

*Shanah Tova. Today is 1 & 2 Tishrei 5787, Rosh HaShanah.
Corresponding to September 12th + 13th 2026*

TORAH DIALOGUE FOR BOTH DAYS
(p. 287 Birnbaum, p. 402 ArtScroll)
[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis (RED)
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1. Our Sages chose a Torah reading that highlights the birth of Yitzchak. The true message resounding throughout the festival is that Hashem remembered Sarah, miraculously allowing her to conceive and have a baby in her elderly age. The Haftorah is selected because of a similar miracle for Chanah. The second day Haftorah has mention of Rachel. These three matriarchal figures are mentioned by name in the Talmud as sharing Rosh HaShanah as the time when they were remembered by Hashem for conception and motherhood. In the Tanchumah there is an additional opinion that adds Rivka and Leah to this list. Seemingly all the matriarchs required blessings from Hashem in order to experience what for many is a natural one. Perhaps it is to bring to our attention that sometimes that which is natural is also quite miraculous. We do not make a blessing for those miracles that occur so frequently in nature. Consequently there is no brachah on giving birth or having children, per se. But these events are nonetheless miraculous. We cannot ever assume that Hashem will give us these blessings, but we do make a distinction between those events that are so natural in nature that we do not take note and pray for them. *Mashiv HaRuach*, He causes the wind to blow, *U'Morid HaGeshem*, and brings down the rain. The prayer that we have is for the rain. The assumed gift from God is the wind. That exists all the time. We need to pray, and prayer is the first lesson in life for mankind, and especially for the Jewish people. We need to pray for the miracles of nature, and we need to pray fervently for Hashem's blessings in life. (RED)

2. 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 Sarah 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 today'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.

3. Sarah 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 Keturah and through her he is blessed with an additional six sons. So the question is: What is the *Ben Zekunim*? 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.

4. 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 Milah. 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. (RED)

5. Sometimes parents have to make very hard decisions in terms of the domestic stability of their own homes; there are moments when tough love is required. This was the case in Avraham expelling his son Yishmael. Our Sages in the Midrash could not accept the concept that there would be total expulsion and no contact between father and son. They could not accept it and consequently they created a story line where Avraham left his home to travel a long distance to visit his son Yishmael. The real problem with this Midrash is our Sages create a story line which is not consistent with the Torah narrative. There has to be somewhere in the Torah where the door gets opened for the Rabbis to create such a story. How could our Sages say that the expulsion was not complete when the Torah narrative seems to indicate the division to be long, wide and forever? I suggest that the answer is a clause in the Torah narrative when Avraham dies. At the end of Parshat Chayei Sarah (25:9) the Torah states when Avraham died "his sons Yitzchak and Yishmael buried him in the Cave of Machpelah...." If the separation was so complete how would Yishmael reappear at the time of Avraham's death? This is the door opening, as far as I can see, giving the Rabbis the opportunity to create a narrative in Midrash where the expulsion is not final. (RED)

6. In the Torah reading for the second day of Rosh Hashanah we read about the Akeidah, 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'ah 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 Holy Temple. Perhaps the root word is Yir'ah, 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 incense 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.

7. The Akeidah, 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 Selichot of this time period, which has within it Akeidah themes, is when will the Akeidah 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 Akeidah theme is in our davening, especially this time of year. (RED)

8. When Avraham takes his son and ventures forth on the journey to Mount Moriah to offer his son as a sacrifice, he is accompanied by two lads. They are not named but the Sages say that they were known to us in other places of the Avraham narrative. According to our Sages, who were they, and how did our Sages know to identify these two lads as these two people?

QUESTIONS FOR ROSH HASHANAH 5787

I. 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 Hashanah in Israel?
6. Why is there a custom of eating a round Challah on Rosh Hashanah?
7. What is the alternate name for Rosh Hashanah in the Torah?

II. THE TORAH READING

8. How many wives and children did Avraham have?

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

III. RELATIONSHIPS

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

ANSWERS FOR ROSH HASHANAH 5787

1. Tishrei
2. According to the Rambam, the Shofar was to arouse our desire to repent.
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.
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 Teruah, the Day of the Shofar Blast.
8. He had in total 3 wives, Sarah, Hagar, and Keturah. OR 2 wives, if we accept the Midrash that Meturah 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

- a) Text: Aunt Sarah. Midrash: Siblings
- b) Uncle Avraham
- c) Grandfather Terach