

Shana Tova 5784

Sarah's Role in the Akeida and in the Shofar of Rosh Hashana

A Torah message from Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, Rosh Hashana 5768

We blow the shofar (Ram's horn) on Rosh Hashana to remember Avraham's near sacrifice of his favorite son Yitzchak. We hear a lot about Avraham's greatness concerning the Akeida (binding of Yitzchak), but what about Sarah? What was her involvement in the Akeida? Did she know about it beforehand, or did Avraham keep it hidden from her? Did she play any part whatsoever in this self-sacrificing act? The commentaries are surprisingly silent regarding this matter.

Sarah is known to be Avraham's devoted wife. She worked in a team with Avraham in all his great accomplishments, yet we never hear anything about Sarah's merit regarding the Akeida, could it be possible that she had no part in his greatest most exemplary deed?

Midrash Tanchuma interprets the entire Eishet Chail verse by verse as the eulogy Avraham lamented for Sarah after her demise. When it states: "She rose while it was still night," the midrash explains that this refers to the time when "Avraham rose early". There are two instances when the Torah describes Avraham rising early: at the sending away of Yishmael with Hagar and at the Akeida. Etz Yosef comments: When "Avraham rose early" Sarah too rose early and went on the way with them to escort them. Perhaps this implies that Sarah indeed did have a role not only in expelling Yismael but also in the near sacrifice of Yitzchak.

Several Midrashic sources and Rashi link the Akeida with Sarah's death. He explains that when Sarah heard that Yitzchak was almost sacrificed her soul flew out of her body and she died. The midrash offers more details. ...Satan went to Sarah and asked: "Did you hear what happened in the world?" She answered, "No." He said, "Avraham took Yitzchak his son, and slaughtered him, offering him up on the altar as a sacrifice." Sarah began to cry and moan the sound of three wails, which corresponded to the three blasts of the shofar, and then her soul burst forth from her, and she died.

There are several different interpretations of how the broken, crying sounds of the shofar are linked to Sarah's cries when she hears about the near sacrifice of Yitzchak. According to another midrash we are commanded to blow six tekiyot – uninterrupted shofar sounds – on Rosh Hashana corresponding to Sara's six cries. It is interesting to note that the name Sarah comprises the initials of Shofar Rosh Hashana, indicating an intrinsic connection between Sarah and the significance of the Shofar.

According to Aviva Zornberg, the shofar on Rosh Hashana is supposed to help us re-enter the state of Sarah's pain. She dies in a haunted cry of ecstasy beyond civilization. It is the sound that bridges the ecstasy experienced at a wedding with the ecstasy of grief. There is no criticism of the way Sarah cried when she was dying. On the contrary, we are asked to enter into her state of mind. Sarah dies in the middle of the six cries. If she had managed to complete her cries she would perhaps have gone to a different level. On Rosh Hashana, we complete Sarah's cries.

If Sarah already intuitively sensed the Akeida when she rose in the middle of the night to prepare the provisions she sent with Avraham and Yitzchak, why would she die from shock when she heard about it? How is it possible that this righteous woman to whom Avraham is inferior in respect of prophecy could so easily fall prey to the tricks of the Satan?

Sefer Avodat Hashem on Parashat Chayei Sarah explains that Sarah's death was not the result of shock, but rather she deliberately handed over her soul at the very climax of the Akeida. Sarah perceived the holiness that was engendered by means of the great holy unification. Since the place of the Akeida was far from her to walk, to participate in it; she decided to unify with the act from afar by giving over her soul in love and purity at the moment of this great holiness.

The Zohar explains that Yitzchak was born with a feminine soul and an essential attachment to his mother Sarah. At the Akeida Yitzchak had a near-death experience, the feminine aspect of his soul departed and he received his masculine soul which enabled him to detach from his mother and afterward cleave to his wife. This is why the description of the birth of Rivkah is juxtaposed to the Akeida, Prior to the Akeida, without his masculine soul, Yitzchak would have been unable to bear progeny. Since Yitzchak's feminine soul was intrinsically attached to the soul of his mother Sarah, at the moment when his feminine soul left him, Sarah's soul also had to depart from this world. This explains why Sarah was bound to pass on during the split second of the binding of Yitzchak, the exact moment before Avraham was told to put down his knife.

Perhaps we may venture to say that in this way Sarah's role in the Akeida had an aspect that was even greater than Avraham's, while Avraham got up early in the morning, Sarah rose even beforehand while it was still night. In a super-conscious way Sarah "knew" even before Avraham, and while Avraham was willing to sacrifice his favorite son, she was willing to sacrifice her own soul for the sake of her only son Yitzchak. Through her death she enabled the birth of his masculine soul, giving over her life for the sake of allowing Yitzchak to beget life and become his independent ultimate self, get married, and raise his own family. In this way, Sarah's cries from which we model the sounds of the shofar are both the wails of mourning for death and ecstasy of birth. They emanate from the very deepest place where death and life are one.

You have the ability to continue Sarah's self-sacrifice for the sake of building families in the Land of Israel, and you can make a great difference without having to give over your own life. You can ensure life both in This World and the Next through your generous donation to support Women's Torah learning in the Land of Israel. By donating to Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin you are supporting the Jewish families of tomorrow. **It is almost Rosh Hashana, please increase your merits by donating to Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin.**

Shana Tova, Tikateivu V'Tichateimu l'Alter Chayim Tovim!!!!

May you be inscribed in the Book of Life!

With Blessings of the Torah & the Land, Chana Bracha Siegelbaum