

The Parshah in a Nutshell

Rosh Hashana

Genesis 21:1-34; Genesis 22:1-24

G-d **remembers** Sarah and gives her and Abraham a son, who is named Isaac (*Yitzchak*) meaning "**will laugh**"; Abraham is 100 years old, and Sarah 90. Isaac is circumcised at the age of **eight days**.

Hagar and Ishmael are banished from Abraham's home and wander in the desert; G-d hears the **cry** of the dying lad and saves his life by showing his mother a **well**. The Philistine king Avimelech makes a treaty with Abraham at **Be'er Sheva**.

G-d commands Abraham to **sacrifice** his son on Mount Moriah (the Temple Mount) in **Jerusalem**. Isaac is **bound** and placed on the altar, and Abraham raises the knife to slaughter his son. A voice from heaven calls to stop him, saying it was a **test**; a ram, caught in the undergrowth by its **horns**, is offered in Isaac's place.



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Rosh Hashana

Genesis 21:1-34; Genesis 22:1-24
Summary and Commentary

The
Birth
of
Isaac

Exactly a year after the three angels visited Abraham and Sarah and delivered G-d's promise that a son shall be born to them (as related in Genesis 18),

G-d remembered Sarah as He had said, and G-d did to Sarah as He had spoken.

Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which G-d had spoken to him.

The boy is named *Yitzchak* ("will laugh"), because, as Sarah declared, "G-d has made **laughter** for me, so that all that hear will laugh with me."

Commentary

remembered: *G-d remembered Sarah (Genesis 21:1)*

"Remembrance" is one of the three primary themes of Rosh Hashanah (the other two being "Kingship" and "Shofarot"). For it is the day on which "the remembrance of all of existence comes before You." In the words of the *U'nesaneh Tokef* prayer:

"On this day... You will remember all that was forgotten. You will open the Book of Memory--it will read itself, and everyone's signature is in it... and all mankind will pass before You like sheep. Like a shepherd inspecting his flock, making his sheep pass under his staff, so shall You run by, count, calculate, and consider the soul of all the living; You will apportion the fixed needs of all Your creatures, and inscribe their verdict.

"On Rosh Hashanah it will be inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it will be sealed: How many shall pass on, and how many shall be born; who will live and who will die; who will die at his predestined time and who before his time; who by water and who by fire, who by sword, who by beast, who by famine, who by thirst, who by storm, who by plague, who by strangulation, and who by stoning; who will rest and who will wander, who will live in harmony and who will be harried; who will enjoy tranquility and who will suffer; who will be impoverished and who will be enriched; who will be degraded and who will be exalted..."

laughter: *And Sarah said: G-d has made laughter for me, so that all that hear will laugh (yitz'chak) with me (21:6)*

*Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being **eight days old**, as G-d had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born to him.*

The Torah then tells of a great feast that Abraham made "on the day that Isaac was weaned."

Commentary

The concept of Rosh Hashanah as the day of G-d's "coronation" as king of the universe explains a most puzzling paradox in the nature of the day. On the one hand, Rosh Hashanah is when we stand before the Supreme King and tremulously accept the "yoke of His sovereignty." On the other hand, it is a festival (*yom tov*), celebrated amidst much feasting and rejoicing--a day on which we are enjoined to "Eat sumptuous foods and drink sweet beverages, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared, for the day is holy to our L-rd; do not be distressed, for the joy of the L-rd is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

But such is the nature of a coronation: it is an event that combines trepidation and joy, awe and celebration. For true kingship, as opposed to mere rulership, derives from the *willful* submission of a people to their sovereign. So the coronation of a king includes a display of reverence and *awe* on the part of the people, conveying their submission to the king; as well as the *joy* that affirms that their submission is willful and desirous.

(From the Chassidic Masters)

eight days old:

Isaac and Ishmael were engaged in a controversy. Said Ishmael to Isaac: "I am more beloved to G-d than you, since I was circumcised at the age of thirteen, but you were circumcised as a baby and could not refuse." Isaac retorted: "All that you gave up to G-d was three drops of blood. But lo, I am now thirty-seven years old, yet if G-d desired of me that I be slaughtered, I would not refuse. Said the Holy One, blessed be He: "This is the moment!"

(Midrash Rabbah)

Jewishness is not a matter of historical conscious, outlook, ethics, or even behavior; it is a state of being. This is the deeper significance of the debate between Ishmael and Isaac. When the Jew is circumcised on the eighth day of life, he is completely unaware of the significance of what has occurred. But this "non-experience" is precisely what circumcision means. With circumcision the Jew says: I define my relationship with G-d not by what I think, feel or do, but by the fact of my Jewishness--a fact which equally applies to an infant of eight days and a sage of eighty years. (From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

The Banishment of Hagar and Ishmael

Abraham already had a son, Ishmael, born 14 years earlier to Hagar, the Egyptian maid whom Sarah urged him to marry in her barren years. As had been predicted, Ishmael grows to become "a wild man, his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him." Sarah, fearing Ishmael's negative influence upon her son, urges Abraham to "Banish this maidservant and her son: for the son of this maidservant shall not be heir with my son, with Isaac."

Abraham is reluctant to do so until G-d intervenes, telling him: "In all that **Sarah** says to you, hearken to her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called."

Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Be'er-Sheva.

Their water, however, runs out quickly in the desert heat, and soon Ishmael is faint with heat and thirst; Hagar

cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went off...the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Let me not see the death of the child." And she sat over against him, and lifted up her voice, and wept.

*And G-d heard **the voice of the lad**; and the angel of G-d called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her*

Commentary

Sarah: *In all that Sarah says to you, hearken to her voice (21:12)*

This teaches us that Sarah was superior to Abraham in prophesy. (Rashi)

the voice of the lad: *And G-d heard the voice of the lad (21:17)*

This teaches us that a person's prayer for himself is preferable to others praying for him, and is sooner to be accepted. (For though the verse speaks of Hagar's weeping, it tells us that it was Ishmael's cry which G-d heard). (Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

*"What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for G-d has heard the voice of the lad **where he is...**"*

And G-d opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.

*And G-d was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of **Egypt**.*

The Covenant with Avimelech

Avimelech the king of the Philistines, who had earlier driven Abraham from his country, now comes seeking a covenant of peace with the Hebrew. "G-d is with you in all that you do," says the king, "let us swear to each other that neither of us will show hostility to the other or the other's offspring."

Abraham agrees, and gives Avimelech seven sheep as a testimony to the resolution of a past controversy between them over a well that Abraham had dug. The place is thus named Be'er Sheva ("Well of the Oath" and "Well of the Seven").

Commentary

where he is: *For G-d has heard the voice of the lad where he is (21:17)*

The ministering angels hastened to indict him, exclaiming: "Sovereign of the Universe! Would You bring up a well for one who will one day slay Your children with thirst?" "What is he now?" asked G-d. "Righteous," said the angels. Said G-d: "I judge man only as he is at the moment."

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

Egypt: *And his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt (21:21)*

Said Rabbi Yitzchak: Throw a stick into the air, and it will fall back to its place of origin (the ground). It is written, "And she had a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar" (Genesis 16:1); therefore, "his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt." (Midrash Rabbah)

Abraham establishes an *eshel* (wayside inn) at Be'er Sheva, where he "called the name of G-d, **G-d of the world.**"

Commentary

G-d of the world: *Abraham established an eshel at Beer Sheva; there he called the name of G-d, G-d of the world (21:33)*

When Abraham's guests wished to bless him for his generosity, he would say to them: "Has the food you have eaten been provided by myself? You should thank, praise and bless He who spoke the world into being!"

If they refused Abraham would demand payment for the food they had eaten. "How much do I owe you?" they would ask. "A jug of wine is one *furlin*," Abraham would say; "a pound of meat, one *furlin*; a loaf of bread, one *furlin*." When the guest would protest these exorbitant prices, Abraham would counter: "Who supplies you with wine in the middle of the desert? Who supplies you with meat in the desert? Who supplies you with bread in the desert?" When the guest would realize the predicament he was in he would relent and proclaim: "Blessed be the G-d of the world, from whose providence we have eaten."

(Midrash Rabbah; Tosofot Shantz on Sotah 10)

What value, we might ask, was there in such an unwilling proclamation, extracted under duress? Was this not a mere mouthing of words, devoid of any conviction as to the truth of the One G-d or any desire to thank Him for His providence?

But Abraham had a vision of humanity which convinced him that every positive deed, word or thought does have value, no matter how "superficial" or "hypocritical" it might seem to a less discerning eye. When Abraham looked at his guests, he did not see pagans and idolaters; he saw creatures of G-d, men and women who had been created in the Divine image and possessed a potential, inherent to the very essence of their being, to recognize their Creator and serve His will.

Most often, a kind word and a helping hand will bring to light this inner potential. At times, however, a soul might be so encrusted by negative influences and a corrupted character that a certain degree of "pressure" must be applied to quell its resistance to a G-dly deed. (Of course, any use of such "pressure" must conform to the dictates of G-d's Torah, whose "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its pathways are peace"--as in the case of Abraham's fully legitimate demand for payment.)

Abraham understood that no human acknowledgment of G-d can ever be "hypocritical." On the contrary: a denial of G-d is the ultimate hypocrisy, for it is at variance with the

Reading for Second Day of Rosh Hashanah

The Binding of Isaac

And it came to pass after these things, that G-d did test Abraham. And He said to him: "Abraham!"

And he said: "Here I am!"

And He said: "Please, take your son, your only son, the one whom you love, Isaac; and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

*And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his **donkey**, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and broke up the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went to the place of which G-d had told him.*

Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men: "Stay here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you."

Commentary

person's quintessential being. When a creature of G-d proclaims "Blessed be the G-d of the world from whose providence we have eaten," nothing can be more consistent with his or her innermost self.

(From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

test: *And it came to pass after these things, that G-d did test Abraham (22:1)*

Said Rabbi Jonathan: A potter does not examine defective vessels, because he cannot give them a single blow without breaking them. What then does he examine? Only the sound vessels, for he will not break them even with many blows. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, tests not the wicked but the righteous. (Midrash Rabbah)

donkey: *And he saddled his donkey (22:3)*

This is the very same donkey which Moses Rode to Egypt (cf. Exodus 4:20); and this is the very same donkey upon which the Messiah will arrive (cf. Zechariah 9:9).

(Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, ch. 25)

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and the knife; and they went both of them together.

And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father, and said, "My father!" and he said, "Here I am, my son."

And he said: "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

And Abraham said: "G-d will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering, my son." And they went both of them together.

And they came to the place which G-d had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and **bound** Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

And Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

And an angel of G-d called to him out of heaven, and said: "Abraham! Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am!"

And he said: "Lay not your hand upon the lad, neither do anything to him: for now I know that you do fear G-d, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked; and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in place of his son.

And Abraham called the name of **that place** Adonai-Yireh ("G-d will be revealed"); as it is said to this day: "On the mount G-d will appear."

The reading concludes with report of a granddaughter born to Abraham's brother, Nachor, named Rebecca (destined to become Isaac's wife).

Commentary

bound: And he bound Isaac his son (22:9)

Can one bind a man thirty-seven years old without his consent?

But when Abraham made to sacrifice his son Isaac, Isaac said to him: Father, I am a young man and am afraid that my body may tremble through fear of the knife and I will grieve you, whereby the slaughter may be rendered unfit and this will not count as a real sacrifice; therefore bind me very firmly." (Midrash Rabbah)

Commentary

that place: And Abraham called the name of that place Adonai-Yireh (22:14)

Shem (the son of Noah) called it Salem, as it is written "And Melchizedek king of Salem" (Genesis 14: 18). Said the Holy One, blessed be He: If I call it Yireh as did Abraham, then Shem, a righteous man, will resent it; while if I call it Salem as did Shem, Abraham, the righteous man, will resent it. Hence I will call it Jerusalem, including both names, Yireh Salem. (Midrash Rabbah)

THE BINDING OF ISAAC

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

The founder of Chabad Chassidism, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, once related:

In Mezeritch, it was extremely difficult to be accepted as a disciple of our master, Rabbi DovBer. There was a group of Chassidim who, having failed to merit to learn directly from our master, wanted to at least serve his pupils: to bring them water to wash their hands upon waking, to sweep the floors of the study hall, to heat the ovens during the winter months, and so on. These were known as "the oven stokers."

One winter night, as I lay on a bench in the study hall, I overheard a conversation between three of the "oven stokers." "What was the specialty of the test of the *Akeidah*?" the first one asked. "If G-d had revealed Himself to me and commanded me to sacrifice my only son, would I not obey?"

Answering his own question, he said: "If G-d told me to sacrifice my only son, I would delay my doing so for a while, to keep him with me for a few days. Abraham's greatness lay in that he arose early in the morning to immediately fulfill the Divine command."

Said the second one: "If G-d told me to sacrifice my only son, I, too, would waste not a moment to carry out His command. But I would do so with a heavy heart. Abraham's greatness lay in that he went to the *Akeidah* with a heart full of joy over the opportunity to fulfill G-d's will."

Said the third: "I, too, would carry out G-d's will with joy. I think that Abraham's uniqueness lies in his reaction upon finding out that it was all a test. When G-d commanded him, "Do not touch the child, and do nothing to him," Abraham was overjoyed--not because his only child would not die, but because he was being given the opportunity to carry out *another* command of G-d."

Rabbi Schneur Zalman concluded: "Do you think this was mere talk? Each of them was describing the degree of self-sacrifice he himself had attained in his service of the Almighty."

This particular question--what is it that sets apart the *Akeidah* from the countless other instances of human martyrdom and self-sacrifice--is raised by almost all the commentaries and expounders of Torah.

For the "Binding of Isaac" has come to represent the ultimate in the Jew's devotion to G-d. Every morning, we preface our prayers by reading the Torah's account of the *Akeidah* and then say: "Master of the Universe! Just as Abraham our father suppressed his compassion for his only son to do Your will with a whole heart, so may Your compassion suppress Your wrath against us, and may Your mercy prevail over Your attributes of strict justice."

And on Rosh Hashanah, when the world trembles in judgment before G-d, we evoke the Binding of Isaac by sounding the horn of a ram (reminiscent of the ram which replaced Isaac as an offering) as if to say: If we have no other merit, remember Abraham's deed. Remember how the first Jew bound all succeeding generations of Jews in a covenant of self-sacrifice to You.

Obviously, the supreme test of a person's faith is his willingness to sacrifice his very existence for its sake. But what is so unique about Abraham's sacrifice? Have not countless thousands of Jews given their lives rather than renounce their covenant with the Almighty?

One might perhaps explain that the willingness to sacrifice one's child is a far greater demonstration of faith than to forfeit one's own life. But in this, too, Abraham was not unique. Time and again through the generations, Jews have encouraged their children to go to their deaths rather than violate their faith. Typical is the story of "Chanah and her seven sons," who, seeing her seven children tortured to death rather than bow before a Greek idol, proclaimed: "My children! Go to Abraham your father and say to him: You bound one offering upon the altar, and I have bound seven offerings..."

Furthermore, while Abraham was *prepared* to sacrifice his son, in thousands of *Akeidot* throughout our history Jews actually gave up their lives and the lives of their entire families. And, unlike Abraham, G-d had not directly spoken to them and requested their sacrifice; their deeds were based on their own convictions and the strength of their commitment to an invisible and often elusive G-d. And many gave their lives rather than violate even a relatively minor tenet of their

faith, even in cases in which the Torah does not require the Jew to do so.

Nevertheless, as the Abrabanel writes in his commentary on Genesis, it is the Binding of Isaac "that is forever on our lips in our prayers... For in it lies the entire strength of Israel and their merit before their Heavenly Father..." Why? What about the many thousands who made the ultimate sacrifice in reiteration of our loyalty to G-d?

The same question may be asked in regard to Abraham himself. The *Akeidah* was the tenth and final "test" in Abraham's life. In his first test of faith, Abraham was cast into a fiery furnace for his refusal to acknowledge the arch-idol of his native *Ur Casdim*, the emperor Nimrod, and his continued commitment to teaching the world the truth of a one, non-corporeal and omnipotent G-d. All this *before* G-d had revealed Himself to him and had chosen him and his descendents to serve as a "light unto the nations" and the purveyors of His word to humanity.

This early act of self-sacrifice seems, in a certain respect, to be even greater than the latter ones. A man, all on his own, comes to recognize the truth and devotes himself to its dissemination--to the extent that he is even willing to sacrifice his very life to this end. All this without a command or even sign from Above.

And yet, the Binding of Isaac is considered the most important test of Abraham's faith. The Talmud asks: Why did G-d, in commanding Abraham on the *Akeidah*, say "Please, take your son"? Answers the Talmud: "G-d said to Abraham: 'I have tried you with many tests and you have withstood them all. Now, I beg you, please withstand this test for Me, lest they say that the earlier ones were of no substance.'" (Talmud, Sanhedrin 89b).

Again we ask, Why? Granting that the *Akeidah* was the most demanding test of all, why are the others "of no substance" without it?

The Chassidic Masters explain the significance of the *Akeida* with a metaphor:

Once there was an untamed wilderness. Not a trail penetrated its thick underbrush, not a map charted its forbidding terrain. But one day there came a man who accomplished the impossible: he cut a path through this impenetrable land.

Many trod in his footsteps. It was still a most difficult journey, but they had his charts to consult, his trail to follow. Over the years, there were some who made the journey under even more trying conditions than those which had challenged the first pioneer: while he had done his work in broad daylight, they stumbled about in the black of night; while he had only his determination for company, they made the trip weighed down by heavy burdens. But all were equally indebted to him. Indeed, all their attainments could be said to be but extensions of his own great deed.

Abraham was the pioneer of self sacrifice. And the first instance of true self sacrifice in all of history was the Binding of Isaac.

For to sacrifice one's self is not the same as to sacrifice one's life--there is a world of difference between the two.

The human story includes many chapters of heroic sacrifice. Every generation and society has had its martyrs--individuals who gave their lives for their faith, for their homeland, and for virtually every cause under the sun. They did so for a variety of reasons. For some it was an act of desperation: to them, their lives were not worth living unless a certain objective could be attained. Others believed that their deed would be richly rewarded in the hereafter, so they readily exchanged the temporal benefits of physical life for the soul's eternal gain. Finally, there were those for whom their cause had grown to be more significant to them than their lives: they had come to so completely identify with a certain goal that it became more integral to their "self" than their existence as individuals.

In all the above cases, the martyr is sacrificing his life, but not his self. Indeed, he is sacrificing his physical life *for the sake* of his self, whether it is for the sake of the self projected by his obsession, the spiritual self of his immortal soul, or a broader, universal "self" he has come to identify with. Ultimately, his is a selfish act; "selfish" in the most positive and altruistic sense of the word--here is an individual who has succeeded in transcending the narrow, material definition of "self" which dominates in our corporeal world--but selfish nonetheless.

Abraham was a man with a mission. A mission for which he sacrificed everything, a mission more important to him than his own life.

For many years he had agonized over the fact that there was no heir to this mission, that his work of

bringing the beliefs and ethics of Monotheism to a pagan world would cease with his passing from the world. Then came the Divine promise: miraculously, at the age of 100, he will have a son, out of whom will stem the people of Israel. "You shall call his name Isaac," said G-d, "and I shall establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him."

And then G-d told him to destroy it all.

When Abraham bound Isaac upon the altar, it was not in the service of any calling or cause. In fact, it ran contrary to everything he believed in and taught, to everything he had sacrificed his life for, to everything G-d Himself had told him. He could see no reason, no purpose for his act. Every element of his self cried out against it--his material self, his spiritual self, his transcendent, altruistic self. But he did it. Why? Because G-d had told him to.

Abraham was the pioneer of *self* sacrifice. Before Abraham, the self was inviolable territory. Man could enlighten the self's priorities, he could even broaden and sublimate it, but he could not supersede it. Indeed, how could he? As a creature of free choice, man's every act stems from within: his every deed has a motive (conscious or otherwise), and his every motive has a rationale--a reason why it is beneficial to his own existence. So how could he be motivated to annihilate his own self? The instinct to preserve and enhance one's self is the source and objective of a creature's every drive and desire--man could no more transcend it than lift himself up by pulling on the hair of his own head.

Yet Abraham did the impossible. He sacrificed his self for the sake of something beyond the scope of the most transcendent of identities. Had he not done so, no other act of self-sacrifice--previous or subsequent, of his own or of his descendants--could be presumed to be of any "substance," to be anything more than a product of the self. But when Abraham bound Isaac upon the altar, the heavenly voice proclaimed: "Now I know that you fear G-d." Now I know that the will of G-d supersedes even your most basic instincts. Now I know that *all* your deeds, including those which could be explained as self-motivated, are, in essence, driven by the desire to serve your Creator. Now I know that your entire life was of true, selfless substance.

So when we speak of the *Akeidah*, we also speak of those who trod the path this great deed blazed. Of the countless thousands who died for the creed

of Abraham, of the many millions who lived for its sake. Their sacrifices, great and petty, cataclysmic and everyday, may, on the surface, seem but the outgrowth of their personal beliefs and aspirations: commendable and extraordinary, but only the fulfillment of an individual soul's identity. But the *Akeidah* revealed them to be so much more than that.

For Abraham bequeathed to his descendants the essence of Jewishness: that at the core of one's very being lies not the self but one's commitment to the Creator. And that, ultimately, one's every choice and act is an expression of that "spark of Divinity" within.

Based on the teachings of the [Lubavitcher Rebbe](#); adapted by [Yanki Tauber](#)

CHANA'S PRAYER

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Some people see the human being as a lonely creature in an indifferent and even hostile universe. They need to look deeper, for the two are essentially one: The soul of man is G-dly and the soul of the universe is G-d. Only in their outward expression does a conflict appear -- or even that which may resemble indifference. But within is a love affair, an eternal, inseparable embrace. It is a drama King Solomon entitled "The Song of Songs," for it is what lies at the core of every song, every human expression and all the cosmos: The longing to reunite, to be one, to create a harmony in the outer world that matches the perfect union that lies beneath.

This, too, is the work of prayer: We have our concerns. G-d seems so distant from them. There is a vast chasm between our world and His. But then He says, "Speak to me about what bothers you. Tell me with all your heart what you desire and I will listen. For what is important to you is important to me. Speak to me. I wish to dwell within your world."

The chasm merges and seals. Outer and inner, higher and lower, spiritual and physical, holy and mundane, heaven and earth kiss and become one.

There is a condition, however, to this healing of lovers' hearts: That first we must find the inner sanctity that lies behind our own desires and strife. For there is nothing of this world that does not contain a Divine spark, no movement of the soul without G-dly purpose.

Only once we have made this peace within ourselves, between our inner souls and our outer desires, between the sanctuary of our hearts and the words of our lips, only then can we create this cosmic peace between the Essence of All Being and our busy, material world.

This is why prayer is called throughout the Psalms "an outpouring of the soul." That which lies within pours outward, with no dam to obstruct it, no mud to taint it, nothing to change it along the way. The entire world may be ripping apart at the seams, but the beseecher's heart and mouth are at peace as one. And then that peace spreads outward into all things.

There are many things we learn from the prayer of Chana (recounted in Samuel I, Chapter 1 and read as the *Haftarah* for the 1st day of Rosh Hashanah). We learn that our lips must move in prayer, that we must be able to hear our own prayer but no one else should. We learn that prayer is to be said standing. But most important, we learn how to pour out our soul.

Eli thought Chana was drunk with wine. He was the High Priest, the holiest of the Jewish nation. The Divine Spirit rested upon him and he was able to see within the hearts of men and women. Yet, he saw Chana as a drunkard -- drunk with a worldly desire, a desire for a child so she would no longer suffer the shame and ridicule afforded her by Penina.

But Chana answered, "No, it is not wine but my soul that pours out to G-d. For my desire for a child has purpose and meaning beyond the pursuits and follies of man. My child, the precious jewel of my heart's desire, I have already given him to G-d."

So it is with our prayers: We pray for material things, but it is not the material, but the spiritual within them that our soul desires.

The mission of every human being is to bring the many things of this chaotic world into harmony with their inner purpose and the oneness that underlies them. To do this, each of us must have those things related to our mission: our family, our health, our homes, our income. We pray for these things from the innermost of our hearts; our soul pours out for them -- because our soul knows that without them she cannot fulfill her mission in this world.

And G-d listens. Because He wishes to dwell within our mundane world.

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe; rendered by [Tzvi Freeman](#)