



by **Rabbi Eddie Davis (RED)**

of the Young Israel of Hollywood -
Ft. Lauderdale (Florida)



ROSH HASHANA

DIVREI TORAH

- Avraham prayed that Avimelech and his household be healed and they should be blessed with the ability to have children, even as he, Avraham, required the same blessing that he requested for Avimelech. Our Sages state that he who prays for someone else and needs that blessing himself will be granted the blessing first. The blessing that we see of Avraham and Sara having a child is linked to the fact that Avraham prayed for someone else. When we pray for someone who is sick we do so with that person's name, unless we are in that person's presence. Does Hashem really want us to pray for the sick individual? He really wants to hear from the sick individual himself. In the first day's reading Yishmael is expelled and is in serious condition in the desert. Hashem responds to Yishmael's voice and offers the young lad salvation. I am sure Hagar was crying and praying to God for her son, but the Torah indicates that Hashem heard the voice of the son and was responding to him. This is the second part of what was stated already, in

that Hashem wants to hear from the sick individual himself. I will go visit somebody who is ill. The person makes a request of me that I should pray for him. That is very fine; it is my privilege to do so. I share it with my wife, whose voice I believe Hashem listens to more than mine. This is all very fine, theologically sound, yet I do remind that person who is requesting my prayer that Hashem wants to hear from him more than Hashem wants to hear from me. Hopefully all our voices can blend and receive a positive and most appreciated blessing of good health from the Almighty.

- Sara conceives and gives birth to Avraham's son in his old age. The simplest reading of this verse would reflect the fact that Avraham is 100 years old when he is blessed with the son. It would also indicate that the son is the youngest in the family. In this particular situation that is impossible because we do know that later on in life Avraham is married to Ketura and through her he is blessed with an additional six sons. So the question is: What is the Ben Zikunim? What does it mean? Even in Yosef's situation we cannot say he is the youngest because Binyamin was born after him. Therefore our Sages expand the definition of the expression, maybe to indicate that the son looked like his father. The appearance was the same. Or, as in the case of Yosef, our Sages define Zakein as

wisdom; the father was able to transmit to this son all the wisdom and the traditions that the father has absorbed in life. That is definitely our case here with Avraham and Yitzchak.

- The Torah tells us that Avraham names his son Yitzchak. It would seem from the narrative that Avraham named his son prior to the Brit Mila. In this particular case this question is moot because Avraham was just fulfilling the naming that Hashem granted his son. Consequently since Hashem already named him there is no issue. The question as to why we wait until the circumcision for the naming is a different question entirely and not connected to our narrative. What is meaningful to us is that all the names of the three patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, all represent a future situation. Avraham will become the father of the nations of the world. Yitzchak will laugh and rejoice. And Yaakov as well is in future tense. This, I think, is an important subtle message. With the birth and naming of our children our focus is on the future. Their future in particular, but their future represents our future. This is a true lesson for us all.

- In the Torah reading for the second day of Rosh HaShana we read about the Akeida, the aborted sacrifice of Yitzchak. The Torah tells us that they went to the land of Moriah, to a

specific mountain there, without embellishing as to why it was called Mount Moriah. Commentaries abound as to an interpretation of the word Moriah. One interpretation is that the root word is HORA'A or teaching. The teaching came from this mountain for all of Israel, be it the Written Law or the Oral Tradition, as later the Sanhedrin would be established to sit on Mount Moriah, as well as the Beit HaMikdash. Perhaps the root word is YIR'A, or reverence. Reverence and fear were not only upon the Jewish people but even upon the non-Jewish people, as in having a great deal of reverence for the sanctity of the city of Yerushalayim, as seen with other religions that came after Judaism. A third possibility is that the root is M'OR, the incense of myrrh, which was an important ingredient in the K'toret that was offered there. This had a very pungent smell that our Sages would return to in their writings. This is consistent in the Torah where it introduces a word and does not give us the definitive understanding. It leaves us to fill in the blanks and all these interpretations can be embellished and enhanced to give us a true understanding of the Temple Mount.

- The Akeida, the sacrifice of Yitzchak, is an extremely important event in Jewish history. It becomes important in our embrace of the concept in our theology. Our

relationship with God requires sacrifice. A sacrifice can and usually does mean the expenditure of money. The sacrifice is also the sense of the many restrictions that come with adherence to Torah and mitzvot. Sometimes the sacrifice occurs in its more literal sense in terms of the death of Jewish martyrs. Throughout our history every generation has to mourn for its Jewish martyrs who pay a supreme price for commitment and dedication to Jewish principles and allegiance to Hashem. Our question, even as we say the S'lichot of this time period, which has within it Akeida themes, is when will the Akeida end? Which are the times when we avert the evil decree and Hashem dispenses an angel to say, "don't kill the child" or other times where we see that the price is paid and we suffer greatly? Consequently the Akeida theme is in our davening, especially this time of year.

Questions by RED

The Holiday

1. In what month is this holiday?
2. What is the purpose of blowing the Shofar?
3. Why do we dip an apple in the honey?
4. What is the purpose of the ritual of Tashlich?

5. Why are there two days of Rosh HaShana in Israel?
6. Why is there a custom of eating a round Challah on Rosh HaShana?
7. What is the alternate name for Rosh HaShana in the Torah?

The Torah Reading

8. How many wives and children did Avraham have?
9. Why did Avraham and Sara name their son Yitzchak: he will laugh?
10. Why did Sara request her husband expel Yishmael from their home?
11. Where did the Akeida (the aborted sacrifice of Yitzchak) take place?
12. How long did it take Avraham to reach the place of the Akeida?
13. Who were the two lads who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the Akeida?
14. How many descendants did Nachor, Avraham's brother, have at this time?

Relationships

- a) Sarah - Lot
- b) Avraham - Betuel
- c) Terach - Yitzchak

ANSWERS

1. Tishrei
2. According to the Rambam, the Shofar was to arouse our desire to repent. (There are many other 'reasons' or symbolisms given for Shofar.)
3. To demonstrate our desire that this new year will be sweet.
4. Tashlich was to allow us to throw our sins into the water. (It is much more complex than this simple explanation.)
5. Because since the holiday was the first of the month, it was impossible to get the word out in time.
6. Round Challah symbolizes that the year is circular, no beginning and no end.
7. Yom T'ru'a, the Day of the Shofar Blast.
8. He had in total 3 wives, Sarah, Hagar, and Ketura. Or - 2 wives, if we accept the Midrash that Ketura was Hagar. And 8 sons.
9. Besides the fact that Hashem said to use that name, Rashi stated that the world will rejoice over so many good things that would occur at the same time.
10. She saw Yishmael sinning radically.
11. Atop Mt. Moriah in Yerushalayim.
12. Three days

13. Eliezer and Yishmael. (Strange Midrash since Avraham had expelled Yishmael.)

14. Twelve

Relationships

- a) Text: Aunt & Nephew
Midrash: Siblings
- b) Uncle & Nephew
- c) Grandfather & Grandson