal and Gunn, *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies*, 61.

⁵²⁷ In the Zohar, Hagar is the mother of Yishmael, who symbolizes hostile forces. See *The Book of Zohar* (MMIX, n.d.), 709; In Shemot: 289, it is said that: “We have learned that no nation was as lowly, as despicable, and as stubborn as the Egyptians before the Holy One, blessed be He, like them. However, the Holy One, blessed be He, gave them power because of Yisrael. ‘And a servant girl who became the heir of her master’ was Hagar, who gave birth to Ishmael, who did much evil to Yisrael, dominating them and oppressing them with various kinds of oppression, and decreed many destructions upon them. They still dominate Yisrael to this day, and do not allow them to practice their religion. There is no exile as severe as the exile by the descendants of Ishmael.” See “Full Zohar Online - Shemot - Chapter 39,” accessed June 29, 2025, https://www.zohar.com/zohar/Shemot/chapters/39?utm_; In Vayera: 470, it is mentioned that when Hagar wandered in the desert, she was involved in idolatry, but the Most Holy One saved her because he heard the cries of her son, even though she had fallen into idolatry. See “Full Zohar Online - Vayera - Chapter 33,” accessed June 29, 2025, https://www.zohar.com/zohar/Vayera/chapters/33?utm_; Feminist scholars say that most interpreters of the Hebrew Bible often accuse women of turning to non-monotheistic religious practices. And when the women are of foreign descent, the accusation becomes a stereotype. See Beal and Gunn, *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies*, 61.

⁵²⁸ In *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, ibn ‘Arabī said, “When perfection was not closed (open) to women, even though women were one degree below men, and that was the degree of creation, because she was created from a man, but that did not harm perfection. Because the man who was Adam, his relation to the origin of his creation, which was the earth, was like the relation of Eve to him (Adam). And this relation of the earth did not prevent Adam from achieving perfection, as was witnessed for him. Rasulullah saw. also witnessed the existence of perfection for Maryam and Asiyah. So, when Allah took this into account in women, He made women have an origin in the Shari’a law, even though it was not with the intention (of the woman herself), namely when Hājar, the mother of Ismā’īl, circled between Safa and Marwah and jogged in the valley seven times, looking for anyone who came with water because of the thirst that had befallen her son, Ismā’īl. She was worried that his son would perish. And the hadith about this incident is very well known. Then Allah made, namely, Allah made the act of Hājar, sa’i between Safa and Marwah, as part of the Shari’ah and determined it as one of the manasik al-ḥajj (pilgrimage rituals).” See ‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1:708.

Irrespective of the Zohar's interpretation that likens Hagar to a representation of negativity or serves as an emblem of the marginalisation of women's societal standing, it does not inherently imply that Jewish mysticism cannot serve as a conceptual framework for examining Hagar's spiritual odyssey. An academic specialising in Jewish philosophy and mysticism, Raḥel Eli'or (2008), for instance, opted to employ Jewish mysticism (Kabbalism) to reconstruct the identity of Jewish women, as this tradition can facilitate an exploration of women's inner experiences and provide insights into their subordinate roles. She posits that Jewish mysticism offers a portrayal wherein the spiritual domain, rituals, and supernatural occurrences that pertain to women signify their resilience in the face of powerlessness within a stringent patriarchal structure.⁵²⁹

The narrative concerning Hagar, who engaged in discourse with the angel and attained divine revelation in the wilderness, retains significant relevance when examined through the lens of Jewish mysticism. As articulated by Jonathan R. Herman, a comparative investigation of mystical traditions is not pursued to identify the parallels between their interpretations, such as those found in Judaism and Sufism regarding Hagar, as both traditions possess distinct perspectives and historical frameworks. Conversely, this analytical endeavour aims to uncover the contextual resonance embedded within the narrative of Hagar's revelation, employing the conceptual paradigms of prophecy and divine revelation inherent to each respective tradition.⁵³⁰

The contextualist perspective posits that the foundation of the experience of revelation or mystical experience resides within the symbolic imagination, specifically in the divine aspect of the human psyche, which facilitates an individual's access to the supernatural (non-physical) domain. This process operates by transmuting sensory perceptions or logical constructs into symbolic representations. For instance, the wilderness encountered in Hagar's odyssey transcends mere physical desolation; it serves as a symbol of existential void and the absence of material connections. In this manner, imagination serves as a tool for hermeneutic interpretation of mysticism, thereby facilitating comprehension of the symbols inherent in the supernatural experience.⁵³¹

In a broad context, Jewish Kabbalah mysticism derives its foundational inspiration regarding revelation and divine insight from the Torah. A prominent example of a significant text within Kabbalah mysticism is the Zohar.⁵³² Within the Zohar, the

⁵²⁹ Eli'or, *Dybbuks and Jewish Women in Social History, Mysticism and Folklore*, 46.

⁵³⁰ Herman, "Comparative Mysticism and Modernism," 98.

⁵³¹ Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, 8.

⁵³² Key concepts such as prophecy and divine revelation (originating from texts relating revelations to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, to the nation of Israel as a whole at Sinai, as well as the visions and prophetic inspiration

dimensions of interpretation and revelation are integrally combined and fundamentally inseparable. In other words, the encounter with the Divine is equated with the act of engaging with the Torah, wherein the sacred scripture is understood as the embodiment of the Divine essence. The distinction between revelation and interpretation is entirely obliterated, as engaging in scriptural interpretation is regarded as an inherently revelatory experience.⁵³³

Similarly, Sufism regards the Qur'an as the principal source of inspiration concerning prophecy and divine revelation. A prominent illustration of this is the Sufism articulated by Ibn 'Arabi.⁵³⁴ In his exegesis, Ibn 'Arabi underscores the significance of the imaginal realm, which operates as a symbolic intermediary that facilitates the representation of the relationship with the Incomprehensible God through images that emerge in the heart, which serves as the locus of the imagination.⁵³⁵ Therefore, within this framework, the primary emphasis of this analysis is to interpret the dimension of revelation experienced by Hagar in the wilderness symbolically or metaphorically as a manifestation of spiritual transformation that signifies her proximity to the Divine.

5.2 Wilderness as a Cosmological Mirror: An Exploration of Hagar's Spiritual Agency in Jewish Mysticism

Kabbalists assert that a profound relationship exists between humanity and the Divine. Both genders are sustained through the grace bestowed by God. Individuals who meticulously adhere to all of God's commandments are instrumental in fostering unity within the divine realm; conversely, transgressing these commandments may unleash malignant forces.⁵³⁶ Jewish mysticism underscores that the deep-seated connection between humanity and God is characterised by prophetic revelations, specifically visions that enable individuals to acquire transcendent knowledge directly from the Divine. This attainment is contingent upon the complete alignment of one's mind and soul with the divine light, achievable through specialised practices such as meditation.⁵³⁷ Consequently, this prophetic insight

of Ezekiel, Daniel in the Hebrew Bible) form the basis for all currents of Jewish mysticism. See Greenspahn, *Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah*, 1–2.

⁵³³ Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, 11.

⁵³⁴ According to William Chittick, the entire work of Ibn 'Arabi is essentially a hermeneutic interpretation of the Qur'an, because the ultimate truth can only be understood with the help of divine guidance, and divine guidance has taken certain forms, as in the verse, "Enter houses by their doors," is the command of God in the Qur'an (2:189). Because one cannot seize the House of God by force, he must enter through the door only when invited. See William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (State University of New York Press, 1989), xvi.

⁵³⁵ Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, 8.

⁵³⁶ Koren, *Forsaken*, 64.

⁵³⁷ Greenspahn, *Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah*, 58.

may manifest when an individual has liberated the ‘bonds’ that tether the soul to the corporeal realm and the material world. This phenomenon is particularly noteworthy, as many mystics intentionally withdraw from societal engagement to secluded environments in order to attain such elevated spiritual states.⁵³⁸ This framework is particularly salient when revisiting the narrative of Hagar’s banishment from Abraham’s tent (Gen 21). In her state of abandonment in the wilderness, devoid of resources, objectives, and the support of Abraham, she ultimately discovered her spiritual impetus through her communion with the angel of God, who provided solace at a time when she and Ishmael were in dire need of water.⁵³⁹

The wilderness represents the site where Hagar not only attains divine deliverance (Gen 21: 14-20), but the Torah also delineates her prior encounters with three or to five angels during her flight to the wilderness, wherein she designates God as *El Roi* and receives a divine assurance (Gen 16:13) that aligns with the notion of prophetic insight, particularly within the framework of Jewish mysticism, which acquires transcendent knowledge directly from the Divine. Furthermore, Jewish mystics drew inspiration from the prophetic experiences of notable figures, including Moses, Jacob, and Isaac. Certain scholars propose that Hagar’s designation of God as *El Roi* (אל ראי) after her divine vision is strikingly analogous to the event wherein Moses articulates the name YHWH (יהוה) following his encounter with the Divine, which also transpires in the wilderness (the Arabah desert).⁵⁴⁰ Just as the Israelites were recipients of divine visions in the Sinai desert, Hagar similarly encountered prophetic visions in the desert en route to *Shur* (Gen 16:7) and the Beersheba desert (Gen 21:14).⁵⁴¹

The Kabbalistic tradition of mysticism, in a general sense, also engages in a symbolic interpretation of the notion of ‘exile.’ This notion is frequently linked with themes of ‘atonement’ regarding the itinerant nature of both soul and body. Kabbalist ascetics conceptualise expulsion as emblematic of the human soul and body’s state of wandering, along with the divine element that is perceived as estranged and necessitates redemption through acts of repentance.⁵⁴² This phenomenon of spiritual exploration or eviction

⁵³⁸ Greenspahn, *Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah*, 7.

⁵³⁹ Halim, “Rereading the Biblical Story of Sarah and Hagar: A Note for Interfaith Activists,” 25.

⁵⁴⁰ See again chapter 2 in the subsection 2.4. Hagar’s Wilderness Journey: A Proto-Mystical Symbol of Divine Revelation in Torah and Qur’an. See also Thomas B. Dozeman, “The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story,” *The Society of Biblical Literature* 117, no. 1 (1998): 31.

⁵⁴¹ Aryeh Cohen, “Hagar and Ishmael: A Commentary,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 68, no. 3 (2014): 253, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964314528877>.

⁵⁴² Eli’or, *Dybbuks and Jewish Women in Social History, Mysticism and Folklore*, 49; Some scholars assume that the depth of the meaning of “expulsion” that the Kabbalist mystics delved into could have been influenced by historical factors, namely when the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, when King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain issued the Edict of Expulsion (Edict of Granada), which forced all Jews to leave the territory

illustrates the complex relationship that exists between the revealed and hidden spheres, as well as the severe contention that unfolds between the two domains; specifically, between the tainted realms, which consist of the forces of night, wickedness, and impurity, referred to in Hebrew as *sitra ahra* (סִטְרָא אַחְרָא), and the area of divine consciousness, which encompasses the connection to the Almighty, truth, and compassion, known in Hebrew as *sitra de-kedushah* (סִטְרָא דְקַדְשָׁא).⁵⁴³

If this allegorical interpretation is utilised for the analysis of Hagar's experience, then her odyssey in the wilderness transcends mere exile, isolation, or a decline in her societal standing. Within the context of her disorientation in the desert and her anguished pleas (Gen 21:14-20), Hagar was bestowed with a divine revelation through an angelic being who delivered her via a spring, providing her solace (Gen 21:17). In this scenario, Hagar's engagement with the transcendent reality (the angel dispatched by the Divine) that facilitated her rescue illustrates the preeminent nature of the domain of divine consciousness, specifically *sitra de-kedushah*, and the wilderness through which she traversed was not a site of punishment; rather, it metamorphosed into a locus for Hagar's redemption.

The examination of Hagar's experience may also be approached through a cosmological analysis situated within the context of Kabbalistic philosophy. Kabbalistic thought delineates human endeavours in the context of the dichotomy between the forces of good and evil, sacredness and defilement, the eternal realm and mortality. Kabbalah presents novel interpretations regarding the connection of humanity to these domains, which are, on one hand, associated with the anticipated redemption and the domain of sacred power, and on the other hand, linked to exile and the domain of impurity or malevolent power. In summary, within Kabbalistic cosmology, the existence of the human soul is intricately tied to the concealed realm elucidated by the concept of *Sefirot*.⁵⁴⁴

Sefirot (סְפִירוֹת) constitutes a pivotal concept for designating the divine emanations articulated within Kabbalistic literature, derived from the term *sappir* (סַפִּיר), which signifies sapphire, thereby epitomising the radiance of light or the "reflection of sapphire." It is posited that when the Holy One intends to communicate with His prophets, these sefirot become imbued with an intrinsic glory,⁵⁴⁵ commensurate with their respective levels,

of Spain unless they converted to Christianity. Some scholars argue that the expulsion was a catalyst that redirected the mystical tradition not only to concentrate on the personal encounter with the Divine, but also on the redemption and unity of the Jewish people as a whole. See Greenspahn, *Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah*, 126.

⁵⁴³ Eli'or, *Dybbuks and Jewish Women in Social History, Mysticism and Folklore*, 50.

⁵⁴⁴ Eli'or, *Dybbuks and Jewish Women in Social History, Mysticism and Folklore*, 48.

⁵⁴⁵ The sefirotic realm is represented by the sacred Sekhel (שֵׁכֶל) means intellect, the vestibule in front of the Holy of Holies. The High Priest represents Hesed (חֶסֶד) means Divine love, the Levites Gevurah (גְּבוּרָה) means

enabling them to perceive the divine utterance. However, the Speaker remains imperceptible to them, as He is concealed within His essence. The distinguished locus of prophetic vision is identified as the tenth sefirot, the *Shekinah* (שְׁכִינָה), the luminous cloud of glory, since it is through this medium that the celestial lights are discerned. Consequently, the essence of prophetic vision is intrinsically connected to the sefirotic emanation.⁵⁴⁶

The *Shekinah* is posited to represent the feminine facet of the Divine that is most proximate to the earthly realm, typically symbolised by entities such as the city of Jerusalem, the Temple in its entirety, the outer courtyard, and the sacrificial altar.⁵⁴⁷ It is regarded as a created luminous presence that serves as a mediator between the Transcendent God and the Jewish populace. It is not synonymous with God, but is instead an emanation of the divine glory (*Kavod*/כְּבוֹד). Beyond its theological dimensions, the *Shekinah* is frequently associated with gender symbolism, often illustrated as a feminine representation of the Divine, or referred to as a “daughter of light.” Thus, *shekinah* is construed not merely as the indwelling presence of God, but rather encompasses a more extensive symbolism that incorporates gender dynamics and historical development in the context of understanding and experiencing the Divine.⁵⁴⁸ Jewish mystics characterise the union of the Divine (Masculine) with the feminine aspect of *shekinah* as a sexual union, particularly within the confines of authentic marriage, which partakes in the enigma of God himself.⁵⁴⁹

It is essential to highlight that Hagar’s experience of salvation in the desolate landscape unfolded as a direct consequence of her linkage to the *shekinah*, taking into account various considerations such as: 1) Her state of being disoriented in the desert of Beersheba, which epitomizes the tumult of both the corporeal and spiritual realms, ultimately culminating in divine salvation, 2) Transitioning from the position of a foreign-born slave marginalized outside the covenant, to receiving the Divine assurance of a formidable nation through her progeny, which entails an acquisition of the Divine vision through an encounter with an angelic being. In a manner akin to *Shekinah*, which signifies separation and exile from the other dimensions of the *sefirot* due to its intrinsically diminished quality,⁵⁵⁰ Hagar endures

divine power, and the Israelites Tiferet (תִּפְעָרֶת) means harmony. Shekhinah (שְׁכִינָה), the lower feminine aspect of the Divine, is symbolised by Jerusalem, the Temple, the outer Shekhal, and the outer altar; while Binah (בִּינָה) means deep wisdom, the high Mother, is signified by the inner Shekhal, the inner altar, and the Holy of Holies. The seven-candle menorah (מְנוֹרָה) represents the seven lower sefirot. Ezekiel’s chariot, Merkavah (מְרַכְבָּה), originally an adaptation of the Temple cult ritual for the Babylonian exiles, later adopted by the Merkava mystics, and later by the German Pietists, became an essential element of sefirotic imagery. See Koren, *Forsaken*, 65.

⁵⁴⁶ Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, 274.

⁵⁴⁷ Koren, *Forsaken*, 65.

⁵⁴⁸ Greenspahn, *Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah*, 194–95.

⁵⁴⁹ Ignacio L. Götz, “Sex and Mysticism,” *Wiley, CrossCurrents*, vol. 54, no. 3 (2004): 18.

⁵⁵⁰ For theosophical Kabbalists, everything in the human realm, including menstruation, has its origin in the Divine. Women menstruate because the Shekhinah menstruates, and both flows (blood and energy) are

exile as a consequence of her foreign lineage, her subordinate social standing, and her exclusion from the principal covenant (which is assured by God through Isaac). Conversely, the *Shekinah* is also positively represented as a mediating element between the corporeal realm and the loftiest spiritual reality, bridging the pure domain of eternal existence and the impure realm of mortality, as well as connecting the terrestrial sphere with the supernatural dimensions, and the dichotomy of purity and impurity.⁵⁵¹ Similarly, Hagar's experience can be correlated with the transcendent, who was directly approached by the angel serving as God's emissary within the profane wilderness, characterised as an arid expanse, a locus of disorientation, a space for transgressors, and a perilous environment.

The event of revelation that Hagar undergoes serves as an implicit cosmic reflection of the *Shekinah*. Her dialogue with the sacred representative reflects the interplay between the tangible creature and the infinite source. Moreover, the great nation that emerges after Hagar and Ishmael occupies the desolate wilderness, symbolically illustrating God's cosmic reconfiguration of the previously desolate area, or esoterically referred to as *tohu wa bohu* (תהו ובהו),⁵⁵² into a prosperous landscape (Gen 1:2).⁵⁵³ Consequently, interpreting Hagar's revelation through this lens facilitates an understanding of the manifestation of a spiritual experience with the transcendent, mediated by the relationship between the revealed and concealed realms. An individual, in this instance, Hagar, may traverse these pathways passively, without her volition, due to the inherent positive latent power within her that is associated with the *Shekinah* or the sacred realm of angels, and liberated from the adverse influence linked to the *sitra ahra*, the domain of demons, and the force of impurity.⁵⁵⁴ According to this framework, Hagar's banishment, tears, and reception of divine promise all mirror Kabbalah's concept of *Shekinah*'s nature: into suffering, into distance, and the wilderness, as highlighted in the following table.

triggered by the dominance of excessive Justice or by the *sitra ahra* (dark side). Menstruating women, who were initially viewed as out of step with the Divine, became even more dangerous when they were understood to be reflections of the *Shekhinah* itself, influenced or "strengthened" by the *sitra ahra*. Just as the menstruating woman was separated from her husband, so the *Shekhinah* had to be separated from the other Divine attributes (*sefirot*), for any contact between the pure and the impure could "infect" the divinity with forces from the demonic realm. This symbolic understanding of the *Shekhinah* as a menstruating being had a profound impact on the image and spiritual possibilities of Jewish women in the Middle Ages, and continues to influence Jewish customary practices to this day. See Koren, *Forsaken*, 174.

⁵⁵¹ Eli'or, *Dybbuks and Jewish Women in Social History, Mysticism and Folklore*, 49.

⁵⁵² Strickman and Silver, *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis (Bereshit)*, 180.

⁵⁵³ Onkelos Bereshit 1: 2: "The earth was unformed and desolate, and (there was) darkness [was spread] over the surface of the abyss. The breath of [from before] Elohim hovered [blew] above the surface of the water. See "Onkelos Genesis 1"; See also Alexander, *Pentateuch*, 897. Also see again chapter 2 in subsection 2.1.

⁵⁵⁴ Eli'or, *Dybbuks and Jewish Women in Social History, Mysticism and Folklore*, 49.

Table 5.1. *The mirroring aspect of Shekinah and Hagar's Wilderness Experience*

Shekinah Aspect	Hagar's Spiritual Insight
In Kabbalah, Shekinah descends into the exile with the people of Israel.	In Genesis, Hagar was banished to the wilderness, wept in isolation, and received Divine salvation.
In Zohar, the Shekinah can be present in an "impure" place (<i>sitra ahra</i>) if there is a sincere call to God.	Hagar in the desert (the most remote location) met God and named Him <i>El Ro'i</i> .
In Kabbalah, a place of isolation can become a place of union.	Wilderness for Hagar became a place of Divine encounters, miracles, and divine promise.

The aforementioned interpretation is predicated upon the recognition that Hagar is identified as the inaugural female figure within the Pentateuch to undergo a direct vision of an angelic being. She addresses the Divine as *Attah El-Ro'i* (אַתָּה אֵל רֹאִי), translated as "You are the Lord Who Sees Me" (Gen 16:13).⁵⁵⁵ Theologians have categorised this occurrence as a theophanic experience,⁵⁵⁶ denoting the immediate manifestation of the Divine within the human sphere.⁵⁵⁷ The Hebrew Bible delineates theophany through various forms, encompassing the Divine Glory (*Kavod*/כְּבוֹד)⁵⁵⁸, the presence of angels (*Mal'ak*/מַלְאָךְ)⁵⁵⁹, and columns of cloud (*'ammūd 'ānān*⁵⁶⁰/עַמֻּד עָנָן).⁵⁶¹ Thus, Hagar may be classified as an individual who encountered one of these manifestations, specifically an angelic being. Nonetheless, within Jewish tradition, she is not recognised as part of the lineage of sacred women due to her social status and ethnicity,⁵⁶² and only female prophets within this

⁵⁵⁵ Royo, "A God Who Sees and Hears the 'Other': Hagar's Theophany as an Illustration of the Lord's Benevolence Toward Those Outside the Covenant," 103.

⁵⁵⁶ Adamo and Eghwubare, "The African Wife of Abraham (Gn 16:1-16; 21:8-21)," 2005, 462, The term theophany, originating from the Greek Theophania, signifies God's visible manifestation, indicating a moment of divine self-revelation that transcends conventional perception. See ; William C Chittick, "Imagination as Theophany in Islam," in *Temenos Academy Review* (The Temenos Academy, 2003), 68.

⁵⁵⁷ Hilary Anne-Marie Mooney, *Theophany: The Appearing of God According to the Writings of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*, Beiträge Zur Historischen Theologie 146 (Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 5.

⁵⁵⁸ נִישְׁכֹן כְּבוֹד יְהוָה עַל־הַר סִינַי (Vayyishkon kevod-YHWH 'al-har Sinai), which means 'And the glory of the LORD abode upon mount Sinai' (Exodus 24: 16). See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 110.

⁵⁵⁹ וַיִּמְצְאָהּ מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה עַל־עֵין הַמַּיִם (Vayyimtza'cha mal'akh YHWH 'al-'ein ha-mayim), which means, 'And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness.' Genesis: 16: 7. See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 18.

⁵⁶⁰ וַיֵּלֶךְ יְהוָה לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמֻּד עָנָן לְהַדְרִיכָם הַדֶּרֶךְ (V-Adonai holekh lifneihem yomam b'ammud 'anan lanhotam ha-derekh) which means 'And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way' (Exodus 13: 21). See *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, 94.

⁵⁶¹ W. Wesley Williams, *Tajallī Wa-Ru'y: A Study of Anthropomorphic Theophany and Visio Dei in the Hebrew Bible, the Qur'ān and Early Sunnī Islam* (The University of Michigan, 2008), 276.

⁵⁶² 256. Rabbi Chiya said that "Avraham and Yitzchak each performed their marital duties with one wife on the side of holiness, because Hagar and the concubines were not of holiness...." See *The Book of Zohar*, 786.

tradition are acknowledged as legitimate representatives of spiritual encounters with such manifestations.⁵⁶³

Nevertheless, a compelling perspective articulated by the Jewish philosopher Abraham Maimonides (d. 1237 CE) can substantiate the authenticity of Hagar's transcendental experience, as he posited that the direct encounter (apprehension) of the Divine names constitutes a facet of the Knowledge of Necessary Existence. He elucidated that each disclosed Divine name is calibrated to correspond with an individual's cognitive capacity. One might consider the significant depiction of 'God the Almighty' (*El Shaddai*/אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי) presented to foundational figures like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen 17:1, Gen 28:3, Gen 35:11), and the declaration "I will be that I will be" (*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*/אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה) and the sacred name Tetragrammaton (YHWH/יהוה) that was revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai (Exod 3:14, Exod 6:2-3).⁵⁶⁴ This characterisation of the Knowledge of Necessary Existence may also resonate with the experience of Hagar, who was encountered in her solitude within the wilderness. Following her interaction with the angel, she designates God through a direct experience as *Attah El-Ro'i* (אַתָּה אֵל רֹאֵי), "You are the Lord Who Sees me" (Gen 16:13). These divine revelations appear to reflect a symbolic relationship; Abraham and Moses acquired their visions through divine revelation, Hagar attained hers in her state of seclusion.

Moreover, the angelic intervention on behalf of Hagar during her period of distress can be interpreted as an embodiment of the Divine, presented in the human-like theophany (Anthropos). Specific Jewish texts indicate that YHWH was predominantly perceived in anthropomorphic form,⁵⁶⁵ and this manifestation within ancient Israelite tradition is

⁵⁶³ The biblical text also clearly records the stories of Jewish female prophets, who experienced prophetic visions such as Sarah (Abraham's wife) who was promised through an angel the birth of Isaac (Gen 17: 15-19), Rebecca (Isaac's wife) is said to have spoken directly with YHWH regarding the destiny of her two sons (Esau and Jacob) and the nation they would give birth to (Gen 25: 22-23), see Hamori, *Women's Divination in Biblical Literature*, 52; and Miriam, who, according to Moses Maimonides (a twelfth-century Jewish philosopher), was a prophetess like Moses and Aaron, and died with a divine kiss. See Schwartzmann, "The Attitude of Medieval Jewish Philosophers to the Phenomenon of Female Prophecy," 60; However, there are also some Jewish interpretations (midrash) of the Female Prophets that are gender biased, because some Rabbis, especially during the Babylonian Talmud (Talmud Bavli) of the sixth century CE, such as Rav Nahman bar Yaakov (d. 320 CE), made cynical comments that although there were Jewish women who held the title of prophets. His opinion was based on his interpretation of the figures of the prophets Deborah and Huldah, whom he perceived as overly self-confident and dominant compared to men. According to him, "Honour is not proper to women." Among the women, there were two who were arrogant, and their names were considered strange. One is called "Bee" (Devorah) and the other is called "Hulda," which refers to small rodents, such as moles. In the book *Nevi'im* (The Prophets), Deborah is instructed to call Barak to come to her, rather than her going to meet Barak (Shoftim 4). Meanwhile, Hulda, when King Josiah sent people to ask about the word of God, they came to Hulda the prophetess. Hulda answered from her place, not going to the palace (Melakhim Bet 22). See Segal, *Vol. 2 The Babylonian Esther Midrash*, 216.

⁵⁶⁴ Lobel, *Moses and Abraham Maimonides*, 131.

⁵⁶⁵ The prophetic tradition, epitomized in Hosea 12:11, that God can be represented in images, served as an interpretive basis for certain mythical ideas that developed in the Aggadah of the formative period of rabbinic Judaism. God took "incarnational form" (the terms used in medieval midrashic, liturgical, and philosophical

intrinsically linked to the concept of recognising God's proximity and presence.⁵⁶⁶ A fundamental attribute of theophany (the vision of God) is that it is instigated by the Divine Being, rather than by any individual seeking a direct encounter with God. This encounter is experienced and observed directly by humans, wherein the Divine presence is revealed immediately and tangibly.⁵⁶⁷ The experience of theophany is frequently characterised by "compassion" and "the glory of God," which are interpreted as symbolic representations that enhance the relationship between the transcendent Divine and humanity.⁵⁶⁸ This characterisation further elucidates how Hagar's exile was not a result of her volition, and her deliverance in the desolate wilderness was bestowed upon her directly and abruptly by God.

Kabbalists from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries frequently used light as a metaphor for the essence of the Divine. The principal role of this light metaphor is theoretical, serving to elucidate the Divine reality through a phenomenological lens. The event of mystical emanations (*Sefirot*) articulated by the Kabbalists, as previously analysed, arises as a consequence of the boundless Divine Light, referred to *Or Ein Sof* (אור אין סוף).⁵⁶⁹ In his commentaries on *Sefer Yesirah* 1:8, the fourteenth-century Kabbalist Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi posits that when a prophet or mystic encounters the sacred lights (*sefirot*), they may observe that these lights occasionally radiate toward them, resembling lightning, only to vanish instantaneously, then reappear and recede once more. The radiant essence of these emanations can exclusively be apprehended within the framework of a phenomenological relationship, that is, through the lived experience of the individual who perceives them. Thus, from the Kabbalistic perspective, illumination through visual contemplation of lights is contingent upon the volition of The Infinite Light (*Or Ein Sof*) to bestow such illumination upon the observer.⁵⁷⁰

Abraham Maimonides, who integrated Jewish Philosophical thought, legal principles, and mystical traditions, also invoked the notion and symbolism of light to elucidate the intersection between the Divine and humanity during several significant theophanic events. In the theophanic experiences undergone by Abraham and Moses at Mount Sinai, for instance, Maimonides articulated that the transcendental experience manifested due to the

and mystical texts are *demuyot*, *dimmuyot*, *dimyonot*, and *dimyonim*) at critical moments in Israel's sacred history, for example at the parting of the Red Sea, he is said to have appeared as a young warrior and at Sinai as a compassionate elder; he is sometimes further depicted as a scribe teaching the Torah. See Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, 8.

⁵⁶⁶ Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, 16–17.

⁵⁶⁷ Greenspahn, *Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah*, 35.

⁵⁶⁸ Greenspahn, *Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah*, 37.

⁵⁶⁹ Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, 270.

⁵⁷⁰ Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, 272.

profound spiritual preparedness of each Prophet, who was poised to receive illumination from the Creator.⁵⁷¹ Through this interpretative framework, Hagar's direct encounter with the Divine appellation, *El-Ro'i*, which transpired independently of a prophet, legal structure, or ritual, exemplifies the phenomenological reality of her intrinsic spiritual preparedness, enabling her to absorb the emanation of God's essence instantaneously, akin to light. This substantiates the assertion that the reception of the emanation of light, which encompasses the Knowledge of Necessary Existence, is not exclusively reserved for select males but is also accessible to females, as illustrated by the example of Hagar.

The twelfth-century Jewish philosopher and theologian Judah Halevi posited that divine influence could indeed extend to women. Nevertheless, in contrast to men, whom God could designate as prophets, the divine revelations encountered by women were typically regarded as secondary, as women's involvement in prophecy was perceived as a less comprehensive or subordinate process compared to that of men.⁵⁷² This established hierarchy, however does not imply that women's prophetic or mystical experiences lacked significance within the Jewish mystical tradition. Rabbi Elazar conveyed to Rabbi Yosi and Rabbi Yitzchak that every expression within the annals of mystical literature illustrates that women frequently played a prominent role in articulating their spiritual experiences in a personal and autobiographical manner.⁵⁷³

Hagar's revelatory encounter within the Jewish biblical narrative exemplifies a distinctive odyssey of how divine revelation can manifest in women. Although male prophets predominantly characterise the prevailing representation of prophetic insights, an analysis of Hagar's transcendental experience through the lens of Kabbalistic mysticism elucidates that every individual, regardless of gender, possesses a unique access to divine wisdom.⁵⁷⁴ This interpretation suggests that women are equally spiritual entities, endowed with significant spiritual cognisance.⁵⁷⁵ The symbolic interpretation of Hagar's expedition in the wilderness highlights the variations in how women perceive truth and engage with the divine. To further enrich the investigation of Hagar's spiritual transformation, the subsequent section will contextualise her narrative within the paradigm of Islamic mysticism.

⁵⁷¹ Lobel, *Moses and Abraham Maimonides*, 128.

⁵⁷² Hierarchically, divine revelation came down in stages: first to chosen men, then to the general public. In the final stage, Jewish women also received prophecies, hence the Jewish tradition also recognizes female prophets. See Schwartzmann, "The Attitude of Medieval Jewish Philosophers to the Phenomenon of Female Prophecy," 59.

⁵⁷³ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 38.

⁵⁷⁴ Hamori, *Women's Divination in Biblical Literature*, 8.

⁵⁷⁵ Koren, *Forsaken*, xiii.

5.3 Wilderness as a Space of God's Manifestation: An Exploration of Hagar's Spiritual Agency in Islamic Mysticism

In contrast to the Jewish tradition, the Islamic mystical framework does not acknowledge the concept of female prophets; however, it does recognise certain esteemed women who exemplify spiritual perfection and receive divine revelations. Within the Qur'an, it is articulated that Allah dispatched angels to women, imparting genuine revelations from Himself. This is exemplified in the case of the mother of Isaac (Sarah), who was heralded with the announcement of Isaac's birth, as well as in the instance when Gabriel was sent to Maryam, the mother of Isa, conveying to her, "Indeed, I am the messenger of your Lord to give you a pure son." Analogously, the mother of Moses was given heavenly guidance by Allah to release her son into the river, with the confidence that he would return to her and be appointed as a prophet, ready to be sent forth.⁵⁷⁶

The prominent Sufi scholar, Ibn 'Arabī, articulated that within each historical epoch, there exists a singular exalted figure (*wali*), who may indeed be a woman, whose spiritual resonance permeates the cosmos, akin to a delicate filament. Individuals may perceive her as the axis (*al-quṭb*), yet she does not constitute the nucleus; instead, she manifests ubiquitously, reminiscent of the gentle nature of breath.⁵⁷⁷ In a separate pronouncement, he elucidates: "A saint (*wali*) was once asked about the count of *abdāl* (noble ones), and he responded: "Forty souls." Upon further inquiry: "Why did you not specify forty men?" He remarked: "Among them, there could be women." This illustrates the perspective of the Islamic mystical tradition, which recognises both genders as possessing the potential to achieve nobility and proximity to the Divine. Noteworthy examples of female figures who have attained spiritual perfection include Maryam, Fāṭimah, the spouses of the Prophet, and Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah (a prominent female Muslim mystic).⁵⁷⁸ Al-Qusyairī additionally referenced a hadith that describes the women of paradise: "And in it (the fourth heaven) there are for Maryam bint 'Imrān seventy palatial structures of pearls; and for the mother

⁵⁷⁶ See again Chapter 4. See also 'Izz ibn 'Abd Salām, *Ḥal Al-Ramūz Wa Maḥātīḥ al-Kunūz* (Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyah, 1430), 44.

⁵⁷⁷ In discussing "The Saint with the Fine Thread that Extends throughout the Universe" (*al-walī dhū al-raqā'iq al-mumtadda ilā jamī' al-'ālam*), Ibn 'Arabī mentions a figure, possibly a woman, who has fine threads (*raqā'iq*) that extend to all corners of the universe. This figure occupies a wonderful and rare station, and only one of its kind is present in the world at any given time. Because of the vastness of his/her spiritual influence, which extends like a filament throughout the universe, some of the spiritual seekers (*ahl al-tarīq*) may think that this figure is the Pole (*al-quṭb*), the cosmic axis and centre of the universe. Nevertheless, he/she is not a Pole. Instead, this saint occupies an incomparable station, distinguished by the subtlety and breadth of his/her presence. Its spiritual connections are like delicate veins or rays of light, spread invisibly throughout creation, affecting everything with an insensible delicacy. A hidden but pervasive influence, not as central as the Pole, but as present everywhere as breath. See 'Arabī, *Al-Futuḥat al-Makiyyah (Arba' Mujalladat)*, II, 14.

⁵⁷⁸ Amīr al-Mu'minīn Imām 'Alī/Husayn ibn Mu'īn al-Dīn Mībdī, *Dīwān Imām 'Alī (Tarjama Wa Sharḥ Mībdī)* (Markaz-e Nashr Mīrāth Maktūb, 1376), 235.

of Moses ... and for Āsiyah binti Muzāḥim seventy palatial structures; and for Khadijah binti Khuwaylid, the mother of the Prophet's progeny, seventy palatial structures of red yaqut; and for Fāṭimah binti Muḥammad, seventy palatial structures of red marjān embellished with pearls, their entrances, fixtures and bedding fashioned from the same essence.⁵⁷⁹

Although the name Hagar does not appear in the aforementioned hadith or Sufi discourses, the Sufi viewpoint, which acknowledges the potential of women to attain spiritual perfection, implicitly suggests that the metaphorical interpretation of Hagar's ordeal in the wilderness within this framework is not an anomaly. Upon revisiting the narrative of Hagar's banishment in the Islamic tradition, it is reported that Abraham was engaged in contemplation when Sarah implored him to distance Hagar from her presence. During his reflection, the angel Gabriel arrived with a divine instruction, stating: "Comply with Sarah's request." Consequently, Abraham mounted *Buraq*, transporting Hagar and Ishmael, and swiftly reached the sacred territory (*al-Ḥaram*).⁵⁸⁰ Al-Suhaylī (d. 1186 CE) interpreted Abraham's response as a demonstration of adherence to God's directives. He underscored that there exists no credible historical record asserting that Abraham relocated Hagar to a desolate valley to gratify Sarah. The established historical account indicates that Abraham brought Hagar to that location in compliance with God's commands, to fulfil the Divine destiny that had been ordained for her.⁵⁸¹

What is particularly noteworthy in the narrative is the assertion that Abraham believed to have traversed on *Buraq*, transporting Hagar and Ishmael, and expeditiously arriving in the sacred territory (*al-Ḥaram*). According to Ibn 'Arabī's philosophical Sufism, *Buraq* is conceptualized as a celestial vehicle (emanating from the transcendent domain) that epitomizes the aspirations and inner perceptions of a saint, which are discernible through their actions and authenticity. Consequently, *Buraq*, in this context, is not construed as a tangible vehicle descending from the heavens, but rather as a symbol representing the spiritual ascent (*mi'rāj*) of the saints, achieved through their *himmah* (spiritual aspiration), with the culmination of their journey being the Divine Names. Upon attaining the pinnacle of their ascension, these Names bestow illumination and wisdom upon the saints following their spiritual preparedness. They are capable of receiving [knowledge] solely concerning their readiness (*isti'dād*).⁵⁸² Thus, Hagar's migration to the desolate sacred land (*al-Ḥaram*)

⁵⁷⁹ Qushayrī, *Kitāb Al-Mi'rāj*, 120.

⁵⁸⁰ Burūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān*, 4:426.

⁵⁸¹ Al-Suhaylī believes that Ibrāhīm was not a person who prioritized his wife's orders over Allah's orders, or did something to please his wife in a way that was contrary to Allah's will. See Suhaylī, *Al-Rawḍ al-Anf Fī Sharḥ al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyah*, 2:13.

⁵⁸² 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 3:55.

at that juncture, when examined through this lens, should not be interpreted as an “abandonment.” Instead, it constitutes a spiritual migration that Hagar undergoes to fulfil the destiny that God has ordained for her. From this vantage point, the revelation Hagar receives through the angel in the wilderness represents a manifestation of divine knowledge (light), which in the terminology of Ibn ‘Arabī is referred to as *tajallī*. Ibn ‘Arabī delineates revelation as the initial comprehension and the primary conveyance stemming from the Divine manifestation (*tajallī*). It encompasses all forms of discourse emanating from *al-Haqq* that possess the capacity to impact the souls of the recipients.⁵⁸³

Another conceptualisation of the revelatory experience undergone by Hagar may be termed *kashf*, signifying the divine disclosure to individuals who consciously purify their hearts from speculative deliberation.⁵⁸⁴ Re-examining the narrative of Hagar, whom Abraham abandoned with her infant in a desolate valley devoid of water, vegetation, and any human presence, manifests a decision that is both extraordinary and transcends human rationality. It is atypical for a prophet to possess the fortitude to banish his wife and child, for whom he has yearned for eighty years, to such an arid wasteland. Similarly, it is unconventional for a spouse and mother of a prophet’s offspring to acquiesce to a decision that will jeopardise her physical well-being. Nevertheless, such reasoning did not impede Abraham and Hagar at that juncture due to their unwavering faith in the divine command as articulated in Surah Ibrāhīm (14): 37.⁵⁸⁵ This elevated spiritual state is what Ibn ‘Arabī refers to as the purity of heart. Individuals possessing a pure heart will be safeguarded from constraints of their intellect, which often proves inadequate in comprehending the essence of reality as it exists. He posits that reliance on reason alone (in the absence of a pure heart) frequently obstructs the attainment of ultimate spiritual purification necessary for fostering proximity to the Divine.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸³ Maḥmūd Maḥmūd Ghurāb, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ Al-Ḥikam Min Kalām al-Shaykh al-Akbar (al-Ghurāb)* (Dimashq, 1416), 397.

⁵⁸⁴ Mahā’imī, *Khuṣūṣ Al-Ni‘am Fī Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 381.

⁵⁸⁵ According to Ibn ‘Arabī, if a person succeeds in rejecting the whispers of Satan that come from the front, namely the temptation that tries to replace the Divine will with personal desires, then Allah will bestow on him the knowledge of light (nūr), as a reward for his steadfastness in choosing the glory of Allah. See ‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1:157.

⁵⁸⁶ Mahā’imī, *Khuṣūṣ Al-Ni‘am Fī Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 381; Regarding the limitations of reason, Ibn ‘Arabī illustrates this through the story of the messengers who were sent to convey divine knowledge that often exceeds the reach of human reason. Therefore, reason is forced to perform ta’wil, interpret symbolically or metaphorically, in order to accept some of what they bring. However, some things cannot be reached at all by reason, even with interpretation. In such cases, the peak of a believer’s attitude is to accept with resignation and say, “This is a matter that only God knows,” while restraining reason from rejecting or denying it. The purpose of all this is so that the soul remains calm and does not rebel against the teachings of the prophets, even though reason is unable to fully understand it. This is the position of a believer who thinks and maintains his faith. As for those who do not believe, they will immediately reject such things because they demand an absolute rational explanation. There is much news from the prophets that conveys realities beyond reason, both related to the

Additionally, the account of Hagar's casting to the wilderness can be viewed through the Sufi lens, especially from the interpretative standpoint of Ibn 'Arabī, who explains the tale of Adam and Eve's exile from paradise. Ibn 'Arabī asserts that the narrative of Adam and Eve's descent from celestial realms to terrestrial existence exemplifies a form of *ta'nīs*, which constitutes both a source of entertainment and a means of consolation for the hearts of the lovers of Allah (*ahl Allāh*) during their moments of faltering and subsequent decline from their *maqām* (spiritual station). This narrative is perceived as emblematic of the plight experienced by a saint during their descent, marked by the emergence of feelings of humiliation, shame, and profound internal disintegration. Nevertheless, akin to the forgiveness and renewed affection that Adam and Eve received from Allah after their repentance, the slips and internal turmoil encountered by the saints likewise serve as pathways for their elevation to a *maqām* of greater significance than they had previously attained. This elevation occurs through *ma'rifah* (profound knowledge of Allah) and *ḥāl* (inner condition), wherein their comprehension of Allah expands beyond their prior understanding, accompanied by an enhanced state of humility and a deeper annihilation of the ego than they have previously experienced. This phenomenon encapsulates the essence of ascension (*mi'rāj*) to a more exalted station.⁵⁸⁷

Ibn 'Arabī's aforementioned perspective bears a slight resemblance to Paul Ricoeur's symbolic hermeneutics regarding the narrative of the fall of Adam and Eve from grace, particularly as elucidated in his seminar work *The Symbolism of Evil* (1960). In his interpretative analysis of this narrative, Ricoeur underscores that the symbols present within, such as "stain, sin, fall, and exile," carry significant implications not solely in moral-historical contexts, but also serve as a conduit for the existential revelation of a fractured human existence, which ultimately seeks reconciliation with its primordial source.⁵⁸⁸ In the lexicon of Sufism, Ibn 'Arabī similarly employs the narrative of Adam as a symbol of solace (*ta'nīs*) for saints who may feel disoriented or have deviated from their spiritual stature, thus facilitating their return to divine proximity. This interpretation resonates with the experiences of Hagar in the wilderness, who, despite enduring abandonment and suffering, simultaneously attained salvation and a renewed closeness to the Divine.

transcendent nature of God and about extraordinary events that occur in the created world. See 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1:218.

⁵⁸⁷ 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1:232.

⁵⁸⁸ Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 6.

Hagar's encounter with divine revelation in the desolate valley⁵⁸⁹ serves as a profound symbol that she was neither socially marginalised nor subjected to degradation. Conversely, she was guided away from terrestrial attachments to attain *ma'rifah* (knowledge of God) through a revelation imparted to her by a non-physical entity (angel), representing a genuine experience of Divine revelation (*kashf*). Hagar emerges as an exemplary figure encapsulating the spiritual odyssey through her seclusion in the arid valley, and the dissolution of her ego arising from her vulnerability and surrender before the Divine, which positions her as an apt recipient of revelation. The phenomenon of the emergence of the Zamzam spring amidst the desolate wilderness signifies a manifestation of spiritual miracle (*karamat*) that transpired as a result of her diligent efforts or intrinsic fortitude.⁵⁹⁰ In relation to *kashf*, Ibn 'Arabī articulated in his poem,

His radiance dances from every conceivable angle,
He is neither the dawn nor the dusk,
Praise to be Him who veils His true nature from sight,
Yet a reflection of Him is conveyed to us through our bond.
We perceive Him when we are truly alive, yet it is not His core.
But a genuine unveiling, intertwined with fanciful reverie.
He manifests to our vision in myriad shapes,
This is the essence of what I express when I declare: "My reflection."⁵⁹¹

Hagar's unwavering resolve, patience, and determination, despite her lack of support and seclusion in the wilderness, exemplify the quintessential spiritual qualities as elucidated by Ibn 'Arabī. He articulates that should an individual succeed in relinquishing the ego and attaining a state of pure spirituality, that individual may become a "mirror" through which the Divine reveals His presence. In such a state, actions no longer emanate from the self; instead, it is al-Ḥaqq that acts, where the Divine becomes his sight, hearing, and consciousness (Al-Baqarah (2): 186, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 6502).⁵⁹² Conversely, when God

⁵⁸⁹ The understanding of wilderness as a space where revelation is present can be seen in Ibn 'Arabī's view of the cosmos as the Word of God, which is articulated in the "Breath of the Most Gracious," which can convey news about God through its signs, namely natural phenomena. See Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, xv.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibn 'Arabī describes three types of supernatural events: miracles (*mukjizat*), *karamat*, and magic (*sihr*). *Mukjizat* is something that is impossible for creatures to imitate, and usually appears to prophets. *Karamat* refers to an extraordinary event that appears to a saint (*wali*) because of his closeness to God, not because of his personal desire. Magic (*sihr*), on the other hand, looks great but comes from trickery and not from divine will. See 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1:235–36.

⁵⁹¹ 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1:234.

⁵⁹² "... I am indeed near (to them by My Knowledge). I respond to the invocations of the supplicant when he calls on Me (without any mediator or intercessor). So let the obey Me and believe in Me, so that they may be led alright" (Al-Baqarah [2]:186). See Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of The Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in The English Language*, 35; (38) Chapter: Humility or simplicity (al-bāb at-tawāḍu). Narrated by Abu Hurairah: Rasulullah saw. Said: Allah says, 'I will declare war on anyone who is hostile to a righteous servant of Mine. And the most beloved things with which My servant draws near to Me, are those which I have made obligatory upon him; and My servant continues to draw near to Me by doing *nawāfil* (praying or doing additional deeds other than those which are obligatory) until I love him, so I become his sense of hearing with which he hears, and his sense of sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he holds, and the feet with which he walks; and if he asks Me, I will give him, and if he asks Me for protection (protection), I will protect him (i.e. give him My protection) and I do not hesitate to do anything as I hesitate to take the soul of a believer,

elects to manifest Himself in human form, whether through prophetic experiences, dreams, or other forms of spiritual manifestation, His manifestation will conform to the attributes of that human form, potentially exhibiting emotions such as anger or joy. However, this expression is only a semblance and does not reflect the core of His elevated being.⁵⁹³ In a related poetic composition, Ibn ‘Arabī articulates,

He brought me into His sight with tenderness,
Like a prisoner freed from his chains,
No one felt the goodness but me,
Because of the beauty of the guard and the perfection of the soul.⁵⁹⁴

The aforementioned passage of the poem can be construed as emblematic of Hagar’s journey, specifically a woman originating from Egypt who was subjugated to the condition of servitude, yet was emancipated by Allah during her expedition in the wilderness, thereby receiving *karamah* as a modality of divine salvation and protection,⁵⁹⁵ alongside revelations imparted through celestial beings concerning the fate of a formidable nation that would subsequently arise through her progeny, Ishmael. Rather than serving as a mere locus of exile, the wilderness traversed by Hagar evolved into a site of liberation and spiritual purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*) due to her emancipation from the shackles of worldly dependencies: sustenance, hydration, and emotional attachments to humanity.

Imam al-Junayd (d. 910 CE), in the context of *tazkiyatun nafs*, articulated: “Whoever engages in the purification (discipline) of oneself through adherence to obedience, and exhibits patience in the face of sensual pleasures and desires, shall ascend to the rank (spiritual standing) of those who are brought nearer (to God) until he is divested of the essence of fundamental human nature. When no remnants of basicness remain with them, the Divine spirit will take residence within them.”⁵⁹⁶ Sachiko Murata references the interpretation of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210 CE), asserting that the trajectory of spiritual elevation (*mi’rāj*) constitutes a metamorphosis into an exemplary servant (of God), yielding to the *shari’a*, thereby facilitating the transformation of the soul into a celestial *Buraq* (a winged steed that transports the Prophet to the heavens); only in this manner can

for he hates death, and I do not like to disappoint him.’ See “Sahih Al-Bukhari 6502 - To Make the Heart Tender (Ar-Riqaq) - كتاب الرقاق - Sunnah.Com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم),” accessed July 3, 2025, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6502>.

⁵⁹³ ‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 3:112.

⁵⁹⁴ ‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 3:112.

⁵⁹⁵ According to Annemarie Schimmel, the wilderness is a space where spiritual miracles can occur. Many stories revolve around miraculous rescues from danger or escapes from death in the barren desert. For people accustomed to traveling long distances across barren areas, the presence of *karamah* to provide food, water, or sweets is one of the most coveted powers of the saints (*wali*). See Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 207.

⁵⁹⁶ Aḥmad Farīd Mazīdī, *Al-Imām al-Junayd Sayyid al-Tā’ifatayn* (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1427), 79.

the soul attain “The Highest of the High.”⁵⁹⁷ This notion of the ascension journey epitomizes the transformation of Hagar’s existence from that of a corporeal servant to Sarah to ultimately serving God exclusively following her entry into the wilderness.

Although Hagar is not a mystic or Sufi, nor did she attain divine revelation (*kashf*) through a consciousness and intentional spiritual quest, she nonetheless underscored her spiritual condition of submission (*Islām*) during her period of crisis, which in the terminology of Ibn ‘Arabī, is termed dependence on God, the sole absolute entity, and this phenomenon is referred to as *mi‘rāj* (spiritual ascension).⁵⁹⁸ Hagar’s willingness to remain in the desolate wilderness with her infant exemplifies the virtues of obedience, faith, integrity, and honesty—attributes that signify spiritual fortitude emanating from her innate capacity to adhere to the truth, regardless of coercion or external influence.⁵⁹⁹ This authentic strength gives rise to spiritual manifestations (*tajallī*) that she experiences through interactions and dialogues with celestial beings, as well as the miraculous emergence of the Zamzam spring.⁶⁰⁰ Hagar’s experience constitutes a singular spiritual phenomenon and occupies a notable spiritual status. Moreover, Ibn ‘Arabī posits that each individual’s spiritual journey is distinctive, novel, and will not be replicated or mimicked by others.⁶⁰¹ This assertion reinforces the notion that divine knowledge (*kashf*) is not exclusive to prophets and saints but is accessible to any individual who demonstrates sincerity, integrity in their actions, and profound piety.⁶⁰²

Another metaphorical perspective is articulated by Abu Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE) concerning the concept of revelation and its association with the valley (*al-wādī*) as a symbolic representation, a term also encountered in the narrative of Hagar, specifically the desolate valley (*wādīn ghayri dhī zar*) referenced in surah Ibrāhīm (14): 37. Following al-Ghazālī’s philosophy, the cosmos serves as an embodiment of spiritual constituents, such as the moon, stars, and sun, which signify radiant and exalted truths. A notable indicator of the cosmos cited by al-Ghazālī is the ‘valley.’ He claims that the valley (*al-wādī*) represents the human heart, which can accept divine inspiration. The most elevated valleys correspond

⁵⁹⁷ Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 370.

⁵⁹⁸ ‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1:167.

⁵⁹⁹ ‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1:157.

⁶⁰⁰ Upon her return from Marwah (after seven times running), Hagar heard a voice. She said, “Be quiet!” because she thought it might be her voice. Hagar was silent for a while, then she heard the voice again, then she called out: “I have heard it; if there is help, help us!” It was revealed that the voice was from an angel who was digging with his heel or wing until water appeared. Hagar went closer and began to scoop water with her hands, and the water continued to flow following what she had collected. See Qāsim, *Minār Al-Qārī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4:187; Qurtubī, *Jāmi‘ Aḥkām Al-Qur‘ān Wa-l-Mubayyin Limā Taḍammanahu Mina al-Sunnati Wa-Āyi al-Furqān*, 12:148. See again chapter 3 in subsection 3.2.

⁶⁰¹ ‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1:167.

⁶⁰² ‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1:200.

to the hearts of prophets, saints, and scholars. Through the purity of their hearts, divine knowledge subsequently streams into the hearts of individuals occupying inferior positions (from high valleys to lower valleys). Al-Ghazālī referred to this supreme valley as the ‘right valley,’ denoting the locale nearest to God, where revelation initially emanated.⁶⁰³ This symbolically suggests that the desolate valley encountered by Hagar epitomizes her heart, which undergoes a state of barrenness, inner anguish, and total surrender, thereby transforming it into a conduit for acquiring direct knowledge from God, as it is devoid of all but reliance on the Most High.⁶⁰⁴

An additional intriguing perspective was articulated by al-Rāghib Iṣfahānī (d. 1108 CE) concerning the various strata of revelation that may augment the revelation encountered by Hagar. Iṣfahānī elucidated that revelation transcends the specific communication bestowed upon the messengers *Ulū al-‘Azm* (Prophets endowed with remarkable resilience). Revelation is also imparted to other individuals, as well as to non-human entities within the cosmos, which are designated as manifestations of *taskhīr* (submission or orchestration), or as forms of inspiration (*ilhām*).⁶⁰⁵ Numerous instances pertinent to the classification of the levels of revelation are documented in the Qur’an, including circumstances surrounding Moses’ mother (al-Qaṣaṣ (28):8), the revelation directed towards the angels (al-Anfāl (8):13), the revelation imparted to bees (an-Naḥl (16):69), and the revelation addressed to the heavens (Fuṣṣilat (41):13),⁶⁰⁶ alongside the divine words conveyed to Maryam (an-Nisā’ (4):171). These verses delineate the inexhaustible nature of Allah’s revelation,⁶⁰⁷ thereby categorizing Hagar’s experience within the spectrum of revelation levels.

While there exists a discourse among Islamic theologians concerning the qualifications of a woman to receive divine revelation—given that such revelation is traditionally believed to be bestowed solely upon the designated prophet who conveys the law or *Shari’a*, as delineated in the preceding chapter four—the Sufi perspective articulated above posits that women, notably Hagar, possess the capacity to receive divine inspiration or knowledge from God.⁶⁰⁸ Notwithstanding the differing interpretations regarding Hagar’s

⁶⁰³ Ghazali, *Majmū‘at Rasā’il Al-Imām al-Ghazālī*, 1:280.

⁶⁰⁴ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 197.

⁶⁰⁵ Revelation can be in the form of symbols, dreams, or even writings, and all of these forms are included in the variety of revelation. However, after the prophetic revelation is cut off, what remains is mubashshirāt (joyous inspiration), which is the dream of a believer. See Iṣfahānī, *Al-Mufradāt Fī Ḡharīb al-Qur’ān*, 1:668–69.

⁶⁰⁶ ‘Allāmah Ḥasan Zādah Āmulī, *Hizār u Yik Kalimah* (Būstān-i Kitāb, 1381), 831.

⁶⁰⁷ Maḥmūd Maḥmūd Ghurāb, *Sharḥ Kalimāt Al-Sūfiyya: Al-Radd ‘alā Ibn Taymiyya Min Kalām al-Shaykh al-Akbar Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī* (Dār al-Kātib al-‘Arabī, 1427), 468.

⁶⁰⁸ Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 303.

designation, while some scholars classify her as a prophet,⁶⁰⁹ the majority within the Sunni tradition regard her as a saint, and the Jewish commentaries perceives her as a mere enslaved individual, Hagar's encounter with divine revelation in the wilderness profoundly underscores her intimate connection with the Divine, and the wilderness she traverses serves as a metaphorical locus of convergence between the secular realm and the sacred.

A prominent scholar, al-‘Izz ibn ‘Abd al-Salām (d. 1262 CE), articulated that should a male contest the nobility of a female who is favored by divine blessings on the premise that “males possess a superior status to females,” it is imperative to recognize that such a claim does not pertain to the spiritual experiences of women. It is applicable solely within the domestic sphere, where the husband exercises rights over his wife. Should a male take this argument at face value, he must possess the capacity to parallel the intellectual and spiritual excellence attained by esteemed women in Islamic history, including figures such as Maryam, the mother of Moses, the mother of Isaac, Aisha, Fatimah, as well as Hagar. Nevertheless, suppose the male is incapable of realizing a spiritual standing that matches that of these women. In that case, he effectively concedes that, in this world, there exist certain men who are intellectually and religiously inferior when contrasted with the majority of women.⁶¹⁰ This perspective has inadvertently facilitated the exploration of creative interpretations, particularly in the contextualization of Hagar as a female archetype embodying the process of spiritual transformation she underwent.

5.4 Hagar as a Liminal Archetype: Between Emanation and Annihilation (*Fanā*)

The investigation of Hagar's narrative within the context of Jewish Kabbalistic mysticism and Islamic Sufism, as elaborated in the preceding section, provides an alternative interpretation of Hagar's liminality that pertains to her spiritual journey. From the perspective of Jewish mysticism, Hagar's anguished tears in the wilderness serve as a conduit to the spiritual realm, effectively unlocking the gateway to *Shekinah*. The Zohar articulates that tears represent the most potent state within the spiritual domain, catalyzing all connections and fostering self-transformation.⁶¹¹ Consequently, the tears and supplications that Hagar utters amidst her turmoil in the wilderness can be interpreted as symbols through the lens of the Zohar's symbolism. Prayer is emblematic of a plea for alignment with the Creator, whereas tears serve to sustain the portal of connection with the

⁶⁰⁹ Birgivi Mehmet Efendi and Tosun Bayrak, *The Path of Muhammad: A Book on Islamic Morals and Ethics & the Last Will and Testament (Vasiyyetname)* (The Library of Perennial Philosophy, 2005), 7.

⁶¹⁰ Salām, *Ḥal Al-Ramūz Wa Maḥāṭih al-Kunūz*, 44.

⁶¹¹ Laitman, *Unlocking the Zohar*, 104.

transcendent (*shekinah*) in an open state.⁶¹² Hagar's encounter in the desert (Gen 21) establishes a theological precedent within the Jewish tradition regarding God's care for the marginalized, and it exemplifies the emanation of divine light that descends upon her through the gateway of the *Shekinah*.

In the realm of Islamic mysticism, the journey of Hagar transcends mere interpretation as a marginalized event; it is also perceived as a pivotal inheritance of the foundational theological principle in Islam, namely, *tawhīd* and submission (*Islām*). Hagar is characterized as an embodiment of integrity, who bequeaths her spiritual exaltation through the ritual of *sa'i* (the act of traversing between Safa and Marwah), which symbolizes her strides as a devout and virtuous individual.⁶¹³ It is asserted that Hagar attained the most esteemed and elevated status in terms of *tawakkal*. A notable assertion from a scholar posits that "all authentic *tawakkal* originates from Egypt," thereby reflecting Hagar's lineage. Scholars draw parallels between Hagar's degree of *tawakkal* and a form of reliance that is beyond the capacity of mountains, or even humanity itself. Hagar is revered for her genuine devotion to Allah the Most High as demonstrated through her unwavering disposition. Although her name does not explicitly feature within the Qur'an, the sentiment of trust that forges her connection with the Divine and facilitates her salvation amidst desolation is encapsulated in surah at-Ṭalāq (65): 3, which articulates, "Whoever puts his trust in Him, He (Allah) will suffice him." From a Sufi perspective, Hagar, abandoned in a desolate valley, emerges as a symbol of autonomy from human dependency; she is liberated from Abraham, thus learning to rely solely upon God.⁶¹⁴ The circumstances that Hagar endures, in Sufi terminology, bear a resemblance to a state of self-annihilation or dissolution (*fanā'*) prior to her eventual reception of the manifestation of God (*tajallī*).

Revisiting the narrative of Hagar within the Jewish tradition facilitates a critical examination that transcends the mere identification of her as a historical entity. The account of Hagar serves as an example of female agency from antiquity that may be employed to interrogate longstanding presuppositions regarding gender dynamics, authority, and the nature of truth in historical documents, through the analysis of how her gendered corporeality and her sociocultural standing influence the interpretation and articulation of Divine truth, particularly within a midrashic framework that male perspectives have

⁶¹² Laitman, *Unlocking the Zohar*, 105. See also chapter 2 in subsection 2.3.

⁶¹³ 'Aḡānī, *Durūs Al-Shaykh Sayyid Ḥusayn al-'Aḡānī*, 3:31.

⁶¹⁴ Then Jibril came and said, "Who are you?" Hājar answered: "I am the mother of Abraham's son." Jibril asked: "To whom were you entrusted in this place?" Hājar answered: "To Allah." Jibril said, "Allah has assigned you to the Most Protective Guardian." See Ḥassān, *Silsilat Al-Dār al-Ākhirah (Min Durūs Ṣawtiyah Qām Bi-Tafrīghihā Mawqī' al-Shabakah al-Islāmīyah)*, 10:14.

predominantly shaped.⁶¹⁵ This reassessment yields an enriched understanding of Hagar's character, motivations, and contextual background, establishing her as an archetype for other prophetic figures within the Hebrew Bible. For instance, a particular scholar underscores Hagar's metamorphosis from a subordinate to the progenitor of a significant nation (Gen 16 and 21), positing this transformation as a precursor to Moses, who similarly experienced a transformation in the wilderness, ultimately ascending to the role of the founder of the nation of Israel (Exodus 13: 17-22).⁶¹⁶

Hagar's theophanic encounter as depicted in Genesis 16 and 21 is similarly regarded as a manifestation of the divine that parallels the theophanic experiences recounted in the account of Moses in Exodus. The principal distinction resides in Hagar's theophanic encounter, which is characterised by a more intimate, subdued, and peripheral witnessing, experienced solely by herself in the wilderness, removed from the presence of human society, prompting her to declare, "You are El Ro'i." This contrasts sharply with Moses' theophanic experience at Sinai, which is marked by a resounding manifestation and observed by a multitude, categorically termed a normative and collective form of revelation. Consequently, Hagar's experience is deemed authentic, and this interpretation facilitates the emergence of novel understandings regarding the qualifications for being a witness and the individuals to whom God is inclined to disclose His presence.⁶¹⁷

Meanwhile, examining Hagar's narrative through a Sufi lens further reinforces her spiritual stance within a complex interpretation. Hagar exemplifies the notion that those who are marginalized can attain authentic liberation through *tawhīd*. Her narrative resonates with a specific verse from the Qur'an that recounts the revelation to the mother of Moses, which states, "and We wished to do a favor to those who were weak" (al-Qaṣaṣ (28):5).⁶¹⁸ Hagar emerges as a beacon of hope, illustrating that from the most barren of landscapes (wilderness), the most profound significance can arise. Within the Sufi paradigm, she is safeguarded from despondency amidst the tribulations she faces, allowing her to attain the zenith of *iḥsān* manifested in the union with Allah (*fanā' fī Allāh*). This state of *fanā'* is contingent upon divine assistance from Allah, alongside the illumination of her heart with the radiance of *tawhīd*, for *tawhīd* serves as the foundational element for all forms of

⁶¹⁵ Male-centered perspectives are often wrongly assumed to be universal, while women's voices are specifically noted because of their embodied and partial nature. See Reed, "Gendering Revealed Knowledge? Prophecy, Positionality, and Perspective in Ancient Jewish Apocalyptic and Related Literatures," 7, 24.

⁶¹⁶ Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story," 1998, 33. For details regarding the wanderings of the prophet Moses and Israel in the wilderness, see again chapter 2 subsection 2.2.

⁶¹⁷ Lobel, *Moses and Abraham Maimonides*, 56.

⁶¹⁸ Gunābādī, *Tafsīr Bayān Al-Sa'ādah Fī Maqāmāt al-'Ibādah*, 3:183.

happiness.⁶¹⁹ According to al-Ghazālī, Hagar was able to receive divine inspiration due to the preparedness of her heart, which was characterised by clarity, emptiness, and refinement.⁶²⁰

Hagar's journey through the desolate expanse of the desert serves as a profound metaphor intimately connected to the authentic realization of a spiritual state known as the *maqām al-faqīr*. Ibn 'Arabī elucidates that the *faqīr* station represents the pinnacle of spiritual attainment (position). He cites the assertion of Abū Yazīd: "My Lord, how may I approach You?" to which Allah responded: "Through that which is not inherently yours, specifically humility and resilience." Furthermore, Allah proclaimed: "I created the jinn and mankind solely to worship Me" (*adh-Dhāriyāt* (51):56). Following Ibn 'Arabī's teachings, a *faqīr* does not rely even upon his own self, as his ability to hear, see, and his very existence are mere reflections of al-Ḥaqq (The Absolute). Similarly, Hagar, amidst her constraints and the dire circumstances she encountered in the wilderness, ceased to place her confidence in worldly power or maternal possessions; instead, she wholly entrusted herself to the Divine.⁶²¹

Although the discourse surrounding Hagar in the context of the wilderness is not overtly articulated within Sufi philosophy, her existential encounter in the desolate desert resonates significantly, aligning with the principles of the *Malāmiyya*. According to Ibn 'Arabī, the *Malāmiyya* are spiritual beings who situate all matters in accordance with divine metrics; they do not conflate the delineations between this temporal existence and the eternal afterlife, nor do they pursue spiritual validation, eschewing all assertions of ownership.⁶²² Within the framework of Islamic spirituality, Hagar epitomizes an inner state that corresponds with this characterization. Her persona, while not positioned as the cosmic nucleus akin to al-Qutb, exerts a nuanced and pervasive spiritual impact, akin to luminous threads that disseminate through the fabric of existence. Her essence is not merely uncommon, but rather exists within an invisibility that encompasses and eludes external frameworks, while simultaneously penetrating the intrinsic reality of all creation.⁶²³

⁶¹⁹ Burūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān*, 6:388.

⁶²⁰ Inspiration (ilhām) is a warning from the universal soul (Highest Reality) to the individual human soul according to the degree of its clarity, its receptivity, and its strength of preparation. Inspiration (ilhām) is the effect of revelation (wahy) because revelation is the confirmation of the invisible command, and inspiration is its direction. See Ghazali, *Majmū'at Rasā'il Al-Imām al-Ghazālī*, 1:230.

⁶²¹ 'Arabi, *Al-Futuhat al-Makiyyah (Arba' Mujalladat)*, II, 17.

⁶²² The *Malāmiyya* group according to Ibn 'Arabī are those who see everything with a view that is in harmony with the way Allah sees it; What belongs to the world, they leave to the world; and what is related to the hereafter, they direct it to the hereafter, without confusing the ultimate truth between the two. They do not disrupt the order that God has established in His creation. See 'Arabi, *Al-Futuhat al-Makiyyah (Arba' Mujalladat)*, II, 16.

⁶²³ 'Arabi, *Al-Futuhat al-Makiyyah (Arba' Mujalladat)*, II, 14.

This scholarly examination endeavors to animate Hagar as a subject of spiritual significance, representing a woman endowed with spiritual agency rather than merely a historical artifact. The transformative experience she encountered in the wilderness substantiates the notion that the symbolism of displacement and exile that Hagar underwent possesses a universal applicability, manifesting in both genders. While the exploration of Hagar's theological role and spiritual condition draws from disparate scriptures and diverse theoretical frameworks, the comprehensive analysis underscores the importance of Hagar's spiritual fortitude, as articulated in her narrative of confronting exile in the wilderness. Hagar can be conceptualized as a liminal archetype, exemplifying her capacity to transcend the constraints of the material realm and establish a connection with the transcendent sphere. In the context of the contemporary human condition, frequently characterised as 'ill, intoxicated, and increasingly estranged from spiritual essence and divine provenance, a reevaluation of Hagar's spiritual resilience in navigating her liminal predicament may facilitate a restoration of awareness regarding one's divine heritage and rejuvenate the ailing human spirit.⁶²⁴

Although the figure of Hagar is often overlooked within Jewish tradition due to her marginalized status as a slave and concubine, as well as her Egyptian ethnicity, her narrative exemplifies a profound instance of spiritual transformation and transcendental experience encountered by women, being recognized as the inaugural woman to undergo revelation in the wilderness, as documented in Genesis 16 and 12. Hagar's narrative is also regarded as less prominent compared to the accounts of other esteemed figures in Islam, such as Maryam and Fatimah. Furthermore, her life journey in Islamic texts lacks the extensive elaboration found in Genesis and the Torah.⁶²⁵ Nonetheless, the figure of Hagar in Islam is esteemed as an archetype of nobility across temporal boundaries, having ascended from the status of a servant to humanity to that of a servant to God. The account of Hagar, who traversed seven times between Safa and Marwa, has left an enduring spiritual legacy manifested in the *sa'i* ritual, which is performed by millions of pilgrims globally, both male and female, during the *Hajj* pilgrimage in Mecca.⁶²⁶

In the Islamic theological framework, the attributes of faith, perseverance, patience, and submission that characterize Hagar's spiritual condition serve as an embodiment of her internal holy war (*jihād al-naḥs*) encountered within an exceptionally challenging physical environment; a scorching desert, bereft of life and devoid of the companionship of fellow

⁶²⁴ Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, 249.

⁶²⁵ Halim, "Rereading the Biblical Story of Sarah and Hagar: A Note for Interfaith Activists," 23.

⁶²⁶ Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman*, 58.

human beings. The wilderness that Hagar traverses transform into a locus of spiritual cleansing and a trial for her complete submission to the Divine. This struggle epitomizes a genuine holy war, as Hagar contends against her inner turmoil (fear, exhaustion, suffering, sorrow, hopelessness) in pursuit of divine approval. Rasulullah saw. acknowledged this significant internal struggle as the ultimate *jihād* (*al-Jihād al-akbar*).⁶²⁷

The phenomenon of divine revelation and miraculous empowerment, or salvation, encountered by Hagar in the wilderness, signifies that her spiritual condition transcends the conventional human experience, thereby positioning her as a pertinent subject for examination as a liminal archetype. The following table presents the theological implications associated with interpreting Hagar’s revelatory experience in the wilderness, situated within the frameworks of Jewish and Islamic mysticism.

Table 5.2. Theological Resonance of Hagar’s Experience of Revelation in the Wilderness within the Framework of Jewish and Islamic Mysticism

Hagar’s Theme	Jewish Mysticism	Islamic Mysticism
Exile	Mirroring one of the divine aspects that is the lowest and separated from the other <i>Sefirot</i> , <i>Shekinah</i> .	Symbolising the spiritual ascension (<i>mi ’rāj</i>), a soul that is free from worldly attachments (<i>fanā</i>).
Divine Revelation	Form of manifestation of God’s Mercy coming from the Highest Reality (<i>Sefirot</i>) for the marginalised.	Witnessing Divine Revelation (<i>kahsf</i>) and God’s Manifestation (<i>tajallī</i>) because of spiritual readiness (<i>isti’dād</i>).
Wilderness	Cosmological Mirror (between the realm of impurity and the side of holiness, or between <i>sitra ahra</i> and <i>sitra de-kedushah</i>).	Manifestation of the purity of heart (emptiness and clarity).

Based on the table above, both the kabbalistic and Sufi paradigms signify the wilderness metaphorically as a cosmic mirror, wherein the mundane realm can be interlinked with the sacred domain. These two traditions exhibit distinct mystical identities to one another. Nonetheless, the hermeneutical divergences inherent in these two frameworks facilitate the interpretation of the incident involving Hagar’s divine intervention in the wilderness as a manifestation of Divine Glory (emanating from the *Sefirot*) descending into the earthly realm through the *Shekinah* (the aspect of God that is closest to humanity), or as a spiritual

⁶²⁷ The Prophet’s famous words after he returned from a battle against the infidels stated, “I have returned from a small *jihād* to face a greater *jihād*.” See Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 310.

ascension (*mi'rāj*) towards the Divine, attributed to Hagar's purity and her untainted heart, which enable her to receive divine revelation (*kahsf*) via manifestation of God's grace (*tajallī*), exemplified through the revelations conferred by angels and the advent of the Zamzam spring. This narrative reinforces the interpretation of Hagar's transitional experience as possessing a profound and universally significant inner meaning.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

The narrative of Hagar as delineated in the sacred scriptures of Judaism and Islam does not overtly articulate the wilderness as a locus that engenders the manifestation of revelation during Hagar's presence there. Classical exegetes and commentators within both Jewish and Islamic traditions do not explicitly articulate the correlation between these two themes. The conceptualization of the wilderness as a domain conducive to transcendental encounters is derived implicitly through a mystical and philosophical paradigm, grounded in both Jewish and Islamic thought. This perspective arises because the mystical and philosophical frameworks serve as symbolic hermeneutics, enabling Hagar's narrative to be interpreted as a dynamic text rich in multiple significances. Within this interpretative framework, the wilderness emerges as a multiple-meaning (polysemous) symbol that transcends the mere notion of an empty physical expanse, simultaneously embodying purity and inner void, thus transforming into a sacred domain wherein the transcendent can manifest. The manifestation of Supreme Reality in the guise of an angel within Hagar's wilderness narrative can be interpreted through a kabbalistic lens as an engagement with *Shekinah*, a feminine aspect of the Divine presence that reaches out to marginalized individuals. Conversely, within the Islamic mystical framework, the wilderness experienced by Hagar serves as a metaphorical representation of the state of self-annihilation (*fanā'*) wherein she detaches from worldly attachments, thereby facilitating the emergence of the divine (*tajallī*) in the wilderness due to her spiritual evolution. This symbolic interpretation is further reinforced by the application of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, which elucidates natural elements as symbols bearing dual layers of meaning, both physical and spiritual. He posits that natural elements, when infused with human consciousness, resonate cosmically, which, in the context of Hagar's experience of revelation, is intricately linked to the wilderness she inhabits. Furthermore, Mircea Eliade's hermeneutics elucidates the metamorphosis of an open space into a cosmic center, referred to as the *axis mundi par excellence* (the focal point of the superior realm). This conceptualization substantiates the notion that the revelatory experience bestowed upon Hagar concerning the great nation that is to arise through her son, Ishmael, has transmuted the wilderness into a sacred locale. This site epitomizes the convergence of transcendent and immanent realities. Jewish tradition commemorates Hagar's encounter with the angel in the wilderness through the existence of the well of *Beer*

Lahai Ro'i. In parallel, the Islamic tradition enshrines Hagar's spiritual legacy within the *sa'i* ritual performed during the *hajj* pilgrimage in the holy land of Mecca, a region where Hagar once resided; this site has evolved into a pivotal point on Earth that unites Muslims worldwide with their Creator. Engaging with the mystical and philosophical paradigms of both Jewish and Islamic traditions fosters a more nuanced interpretation of the wilderness, not merely as the historical setting of Hagar's exile, but as a spiritual terrain that catalyzes Hagar's journey of inner transformation as a liminal figure.

The theological significance of comprehending the interplay between wilderness and the experience of revelation within Hagar's narrative resides in its capacity to deconstruct the binary opposition between the sacred and the profane while simultaneously contesting the patriarchal model that presumes women lack the spiritual perfection attributed to men. The narrative of Hagar, who was abandoned by the Prophet Abraham alongside her son in a desolate desert at God's behest, exemplifies Hagar's resilience and spiritual maturity as a single mother, grounded in her direct communion with the Divine. She transcended the confines of a traditional spousal relationship that necessitated reliance on her husband, and emerging as an autonomous entity in orchestrating her existence in the wilderness in response to God's directive. Her association with Abraham is not construed through a romantic lens but rather as an embodiment of *tawhīd*. The episode of Hagar's abandonment in the wilderness represents a pivotal occurrence that profoundly influences both the Biblical narrative and Islamic theology. Within the Jewish tradition, she is recognized as the first woman to invoke the name of God, *El-Ro'i*, upon encountering an angel during her solitude in the wilderness. In Islamic tradition, Hagar's presence in the wilderness serves as a precursor to a more significant reality, as the barren valley, where she traversed between Safa and Marwah in search of help for her son Ishmael, has now been sanctified as the *Qibla*, the holy land, which holds a status equal to that of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, often referred to as the cosmic center (*axis mundi*). Furthermore, the esteemed Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, is also a descendant of Ishmael. Hagar's designation as the matriarch of Arabs signifies that the genesis of leadership emanates from Hagar's experiences in the wilderness, as she became the earliest participant in the inception of Islam. The essence of Hagar's actions (the spiritual heritage of the *sa'i* ritual) has been integrated into Islamic practice, enhancing the pilgrimage of the *hajj*. This underscores the notion that her exile in the wilderness transcends mere historical occurrence, embodying a symbolic and sacred event. Hagar's narrative suggests that marginalized spaces such as the wilderness are, in fact, the crucible for authentic and liberating spiritual significance. The ramifications of Hagar's story reverberate with the spiritual transformations experienced by other noble women who

endure oppression, exclusion, and injustice (both in physical and symbolic wilderness), including Yocheved (the mother of Moses), Virgin Mary (Maryam), and Fāṭimah al-Zahrā'. The importance of spiritual agency exemplified by Hagar in the wilderness positions her as an archetypal liminal figure, reflecting the maternal essence of all souls navigating the wilderness of existence.

6.2 Recommendations

Further scholarly investigation could enhance the interpretation of Hagar's narrative by implementing a more comprehensive analytical framework. This framework would examine the symbolic interrelation between wilderness and revelation within Jewish and Islamic contexts, as well as within Christian contexts, where these three Abrahamic faiths converge, each offering its distinct perspective on Hagar. This could involve a nuanced critique of Paul's interpretation in Galatians 4, particularly regarding Hagar's story, a facet that has yet to be addressed in the current study.

The re-interpretation of Hagar's narrative can also be conducted through a feminist framework derived from Jewish, Christian, and Islamic theological perspectives in conjunction with the theology of liberation. In this context, Hagar serves as a paradigm illustrating her marginalized existence and lack of agency, which constitutes a focal point of divine trust that liberates her from oppressive theological and social constructs. This interpretation facilitates the reclamation of the voices of marginalized women within religious traditions.

An in-depth exploration of Hagar's narrative may also be enhanced by envisioning her as a universal archetype within the context of interfaith dialogue, employing a contextual methodology. The persona of Hagar serves as a foundational element for fostering solidarity among Abrahamic faith communities, which share common concerns such as migration, injustice, and other pressing issues. This exploration aims to examine the universal significance of Hagar's experience in the context of contemporary interfaith challenges.

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