



# ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS  
RCA ISRAEL REGION

## DAY 1

This being Shabbat the Torah reading has 7 aliyot in place of the usual 5 for Yom Tov.

The Torah reading for the first day is Genesis, Chapter 21, v. 1-34. This chapter describes the birth of Yitzchak, the insistence of Sarah to send Yishmael away, and Hagar and Yishmael's near death in the desert before being saved. It concludes with a pact made between Avraham and Avimelech in Be'er Sheva.

This Torah reading expresses an essential theme of Rosh Hashana. While the particular themes of the day are G-d as Judge, as King, as remembering us, those are particulars. They all express a far more grand and majestic notion. That we, mankind, little us, have an ongoing engagement with the Creator. He reached for us, pulled us close, and does not turn away. He made a covenant with the Jewish people, promising children to Sarah. Even those words are fanciful; are you telling me that the Master of the Universe engages with us? *He Reaches for us? He Promises to us? And remembers, takes note of those promises and makes them come true? That is the essential theme of Rosh Hashana; that we have a glorious connection with the Creator, on His initiative. The first chapter of that glorious connection is the promise to Sarah of a child. And most crucially; the moment He keeps His promise.*



### 1ST ALIYA (BERESHIT 21:1-4)

The promise made to Avraham and Sarah is granted and Yitzchak is born.

G-d did “as He said”. He promised; He made good on His promise. The phrase “as He said” appears 3 times in the first 2 verses. He promises; He does. This is the theme of Zichronot; not just that G-d remembers, but that He does what He promises, acts on what He says. He granted Sarah the child that He promised. The notion that G-d Promises to us and then does what He promises frames man as a glorious and majestic partner for the Divine.



### 2ND ALIYA (21:5-8)

Sarah says “all who hear of this birth will laugh”. Hence Yitzchak.

Sarah is not worried that people will make fun of her, embarrassed by the birth of a child at such an advanced age. Were she embarrassed, she would not immortalize that embarrassment by naming him “laughter, Yitzchak”. Rather, it is a laugh of the incredulous. A laugh expressing how incredulous this birth is. Sarah, by naming the next of the patriarchs Yitzchak expresses how incredulous our history will truly be; a history of walking with the Divine.



### 3RD ALIYA (21:9-12)

Sarah demands that Hagar and Yishmael be sent off, for Yitzchak alone is our future.

While Avraham does not like this, Hashem

tells him that Sarah is correct, for Yitzchak is the Jewish future. While we value all people, Jewish destiny is different, our people are different and our covenant with G-d is different. We are a people of unique destiny.



#### 4TH ALIYA (21:13-17)

Avraham awakens early to send Hagar and Yishmael away. They go to Be'er Sheva. Hagar cannot bear to see the death of her son. An angel calls to her that her son is saved as G-d heard the voice of the child.

The story of Hagar journeying with her son is a parallel story to the Akeida, Avraham journeying with his son that we will read tomorrow. Early in the morning, journey off, with a son, near death, the angel calls, her eyes are open.

There is a universal theme of Rosh Hashana, of all of G-d's creation. There are great nations. Like Yishmael. But the parallel to the story of Yitzchak and the Akeida is to highlight not the similarity but the difference. There *are* many great nations. Yishmael becomes a great warrior archer. As great as he is, he is but a great nation amongst nations. The greatness of the Jewish people is our uniqueness; a covenant with G-d. Yitzchak will carry on this covenant, not Yishmael.



#### 5TH ALIYA (21:18-21)

Yishmael too will be a great nation. She opens her eyes and sees water and they drink. He grows and becomes an archer.

Hagar sees water and she drinks. Avraham at the Akeida sees a ram and offers an offering. One is temporal life; water to drink. Avraham is the rarefied life of Divine connection; the ram to offer.



#### 6TH ALIYA (21:22-27)

Avimelech makes a pact with Avraham because “G-d is with you in all you do”.

This too is a promise fulfilled. Avraham was promised he would have a great name. His fame has come to be. G-d promises and fulfills those promises.



#### 7TH ALIYA (21:29-34)

They call the name of the location Be'er sheva from the word oath, or pact.

The theme of covenant, of special pacts animates this Torah reading. But there are human pacts of friendship and peace. And Divine covenants of majesty and grandeur.

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## DAY 2

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The Torah reading is the 24 verses of Genesis, Chapter 22. This story, Akeidat Yitzchak, the binding of Isaac, is the most dramatic story of the Torah. It expresses how far man is willing to go in his allegiance to G-d. While it is a complex story of conflicted commands, the narrative is beautiful in its simplicity. Amidst the simplicity of the story, the deep and unswerving commitment of Avraham is majestic. The story concludes with the ram, caught

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in the thicket by its horn; the shofar we use for Rosh Hashana.



### 1ST ALIYA (22:1-3)

G-d tests Avraham: Take your beloved son and offer him as an offering. Avraham awakens early, gets up and goes with his assistants, with Yitzchak and with the wood.

The drama of the story is belied by the strikingly simple wording: *Hineni*, here I am; he woke up early, got up and went to do what G-d requested. The absence of any dialogue, of any questions, of challenge to G-d, of discussion with Sarah, of explanation to Yitzchak is striking. This simplicity drives the message of the simplicity of Avraham's loyalty to G-d; simple language, simple faith. For this terribly complex story is at its root quite simple. This simplicity is a Rosh Hashana theme. We live in a terribly complicated world; we have many unanswered questions, theological questions, many challenges and confusion. But at some very deep and profound level we are simple in our devotion. Like the shofar – no words, just a simple call from way deep in our souls.



### 2ND ALIYA (22:4-8)

They arrive at the place. The assistants stay back. Avraham and Yitzchak walk, together. Yitzchak inquires as to where the offering is. Avraham responds that G-d will provide the offering. And they walk together.

They walk together. This togetherness is ironic – for Avraham knows he is to sacrifice Yitzchak, while Yitzchak does not know this. Or perhaps he does. Does Yitzchak figure out what is going on? Did

he wonder for these 3 days why everything for the offering was brought – except the offering itself? Perhaps he has figured it out; he really is together with Avraham. While Avraham is tested, Yitzchak is too. Yitzchak's role as the willing offering is dramatic. And as the father of the Jewish people, he expresses the image of the Jew as nearly destroyed, but surviving.



### 3RD ALIYA (22:9-14)

Avraham builds the altar, arranges the wood, places Yitzchak on the altar and takes the knife to slaughter his son. The angel interrupts; instructing him not to slaughter his son, or do a thing, for now we know you would not withhold even your son from Me. Avraham sees the ram and offers it in place of his son. He calls the place “G-d will see, *yireh*” and it is called the mountain in which G-d is seen (Har HaMoriah).

What more can be said of this powerful and dramatic moment? The mountain is named. He sees. And He is seen. The story told Him a lot about Avraham. He saw Avraham not just profess faith, but be faithful. And the story tells us a lot about Him. What we see in Him is the mystery – why did He do this, and how little we know of His ways. While at the same time His mercy and His faithfulness to us was clear to see. He saved Yitzchak and He saved Avraham from a treacherous moment.



### 4TH ALIYA (22:15-19)

The angel calls to Avraham a second time. He is told that G-d swore that if Avraham did not withhold his child, that he and his children would be blessed, would be a blessing and would be a great people.

This too is a Rosh Hashana theme. The

Creation of the world was an expression of Divine desire for a partner in man. The choosing of Avraham was a more intimate expression of Divine desire for a specific partner in man. And the expression of blessing to the Jewish people is a further expression of our unique covenant. Rosh Hashana is not only the majesty of G-d but the majesty of man. We are partners with the King. He reaches to us, creates us, chooses us, instructs us, blesses us. What a majestic mandate – the partners, the intimate partner of the King.



**5TH ALIYA (22:20-24)**

Avraham is told that his brother has a full family of descendants including Rivka.

The next generation is now ready to pick up this great covenant and take its place in Jewish history. ■

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