

The Sound of Silence

The Akedah from the Perspective of Sarah

Yom Kippur 5781



Rembrandt, *Abraham Serving the Three Angels*, 1646

Genesis 32: ²⁸ Then he said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel (יִשְׂרָאֵל), because you have struggled (שָׁרַיתָ) with God (אֱלֹהִים) and with people (אֲנָשִׁים) and have been able (וְתוּכָל).”

Genesis 11: ²⁹ Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram’s wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor’s wife was Milkah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and Iskah. ³⁰ Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive.

Genesis 16: Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; ² so she said to Abram, “The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.”

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. ³ So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. ⁴ He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. ⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May Adonai judge between you and me.” ⁶ “Your slave is in your hands,” Abram said. “Do with her whatever you think best.” Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her...

¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

Genesis 17: When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Adonai appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. ² Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.” ³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations...

¹⁵ God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶ I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.” ¹⁷ Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said in his heart,

“Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?”

¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!”

¹⁹ Then God said, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

²⁰ And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. ²¹ But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.” ²² When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him.



Jean Leon Jerome, *Egyptian Water Carrier*, 1882

Genesis 18: ⁹“Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him. “There, in the tent,” he said. ¹⁰Then one of them said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.”

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. ¹¹Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ¹²So Sarah laughed within herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?”

¹³Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴Is anything too wondrous for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

¹⁵Sarah denied it and said, “I did not laugh” for she was afraid. But he said, “Yes, you did laugh.”

¹⁶When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. ¹⁷Then the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? ¹⁸Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. ¹⁹For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

²⁰Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous ²¹that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”

²²The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before Adonai. ²³Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? ²⁵Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”



Abraham, Sarah and the three Angels, Marc Chagall 1966

Genesis 21: The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised.² And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.³ Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.⁴ And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.

⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.⁶ And Sarah said, “God has made laughter (יִצְחָק) for me; everyone who hears will laugh (יִצְחָק) over me.”⁷ And she said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

⁸ And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac (יִצְחָק) was weaned.⁹ But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, making sport (מְצַחֵק).¹⁰ So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.”¹¹ And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son.

¹² But God said to Abraham, “Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. **Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you (כָּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלַיךָ שָׂרָה, שָׁמַע בְּקוֹלָהּ)**, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

¹³ And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring.”¹⁴ So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away.

...³³ Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Eternal God.³⁴ And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

Genesis 22:¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

...¹⁹ Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

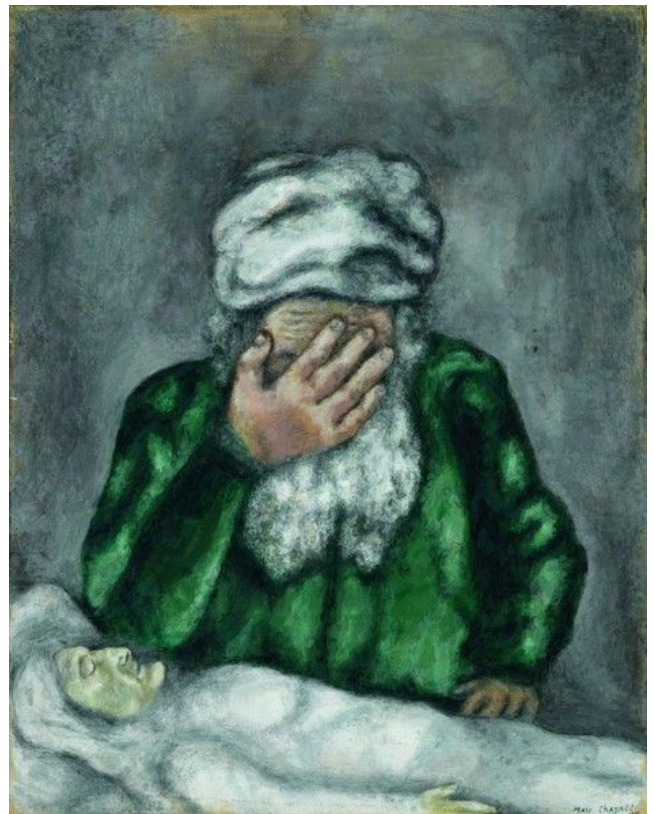
Genesis 23: Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old.² She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came (וַיָּבֵא) to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her (וַיִּלְבֹּטָהּ).

Genesis 1: בְּרֵאשִׁית, בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים, אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

Deuteronomy 6:4 שְׁמַע, יִשְׂרָאֵל: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְהוָה אֶחָד

Genesis 24:⁶⁷ Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.

Genesis 25:⁷ Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years.⁸ Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people.⁹ His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite,¹⁰ the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah.



Marc Chagall, *Abraham Weeping over Sarah*, 1931