

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

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."

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

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)

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)

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).

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

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Reading for First Day of Rosh Hashanah

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

Commentary

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..."

AND SARAH SAID: G-D HAS MADE LAUGHTER FOR ME, SO THAT ALL THAT HEAR WILL LAUGH (YITZ'CHAK) WITH ME (21:6)

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

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man's hand against him." Sarah, fearing Ishmael's negative influence upon her son, urges Abraham to "Banish this maid-servant 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 "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 testi-

Commentary

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

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)

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 ESTABLISHED AN ESHEL AT BE'ER 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

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mony 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").

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

Reading for Second Day of Rosh Hashanah

The Binding of Isaac

Commentary

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 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)

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)

Isaac and Ishmael were engaged in a controversy... Said Ishmael to

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."

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and

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)

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)

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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

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)

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)

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From the Chassidic Masters

CHANA'S PRAYER

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 at 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 and read as the *Haftorah* 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; tfreeman@chabadonline.com see <http://www.chabad.org/article.asp?aid=3009> for bio, info and more articles by this author as well as to order his book, "Bringing Heaven Down to Earth".