

Avraham wanted to kill Isaac & the Devil killed Sara

(An interesting look at the binding of Isaac)



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Bereishit, parshat Vayeira, Chapter 22:1-19

1. Some time **afterward** God tested Abraham, and said to him, Abraham; and he said, Yes, here I am.
2. And God said, Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you.
3. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his donkey, and took two of his servants with him, and his son, Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and set out to the place which God had told him.
4. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place far away.
5. Then Abraham said to his servants, Stay here with the donkey; and the boy and I will go to that place and worship, and then we will come back to you.
6. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and put it on his son Isaac; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and both of them went together.
7. Then Isaac spoke to Abraham his father, and said, Father; and he said, Here I am my son. And he (*Isaac*) said, Here is the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?
8. And Abraham said, My son, God will provide a lamb for a burnt offering; and so both of them went together.
9. They arrived at the place which God had told him and Abraham built an altar there, and arranged the wood He then bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.
10. And Abraham reached out his hand, and took the knife to slit his son's throat.
11. And then an angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham; and he said, Here I am.
12. And he (*the angel*) said, Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing that you did not withheld your son, your only son from me.
13. Abraham looked up, and saw a ram caught in a thicket by its horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in place of his son.
14. And Abraham called the name of that place Adonai-Yireh; Today it is called, "On God's Mountain, He will be seen."
15. And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven the second time,
16. And said, God declares, "I have sworn by my own essence, that because you have performed this act, and did not hold back your only son;
17. I will bless you greatly, and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven, and as the sands on the sea shore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies;
18. All the nations of the world shall be blessed by your descendants; all because you obeyed my voice.
19. So Abraham returned to his servants, and they rose up and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

The Magic of the Ram

The real hero of the Isaac story was the ram,
who didn't know about the conspiracy of the others.
As if he had volunteered to die instead of Isaac.
I want to sing a song in his memory –
about his curly wool and his human eyes,
about the horns that were so silent on his living head,
and how they made those horns into shofars when he was slaughtered
to sound their battle cries or to blare their obscene joy.

I want to remember the last frame, like a photo in an elegant fashion magazine:
the young man tanned and manicured in his jazzy suit
and beside him the angel, dressed for a party in a long silk gown,
both of them empty-eyed, looking at two empty places,
and behind them, like a coloured backdrop, the ram,
caught in the thicket before the slaughter.
The thicket was his last friend.

The angel went home. Isaac went home.
Abraham and God had gone long before.
But the real hero of the Isaac story
was the ram.

Yehuda Amichai, *The Real Hero*, 1983

Ten things were created on Sabbath eve, at twilight. They are: The mouth of the earth; the mouth of the well; the mouth of the donkey; the rainbow [which was Noah's sign that there would be no future floods]; the manna; the staff; the shamir worm; the script; the inscription; and the Tablets. Some say also destructive spirits, Moses' grave, and the ram of our forefather Abraham

Pirkei Avot 5:9

Isaac

Avraham had 3 sons, not two
Avraham had 3 sons, Yishmael, Yitzchak and Yivke.
Nobody ever heard about Yivke, because he was the small one
The beloved son who was sacrificed on Mount Moriah.
Ishmael was saved by his mother Hagar, Yitzchak was rescued by the angel,
But nobody saved Yivke. When he was small
His father lovingly named him Yivke, Yivk, my lovely little Yevk.
But he sacrificed him at the Akeida.
The torah says it was a ram, but it was Yivke.
Yishmael never again heard God.
Yitzchak never laughed again
And Sarah only laughed once, never again.
Avraham had three sons, Yishma, Yitzchak, Yivke,
Yishmael, Yitzchakel, Yivke-el

Yehuda Amichai, from *Open Closed Open*, 2000

“God’s messenger called to him from heaven and said, “Avraham, Avraham! and Avraham said, “Let me at least choke him....” Do not lay your hand on the boy...“then let me just spill a drop of his blood...” do not do anything to him. (Gen. Rabbah 56:7)

The flagrant inconsistency and unfairness of God’s command was part of the very essence of the Akeida. To Yitzchak, the Akeida was infinitely more than an acid test of obedience. It was a completely new consciousness, an icy stab at the heart of our most cherished assumptions: that our right to existence is somehow absolute. It left Yitzchak on the altar, never to return home again. This is why the Torah portrays Avraham returning home from Moriah alone.

In every psychological & spiritual sense, Yitzchak remained behind, burned on the altar.

When they returned from Babylon...how did they know the precise location of the altar? They saw the ashes of Yitzchak lying on that spot. (Talmud, Zevachim, 62a)

Rabbi Matis Weinberg, *Frameworks – Genesis*

After these things (22:1)

Some of our sages say (Sanhedrin 89) that it means,

After the words of Satan, who denounced and said, ‘Of every feast that Avraham made, he did not offer before You one ox or one bull.’ (God) said to Satan, “He (Avraham) only did this for his son; if I were to say to him, ‘Sacrifice him before me,’ he would not hold back.”

Others say, “After the words of Yishmael, who boasted before Yitzchak that he was circumcised when 13 years old and he did not protest. Yitzchak said to him, “With one organ you intimidate me? If the Holy One said to me, “Sacrifice yourself before Me,” I would not hold back.

Rashi

Where did Isaac vanish to?

The boy and I will go up there; We will worship and we will return to you...And both of them went together. (Gen 22:5-6) Abraham then returned to his servants...(Gen 22:19)

Rabbi Berekiah reported in the name of the masters there that (immediately after the Akeidah) Isaac's father had sent him off to study with Shem...In the same way Abraham said to himself : 'Everything I gained only because I engaged in the study of Torah and in carrying out God's commandments. That is why I do not want such practice to leave my seed.' Thereafter Isaac passed three years in the Great Study House of Shem and Ever.

Genesis Rabbah 22:19

Isaac's father had sent him home to Hebron by another route to bring the glad tidings to Sarah and to relive her of her sorrow.

Abrabanel Gen 22:19

And Isaac, where was he? The Holy One, blessed be He, brought him into the Garden of Eden, and there he stayed for three years.

Midrash HaGadol Gen 22:19

No wonder Rebecca fell from her camel (Gen 24:64) because she saw Isaac coming down from paradise, and he walked the way the dead walk, head down and feet up. And what was he doing all that time in Paradise? They were healing him there. When was that? After the incident on Mount Moriah: And the angels bore him to Paradise where he was for three years, to be healed from the wound inflicted upon him by Abraham on the occasion of the Akeidah.

Shalom Spiegel,

The Last Trial – On the Legends & Lore of the Command to Abraham to offer Isaac as a Sacrifice pg. 6

Where was Isaac? Estranged from his father? Menachem Mendel of Kotzk taught that although it was hard for Abraham to bind Isaac on the altar, it was just as hard to release him. For Abraham realised that Isaac, for the rest of his life, would remember that his father had almost killed him.

Etz Chayim Chumash, Torah & Commentary, UCSJ, pg. 121

Sarah

All sources taken from 'The Beginning of Desire, Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg pp.97-141

Abraham said, "What shall I do? If I reveal it to Sarah, female agitation will certainly overcome her in such an enormous manner. And if I don't reveal it to her now, but only when Isaac is no longer here, she will kill herself." What did he do? He said to Sarah, "Prepare food and drink for us, and let us eat and rejoice." She asked, "How is today different from other days? What is the nature of this joy?" He answered her, "Old people like us, who have had a child in their old age – surely we should eat, drink and rejoice!" She went and prepared the food. When they were in the middle of the meal, he said to her, "You know, when I was three years old I first knew my Creator, and this boy is already mature and has not been initiated – let me take him, and initiate him there." And she said, "Go in peace."

Midrash Tanchuma, Vayera 22

When Abraham came from Mount Moriah, Satan was furious that he had failed to realize his lust to abort Abraham's sacrifice. What did he do? He went off and told Sarah, "Ah Sarah, have you not heard what's been happening in the world?" She replied, "No." He said, "Your old husband has taken the boy Isaac and sacrificed him as a burnt offering, while the boy cried and wailed in his helplessness. Immediately, she began to cry and wail. She cried three sobs, corresponding to the three *tekiah* notes of the Shofar, and she wailed (Yelalot) three times corresponding to the Yevava, staccato notes of the shofar. Then, she gave up the ghost and died.

Pirkei d' Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 32

Just as Abraham stretched out his hand to take the knife, a heavenly voice came forth and said to him: "Do not stretch your hand out against the boy." *If it were not for that, he would already have been slaughtered.* At that time, Satan went to Sarah and met her *in the guise of Isaac.* When she saw him, she said, "My son, what has your father done to you?" He answered, "My father took me and led me up hill and down dale, until he took me up to the top of one mountain, built an altar, and laid it out, and arranged the wood, and bound me on top of the altar, and took the knife to slaughter me. If it had not been that God told him, 'Don't stretch out your hand against the boy', I should have already been slaughtered." Satan did not finish when Sarah died.

Midrash Tanchuma, Vayera 23

"Abraham did not rejoice in My world and you seek to rejoice?" He had a son at the age of a hundred. And in the end, God said to him, "Take your son..." So Abraham took Isaac, his son, and led him up hill and down dale, and up to the top of one mountain, and he built an altar and arranged the wood, and took the knife to slaughter him. And were it not that the angel called out to heaven, he would have already been slaughtered. Know that it was so, for Isaac then returned to his mother and said to him, "Where have you been my son?" He answered, "My father took me and led me up hill and down dale..." She said, "Woe upon the son of a drunken woman! Were it not for the angel, you would already be slaughtered?" He said, "Yes." At that she screamed six times, corresponding to the six *Tekiah* notes. She had not finished doing this when she died.

Vayikra Rabbah, 20:2

Sarah dies of the unbearable lightness of being; the restoration of Isaac in no way palliates the horror of what might well have been. For Sarah, this is not a 'test', a three day trial, culminating in rescue and vindication. She, rather than Abraham, faces the full anguish of the "already slaughtered" one: his survival changes nothing. Her invocation to him holds the full measure of her situation: "Woe to the son of a drunken woman!" The image of own unhinging, of an ecstasy (literally, standing outside oneself), in which all stability is undermined, involves mother and son in a miasma of absurdity.

Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, Hayyei Sarah: Vertigo – The Residue of the Akeidah, p.127

Extra sources and quotes on the Akeidah

The door it opened slowly, my father he came in, I was nine years old.
And he stood so tall above me, his blue eyes they were shining,
and his voice was very cold.
He said, "I've had a vision and you know I'm strong and holy,
I must do what I've been told."
So he started up the mountain, I was running, he was walking,
and his axe was made of gold.
Well, the trees they got much smaller, the lake a lady's mirror,
we stopped to drink some wine.
Then he threw the bottle over, broke a minute later and he put his hand on mine.
Thought I saw an eagle but it might have been a vulture, I never could decide.
Then my father built an altar, he looked once behind his shoulder,
he knew I would not hide.
You who build these altars now to sacrifice these children, you must not do it anymore.
A scheme is not a vision and you never have been tempted by a demon or a god.
You who stand above them now, your hatchets blunt and bloody,
you were not there before,
when I lay upon a mountain and my father's hand
was trembling with the beauty of the word.
And if you call me brother now, forgive me if I inquire, "According to whose plan?"
When it all comes down to dust I will kill you if I must, I will help you if I can.
When it all comes down to dust I will help you if I must, I will kill you if I can.
And mercy on our uniform, man of peace or man of war, the peacock spreads his fan.
The Story of Isaac, Leonard Cohen

early in the morning the sun took a walk in the woods with me & my father
my right hand in his left
a knife flashed between the trees like lightning.
And I'm so scared of the fear in my eyes facing blood on the leaves.
Father, father come quick and save Isaac
So no one will be missing at lunchtime.
It's I who am butchered, my son; My blood's already on the leaves.
And my father's voice was choked. And his pale face.
I wanted to cry out, struggling not to believe, I tore my eyes open and woke.
And my right hand was drained of blood.
Isaac, Amir Gilboa

The ethical expression for what Abraham did is, that he would murder Isaac; the religious expression is, that he would sacrifice Isaac; but precisely in this contradiction consists the dread which can well make a man sleepless, and yet Abraham is not what he is without this dread... For when faith is eliminated by becoming null or nothing, then there only remains the crude fact that Abraham wanted to murder Isaac – which is easy enough for anyone to imitate who does not have faith, the faith, that is to say, which makes it hard for him
Fear & Trembling, Soren Kierkegaard

After all hope of a son had already been given up, a son was born unto him. How great must have been his delight...how intensely must he have loved him! And yet because he feared God, and loved to do what God commanded, he thought little of that beloved child, and set aside all his hopes concerning him, and consented to kill him after a journey of three days. If the act by which he showed his readiness to kill his son had taken place immediately when he received the commandment, it might have been the result of confusion and not of consideration. But the fact that he performed it three days after he had received the commandment, proves the presence of thought, proper consideration, and careful examination of what is due to the Divine command and what is in accordance with the love and fear of God...Abraham did not hasten to kill Isaac out of fear that God might slay him or make him poor, but solely because it is man's duty to love and to fear God, even without hope of reward or fear of punishment... The angel, therefore, says to him, "For now I know," etc that is, from this action, for which you deserve to be truly called a God-fearing man, all people shall learn how far we must go in the fear of God.
Rambam (Maimonides), Guide for the Perplexed, Ch.24

The Cast

Yehuda Amichai (1924-2000). Born in Germany he moved to Israel in 1936. His work has been translated into 37 languages including Chinese, Arabic, Estonian and Albanian. He is the recipient of many awards, including the 1982 Israel Prize, the country's highest honour. His most recent book, *Open Closed Open* was published in 2000, shortly before his death. He published his first book of poems, *Now and in Other Days*, in 1955. He published a dozen more volumes of poetry, a body of work that, in the words of the American poet Anthony Hecht, "exhibit a majestic and Biblical range of the topography of the soul."

Rabbi Matis Weinberg, is the past Dean of the Hebrew Institute of California and Rosh Yeshiva of Kerem Yeshiva. Currently living in Israel, he is the author of the Patterns in Time books on Chanukah and Rosh HaShana and of the current Framework series that contains essays on the weekly parasha.

Rambam/Maimonides (1135-1204). Born in Cordoba, Spain, his full name was of **Rabbi Moses ben Maimon**. Rambam was the author of the Mishneh Torah, one of the greatest codes of Jewish law. In his own time, he was widely condemned because he claimed that the Mishneh Torah was a substitute for studying the Talmud. He developed the 13 Principles of Faith, the Guide for the Perplexed as well as the Eight Degrees of Tzedakah. (www.sephardicsages.org/rambam). He lived in a variety of places throughout the Moorish lands of Spain, the Middle East and North Africa, often fleeing persecution. He came to Egypt in 1166 and was a leader of the Jewish community in Cairo. Whilst in Egypt his skills as a medical doctor saw him become the official physician to Saladin, the Egyptian ruler.

Rashi (1040-1105). His full name was **Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki**. Rashi was the outstanding Biblical commentator of the Middle Ages. He was born in Troyes, France, and lived from 1040 to 1105, surviving the massacres of the **First Crusade** through Europe. Rashi wrote the definitive commentaries on the Babylonian **Talmud** and the Bible. Almost every edition of the Talmud printed since the invention of the printing press has included the text of Rashi's commentary side-by-side with the Talmudic text. (www.jewfaq.org/sages.htm#Rashi)

Midrash Tanchuma a midrash most probably compiled in the 4th Century

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer by the school of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus Hagadol (first and second centuries). First published in Constantinople, 1514.

Vayikra Rabbah a midrash most probably compiled between 4th and 5th Century

Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg Born in London and raised in Glasgow, whose home is Jerusalem, holds a Ph.D. in English Literature from Cambridge University, and degrees from Gateshead & Jerusalem seminaries. Her first book, *Genesis: the Beginning of Desire* was published in 1995 and won the National Jewish Book Award for non-fiction in 1996. Her most recent book, *The Particulars of Rapture : Reflections on Exodus* was published in 2001.

Don Isaac (Yitzchak) ben Judah Abrabanel, 1437-1508. Late **medieval** Spanish **Jewish** philosopher, theologian and statesman. His political writings and biblical commentaries paved the way for later **humanist** thought.

Midrash HaGadol was written by Rabbi David ben Amram Adani who lived in Aden, Yemen in the 13th Century

Shalom Spiegel (1899–1984), one of the greatest scholars of Judaica of his generation and a leading expert in medieval Hebrew literature. Professor Spiegel taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary in the United States from 1944 until his death forty years later.

With guest appearances from

Leonard Cohen a singer songwriter born in Montreal in 1934. This song comes from *Songs From a Room* (1969)

Amir Gilboa (1917 – 1984) was born in the Ukraine. He studied at a Hebrew school and immigrated to Palestine illegally in 1937. He published his first book in 1942 and the poem *Isaac* in 1954

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was a Danish philosopher whose ideas about the nature of human freedom in an uncertain world make him one of the founders of the modern philosophy of existentialism. He wrote *Fear and Trembling* in 1843.