

OUT OF THE BOX AND ON TO THE PAGES:
ELEVATED VOICES OF FEMALE BIBLICAL CHARACTERS
IN MIDRASH SEFER HA-YASHAR

STEPHANIE CRAWLEY

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Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
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Rabbi Norman Cohen, Ph.D.

You told me not to forsake her Torah,¹ so I search the silence. I listen for a whisper; I look for her between lines and letters. I read the footnotes. I find her living in the margins.

To Dr. Norman Cohen: Thank you for your endless patience, thoughtful edits, and most of all, for showing me that text is a place where heart and head can live together.

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¹ Proverbs 6:20.

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

ויאמר אלהים: נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו. ויברא אלהים את האדם בצלמו. וייצר יי אלהים את האדם עפר מן האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים. ויהי האדם לנפש חיה מדבר.

And God said: Let us make *adam* in our image, after our likeness, and God created *adam* in God's own image, and the Eternal God formed *adam* from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and *adam* became a living being endowed with speech.

(*Sefer Ha-Yasher* 1)

In *Sefer Ha-Yashar*, a narrative midrash from the Middle Ages, the Genesis account begins with the creation of humanity. This midrashic retelling is almost identical to the language from its biblical sources (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7) with one noticeable addition. *Sefer Ha-Yashar* adds the word “מדבר”-speech” to the language from Genesis 2:7. With a single word, *Sefer Ha-Yashar* makes a profound statement about the nature of human existence: the ability and desire to speak and tell stories is built into our very DNA. Moreover, by weaving together the creation accounts from Genesis 1 and 2, we can understand that to be made in God's image *is* to speak, as God does. We may be made from ashes, but our souls are made up of God's holy exhalations of speech. This was our first gift of Torah. The second was at Sinai, where Divine revelation was manifest in words. Michael Fishbane writes: “The written text thus mediates between the original verbal revelation of God at Sinai and the ongoing discourses of the sages in history. Paradoxically, the divine Word unfolds through human speech. As exegetical act and

event, this human speech is Midrash. This is a stunning definition of midrash: the ¹ continually expanding human record of engaging with and interpreting the divine Word.² The result of this interpretive exegesis is halakhah and aggadah, commonly defined as legal and nonlegal literature. It is aggadah which is “inextricably bound up with the idea of speech,” writes Joseph Heinemann in his seminal work *Darkhey ha-Aggadah*.³ As he notes, haggadah, the Hebrew equivalent of aggadah comes from the root .ג.א.א, meaning “to say.” It is not, however, simply about repeating and telling the stories of the past. In Aramaic, the term also derives from the root .ג.א.א, which means both drawing in and expanding out. Aggadah is the “breath” of Scripture: Torah is drawn in to the human reader, who then respires a renewed Revelation. Geza Vermes suggests that the true nature of aggadah is this renewal of the written Torah:

...it is not necessary for the written word into which living tradition is translated to become a dead letter. This written word carries within it a germ of spiritual energy capable of generating a new living tradition, which, in turn, should breathe new life into the word.⁴

Yet another etymological aspect of .ג.א.א, is the idea of flow. Aggadah creates a sense of fluidity between reader and text, a fluid relationship wherein one informs and shapes the other. As aggadah flows through history, it expands and adapts. Aggadah allows Torah to shape-shift so that its readers may identify with its enduring messages, “For you can truly understand only what you resemble.”⁵ Thus Torah takes a human

¹ Michael Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology*, (Harvard: Cambridge, 1998), 10.

² For Resources on defining Midrash, see Kugel, Two Definitions of Midrash; Neusner, The Midrash.

³ Joseph Heinemann, “The Nature of the Aggadah”

⁴ Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition*

⁵ Bregman’s summary of Heinemann, 177

shape in midrash, for “the ultimate purpose of all Jewish exegesis [is] to fuse Scripture with life.”⁶

Perhaps no text embodies these qualities better than *Sefer ha-Yashar*. Like Torah itself, there is an element of mystery that accompanies this midrash. Its authorship and origin is only speculative. It claims to be the lost book of its namesake, a book referenced in Joshua 10:13 and II Samuel 1:18, and is written in an “artificial pseudo-biblical Hebrew.”⁷ It is a fluid rewrite of the biblical narrative, beginning with the creation of Adam and Eve, followed by parts of Exodus, and ending with Joshua’s death. Its primary focus, however, is on the figures in Genesis. *Sefer ha-Yashar* interprets the biblical text as well as other midrashim and folk traditions, drawing on ancient, classical, and contemporaneous traditions, both Jewish and Islamic. Although its style of “rewritten bible”⁸ – “המקרא המשוכתב” resembles the early midrashic literature of the Targumim, Jubilees, and Genesis Apocryphon, it is not their contemporary, as it emerged sometime between the 11th and 16th centuries, and is likely a product of somewhere in Southern Europe. Instead, it best fits in the genre of narrative midrash, or מדרש סיפורי. Rachel Adelman, who coined the term, defines it as: “The ‘narrative’ component of the term for this genre refers to the artful story telling of the composition; ‘midrash’ to its exegetical aspect, the dependence on its biblical progenitor.”⁹ It is this combination of different

⁶ Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition*, 229

⁷ Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. *Sefer ha-Yashar*

⁸ Vermes

⁹ Rachel Adelman, *The Return of the Repressed: Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer and the Pseudepigrapha*

approaches to midrash that makes Narrative Midrash distinct, as it uses narrative as an exegetical tool, and its exegesis takes the form of narrative.

Although Adelman's definition is based on her study of Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer, one of the main sources employed by Sefer Ha-Yashar, it appears that Sefer Ha-Yashar might be a better representation, and later development, of Narrative Midrash. In Sefer Ha-Yashar, the line between exegesis and eisegesis is all but erased. The text includes myriad biblical allusions, rabbinic and outside traditions, but they are woven into the story in a completely organic manner. Furthermore, its intertextuality serves to not just "to enrich the lyricism and the visual imagery in the midrash," but to add meaning, depth, and authority to its narrative. Although the text is exceedingly allusive and intertextual, its quotes, allusions, and traditions are incorporated without sacrificing narrative flow. Unlike classical exegetical or homiletical midrashim, which are *about* story, Sefer Ha-Yashar *is* story. Without any outwardly visible hand of an author, the characters in this story speak in their own words. If, as stated previously, the goal of midrash is a fusion of Torah with life; how powerful that these biblical figures might *themselves* speak to our lived experiences. In this way, Sefer Ha-Yashar allows for our biblical figures to be humans rather than characters. The people in Sefer Ha-Yashar are represented as fully emotive and expressive. Men and women weep, brothers quarrel, husband and wife argue, and then pray for each other. In Sefer Ha-Yashar, we see ourselves. Such a text invites us to ask questions about human nature and experience, and draws our hearts into the text. Adding these midrashic elements into the biblical narrative changes the entire meaning of the story, breathing life into familiar legends and tropes.

Although covert, the narrative in Sefer Ha-Yashar provides exegesis. Vermes writes: “In order to anticipate questions and solve problems in advance, the midrashist inserts haggadic development into the biblical narrative—an exegetical process which is probably as ancient as scriptural interpretation itself.”¹⁰ Take, for example, the creation of Adam discussed above. In Genesis 1 and 2, two accounts of the creation of Adam are given, creating an interpretive need. Without presenting the problem, Sefer Ha-Yashar solves the inconsistency by weaving both together, creating something perhaps more powerful than the original biblical account. A literate reader of Torah will recognize this exegetical problem-solving, but such knowledge is not required to benefit from the text. This scholar is gifted with what Harold Fisch describes as “joy of recognition,”¹¹ when they see the different possibilities for interpretation of the biblical verse they know. In reading the classical midrashim, this process is integral, requiring a great deal of prior knowledge. Sefer Ha-Yashar, through a more seamless weaving together of exegetical questions and uncited source texts opens the text up for discovery to the novice as well as the scholar, thus serving both the folk and the academy.

The narrative style of Sefer ha-Yashar, as well as its focus on the figures from Genesis (whose names are evoked even after their death) allows the reader to see how relationships grow and evolve. What might be five verses in the Torah becomes fodder for two chapters in Sefer Ha-Yashar. We see humans in relationship with each other, and humans in relationship with God. This is a primary focus of Sefer Ha-Yashar, evident in

¹⁰ Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition*, 95.

¹¹ Harold Fisch, "The Hermeneutic Quest in Robinson Crusoe," in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven: Yale UP 1986) 213-235: 232. 72.

how the text itself begins. Departing from the Torah's Genesis, creation *begins* with humans, establishing that this will be a text which explores human nature as it interacts with its Creator.

Finally, this authentic portrayal of human life includes men and women. Although all the main characters in Sefer Ha-Yashar are elevated and expanded, it is the female characters who benefit from this most intensely. This is a text where women speak for themselves, advance their own plots, and intercede on their own behalf. This on its own is revolutionary: pieces of midrash and folklore are woven together to create interesting, complicated, and powerful women who have distinct relationships with God. Note how the creation account continues:

ויקח יי אלהים את האדם ואשתו ויניחם בגן עדן לעבדה ולשמרה: ויצום ויאמר אליהם מכל עץ הגן אכול תאכלו: ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכלו ממנו כי ביום אכלכם ממנו מות תמות:

And the Eternal God took Adam and his wife and placed them into the garden of Eden, to till it and watch over it. And he commanded them and said unto them : From all the trees of the garden you may freely eat; but from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat; for on the day that you eat from it you will surely die.

(Sefer Ha-Yashar 1)

Again, the text closely mirrors the biblical verses, except for one significant addition, Eve! God places both Adam and Eve in the garden, and commands both of them not to eat from the tree of knowledge. From its first lines, Sefer Ha-Yashar asserts itself as a text that is concerned with elevating female voices.

Unfortunately, Sefer Ha-Yashar has not received the critical attention it deserves, particularly in the English-speaking world. Especially now, in our post-modern context, we need midrash that is concerned with individuals and their human experiences. We need a text like Sefer Ha-Yashar, which invites all into Torah without sacrificing depth

for profundity. Lastly, as more and more Jewish women across the spectrum of Jewish identity find their way into Jewish educational spaces, we need texts that speak *to* women, not *about* women, and emphasize their equal stake in the covenant. We need Sefer Ha-Yashar.

This thesis is a first step in bringing Sefer Ha-Yashar back to the Jewish world. What follows is an annotated translation and commentary on two chapters of the text, six and nine.¹² These translations are based on the edition of Sefer Ha-Yashar by Yosef Dan. They represent an effort to preserve the original Hebrew text, while retaining their folk-quality in English, with a strong preference towards readability and colloquialism in the translation. The annotations and commentaries explore the textual traditions present in the text, revealing the sources and intertextuality in order to derive interpretive meaning from their inclusion. Chapter six of Sefer Ha-Yashar begins with Abram and Sarai entering Egypt due to famine and ends with the covenant of circumcision, (Genesis 12-18) and chapter nine is an extended Akedah narrative. (Genesis 22) Particular attention is paid to the evolution of Sarah throughout these chapters. The structure of those two sections is as follows:

- 1) Above the Line
 - a. ShY text
 - b. Biblical Source Text
 - i. These are only included above the line if they are part of the narrative flow of the text. All other relevant source texts are included in the commentary and notes.
- 2) Below the Line
 - a. Commentary
 - i. The commentary explores broader themes in the textual sections. The commentaries are diverse, but all aim to derive meaning from the literary, inner-textual and intertextual elements of the ShY.

¹² Chapters as divided in Yosef Dan edition

Particular attention is paid to the parallel biblical and rabbinic sources.

b. Endnotes

- i. Includes source texts, textual allusions, parallel texts and traditions.

Following the translation and commentary is an overview and analysis of the other women in Sefer Ha-Yashar (ShY, hereto forth) which explores the how the literary and structural elements work to give voice to the female figures.

PART II

SEFER HA-YASHAR CHAPTER 6 (GENESIS 12-18)

ויהי בשנה ההיא ויהי רעב כבד בכל ארץ¹ כנען, ולא יכלו יושבי הארץ לשבת בה מפני הרעב כי כבד הוא מאד².³ ויקם אברם הוא וכל אשר לו⁴, וילכו וירדו מצרימה מפני הרעב, ויהי בנחל מצרים⁵, וישבו על הנחל ימים לנות מפני הדרך.

And it came to pass in that year and there was a severe famine in all the land of Canaan, and the inhabitants of the land couldn't dwell there because of the famine, which was very oppressive. Abram and everyone with him arose, and they went down to Egypt because of the famine, and at the river of Egypt, they dwelled by the river for a few days to rest because of the journey.

This event is recording in the Tanach in Genesis 12:9-10.

וַיֵּסַע אַבְרָם הָלוֹךְ וְנֹסֵעַ הַנֶּגֶבָה: וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ וַיֵּרֶד אַבְרָם מִצְרָיִם לְגִיּוֹר שָׁם כִּי־כָבֵד הָרָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ:

Then Abram journeyed by stages toward the Negev.

There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.

Genesis includes the journeying towards the Negev as part of Abram's tour of the land that God has just promised him. The descent into Egypt due to the famine appears to be a separate event.

ShY omits the tour of the land, and states that Abram dwelled in the Oaks of Mamre, in the land of Canaan. (Ch. 4) The above section combines the journey towards the Negev with descent into Egypt, citing the famine as the only reason to be heading southward. Although subtle, this change emphasizes the dire situation of the famine, causing them to uproot themselves from their newly-given land entirely and going to Egypt as a last resort, rather than going to Egypt as a convenient, nearby alternative to the scarcity in Canaan.

More noticeably is the emphasis placed on the scope and magnitude of the famine in the ShY text, adding adjectives and superlatives to the biblical text, as well as a third mention of the famine.

Genesis 12:10 Text	Sefer haYashar Text	
וַיְהִי רָעָב	וַיְהִי רָעַב כָּבֵד	The adjective כָּבֵד, (lit. heavy) is included only in the second half of the biblical verse. Adding it here emphasizes the intensity of the famine.
בְּאֶרֶץ	בְּכָל אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן	Genesis simply states, “in the land.” ShY’s rendering explicitly states Canaan as the location for the famine, connects to the previous chapter which places Abram in Canaan, and explains why Abram couldn’t travel elsewhere in Canaan. There is also a narrative effect of describing the famine as effecting the entirety of Canaan.
	וְלֹא יָכְלוּ יוֹשְׁבֵי הָאֶרֶץ לִשְׁבֹּת בָּהּ	Not found in the biblical text, paints Canaan as uninhabitable.
וַיֵּרֶד אַבְרָם מִצִּרְיָמָה	וַיֵּלְכוּ וַיִּרְדּוּ מִצְרִימָה מִפְּנֵי הָרָעָב	An additional mention of the famine as the reason for traveling to Egypt, not found in the biblical text.
כִּי־כָבֵד הָרָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ	כִּי כָבֵד הוּא מְאֹד	The word “מְאֹד” is added here for extra emphasis.

Notes:

¹ Genesis Apocryphon 19:3 also describes the famine as affecting the entire land, “A famine took place throughout all this land...” Midrash Tanhuma states that “no famine ever equaled it.” (Tanhuma ha-Nidpas Lech L’cha 5)

² כָּבֵד, literally meaning “heavy.” NJPS translates the word in this context as “severe.” BDB notes that when the phrase “כָּבֵד מְאֹד” appears in the biblical text, it has the

connotation of “very oppressive.” I have chosen to preserve both these renderings in my translations of “כבד” and “כבד הוא מאד.”

³ A possible allusion to “כבד מאד,” which occurs several times in the biblical account of the Ten Plagues. Including it here foreshadows the plagues which will hit the house of Pharaoh on account of Sarai later in the narrative (See Ex 9:3,18:24; 10:14), and the fortune with which Abram will leave Egypt with. (Gen 13:2)

⁴ Note that this is inclusive of Sarai, who is a fellow traveler alongside Abram. This is found in Tanhuma ha-Nidpas as well, where Abram informs Sarai of the famine and of the required journey. “Abraham said to his wife Sarah: ‘There is a famine in our land...Egypt is a pleasant land in which to dwell; let us go there, since there is a huge supply of bread and meat in that land.’ Thereupon, the two of them departed for Egypt.” (Lech L’cha 5)

⁵ The expression “בנהל מצרים” is used as a geographic marker – a border of the edge of Canaan. (See II Kings 24:7; Isaiah 27:12; Joshua 15:47; II Chronicles 7:8; Numbers 34:5; I Kings 8:65; Ezekiel 47:19, 48:28)

This understanding fits with the Genesis narrative, which lists the “נְהַר מִצְרַיִם” as a border of the covenantal land. (Gen 15:18) Ibn Ezra notes that this does not refer to the Nile.

(Comment to Gen 15:18) Note that ShY does not use the word “יֵאוֹר,” a borrowed Egyptian word which refers to the Nile River or the surrounding delta and tributaries. Generally, this word is used in place of נהר – river – either when the setting is Egypt (Ex 2:3, 5 4:9, 7:9, 15, 18) or in references to

Egypt (Dan 12:5,6). However, a similar account in Midrash Tanhuma ha-Nidpas specifically names the river as “הַיֵּאוֹר.”

Genesis Apocryphon identifies this river as “לְכַרְמוֹנָא נְהַרָא” the Carmon river, one of the branches of the Nile. (1Q20 (1QapGen ar) 19:11) In the GA narrative, Abram reaches the Carmon river, and then crosses its seven branches in order to reach the land of Egypt. The Carmon River might refer to the Eastern branch of the Nile Delta. (Knibb 1987)

ויתהלכו⁶ אברם ושרי אשתו על שפת נחל מצרים, ויבט אברם אל המים וירא את שרי אשתו כי יפה היא מאד מאד. ויאמר אברם אל שרי: אחרי אשר בראך האלהים במראה הטוב הזה, ירא אני את המצריים פן יהרגוני ולקחו אותך, כי אין יראת אלהים במקומם.⁷ אך זה אשר תעשה עמי, אמרי נא לי אחותי את לכל אשר ישאלו אותך עלי, למען ייטב לי ונחיה ולא נמות.

And Abram and Sarai, his wife, walked along the bank of the river of Egypt, and Abram gazed at the water, and for the first time saw Sarai, his wife, for she was incredibly beautiful. Abram said to Sarai: “Since God created you with this beauty, I fear the Egyptians, lest they kill me and take you, for there is no fear of God in their place. So, this is what you must do for me: Please say that you are my sister whenever they ask you about me, in order that it may go well for me, and that we will live and not die.”⁸

Genesis 12: 11-13

וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר הִקְרִיב לְבוֹא מִצְרָיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ הִנֵּה־נָא יֵדְעִתִּי כִּי אִשָּׁה יִפְתַּח־מְרָאָהָ אֹתָּהּ: וְהָיָה כִּי־יִרְאוּ אֹתָךְ הַמִּצְרִיִּים וְאָמְרוּ אִשְׁתּוֹ זֹאת וְהָרְגוּ אֹתִי וְאַתָּה יְחִי: אֲמַרְי־נָא אַחֲתִי אָתָּה לְמַעַן יִיטַב־לִי בְּעַבְדֵיךָ וְחַיְתָּה נַפְשִׁי בְּגִלְדְּךָ:

As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know what a beautiful woman you are. If the Egyptians see you, and think, ‘She is his wife,’ they will kill me and let you live. Please say that you are my sister⁹, that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may remain alive thanks to you.”

In Genesis, Abram already knows of Sarai’s beauty, and tells her his plan just before entering Egypt. In the ShY account, Abram has a sudden realization of Sarai’s beauty. Two verbs emphasize this point, “ויבט” and “וירא.” Literally, “ויבט” means, “look, gaze,” but can also suggest illumination and even vision. The more common “ראה” here, too, suggests a more essential way of *seeing*, an idea rooted in the Midrashic tradition.

The account in ShY closely resembles Midrash Tanhuma ha-Nidpas. As the two of them were standing by the river:

רָאָה אַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ בְּבוֹאָהָ שֶׁל שָׂרָה בְּאוֹתוֹ נֶהָר כְּחֶמֶה זֹרְחָת.

Our patriarch Abraham noticed that Sarah’s reflection in the river was like the radiance of the sun.

The Tanhuma then states that Abram was previously unaware of Sarai's beauty and only realizes it in this reflective revelation. Targum Yonatan indicates that Abram's sudden awareness comes because they must remove their clothing in order to cross the river, and upon seeing her naked says, "Behold, until this I have not beheld thy flesh; but now I know that thou art a woman of fair aspect."

The Babylonian Talmud also maintains this tradition, stating:

Abraham did not even look at his own wife, as it is written: "Now I know that you are a beautiful woman" (Genesis 12:11). One may learn by inference that initially he did not know how beautiful she was because he had not gazed at her. (BT Baba Batra 16a)

In Genesis Apocryphon, this realization came in an actual vision:

And on the night of our entry into Egypt, I, Abram, dreamt a dream; and behold, I saw in my dream a cedar tree and a palm tree. Men came and they sought to cut down the cedar tree and to pull up its roots, leaving the palm tree standing alone. But the palm tree cried out/saying, "Do not cut down this cedar tree, for cursed be he who shall fell it." And the cedar tree was spared because of the palm tree and was not felled.

And during the night I woke from my dream, and I said to Sarai, my wife, "I have dreamt a dream and I am fearful because of this dream." She said to me, "Tell me your dream that I may know it." So I began to tell her this dream and told her the interpretation of the dream: that they will seek to kill me, but will spare you. Say to them of me, 'He is my brother, and because of you I shall live, and because of you my life shall be saved.'

In both Genesis and ShY, the word used for the Egyptians seeing Sarai is "וַיִּרְאוּ.".

Giving Abram a special word (יִבְט) to see Sarai suggests that he sees her beauty in a different, deeper way.

⁶ וַיִּהְיוּ הָרְגֵלִי connotes a sense of wandering or walking around, without a destination in mind. ShY paints a picture of a couple out for a waterfront stroll.

⁷ The idea that the Egyptians are immoral can be found in numerous places, see Midrash Tanhuma Lech L'cha 5; Ginsberg Legends of the Jews I 222)

⁸ Note the use of the common plural, “וְנַחֲיָהּ וְלֹא נִמּוּת.” This change from the biblical text presents Abram more humanely, concerned with the well-being of himself, as well as his wife.

⁹ While other traditions maintain that Abram and Sarai, were in fact, half-siblings (See Jubilees 12:10) ShY casts Sarai as a distant niece. We are introduced to Sarai as the daughter of Terach, Abram’s eldest brother, when Abram was ten years-old. According to ShY, Sarai had a sister as well, named Milca. The text avoids some insinuations of impropriety, maintaining that Sarai and Abram did not grow up in the same house, Abram instead living with Noah and Shem. (Dan, 66) Later, Nachor and Abram both marry their brother’s daughters, which is consistent with the biblical text. (Gen 11:29; Dan, 81) ShY includes no mention of Iscah, who is mentioned in Genesis and the rabbis later identify as Sarai, but comes to the same conclusion, that Abram married his brother’s daughter. (BT Sanhedrin 69b, Targum Yonatan 11:29) One Islamic tradition suggests that Abram said, “‘She is my sister,’ having in mind his sister in religion.” (al-Qummi 1:332.3) This stems from a prevalent theme in Islam, that “Abraham and Sarah are the only believers (Muslims) on earth. As fellow Muslims, they are indeed siblings in a religious sense, despite the fact that they are in no way biologically related.” (Firestone, 1991 204)

ויצו אברם גם לכל האנשים אשר באו אתו מצרימה מפני הרעב וגם אל לוט¹⁰ בן אחיו צוה לאמר: כי ישאלו אתכם המצריים אל שרה¹¹ ואמרת¹²: אחות אברם היא. ובכל זאת לא בטח אברם בהם¹³ ברברים האלה, אך לקח את שרי ויתנה בתיבה ויסתירנה תחת הכלים אשר להם, כי ירא מאד אל שרי מפני רעת המצריים.

And Abram also commanded all the people that came with him to Egypt because of the famine, and Lot, his nephew, saying: If the Egyptians ask all about Sarai, you should say: She is Abram's sister. Nevertheless, Abram did not trust them in these matters, so he took Sarai and put her in a chest and hid her underneath the vessels they had, for he was very afraid for Sarai because of the evil of the Egyptians.

ויקם אברם וכל אשר אתו¹⁴ מנחל מצרים ויבואו מצרימה. המה באו בשערי העיר וכל שוערי העיר עמדו עליהם לאמר: תנו מעשר המלך על אשר בידכם ואחר תבואו העירה. ויעש אברם והאנשים אשר אתו כן. ויבוא אברם והאנשים אשר אתו מצרים, ויהי בבואם וישאו את התיבה אשר שרי בתוכה, ויראו המצרים את התיבה. ויגשו כל עבדי המלך אל אברם לאמר: מה יש אתך בתיבה הזאת אשר לא ראינו, עתה פתח נא את התיבה ונתת את מעשר המלך מכל אשר בתוכה.

And Abram and all that were with him arose from the river of Egypt and came into Egypt. They entered the gates of the city and all the city's guards stood before them, saying: Give us the King's tithe for that which you possess and then you may enter the city. And Abram did so, and the people that were with him did so. And Abram and the who people came with him to Egypt were carrying the chest that Sarai was inside of, and the Egyptians saw the chest. All the servants of the King approached Abram, saying: What do you have in this chest that you didn't show us? Now, please, open the chest and give us the King's tithe for everything within it.

ויאמר אברם: התיבה הזאת לא אפתח, אך כל אשר תאמרו אלי אתן עליה¹⁵. ויענו שרי פרעה¹⁶ את אברם לאמר: תיבת אבני שוהם ובדולח היא, תנה לנו את מעשרה. ויאמר אברם: כל אשר תאמרו אלי אתן, רק פתוח לא תפתחו¹⁷ את התיבה.

And Abram said: I will not open this chest, but, for it, I will give you anything you say. And Pharaoh's ministers answered Abram, saying: The chest is onyx stone and crystal, give us its' tithe. Abram said: I will give you anything you say; just do not open the chest.

The motif of hiding a woman in a box in order to keep her safe and chaste is a common tale type both internal and external to Jewish literature. Genesis Rabbah puts both Sarai and Dinah in a box for their protection. (BR 40:5, 76:4) While in the Tanhuma text, Abram discusses this plan with Sarai, Genesis Rabbah insinuates that this was done without Sarai's knowledge or consent. (Midrash Tanhuma Lech L'cha 5)

A similar legend is found in Islam, written by al-Qummi, an early tenth-century Shi'ite commentator. In this version of the legend, Pharaoh is replaced by Nimrod, who also plays an adversarial role in ShY, and Abraham is leaving the foreign land rather than entering. Although a few of these details differ, the structure and content closely parallels the midrashic tradition:

Nimrod made a proclamation throughout the land to forbid Abraham from living in any settled areas. [As] Abraham passed by-Nimrod's governors, any of them could take a tenth of his possessions. Sarah, at this time, was with Abraham [hidden] in a box. [One of Nimrod's men] took a tenth of Abraham's possessions and then came to the box. He said, 'You must open it!' Abraham said, 'Reckon whatever you desire [of its contents] and take a tenth.' But he said, 'You must open it!'...¹⁸

The narrative as presented in ShY appears to be fusion of both the Islamic and Jewish traditions. In both Genesis Rabbah and Midrash Tanhuma, the tax-collectors hustle Abram when assessing the unknown contents of the chest, repeatedly increasing the quality of the presumed items inside. Both ShY and al-Qummi omit this detail, although ShY does reappropriate one detail from Genesis Rabbah, the image of precious stones. Instead of being the alleged contents, ShY constructs the chest itself out of onyx and crystal, a feature not found in other parallel texts, but perhaps an allusion to the earlier midrash. Furthermore, ShY is the only sampled text which has Abram hiding Sarai within the chest as well as hiding the chest itself.

These added details create an important literary effect. One might imagine the scene, a glistening box hidden underneath vessels, just waiting to be discovered. The reader waits anxiously as Abram's attempt to deceive the gatekeepers by hiding such a conspicuous item inevitably fails. Abram's botched deception raises skepticism among Pharaoh's ministers, and allows them to assume that such a beautiful chest must be protecting equally precious items. The radiant exterior of the chest is surpassed only by its' content, Sarai, whose beauty is discussed at length in the following section.

¹⁰ This is the first explicit mention of Lot in this chapter, filling in a gap in the biblical text. In both the ShY and Genesis narratives, Lot leaves Haran with Abram, and accompanies them into Canaan. However, Genesis 13:1 comments that Lot left Egypt with Abram, but never states that he entered Egypt with Abram and Sarai. Including him here makes explicit the assumption that he continued to travel in Abram's party, filling in that textual gap. However, this inclusion has a narrative function as well. As Lot plays an important role in the later part of this chapter, he is included in our cast of characters from the start.

¹¹ Yosef Dan's edition of Sefer haYashar indicates a discrepancy in the manuscript, which here names שרה instead of שרי. As I see no exegetical impact of rendering the text Sarah versus Sarai, I have chosen to render it as Sarai until the name change.

¹² In Abram's request to Sarai, ShY mirrors the language of Genesis 12:13: "אמרי נא- Please say."

When speaking to Lot and the others, ShY does not include "נא," suggesting that while Abram asked Sarai, he ordered the others. This is yet another indication of Abram's special regard for Sarai.

¹³ The parallel form in Abram's request to Sarai, and Abram's request to Lot and the others suggests that Sarai is included in "לא בטח אברם בהם." Why does Abram mistrust Sarai and the others? Ultimately, the result is the same, as we will soon see.

¹⁴ This mirrors the biblical text, which only mentions Abram entering Egypt. Bereshit Rabbah asks, "But where was Sarah?" Filling in this gap, several narratives place Sarai inside the chest, and therefore alongside Abram, but not listed. (Gen. Rabbah 40:5; in Tanhuma, Lekh Lekha 5)

¹⁵ Abram's language here is suggestive. "עליה" here has a double meaning, "for it," meaning for the price of the chest, and "on her," for Sarai.

¹⁶ The titles "Pharaoh" and "King" are used interchangeably, allowing the ancient biblical story to speak to ShY's contemporary readers.

¹⁷ The doubling of the verb here reflects a device in biblical grammar, used to add emphasis.

¹⁸ al-Qummi 1:332.3, as translated by Reuven Firestone in “Difficulties in Keeping a Beautiful Wife: The Legend of Abraham and Sarah in Jewish and Islamic Tradition. *Journal of Jewish Studies*. October 1991.

ויאיצו כל שרי המלך באברם ויגשו אל התיבה ויפתחו את התיבה בחזקה, ויראו והנה אשה יפת תאר מאד¹⁹ בתיבה. ויהי כראות שרי המלך את שדי ויתמהו מאד מיפיה, ויתקבצו יחד כל השרים וכל עבדי פרעה לראות את שרה כי יפה היא מאד. וירוצו שרי המלך ויגידו אל פרעה את כל הדברים אשר ראו, ויהללו את שרי אל המלך, וישלח פרעה ויקחה, ותבוא האשה לפני המלך²⁰. וירא פרעה את שרי וטיטב מאד בעיניו ויתמה מאד מיפיה, וישמח המלך²¹ בה מאד ויתן מתנות לכל המבשרים אותו בה.²² ותקח האשה בית פרעה.

And all the ministers of the King pressed Abram and approached the chest and they opened the chest forcefully, and they saw, behold, a very beautiful woman was in the chest. And when the ministers of the King saw Sarai and were astonished by her beauty, they all gathered together, all the ministers, and all the servants of Pharaoh to see Sarai, because she was incredibly beautiful. And the ministers of the King ran and told Pharaoh everything that they had seen, and they praised Sarai to the King. Pharaoh sent for her and took her, and the woman came before the King. Pharaoh saw Sarai, and she was very pleasing in his eyes, and he was very astonished by her beauty, and the King rejoiced in her and gave gifts to everyone who brought the good news of her to him. And the woman was taken into the house of Pharaoh.

Genesis 12:14-15

וַיְהִי כִּבּוֹא אַבְרָם מִצְרָיִם וַיֵּרְאוּ הַמִּצְרִיִּם אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה כִּי־יָפָה הִוא מְאֹד: וַיֵּרְאוּ אֹתָהּ שְׂרֵי פַרְעֹה וַיְהַלְלוּ אֹתָהּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וַתִּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה בֵּית פַּרְעֹה:

When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw how very beautiful the woman was. Pharaoh's courtiers saw her and praised her to Pharaoh, and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's palace.

The moment at the city gates mirrors the scene at the river. Just as Abram is amazed by the beauty of his wife, so too, are the Egyptians. Sarai's beauty is astounding. According to Genesis Rabbah, when the chest containing Sarai was opened, the entirety of Egypt was illuminated. (BR 40:5) Tanhuma uses similar language when Abram and Sarai are at the river, when Abram notices that Sarai's reflection was "כְּחֶמֶה זֹרְחֶת"-like the radiance of the sun," and then repeats the same phrase when the chest is open.²³

Sarai's beauty is well known in the textual tradition, mentioned in both Jewish and Islamic sources. Some sources suggest that her beauty stands out compared to the

other women around her, as the Egyptians are “swarthy and ugly.” (BR 40:4) Rashi suggests a racial dimension, describing the Egyptians as “שחורים ומכוערים-black and ugly people,” who are therefore unaccustomed to beautiful women.

Other interpretations assert a more universal, eternal beauty. Genesis Rabbah declares that she was more beautiful than Eve, and Midrash Tanhuma claims that “any woman compared to Sarah was like a monkey in comparison to a human.” Genesis Apocryphon proclaims:

How irresistible and beautiful is the image of her face; how lovely her forehead and soft the hair of her head! How graceful are her eyes, and how precious her nose; Every feature of her face is radiating beauty. How lovely is her breast, and how beautiful her white complexion! As for her arms, how beautiful they are! And her hands, how perfect they are! Every view of her hands is stimulating! How graceful are her palms, and how long and thin all the fingers of her hands! Her feet are of such beauty and her legs so perfectly apportioned! There is no a virgin or bride who enters the bridal chamber more beautiful than her. Here beauty surpasses that of all women, since the height of her beauty soars above them all! And alongside all this beauty she possesses great wisdom. Everything about her is just right!²⁴

Again, we see in Genesis Apocryphon a link to whiteness and beauty. Although problematic for the contemporary reader, the image of Sarai’s beauty as luminescent is a powerful literary theme throughout the various texts. The Apocryphon text also introduces a new element, Sarai’s wisdom. Philo writes that Sarai was “distinguished greatly for her goodness of soul and beauty of body, in which she surpassed all the women of her time.”²⁵

The description of Sarai in ShY is not as extensive as these other midrashim, but read alongside these earlier traditions, we can understand why ShY emphasizes Sarai’s beauty. Rather than an extensive description, the bejeweled chest serves as the emblem of Sarai’s own radiance. By using this symbol, ShY achieves several aims. First, the

sparkling chest provides a literary device, building thematically to the point when the chest will inevitably be discovered. Second, ShY incorporates the midrashic and folkloric motif of a woman's beauty as illuminative. While it does not state this outright, the dazzling crystal and onyx of the chest suggests a similar radiance. Lastly, unlike the other narratives, Sarai's beauty is striking, but not superhuman. The humanity of her character will come to serve as an important theme in later sections.

¹⁹ ShY both quotes and expands the verses from Genesis 12. By retaining the biblical language, ShY emphasizes Sarai's objectification. Now an object to be acquired, Sarai's label changes, referred to for the first time in ShY as "the woman," rather than by her name. By adding the word "תארה-appearance," the text further emphasizes Sarai's beauty, and implies that the Egyptians only "ראה.ה.ר-see" Sarai for her external beauty. This understanding is underscored in Genesis Rabbah, where the ministers compete in a bidding war in order to win the chance to take Sarai to Pharaoh. (BR 40:5) The Tanhuma sees Sarai as a sexual object, only someone like Pharaoh is worthy of using such beauty. The text employs the phrase "לְהַשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בָּהּ," a euphemism for sex. (Midrash Tanhuma Lech L'cha 5)

²⁰ In the biblical account, only the ministers praise Sarai's beauty. By including Pharaoh's own reaction here, Sarai's beauty is further highlighted, astounding even a ruler presumably accustomed to beautiful things.

²¹ The extent of Pharaoh's joy will be juxtaposed against his fear and disappointment in the following section.

²² This foreshadows the gifts that Abram will be given for taking Sarai away the subsequent section.

²³ Midrash Tanhuma Lech L'cha 5

²⁴ Genesis Apocryphon

²⁵ Philo, as quoted by Vermes, Scripture and Tradition

בימים ההם ויחר לאברם מאד על אודות אשתו ויתפלל אל ה' להצילה מיד פרעה.

In those days, Abram was very upset because of his wife and he prayed to the Eternal to save her from the hand of Pharaoh.

Most striking about this section is its emotionality, offering portraits of human, sympathetic characters. This addition to the biblical narrative highlights an important goal of ShY, and narrative midrash more generally, which seek to humanize our biblical characters. Commentators and sages have long been concerned with the problematic portrait of Abram in Genesis 12, who seems to benefit from Sarai's suffering without any concern for her wellbeing. This stands in contrast to his concern for Ishmael, who, when asked to exile his son, responds emotionally in Genesis 21:11. ShY rectifies this discrepancy by adapting that verse for this event:

Genesis 21:11 Text	Sefer haYashar Text
<p>וַיַּרְע הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּעֵינֵי אַבְרָהָם עַל אֹדוֹת בְּנֹוֹ:</p> <p>The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his.</p>	<p>בימים ההם ויחר לאברם מאד על אודות אשתו</p> <p>In those days, Abram was very upset because of his wife.</p>

Sarai's capture leads to Abram's distress. This emotional response is found in other midrashim as well. Some suggest he cries, others imagine that he prayed as well.²⁶

²⁷ The account in Genesis Apocryphon illustrates a distraught man:

And I, Abram, wept aloud that night, I and my nephew Lot, because Sarai had been taken from me by force. I prayed that night and I begged and asked for mercy, and I said in my sorrow while my tears ran down: "Blessed are you, O Most High God, Ruler of all the worlds, You who are Ruler and King of all things who rules over all the kings of the earth and judges them all! I cry now before you, my Lord, against Pharaoh of Zoan, king of Egypt, for my wife who has been taken from me by force. Judge him for me that I may see your mighty hand raised against him and against all his household, and that he may not be able to defile my wife this night and that they may know

you, my Lord, that you are Lord of all the kings of the earth.” And I wept and was sorrowful.²⁸

In Midrash Tanhuma, Abram also cries and prays, but his prayer is more critical than praising:

When Abraham saw this, he began to weep, and to supplicate the Holy One, blessed be He: “Master of the Universe, is this to be my reward for my abiding faith in You? For the sake of Your compassion and Your loving-kindness, do not put my trust in You to shame.”²⁹

While both traditions portray Abram as emotional and troubled, his concern seems to be more for himself than Sarai. In Genesis Apocryphon, he prays that Pharaoh is unable to “defile” Sarai, which ultimately makes her unfit for Abram. In Tanhuma, Abram suggests that Sarai’s capture is a punishment for *him*!

ShY does not include the words of Abram’s prayer, only the content. However, the language of our text suggests both an emotional response from Abram as well as a selfless prayer for her to be saved. This is a unique addition to the midrashic tradition. In the Torah, Abram never prays for Sarai, even when she is barren. Isaac, however, *does* pray for Rebecca:

Genesis 25:21

וַיַּעֲתֵר יִצְחָק לַיהוָה לְנִכְחַ אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עָקְרָה הָיָא...

Isaac pleaded with the Eternal on behalf of his wife, because she was barren...

Midrash Chad Shenati, an early medieval midrash collection discovered in the Cairo Geniza uniquely criticizes Abram’s cold behavior³⁰:

Come and see! The conduct of Isaac is not like the conduct of Abraham, for Abraham’s wife was barren for many years, and he did not plead for mercy on her behalf. But when our forefather Isaac saw the matter, he began to plead for mercy on her behalf.³¹

Although no other textual parallel exists, a discomfort with Abraham's lack of prayer can be found in Tanhuma (Buber).

[Rachel] said to [Jacob]: "Thus did Isaac your father do for Rebecca your mother; did the two of them not stand and pray opposite one another, as it is written, 'Isaac pleaded with the Lord on behalf of his wife,' (Gen 25:21), so should you pray for me to God. And did Abraham your grandfather not do [the same] for Sarah?"³²

This text similarly criticizes a patriarch, Jacob instead of Abraham. Here, however, Jacob's lack of prayer is unique among his fathers. Although there is no biblical support for the claim, this midrash indicates that Abraham, too, prayed for Sarah.

ShY includes this contradiction. Rebecca entreats Isaac to pray for her to have a child. She says to him:

My lord, truly, I heard that Sarah, my mother, was also barren in her days, until my lord Abraham, your father prayed for her, and she conceived with him? Now, you will also stand and pray to God, and God will hear your prayer and remember us for the sake of God's kindness.³³

However, ShY includes no such prayer from Abraham on account of Sarah's barrenness.

In fact, Sarah's criticism of Abram for not praying for her is found later in this chapter.

However, the mention of his prayer for her in this moment makes it more plausible that he prays for her later.

²⁶ See Genesis Apocryphon (IQapGen, IQ20); Tanhuma Lech L'cha 5; Tanhuma Buber Lech L'cha 8; Legends of the Jews 1: 5 97

²⁷ Abram also prays for Sarai in Hadith literature. See al-Tabari 2:268

²⁸ Genesis Apocryphon (IQapGen, IQ20)

²⁹ Tanhuma Lech L'cha 5

³⁰ Shana Strauch-Schick and Moshe Lavee, *מדורי הגניזה, A Monogamous Isaac Prays for his Barren Wife*. <http://thetorah.com/a-monogamous-isaac-prays-for-his-barren-wife/>

³¹ Midrash Chad Shenati, Toldot

³² Tanhuma Buber, Vayezei 19

³³ ShY, 11

ותתפלל גם שרי בעת ההיא ותאמר: ה' אלהים, אתה אמרת לאדוני אברם ללכת מארצו ומבית אביו ארצה כנען ותבטיחהו להיטיב לו וכי יעשה את דבריך. עתה הנה עשינו את אשר צויתנו ונעזוב את ארצנו ואת משפחתנו ונלך אל ארץ נכריה ואל עם אשר לא ידענו תמול שלשום. ונבוא בארץ הזאת להציל את בתינו מן הרעב, ויבוא עלי הפגע והמקרה הרע הזה. ועתה ה' אלהים הצילני נא והושיעני מיד הצר הצורר הזה, ועשה אתי טובה למען חסדך.

And Sarai also prayed in that time, and she said: Eternal God, You told my master Abram to go from his land and the house of his father, to the land of Canaan, and promised to be good be toward him, if he acts according to your word. And now, behold, we have done what You commanded us and we left our land and our families, and we went to a foreign land and to people we did not know heretofore. And we came into this land to save our house from the famine, and this misfortune and evil occurrence was brought on me. And now, Eternal God, please save me, and free me from the hand of this enemy oppressor, and treat me with goodness for the sake of Your grace.

Although the mention of Abram's prayer is notable, it is the detailed supplication of Sarai that is most striking. She both beseeches and criticizes God, calling him out for not holding up his end of the covenant. Her prayer is rooted in a rich textual tradition, appearing first in Genesis Rabbah.³⁴ In captivity, she cries out to God in anger:

And the whole of that night Sarah lay prostrate on her face, praying, "Sovereign of the Universe! Abraham went forth on your Promise, and I went forth with faith; yet Abraham is outside this prison while I am inside it!"³⁵

Tanhuma Buber expands on the language of Genesis Rabbah:

Sarah also said, Sovereign of the World, Abraham came with you in trust, since you had said to him (in Gen 12:3): "I will bless those who bless you." Now I did not know anything except that, when he told me that you had said to him (in Gen. 12:1): "Go," I believed your words. But now, I have been left isolated from my father, my mother, and my husband, and this wicked man has come to mistreat me. Abraham had acted because of your great name and because of our trust in Your words.³⁶

In these classical midrashim, Sarai declares her captivity to be particularly unjust. Whereas Abram required a promise to heed God's call, Sarai had no such promise and still went forward in faith. Despite her honorable deed, she has been taken captive alone. Yet Abram and Sarai were meant to be in covenant together, indicated by the line "because of our trust." Notably, this last line is different in Tanhuma. Sarai prays, "Act for the sake of Your great name, and because of my trust in Your word."³⁷ Here, Sarai is an independent agent, imploring God to act because of her faith, and not Abram's actions.

ShY includes elements from each of these midrashic traditions. Similarly, she begins by harkening back to God's call to Abram in Lech L'cha:

ShY Text	Genesis 12:1 Text
<p>אתה אמרת לאדוני אברם ללכת מארצו ומבית אביו</p> <p>You told my Master Abram to go from his land and the house of his father</p>	<p>וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ־לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ־ךָ וּמִמּוֹלֶדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ</p> <p>The Eternal said to Abram, Go forth from your land, your birthplace, your father's house.</p>
<p>ארצה כנען</p> <p>to the land of Caanan,</p>	<p>אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה:</p> <p>to the land that I will show you.</p>
<p>ותבטיחהו להיטיב לו וכי יעשה את דברך.</p> <p>and promised him to good be toward him, if acts according to your word.</p>	<p>וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְךָ גֹּדוֹל וְאַבְרָכָה וְאֶגְדָּלָה שְׁמִי וְהָיָה בְרָכָה:</p> <p>I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and it shall be a blessing.</p>

Beautifully, she then transforms the language of Lech L'cha to include herself in the call:

ShY Text	Genesis 12:1 Text
<p>עֲתָה הִנֵּה עָשִׂינוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָנוּ And now, behold, we have done what You commanded us</p>	
<p>וַנֵּעֲזֹב אֶת אֶרְצָנוּ וְאֶת מִשְׁפַּחֲחֵינוּ וְנָלַךְ and we left our land and our families, and we went</p>	<p>וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם לֵךְ-לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלֶדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ The Eternal said to Abram, Go forth from your land, your birthplace, your father's house</p>
<p>אֶרֶצָה כְּנָעַן אֶל אֶרֶץ נִכְרִיָּה וְאֵל עַם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַעְנוּ תְּמוּל שְׁלוֹמוֹ. to a foreign land and to people we did not know heretofore.</p>	<p>אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה: to the land that I will show you.</p>

Unlike the classical midrashim, Sarai does not seem to indicate that she is any more worthy or faithful than Abram. She simply includes her own journey and sacrifices alongside Abram's. Her approach creates a logical request to God: If Sarai was included in the command and promises from God, and she did what was requested of her, then she also should also receive benefit from God. She shouldn't, however, be imprisoned. Having made her case, Sarai stands alone before God, and asks to be rescued. In this final section of her prayer, there is no mention of Abram or request for his benefit.

This prayer is the first time we hear Sarai's voice in ShY. Through her prayer, she moves from a passive to an active character. Although silenced during her capture, she is now portrayed as a powerful self-advocate.

The text says something profound about the nature of women's prayers. Hagar and Hannah are often credited as the rabbinic paradigm for praying. ShY instead credits Sarai with the original prayer. While Abram's prayer is mentioned but not detailed, Sarai's supplication is included in full. This seems to indicate that Sarai's prayer has

more power or influence. As discussed in the following section, ultimately God hears Sarai's prayer and intervenes on her behalf.

³⁴ See also Legends of the Jews 1: 5 97

³⁵ Genesis Rabbah 41:2

³⁶ Tanhuma Buber, Lech L'cha 8

³⁷ In Tanhuma Lech L'cha 5

וישמע ה' בקול שרי וישלח ה' מלאך להציל את שרי מיד פרעה. והמלך בא וישב לפני שרי והנה מלאך ה' עומד עליהם, וירא אל שרי ויאמר אליה: אל תירא כי שמע ה' את תפלתך. ויגש המלך אל שרי ויאמר אליה: האיש אשר הביאך הנה, מה הוא לך? ותאמר: אחי הוא. ויאמר המלך: עלינו לגדלו ולנשאו מאד לעשות לו בכל הטוב אשר תצוה אתה עלינו. וישלח המלך לאברם בעת ההיא כסף וזהב ואבני שהם ובדולה הרבה מאד וצאן ובקד ועבדים ושפחות. ויצו המלך ויביאו את אברם, וישב בחצר בית המלך. ויגדל המלך את אברם כלילה ההוא מאד.

And the Eternal heard the cry of Sarai, and sent an angel to save Sarai from the hand of Pharaoh. And the King came and sat before Sarai, and behold, an Angel of the Eternal stood before them, and he saw Sarai and said to her: "Do not fear, for the Eternal heard your prayer." And the King approached Sarai and said to her: "The man who brought you here, who is he to you?" She said: "He is my brother." And the King said: We must advance him, and elevate him, and enrich him with goodness in any way that you command. And at this time, the King sent to Abram silver and gold and onyx stones and much crystal³⁸ and sheep and cattle and [male] slaves and maidservants. And the King commanded that Abram be brought to him, and he sat in the courtyard of the palace. And the King elevated him that very night.

Genesis 12:16

וְלִאֲבֶרֶם הֵיטִיב בְּעֵבוֹרָהּ וַיְהִי־לּוֹ צֹאן־וּבָקָר וְחֲמֹרִים וְעֶבְדִּים וְשִׁפְחוֹת וְאַתְנַת וְגַמְלִים:

And because of her, it went well with Abram; he acquired sheep, oxen, asses, male and maidservants, she-asses, and camels.

Genesis states that God's intervention (discussed in the following section) is "עַל־דִּבְרֵי שָׂרַי." This phrase is most often translated as "on account of Sarai," but the word "דִּבְרֵי" speaks—alludes to the midrashic tradition of Sarai praying discussed in the earlier section.³⁹ However, no such prayer is included in Genesis.

In ShY, as well as other midrashim, God's intercession is a direct result of Sarai's prayer. Although both Abram and Sarai pray, it is Sarai's supplications that are heard by God. Both the language and the method of help seem parallel the biblical narrative of Hagar. Twice God sends an angel to rescue Hagar. Both events are precipitated by God hearing Hagar's troubles:

Genesis 16:11	Genesis 21:17
כִּי־שָׁמַע יְהוָה אֶל־עֲנִיָּהּ:	וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת־קוֹל הַנֶּעֱרָ... כִּי־שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶל־קוֹל הַנֶּעֱרָ
For the Eternal has heard your suffering.	God heard the cry of the boy... For God has heard the cry of the boy

The words of the angel are parallel as well:

ShY Text	Genesis 21:17
וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' בְּקוֹל שָׂרַי וַיִּשְׁלַח ה' מַלְאָךְ לְהַצִּיל אֶת שָׂרַי מִיַּד פַּרְעֹה.... וַיֵּרָא אֶל שָׂרַי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ: אַל תִּירָא כִּי שָׁמַע ה' אֶת תַּפְלִתְךָ. And the Eternal heard the cry of Sarai, and sent an angel to save Sarai from the hand of Pharaoh....and he saw Sarai and said to her: "Fear not, for the Eternal heard your prayer."	...וַיִּקְרָא מַלְאָךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶל־הַגֵּר מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מִה־לָּךְ הַגֵּר אֶל־תִּירָאִי כִּי־שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶל־קוֹל הַנֶּעֱרָ בְּאֶשְׁרָהּ הוּא־שָׁם: ...and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the cry of the boy where he is.

This text serves to further link these two women, whose lives become linked without their consent.

³⁸ Note that Pharaoh's gift includes onyx and crystal. If, as discussed in the earlier section, these stones are a symbol for Sarai's radiance, perhaps these stones are meant to replace what Abram lost.

³⁹ Genesis Rabbah 41:2

והמלך נגש לדבר את שרי, וישלח ידו לגעת אליה ויכהו המלאך מכה רבת וינהל ויחדל מגעת אליה. ויהי כאשר קרב המלך אל שרי והכהו המלאך על הארץ, ויעש לו כמעשה הזה כל הלילה. וינהל ויחרד המלך מזה. רגם כל עבדי פרעה וכל ביתו הכת המלאך בלילה ההוא מכה רבה על דבר שרי, ותהי צעקה גדולה בכל אנשי בית פרעה בלילה ההוא. וירא פרעה את כל הרעה הבאה עליו ויאמר: אך הנה על האשה הזאת בא אלי הדבר הזה, ויתרחק ממנה וידבר על לבה דברים טובים.

And the King went to approach Sarai, and reached out his hand to touch her and the angel struck his hand with a mighty hit and he was frightened, and he desisted from touching her. And when the King came close to Sarai, the angel struck him to the ground, and did this to him all night long. And the King was terrified and fearful from this. The angel struck all the servants of Pharaoh and his whole household a great blow that night on account of Sarai's word⁴⁰, and there was a great cry in all of the people of Pharaoh's house that night. And Pharaoh saw all of the evil that had come upon him and said: Surely, on account of this woman this came upon me, and he distanced himself from her and spoke nice words to her.

Genesis 12:17

וַיִּנָּגַע יְהוָה אֶת־פַּרְעֹה וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶת־דְּבָרֵי שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲבָרָם:

But the Eternal afflicted Pharaoh and his household with mighty plagues on account of Sarai, the wife of Abram.

Sarai's prayer has power, bringing the help of an angel, who keeps Pharaoh from touching her. This angelic figure appears in Genesis Rabbah and the Tanhuma midrashim. Although in each of the texts the angel serves to protect Sarai, in the classical texts, the angel acts according to Sarai's commands, striking Pharaoh on demand. Still of paramount concern is Sarai's chastity. These midrashim place the angel between Pharaoh and Sarai, striking him even if he tried to touch just her shoe.⁴¹

Although it does not include an angelic aid, the Islamic tradition closely parallels our own, as it connects Sarai's prayer with her protection. She is depicted as devout, praying in the Islamic manner, and then adding:

O God, You know that I am a believer in You and in Your Apostle. I have been chaste to all but my husband. Do not let this infidel overcome me!⁴²

In other Islamic interpretations, whenever Pharaoh tries to touch Sarai, his arm becomes paralyzed or withered. Pharaoh, seemingly aware of Sarai's "power" begs her to pray to God to release him.⁴³

ShY includes both the angel striking Pharaoh as well as the plagues mentioned in Genesis 12:17 and other midrashic accounts. Certainly, striking Pharaoh and his household with plagues calls to mind the Exodus narrative. The parallels are remarkable: Sarai and B'nai Yisrael call out to God, God sends an angel and plagues to effect their freedom. Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer further extends the parallel, stating that the night that Sarai was taken into Pharaoh's house was Erev Pesach. PRE indicates that the plagues were meant as a sign of the future plagues that would strike Egypt.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ The translation here is meant to emphasize the ambiguity of the biblical text alongside the Midrashic reading. Is it that Pharaoh is struck simply on account of Sarah, or because of her prayer, i.e. her words?

⁴¹ Genesis Rabbah 41:2; Tanhuma Buber, Lech L'cha 8; Tanhuma Lech L'cha 5

⁴² Ibn Hanbal 2:403; al-Bukhari 3:231, 9:67; Ibn Kathir 216-17 (cited in Firestone)

⁴³ al-Tabari 2: 267

⁴⁴ Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer

ויאמר המלך אל שרי : הגד נא לי אודות האיש אשר באת עמו הנה. ותאמר שרי: האיש ההוא אישי הוא, ואומרה אליך אחי הוא כי יראתי פן תמיתוהו ברעתכם. ויחדל המלך מעל שרי ויחדלו ממנו ומביתו מכות מלאך ה', וידע פרעה כי בעבור שרי הוכה, ויתמה המלך מאד מזה.

And the King said to Sarai: Tell me, please, about the man that you came with here. And Sarai said: The man, he is my husband. And I told you he is my brother because I feared lest you would kill him in your wickedness. And the king desisted from Sarai, and the afflictions from the angel of God ceased from him and from his house, and Pharaoh knew that it was because of Sarai that he had been afflicted, and the king was very astonished by this.⁴⁵

ויהי בבקר ויקרא המלך לאברם ויאמר: מה זאת עשית לי, למה אמרת אחותי היא, ואקח אותה לי לאשה ותביא עלי ועל ביתי מכה רבה מאד. עתה הנה אשתך קח ולך, לך⁴⁶ מארצנו פן נמות כולנו בעבורה.

And it came to pass in the morning, that the king called to Abram, saying: "What is this that you did to me; why did you say that she was your sister," so I took her as my wife and she brought upon me and all my house a very great affliction. And now, "Behold, take your wife and go," go from our land, lest we all die because of her.

ויקרא פרעה לאברם ויאמר מה-זאת עשית לי למה לא-הגדת לי כי אשתך היא: Pharaoh sent for Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me! Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?"

למה אמרת אחתי היא ואקח אתה לי לאשה ועתה הנה אשתך קח ולך: Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her as my wife? Now, here is your wife; take her and be gone!"

Despite attesting to the power of her prayer, it is not clear if ShY believes that it is Sarai's prayer that saves her, or that she is Abram's wife.

⁴⁵ Suddenly, he sees Sarah in a different way, beyond just the beauty that he saw before.

⁴⁶ Note the literary allusion to Lech L'cha. Just as Abram journeyed to Egypt after leaving home, he will now return to Canaan.

ויקח פרעה עוד צאן ובקר ועבדים ושפחות וכסף וזהב ויתן לאברם וישב לו את שרי אשתו. ויקח המלך גם את נערה אחת אשר לו אשר ילדה לו פילגשו ויתנה אל שרי לשפחה. ויאמר המלך אל בתו : טוב לך בתי אשר תתיה לשפחה בבית האשה הזאת מהיותך גבירה בביתי אחרי אשר ראינו את הרעה הבאה עלינו בעבור האשה הזאת .

And Pharaoh took more sheep, cattle, slaves, [male] slaves, maidservants, silver and gold, and he gave [them] to Abram, and returned Sarai, his wife to him. And the King also took a girl whom his concubine had borne to him, and gave her to Sarai as a handmaid. And the king said to his daughter: It is good for you, my daughter, that you will be a handmaid in this woman's house, rather than you being mistress in my house, after we have seen the evil that came upon us on account of this woman.

In Genesis, Abram and Sarai are simply escorted out of the land. ShY, and other midrashim include parting gifts. In the first round of gifts in our text, Abram is given: silver, gold, onyx, crystal, sheep, cattle, [male] slaves and maidservants. Upon leaving, Pharaoh gives Abram silver, gold, sheep, cattle, [male] slaves and maidservants. Only missing from this second round of gifts is the onyx and crystal. These precious stones symbolized Sarai. As Sarai has returned to her husband, he no longer needs the symbolic representation.

An additional gift, given to Sarai, is Pharaoh's daughter, who will later be known as Hagar. Genesis Apocryphon is the first to include this lineage of Sarai's handmaiden. In that narrative, the woman given to Sarai is simply named as "Hagar," no lineage is given.⁴⁷ Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, however, provides this important detail.

Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children; but she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar, a daughter of Pharaoh, whom he gave to her as maid when he took her and was smitten by a word from before the Lord.⁴⁸

Later, the conversation between Pharaoh and his daughter are added. Our text reflects Genesis Rabbah, which portrays Pharaoh as a caring father. He sees that his daughter has an opportunity to live a better life, and gives her to Sarai as a handmaid.

⁴⁷ Genesis Apocryphon, 1QapGen20:18

⁴⁸ Targum Pseudo Jonathan Genesis, translation by M.J. Maher

ויקם אברם ויעל ממצרים הוא וכל אשר לו, ויצו עליו פרעה אנשים וישלחו אותו ואת כל אשר לו. וישב אברם ארצה כנען אל מקום המזבח אשר עשה אשר נטה שם אהלו בתחילה.

And Abram arose and went up out of Egypt, himself and all that was his, and Pharaoh appointed men and they accompanied him, and all that was his. And Abram returned to the land of Canaan to the place of the altar⁴⁹ which he had made, there, where he had pitched his tent in the beginning.

Genesis 13:1

וַיַּעַל אַבְרָם מִמִּצְרַיִם הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וְלוֹט עִמּוֹ הַנֶּגֶבָה:

From Egypt, Abram went up into the Negev, with his wife and all that he possessed, together with Lot.

Genesis 13:3-4

וַיֵּלֶךְ לְמַסְעָיו מִנֶּגֶב וְעַד־בֵּית־אֵל עַד־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה שָׁם אֹהֶלָה [אֶהְלוֹ] בְּתַחֲלָה בֵּין בֵּית־אֵל וּבֵין הָעֵי: אֶל־מָקוֹם הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה שָׁם בְּרִאשֹׁנָה וַיִּקְרָא שָׁם אַבְרָם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה:

And he proceeded by stages from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been formerly, between Bethel and Ai, the site of the altar that he had built there at first; and there Abram invoked the LORD by name.

⁴⁹ PRE 31:1 names this site as Bethel, where Jacob later has his famous ladder dream.

וגם לוט בן הרן אחי אברם היה לו מקנה כבד צאן ובקר ואהלים, כי הטיב ה' לו בעבור אברם. ויהי כשבת אברם בארץ ויריבו רועי מקנה לוט עם רועי מקנה אברם, כי היה רכושם רב משבת בארץ ולא יכלה הארץ לשאת אותם מפני מקניהם. וגם כל רועי מקנה אברם כאשר ילכו לרעות לא יגעו בשדות אנשי הארץ, ורועי מקנה לוט לא כן יעשו כי יעזבום לרעות בשדות אנשי הארץ. ויראו אנשי הארץ את הדבר הזה יום יום, ויבואו אל אברם ויריבו עמו על אודות רועי מקנה לוט. ויאמר אברם אל לוט מה המעשה הזה אשר עשית לי להבאישני ביושבי הארץ אשר תצוה את רועי מקנך לרעות בשדות אחרים, הלא ידעת כי אני גר בארץ הזאת בתוך בני כנען ולמה תעשה להם זה. וירב אברם בלוט על הדבר הזה יום יום. ולא שמע לוט בקול אברם ויוסף לעשות כדבר הזה.

Lot, the son of Haran, Abram's brother, also had much livestock, sheep, cattle and tents, for God was good to him on account of Abram. And when Abram dwelled in the land the herdsmen of Lot's livestock and the herdsmen of Abram's livestock quarreled because their possessions were too great to dwell in the land and the land could not support them because of their livestock.

Also, when all of Abram's livestock went to graze, they would not touch the fields of the people of the land, but the herdsmen of Lot's livestock would not do this, for they left them to graze in the fields of the people of the land. And when the people of the land saw this day after day, they came to Abram and they quarreled with him about the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. Abram said to Lot, "What is this thing that you are doing to me, to defame me among the people of the land who command their herdsmen to graze in other fields! Don't you not know that I live in this land among Canaanites? Why do you do this do them?" And Abram quarreled with Lot about this matter every day, but Lot did not listen to Abram, and continued to act in this manner.

Genesis 13:5-7

וְגַם־לְלוֹט הָהוּא אֶת־אַבְרָם הָיָה צֹאן־וּבָקָר וְאֵהָלִים: וְלֹא־נָשָׂא אֹתָם הָאָרֶץ לְשִׁכְתָּ יִחְדּוּ כִּי־הָיָה רִכּוּשָׁם רָב וְלֹא יָכֻלוּ לְשִׁכְתָּ יִחְדּוּ: וַיְהִי־רִיב בֵּין רֹעֵי מִקְנֵה־אַבְרָם וּבֵין רֹעֵי מִקְנֵה־לוֹט וַהֲפִנְעֵנִי וַהֲפִרְזִי אֲזִי יָשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ:

Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support them staying together; for their possessions were so great that they could not remain together. And there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and those of Lot's cattle.—The Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land.

ויבואו יושבי הארץ ויגידו לאברם. ויאמר אברם אל לוט: עד מתי תהיה לי אתה למוקש עם יושבי הארץ, עתה אל תהי נא מריבה ביני וביניך כי אנשים אחים אנחנו. אך היפרד נא מעלי, לך נא ובחר לך מקום אשר תשב בו אתה ומקנך וכל אשר לך, אך רחק נא ואתה אל תירא כי תלך מאתי והיה אשר יעשה לך רעה ונקמתי ממנו, אך רחק נא מעלי. ויהי בדבר אברם אל לוט את כל הדברים האלה ויקם לוט וישא עיניו נגד ככר הירדן וירא את המקום ההוא כולו משקה וטוב לאדם ולמרעה והמקנה. וילך לוט מעם אברם אל המקום ההוא, ויט שם אהל, ויגר בסדום, ויפרדו איש מעל אחיו. ואברם ישב לו באלוני ממרא אשר בחברון ויט שם אהל, וישב אברם במקום ההוא ימים רבים ושנים.

And the people of the land came and told Abram. Abram said to Lot, “For how long will you be a snare with the people of the land for me? Now, please let there not be a quarrel between me and you, for we are brothers. But, you must separate from me, go please land choose for yourself a place that you may dwell in, for you, your livestock and all that is yours, but please, be far away, and do not fear that you will depart from me, for when evil comes to you, I will avenge you; but please, go far away from me! And after Abram to Lot all of these things, Lot arose and lifted his eyes to the Jordan Valley, and he saw that the place was fertile and good for humans and for pasture, and for livestock. And Lot went away from Abram to that place, and he put up his tent, and lived near to Sodom, and separated kinsmen. And Abram settled himself in the Terebinths of Mamre that were in Hebron, and he pitched his tent there, and Abram dwelled in that place for a long time.

Genesis 13:8-12

ויאמר אברם אל־לוט אל־נא תהי מריבה ביני וביניך ובין רעי ובין רעיך כִּי־אנשים אחים אנחנו: וישאל־לוט את־עיניו וירא את־כל־כפר הירדן כי כלה משקה לפני שחת יהוה את־סדום ואת־עמרה כגו־יהוה כארץ מצרים באֶבֶר צֶעֶר: ויבחר־לו לוט את כל־כפר הירדן ויסע לוט מקדם ויפרדו איש מעל אחיו: אברם ישב בארץ־כנען ולוט ישב בערי הכפר ויאהל עד־סדום:

Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, between my herdsmen and yours, for we are kinsmen. Lot looked about him and saw how well watered was the whole plain of the Jordan, all of it—this was before the LORD had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—all the way to Zoar, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt. So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they parted from each other; Abram remained in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the Plain, pitching his tents near Sodom.

The relationship between Abram and Lot is complex. His prominent role in Genesis, and particularly in ShY indicate that their relationship is deeper than that of a typical uncle and nephew. Abram uses the language of “brothers,” and emphasizes his loyalty to Lot. Genesis Rabbah explains that Abram calls Lot his brother because the two bear a striking resemblance.⁵⁰ Our interpretive tradition suggests that these two needed each other. Josephus suggests that, “Abram, having no son of his own, adopted Lot.”⁵¹ Bereishit Rabbah tells the story of Haran, Lot’s father’s death, incited by Abram’s monotheistic rebellion.⁵²

⁵⁰ Genesis Rabbah 41:6

⁵¹ The Antiquities of the Jews, Ch. 7

⁵² Genesis Rabbah 38:11

בעת ההיא שלח כדורלעמר מלך עילם אל כל המלכים אשר סביבותיו, אל נמרוד מלך שנער אשר היה תחת ידו ואל תדעל מלך גוים ואל אריוך מלך אלסר אשר כרת איתם ברית לאמור, עלו אליי ועזרו לי ונכה את כל ערי סדום ואת יושביה כי פשעו בי היום שלוש עשרה שנה. ויעלו ארבעה מלכים האלה עם כל מחניהם יחד כשמונה מאות אלף איש ויתהלכו כאשר הם, ויכו את כל האדם אשר מצאו על דרכם. ועל מלכי סדום ועמורה חמשת מלכיהם שנאב מלך אדמה ושמאכה מלך צבויים וברע מלך סדום וברשע [מלך עמורה]. עשרה שנה וילחמו תשעה מלכים האלה בעמק השדים.

At that time, the King Chedorlaomer of Elam sent to all the Kings that were around him, to Nimrod, King of Shinar that was subordinate to him, and to Tidal, King of Goiim and to Arioch of Ellasar, with whom he had made a covenant, saying "Come up to me and help me and we will smite the entire city of Sodom and its inhabitants, because they have rebelled against me for thirteen years. And these four kings went up, with all their camps together they were eight-hundred thousand men, and went where they were, and smote every person that they found on their way.

And the Kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, their five kings, Shinav, King of Admah, and Shemeber, King of Zeboiim, and Bera, King of Sodom, Birsha, King of Gomorrah. In the tenth year, these four kings went up with all their camps, and were together in the Valley of Siddim.

וינגפו כל מלכי סדום ועמורה לפני מלכי עילם. ועמק השדים מלא בארות בארות חמר וירדפו מלכי עילם את מלכי סדום, וינוסו כל מלכי סדום עם מחניהם ויפלו בבארות החמר וכל הנשארים עלו אל ההר להימלט.

ויבואו אחריהם חמשת מלכי עילם וירדפום עד שער סדום, ויקחו את כל אשר בסדום ויבזו את כל ערי סדום ועמורה. וגם את לוט בן אחי אברם לקחו אותו ואת רכושו, וישיבו את כל רכוש ערי סדום וילכו להם.

And these nine kings waged war in the Valley of Siddim, and all the Kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were smitten by the Kings of Elam. And the Valley of Siddim was filled with many bitumen pits, and the Kings of Elam pursued the Kings of Sodom, and the Kings of Sodom, with their camps, fled, and fell into the bitumen pits, and all those who remained went up to the mountain to escape.

The Five Kings of Elam came after them, and pursued them until the Gates of Sodom, and they took all that was in Sodom and plundered all of the cities of Sodom and Gommorah. They also took Lot, nephew of Abram, and his possessions, and they returned with all of the possessions of the cities of Sodom and went on their way.

ויבוא עוגי עבד אברם אשר היה במלחמה ההיא, ויגד לאברם את כל אשר עשו המלכים האלה אל ערי סדום ואת אשר נשבה לוט בן אחיו עמהם. וישמע אברם הדבר הזה, ויקם הוא והאנשים אשר איתו כשלוש מאות ושמונה עשר איש וירדוף אחרי ארבע המלכים האלה בלילה ההוא. וירדפם ויכם ויפלו כולם לפני אברם ולפני אנשיו, ולא נותר מהם איש כי אם ארבעה מלכים לבדם ברחו וילכו איש לדרכו. וישב אברהם את כל רכוש סדום וגם את לוט ורכושו השיב ונשיהם וטפם וכל אשר להם, לא נחסר דבר ללוט.

And Ogi⁵³, Abram's servant, who was present in this war, told Abram everything that these Kings did to the cities of Sodom, and that Lot, his nephew, was captured with them. When Abram heard this thing, he and the people that were with him, some three-hundred and eighteen men⁵⁴ pursued these four Kings on that night, and they all fell and he smote them, and they all fell before Abram and before his people, and none of the men survived, except for the four kings alone, and they fled, each man on his way. And Abram returned all of Sodom's possessions, and also Lot and his possessions he returned, and their wives, and their babies, and all that was theirs, and not a thing was lost to Lot.

ויהי בשובו מהכות את המלכים האלה, ויעבור הוא ואנשיו מעמק השדים אשר נלחמו שם כל המלכים. ויצא ברע מלך סדום ויתר אנשיו אשר אתו מבארות החמר, אשר נפלו שם לקראת אברם אנשיו עם אברם. וגם אדוניצדק מלך ירושלם הוא שם. ויצא עם אנשיו לקראת אברם ואנשיו בלחם ויין וישבו שם יחד בעמק המלך. ויברך אדוניצדק את אברם, ויתן לו אברם מעשר מכל אשר הביא משלל אויביו כי היה אדוניצדק כהן לפני אלוהים. ויגשו מלכי סדום ועמורה אשר היו שם, הם ועבדיהם אל אברם, ויתחננו אליו לאמר, לתת להם השבי אשר שבה מעבדיהם ולקחת לו את כל הרכוש.

And it came to pass, when he returned from smiting these kings, he and his men passed through the Valley of Siddim where the kings had fought. And Berah, King of Sodom and his men who remained that were in the bitumen pits, where they fell, went out to meet Abram and the men that were with Abram. Adonizedek, King of Jerusalem⁵⁵ was there. And he went out with his people to meet Abram and his men with bread and wine and they sat there together in the Valley of the King. And Adonizedek blessed Abram,

and Abram gave him a tenth of all that he brought from the spoil of his enemies, for Adonizedek was a priest before God. And the Kings of Sodom and Gomorrah who were there, they and their servants approached Abram, and they urged with him, saying: "Give them the captives which he captured from among their slaves, and let him take for himself all of their possessions."

ויען אברם את מלכי סדום לאמר: חי ה' אשר ברא את השמים ואת הארץ ואשר פדה נפשי מכל צרה ואשר הצילני מאויבי היום ויתנם בידי, אם אקח דבר מכל אשר לכם ולא תתהללו מחר לאמר מרכושינו אשר הציל אברם העשיר. כי ה' אלוהי אשר בטחתי בו דבר אלי לאמר: לא תחסר דבר כי ברך אברכך בכל מעשה ידיך אשר תעשה. עתה הנה כל אשר לכם, קחו ולכו⁵⁶, חי ה' לא אקח מכם מנפש ועד שרוך נעל ועד חוט זולתי אשר אכלו הנערים היוצאים אתי למלחמה, וגם חלק האנשים אשר הלכו עמי, ענר אשכול וממרא, הם ואנשיהם, וגם אשר ישבו על הכלים לשמור הם יקחו חלקם מהשלל. ויתנו מלכי סדום לאנשי אברם ככל אשר אמר ויפצרו בו לקחת הוא מכל אשר יבחר, ולא אבה. וישלח את מלכי סדום ואת יתר אנשיהם ויצום אל לוט, וילכו למקומם. וגם את לוט בן אחיו שלח עם כל קניינו, וילך עמהם. וישב לוט למקומו סדומה, ואברם ואנשיו שבו אל מקומם אל אלוני מורה אשר בחברון.

And Abram answered the Kings of Sodom, saying, "I swear by The Living God, who created the Heavens and the Earth, and who redeemed my soul from all my troubles, and who saved me from my enemies, and today, placed them in my hands: If I took anything from all that was yours, tomorrow will you not complain, saying: 'Abram became rich from our possessions that he saved?' For my God, in whom I trusted, spoke to me, saying, 'You will shall remove anything, for I will surely bless you in all the works of your hands which you do.' And now, behold, all that is yours, take it and go. By The Living God, I will not take from yours, not a person or even a shoelace or even a thread, other than that which the boys that went out with me to war ate, and also a portion of people who went with me, Anar, Eshkol, and Mamre,⁵⁷ they and their people, and also those who were in charge of the vessels to guard them, they will take their portions from the spoils. And the King of Sodom gave to the men of Abram all that Abram had said, and they pleaded with him to take all that he would choose, but he didn't desire. And he (Abram) sent the King of Sodom and the remaining people, and he commanded them to go to Lot, and they went to their place. Lot, Abram's nephew was sent with all he had acquired, and he went with them. And Lot settled in his place in Sodom. Abram returned to their place, to the Terebinths of Mamre that were in Hebron.

This long discursion serves to set up the events at Sodom and Gommorah which occur in the next chapter. However, although it explains how and when Lot arrived in Sodom, Genesis 13:12 already established Sodom as Lot's chosen dwelling place. Why then, is this included? It sets up a context of where Abram is located, the quality of person he is, and how he interacts with others.

⁵³ In Genesis 14:13, this person is named as “הֶפְלִיט-a fugitive.” Who is Ogi and why is he included here?

⁵⁴ See also GR 43:2; Numbers Rabbah 18:21; b. Ned. 32a, PRK 8:2; PRE 27

⁵⁵ Joshua 10:1-3 names Adonizedek as the King of Jerusalem. See also Genesis Rabbah 43:6.

⁵⁶ This phrase, “עַתָּה הִנֵּה כָּל אֲשֶׁר לָכֶם, קָחוּ וּלְכוּ” directly parallels Pharaoh's language in Genesis 12:18: “וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְּ קַח וְלֵךְ.” WHY?

⁵⁷ PRE identifies these three men as Abram's disciples. See PRE 32; Genesis Rabbah 43:9

בעת ההיא נראה ה' אל אברם עוד בחברון ויאמר אליו, אל תירא שכרך הרבה מאוד לפניי כי לא אעזבך כי אם הרביתי אותך ואברכך ושמתי את זרעך ככוכבי השמים אשר לא ימד ולא יספר. ונתתי לזרעך את כל הארצות אשר אתה רואה בעיניך להם נתתי אותם לרשתם עד עולם, אך חזק ואל תירא התהלך לפניי והיה תמים.

At that time, God appeared to Abram, who was still in Hebron, and said to him: “Do not fear, your reward from me shall be very great, for I will not leave you until I have multiplied you and blessed you, and made your progeny like the stars in the sky which can not be measured or numbered. And I will give your progeny all of the lands that you see with your eyes, to them they have been given to inherit forever. So be strong and do not fear, walk before me, and you will be blameless.

Genesis 15:1

אחר הדברים האלה הָיָה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם בַּמַּחֲזֵה לֵאמֹר אֶל־תִּירָא אַבְרָם אָנֹכִי מִגֵּן לְךָ שְׂכָרְךָ הָרַבָּה מְאֹד:
Some time later, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision. He said, “Fear not, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.”

Genesis 17:1

וַיְהִי אַבְרָם בְּן־תִּשְׁעִים שָׁנָה וְתִשְׁעֵי שָׁנִים וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי־אֵל שְׂדֵי הַתְּהֵלֶךְ לִפְנֵי וְהָיָה תָּמִים:
When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am El Shaddai. Walk in My ways and be blameless.

What precipitates the need for God to give Abram such assurances? The question of Abram's faith will be a continual theme throughout ShY, called into question with the various tests.

ויהי בשנת שמונה שנה ושבעים שנים לחיי אברם, וימת רעו בן פלג בשנה ההיא. ויהיו כל ימי רעו מאתיים שנה ותשע ושלשים שנה וימת. ושרי בת הרן אשת אברם עודנה עקרה בימים ההם, ולא ילדה לאברם לא בן ולא בת. ויהי כראותה כי לא ילדה, ותיקח את הגר שפחתה אשר נתן לה פרעה ותיתן אותה לאברם אישה לאשה. כי הגר למדה את כל דרכי שרי כאשר לימדה אותה שרי, לא חסרה מכל דרכיה הטובים מאומה. ותאמר שרי לאברם הנה שפחתי הגר, בא אליה ותלד על ברכיי ואבנה⁵⁸ גם אנוכי ממנה.

And it came to pass in the eighty-seventh year of Abram's life that Re'u⁵⁹, the son of Peleg died in that year. And when he died, the span of Re'u's life was two-hundred and thirty-nine years.

And Sarai, the daughter of Haran, Abram's wife was still barren in those days, and she hadn't bore a child to Abram, neither son nor daughter. And it was when she saw that she had not born a child that she took Hagar, her handmaid, that was given to her by Pharaoh, and gave her to Abram as a wife. For Hagar had learned all of the ways of Sarai that Sarai taught her. She lacked nothing of her good ways at all. And Sarai said to Abram: Behold, here is my handmaid, Hagar, come upon her and she shall bear a child on my knees, and I will also be built up from her.

⁵⁸ Note the word play on the word ב.נ.ב. – build, and בן –son. Their future is built on their ability to produce male heirs.

⁵⁹ Re'u is Abram's great-great-grandfather (Genesis 11:2) and was King of Lagash. There is no indication why this detail is included in ShY. Perhaps his name, which is related to "friend" suggests a closeness between the two. Alternatively, the mention could introduce Re'u as a foil to Abram. According to the Book of Jubilees, Re'u stayed home when Abram left, he worshiped idols when Abram became a monotheist. Re'u's son, Serug dies the same year that Isaac was born, a detail also included in ShY. Perhaps, however this is merely chronological filler for our narrative.

ותתן שרי את הגר לאברם מקץ עשר שנים⁶⁰ לשבת אברם בארץ כנען, היא שנת חמש ושמונים שנה לחיי אברם. וישמע אברם לקול שרי אישתו, ויקח את הגר שיפחתו ויבוא אליה אברם ותהר לו. ותרא הגר כי הרתה, ותשמח מאוד ותקל גבירתה בעיניה. ותאמר בליבה, אין זה כי אם אנוכי טובה לפני ה' משרי גבירתי. כי כל הימים אשר גבירתי עם אדוני לא הרתה, ואני בימים אחדים נתן לי ה' הריון ממנו.

And Sarai gave Hagar to Abram after ten years that Abram lived in the land of Caanan, this was the eighty-fifth year of Abram's life. And Abram heeded the request of Sarai, his wife, and he took Hagar as his handmaid, and came upon her and she conceived for him. And Hagar saw that she was pregnant, and she was very happy, and her mistress was lowered in her esteem. She said to herself: "It can only be that I am more worthy before God than Sarai, my mistress, for all that time that my mistress with my Lord she did not bare, but I was with him only for a few days, and God allowed me to conceive with him."

Genesis 16:1-4

ושרי אשת אברם לא ילדה לו וְלֹה שָׁפְחָה מִצְרִית וּשְׁמָהּ הָגָר: וּתְאֹמַר שְׂרִי אֶל-אַבְרָם הִנֵּה-נָא עֲצָרְנִי יְהוָה מִלְּדֹת בָּאֵ-נָא אֶל-שִׁפְחָתִי אוּלַי אֶבְנֶה מִמֶּנָּה וַיִּשְׁמַע אֲבָרָם לְקוֹל שְׂרִי: וַתִּקַּח שְׂרִי אֶשְׁת־אַבְרָם אֶת-הָגָר הַמִּצְרִית שִׁפְחָתָהּ מִקֵּץ עֶשְׂרִי שָׁנִים לְשִׁבְתָּ אֲבָרָם בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַתֵּתֶן אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָם אִישָׁהּ לֹא לְאִשָּׁה: וַיְבֹא אֶל-הָגָר וַתֵּהָרֶה וַתֵּרָא כִּי הָרְתָה וַתִּקַּל גְּבִירָתָהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ:

Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Look, the LORD has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her." And Abram heeded Sarai's request. So Sarai, Abram's wife, took her maid, Hagar the Egyptian—after Abram had dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years—and gave her to her husband Abram as concubine. He cohabited with Hagar and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was lowered in her esteem.

Philo wrote: "The way of her offer of Hagar to Abraham becomes the clearest proof of her virtuous character. In the bible, Sarah says that Abraham should consort with her maid because she herself can not bear children; in Josephus's telling, she makes the suggestion only at God's prompting."

Rather than describing Sarah's feelings, Philo lets her voice them herself. His Sarah strikes a very sympathetic, sensitive note.

⁶⁰ Abram's behavior determines future rabbinic law. Based on his example, if a man marries a woman and does not have a child after ten years, he is no longer exempt from the commandment to procreate. One opinion suggests that a man must remarry, citing Genesis 16:3 as its proof text. Although Abram and Sarai were married for much longer than ten years, this gemara argues that his time outside of the land of Israel or while one of them is either sick or imprisoned does not count towards his tally. (bYevamot 64a)

ותרא שרי כי הרתה הגר לאברם ותקנא שרי בשפחתה, ותאמר שרי בליבה: אין זה כי אם היא טובה ממני מאוד. ותאמר שרי לאברם: חמסי עליך, כי בעת אשר התפללת לפני ה' על הזרע, למה לא התפללת עליי, לתת ה' לי זרע ממך. וגם כי אדבר אל הגר בפניך ותבזה את דברי בעבור אשר הרתה ולא תדבר אליה מאומה, ישפוט ה' ביני וביניך על אשר עשית לי. ויאמר אברם אל שרי: הנה שפחתך בידך, עשי לה הטוב בעיניך.

And Sarai saw that Hagar had conceived with Abram, and Sarai envied her handmaid. Sarai said to herself, “It can only be that she is more worthy before the Eternal than me.” And Sarai said to Abram, “The hurt done to me is because of you, for when you prayed to God for children, why didn’t you not pray to the Eternal for your progeny to come from me? Moreover, when I speak to Hagar in your presence, she scorns my words⁶¹ because she is pregnant and you never say anything. God will judge between you and me on account of what you have done to me.” And Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your handmaid is in your hands, do with her what is good in your eyes. And Sarai tortured her, so Hagar fled from her presence to the desert.

Genesis 16:5-6

ותאמר שרי אל־אברם חמסי עליך נתתי שפחתי בחיקך ותרא כי הרתה ואקל בעיניך ישפט יהוה ביני וביניך: ויאמר אברם אל־שרי הנה שפחתך בידך עש־לה הטוב בעיניך ותענה שרי ותברח מפניה:

And Sarai said to Abram, “The wrong done me is your fault! I, myself put my maid in your bosom; now that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her esteem. The Eternal decide between you and me!” Abram said to Sarai, “Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right.” Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she ran away from her.

Sarah’s statement is that Hagar is more worthy. Sarah’s concern begins a thematic focus on worthiness in the eyes of Abraham and God. This will be explored at length in chapter nine.

⁶¹ See Josephus – Hagar puts on “queenly airs as though the dominion were to pass to her unborn son” (Jewish antiquities I.I87-90)

ותענה שרי, ותברח הגר מפניה אל המדבר. וימצאה מלאך ה' במקום אשר ברחה שמה ויאמר אליה, אל תראי כי הרבה ארבה את זרעך. כי הנך יולדת בן וקראת את שמו ישמעאל, עתה שובי אל שרי גבירתך⁶² והתעני תחת ידיה. ותקרא הגר למקום הבאר שהוא באר לחי רואי הנה בין קדש ובין ברד. ותשב הגר בעת ההיא בית אברם אדוניה, ויהי מקץ ימים ותלד הגר לאברם בן. ויקרא אברם את שמו ישמעאל, ואברם בן שמונים ושש שנים בלדתה אותו.

An angel of the Eternal found her in the place to which she fled, and said to her out in that place that she fled to, and said to her, "Do not fear, for I surely will increase your progeny, for you will bear a son and you will call his name "Ishmael." Now you will return to Sarai, your mistress, and suffer under her power. And Hagar called that place of the well "Be'er L'hai Roi, which is between Kadesh and Bered. And Hagar returned at this time to the house of Abram, her lord, and after some time, Hagar birthed a son to Abram. And Abram called him Ishmael, and Abram was eighty-six when she bore him.

Genesis 16:7

וַיִּמְצָאָהּ מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה עַל-עֵין הַמַּדְבָּר עַל-הָעֵין בְּדֶרֶךְ שׁוּר:

An angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the road to Shur,

Genesis 16:9-10

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה שׁוּבִי אֶל-גְּבִירְתְּךָ וְהִתְעַנִּי תַּחַת יְדֶיהָ: וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה הֲרִבָּה אֲרֻבָּה אֶת-זֶרְעוֹךָ וְלֹא יִסְפָּר מִרְבּוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה הִנֵּה הָרָה וְיִלְדֶּת בֶּן וְקָרָאת שְׁמוֹ יִשְׁמָעֵאל כִּי-שָׁמַעַל יְהוָה אֶל-עֲנָנֶיהָ:

And the angel of the Eternal said to her, "Go back to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment." And the angel of the Eternal said to her, "I will greatly increase your offspring, And they shall be too many to count." The angel of the LORD said to her further, "Behold, you are with child and shall bear a son; You shall call him Ishmael, For the LORD has paid heed to your suffering.

Genesis 16:13-16

וַתִּקְרָא שְׁם-יְהוָה הַדֹּבֵר אֵלֶיהָ אֶתָּה אֵל רֹאִי כִּי אָמְרָה הָגַם הָלָם רְאִיתִי אַחֲרָי רֹאִי: עַל-כֵּן קָרָא לְבָאֵר בְּאֵר לַחֲי רֹאִי הִנֵּה בֵּין-קֶדֶשׁ וּבֵין בְּרֶד: וַתֵּלֶד הָגָר לְאַבְרָם בֶּן וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָם בֶּן וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָם שְׁם-בְנוֹ אֶשְׁרֵי-יְלִידָהּ הָגָר יִשְׁמָעֵאל: וְאַבְרָם בֶּן-שְׁמֹנִים וָשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים בָּלְדָתָהּ הָגָר אֶת-יִשְׁמָעֵאל לְאַבְרָם:

And she called the Eternal who spoke to her, "You Are El-roi," by which she meant, "Have I not gone on seeing after He saw me!" Therefore, the well was called Be'er-l'hai-roi; it is between Kadesh and Bered. Hagar bore a son to Abram, and Abram gave the son that Hagar bore him the name Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

ShY only includes Hagar naming the well, and omits Hagar's response to God and the explanation of Ishmael and the well's names. Perhaps, the author assumes that the reader already knows this detail, or perhaps this is an attempt to weaken the appearance of Hagar having a closer relationship with God than Sarai. When Sarai prays, God responds to with an affirmation of having heard her voice, yet one of the biblical sources of that language, from this very event, is not given to its originator.

The angel instructs Hagar to return to Sarai. Physically, she may return to Sarai's rule, but our author gives a hint as to where her heart lies. She returns to the house of "Abram, her lord," not to Sarai. As an exile herself, perhaps she realizes she does not want the same for her son, and knows the opportunities that exist if she remains close to Abram, and that she is part of his house whether Sarah likes it or not.

⁶² Note that while Genesis 16:9 only names Sarai as גְּבִירָתָךְ, ShY includes Sarai's name as well. Even when she is treating Hagar poorly, the attempt to humanize her character remains.

ויהי בימים ההם בשנת אחת ותשעים שנה לחיי אברם, וילחמו בני כתים את בני תובל כי בהפיץ ה' את בני האדם על פני כל הארץ יצאו בני כתים ויהיו לאגודה וילכו בקעת כנפיא ויבנו שם ערים וישבו שם על נהר תיבראיו. ובני תובל ישבו בתושכנה, ויקראו את שמה סבינה על שם סבינה בן תובל אביהם וישבו בה עד היום הזה. ויהי בעת ההיא וילחמו בני כתים את בני תובל, וינגפו בני תובל לפני בני כתים ויפלו בני כתים מבני תובל כשלוש מאות ושבעים איש. וישבעו בני תובל בעת ההיא אל בני כתים לאמור לא יתחתנו בנו, ואיש אל יתן בתו אל בני כתים. כי כל בנות תובל היו נערות יפות בימים ההם, כי לא נמצאו שם נשים יפות בימים ההם כבנות תובל בכל הארץ. והיה כל איש אשר יחפוץ בתואר האישה והלך אל בנות תובל ולקח מהם אשה מכל אשר יחפוץ. וכל בני האדם והמלכים והשרים לוקחים מבנות תובל בימים ההם, כל אשר יחפוץ בתואר האישה מאוד.

ויהי מקץ שלוש שנים אשר נשבעו בני תובל על בני כתים לבלתי תת להם בנות לנשים, וילכו מבני כתים כעשרים איש לקחת מבנות תובל ולא מצאו. כי שמרו בני תובל את שבועתם לבלתי התחתן בם, ולא אבו להפר את שבועתם. ויהי בימי הקציר וילכו בני תובל אל שדותיהם לקצור קצירם, ויתקבצו כל בחורי בני כתים וילכו אל עיר סבינה ויחטפו כל איש נערה מבנות תובל ויביאום אל עריהם. וישמעו בני תובל ויבואו עליהם למלחמה, ולא יכלו עליהם וישובו להם לארצם. ויהי לתקופת השנה וילכו בני תובל וישכרו להם מבני האדם ומכל הערים הקרובים אליהם כעשרה אלף איש, וילכו אל בני כתים למלחמה. וילכו בני תובל להילחם בבני כתים ולהפיל את כל ארצם ולהצר עליהם, ויגברו בני תובל על בני כתים בפעם הזאת. ויראו בני כתים כי צר להם מאוד, ויעלו את כל הילדים אשר ילדו בני כתים מבנות תובל על החומה אשר בנו לעיני בני תובל. ויאמרו אליהם בני כתים הבאתם למלחמה עם בניכם ועם בנותיכם, ולא עצמכם ובשרכם אנחנו מאז ועד עתה? ויהי כשמוע בני תובל את הדבר הזה, ויחדלו להילחם בבני כתים וילכו וישובו אליהם אל עריהם. ויתקבצו בני כתים בעת ההיא ויבנו להם ערים שתיים על הים, ויקראו את שם האחת פורטו ושם השנית אריצה.

And it came to pass in those days, in the ninety-first year of Abram's life, that the people of Kittim fought a war against the sons of Tubal⁶³, for when God scattered humans over the face of the Earth, the people of Kittim went out and became a community, and they went to the Valley of Canopia and built there cities and settled there, on the Tibreu river. And the people of Tubal settled in Tushcanah, and they named it Savina, in the name of Savina, son of Tubal their father, and dwelled there until this day. And at that time, the sons of Kittim and the sons of Tubal fought a war. And the sons of Tubal were defeated by the sons of Kittim, and the sons of Kittim killed three hundred and seventy men from the sons of Tubal. After that, the sons of Tubal swore an oath to the sons of Kittim, saying: "They shall not

marry us, and no man shall give his daughter to the sons of Kittim. For in that time, all the daughters of Tubal were beautiful young women, and in the whole land, they couldn't find beautiful women at that time like the daughters of Tubal. And any man that desired a beautiful woman went to the daughters of Tubal and took from them the woman from all that he desired. And every man, king, and minister took from the daughters of Tubal in those days, everyone who desired a very beautiful woman.⁶⁴

And three years after the sons of Tubal swore concerning the sons of Kittim not to give to them their daughters for wives, and approximately twenty men from the sons of Kittim went to take from the daughters of Tubal, and they could not be found. For the sons of Tubal guarded their oath not to marry them, and they did not want to break their oath. And in the days of the harvest, the sons of Tubal went to their fields to reap their harvest, then all the young sons of Kittim went to the city of Savina and every man kidnapped a young women from the daughters of Tubal, and they brought them to their cities. And the sons of Tubal heard this and came upon them to wage war, but they couldn't overcome them and they returned to their land. And during that time of the year, the sons of Tubal hired about 20,000 men from all the cities that were near them, and they went to the sons of Kittim to wage war. The sons of Tubal went to fight the sons of Kittim and to overthrow their whole land, and to besiege them, but this time, the sons of Tubal prevailed over the sons of Kittim. And the sons of Kittim saw that they were in great trouble, and they lifted all the children that were borne to the sons of Kittim by the daughters of Tuval on the wall that they had built, in the sight of the sons of Tuval. And the sons of Kittim said, "Have you come to fight your sons and your daughters; have we not always been your bones and your flesh from then until now?" And when sons of Tubal heard this thing, they stopped fighting the sons of Kittim and they went and returned to their cities. And the sons of Kittim gathered at this time, and they built two cities on the water, and named the first one Porto and the second Aritzah.⁶⁵

⁶³ Tubal is mentioned in Genesis 10:2 as the son of Yafet. He is the grandson of Noah.

⁶⁴ Insert comment here on parallel description of Sarai, how it helps link the two narratives.

⁶⁵ Tubal is discussed in Josephus and Pseudo- Philo, and this legend is a version of two stories, found in the medieval Chronicles of Jerahmeel and the 10th century Sefer Josippon.

ואברם בן תרח היה בימים ההם בן תשעים ותשע שנים. בעת ההיא נראה אליו ה' ויאמר אליו, ואתנה בריתי ביני וביניך וארבה את זרעך במאוד מאד. וזאת הברית אשר נתתי ביני ובינך, המול לכם כל זכר אתה וזרעך אחריו. ובן שמונת ימים ימולו. והייתה זאת בריתי בבשרם לברית עולם.

ואתה לא יקרא עוד שמך אברם כי אם אברהם, וגם שרי אישתך לא תקרא שמה שרי כי אם שרה. כי ברך אברך אתכם והרביתי את זרעכם אחריכם, והייתם לגוי גדול ומלכים מכם יצאו. ויקם אברהם ויעש את כל אשר צוה אותו אלוהים, ויקח את כל אנשי ביתו ומקנת כספו וימל אותם כאשר צוהו ה'. ולא נשאר אחד מהם אשר לא מל. וגם אברהם וישמעאל בנו מלו בשר ערלתם. בן שלוש עשרה שנה היה ישמעאל בהמולו בשר ערלתו. ויהי ביום השלישי ויצא אברהם מאהלו, וישב פתח האהל להתחמם בחום השמש מכאב בשרו.

And Abram son of Terach was in those days nine-nine years old. And it was in this time that the Eternal appeared to Abram, and said to him, "And I will place my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your seed. And this is the covenant that I place between me and you--circumcise every male and all of your progeny after you. And when a son is eight days old, circumcise him, and this will be my covenant in their flesh a covenant for all time.

And your name will no longer be called Abram, but Abraham, and also Sarai, your wife, will not be called by her name Sarai, but rather Sarah. For I will surely bless you, and I will increase your progeny after you, and you will become a great nation, and kings will come from you. And Avraham arose and did all that God commanded him, and took every man in his house and those which he acquired with his money, and circumcised them as he was commanded to by the Eternal. And there was no one left from them who wasn't circumcised. And also Abraham and Yishmael, his son, circumcised the flesh of their foreskins. Yishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And it was on the third day⁶⁶ that Abraham came out from his tent and sat in the opening of his tent to warm himself in the heat of the sun from the pain of his flesh.

Genesis 17:2

וְאֶתְנֶה בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וְאַרְבֶּה אוֹתָךְ בְּמֵאֹד מְאֹד:

I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will make you exceedingly numerous."

Genesis 17:5

וְלֹא־יִקְרָא עוֹד אֶת־שְׁמֹךְ אַבְרָם וְהָיָה שְׁמֹךְ אַבְרָהָם כִּי אֲבִי־הַמּוֹן גּוֹיִם נִתְּתִידָּהּ:

And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations.

Genesis 17:15

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָהָם שְׁרִי אֲשַׁתְּךָ לֹא־תִקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמָהּ שְׁרִי כִּי שָׂרָה שְׁמָהּ:

And God said to Abraham, “As for your wife Sarai, you shall not call her Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah.

Genesis 17:23-25

וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ וְאֵת כָּל־יְלִידֵי בֵיתוֹ וְאֵת כָּל־מִקְנֵת פִּסְפּוֹ כָּל־זָכָר בְּאַנְשֵׁי בֵית אַבְרָהָם וַיְמַל אֶת־בָּשָׂר עֲרֻלָּתָם בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהִים: וְאַבְרָהָם בֶּן־תִּשְׁעִים וְתִשְׁעֵ שָׁנָה בָּהֶמְלֹו בָּשָׂר עֲרֻלָּתוֹ: וַיִּשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ בֶּן־שְׁלֹשׁ עָשָׂר שָׁנָה בָּהֶמְלֹו אֵת בָּשָׂר עֲרֻלָּתוֹ:

Then Abraham took his son Ishmael, and all his homeborn slaves and all those he had purchased, every male in Abraham’s household, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins on that very day, as God had spoken to him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he circumcised the flesh of his foreskin, and his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.⁶⁷

Genesis 18:1

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה בְּאֵלֶיךָ מִמְּרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח־הָאֵהָל בְּחֹם הַיּוֹם:

The LORD appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot.

This section does not reference Genesis 17:16, in which Abraham is told that

Sarah will have a child and that she is meant to be the mother of his future nation.

⁶⁶ In Jewish tradition, the third day is redemptive, a signal by the author that things will all work out fine in the end.

⁶⁷ ShY incorporates the tradition that Abraham is sitting the entrance of his tent healing from his circumcision. (Rashi on Genesis 18:1; Bava Metziah 86b)

PART III

SEFER HA-YASHAR CHAPTER 9 (GENESIS 22)

יצחק בן אברהם הולך וגדל בימים ההם, וילמדו אברהם אביו את דרך ה' לדעת את ה',
וה' עמו.¹ ויהי בהיות יצחק בן שלושים שנה ושבע שנים,² וישמעאל אחיו הולך ובא עמו
באהל.

Isaac, the son of Abraham was growing up in those days, and his father,
Abraham taught him the way of God, to know God, and that God was with
him. And when Isaac was thirty-seven years old, his brother Ishmael went
and came into his tent.

The previous chapter of ShY concludes with a family tree of Abraham's relatives,
leading us directly into a main theme of this chapter, the future of Abraham's immediate
family. All along, God has promised Abraham that his descendants will be numerous and
his legacy great. But Abraham has two sons, Ishmael, his firstborn, borne of the Egyptian
handmaiden, Hagar, and Sarah, his wife. In reading the Genesis narrative, there is little
speculation about the rightful heir of the birthright, as Ishmael is out of the picture when
he and Hagar are exiled. (Gen 21:10-21)

The account in ShY, however, does not make it clear who will be the chosen
transmitter of Abraham's legacy. As in Genesis, in ShY, *both* Hagar and Sarah are
promised by God that their progeny will be multiplied.³ However, ShY omits details
which identify Isaac as the inheritor of Abraham's covenant, including God's direct
assertion.⁴ In the Torah, when Hagar is promised a child, the angel of God tells her:

וְהוּא יִהְיֶה פָּרָא אִדָּם יָדוֹ בְּכָל יָד כָּל בֶּן וְעַל-פָּנָיו כָּל-אָחִיו יִשָּׁכֵן:
He shall be a wild ass of a man; His hand against everyone, And everyone's hand
against him; He shall dwell alongside of all his kinsmen.⁵

Even before his birth, a reader of the biblical narrative expects Ishmael to be savage and
sanguinary. He will not inherit his father's land, rather he will dwell outside of it.

Without these details present in ShY, Ishmael is painted as an innocent child with a

promising future, just like his brother.⁶ In fact, the language used for Isaac and Ishmael parallels:

Ishmael	Isaac
בן שלוש עשרה שנה היה ישמעאל בהמולו בשר ערלתו. Ishmael was thirteen when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.	וימל אברהם את יצחק בנו בו שמונת ימים... And Abraham circumcised Isaac, his son when he was eight days old...
וישמעאל בן אברהם גדל בימים ההם... ויהי אלהים את ישמעאל... Ishmael, the son of Abraham was growing up in those days... and God was with Ishmael.	ויצחק בן אברהם הולך וגדל בימים ההם, וילמדו אברהם אביו את דרך ה' לדעת את ה', וה' עמו. Isaac, the son of Abraham was growing up in those days, and his father, Abraham taught him the way of God, to know God, and that God was with him.

ShY causes the reader to wonder. If the news of both Isaac and Ishmael's births are brought by divine messenger, God is with both, and both boys are covenanted, who is the more deserving?⁷ This ambiguity has a highly effective literary impact, heightening the sense of familial drama; the children of the two clashing matriarchs will inevitably feud.

One important detail about Ishmael, however, is modified from the Genesis narrative,⁸ signaling that Ishmael is not exactly who he seems. In Genesis, it is not until after he and Hagar are exiled that we learn he will become an archer. In PRE, it is noted at the outset of Chapter 30, at the very beginning of Isaac's birth and weaning, a hint about Ishmael's true character. ShY, however, this skill is noted in the context of Isaac's birth:

וישמעאל בן אברהם גדל בימים ההם, בן ארבע עשרה שנה היה בלדת שרה את יצחק לאברהם. ויהי אלהים את ישמעאל בן אברהם ויגדל וילמד קשת, ויהי רובה קשת.

Ishmael, the son of Abraham was growing up in those days; he was fourteen years old when Sarah bore Isaac to Abraham. And God was with Ishmael, son of Abraham, and he grew up and he studied archery and became an archer.⁹

Like the dramatic principle of Chekov's gun, Ishmael's bow and arrow is introduced in order that the reader may anticipate its usage. Sure enough, it is with this weapon that Ishmael attempts to murder his brother.¹⁰ This event is drawn from a midrashic reading of Genesis 21:9:

וַתֵּרָא שָׂרָה אֶת־בְּנוֹ־הַיִּגָּר הַמִּצְרִית אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה לְאַבְרָהָם מִצְחָק:

Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing.

Although the word “מִצְחָק-playing,” might suggest an innocent brotherly interaction, Sarah sees something that alarms her.¹¹ Bereshit Rabbah offers three alternative meanings of “מִצְחָק”: sexual immorality, idolatry, or bloodshed.¹² Rather than jealousy, as is suggested elsewhere¹³, Sarah fears for her son's life.¹⁴

ShY removes any ambiguity, and rather than the two boys playing together, Ishmael sits across from his younger brother, prepared to kill him.¹⁵ This is slightly different from the narrative as told in Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer:¹⁶

He took bow and arrows and began to shoot at the birds. He saw Isaac sitting by himself, and he shot an arrow at him to slay him.¹⁷

Ishmael's motives are a little more suspect in Ginzberg:

When Isaac grew up, quarrels broke out between him and Ishmael, on account of the rights of the first-born. Ishmael insisted he should receive a double portion of the inheritance after the death of Abraham, and Isaac should receive only one portion. Ishmael, who had been accustomed from his youth to use the bow and arrow, was in the habit of aiming his missiles in the direction of Isaac, saying at the same time that he was but jesting.¹⁸

Ishmael's murderous behaviors instigate Sarah to call for him and his mother to be expelled. The matter of inheritance seems to be settled at this point. Still, Abraham cares

for both of his children. Before sending Ishmael and Hagar into the wilderness, ShY specifies that Abraham gave them twelve loaves of bread, suggesting that he wanted to provide for them. This addition seems to be singular occurrence in midrashic tradition. Furthermore, ShY does not include any of Genesis 21:15-19, where Hagar and Ishmael run out of water and are rescued from certain death by an angel.^{19 20}

Years later, Abraham tells Sarah that he yearns to see Ishmael, and travels by camel to visit him. This legend is found in Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer and various Islamic sources.²¹ A comparison of these two stories highlights the emotional and literary dimensions present in ShY. While PRE simply states the time that has passed since Abraham and Ishmael have seen each other, ShY adds the word “הַתְּאַוִּיתִי,” which indicates a strong desire or yearning; this father misses his son. He shares this within the context of a conversation with Sarah, creating an intimate, human portrait of these characters, speaking openly as husband and wife. Abraham’s longing is matched by Sarah’s worry, and she makes Abraham swear that he will not dismount his camel when he reaches Ishmael’s home. When Abraham reaches the house, Ishmael is absent. In PRE, he is told that Ishmael is out collecting fruit and dates with his mother. In ShY, Ishmael is said to be hunting, a tradition found in Islamic literature.²² Perhaps ShY includes this Islamic idea to hint that although Ishmael has grown, he has not changed his bloodthirsty ways. Still, this humanized Abraham cares for his son, and when Ishmael’s wife²³ refuses him bread and water,²⁴ and he hears her cursing and beating her children, he becomes concerned. He leaves a message for Ishmael, and returns three years later to check on his son. This second visit parallels the first, but this time, Ishmael’s new wife (having cast out the previous one for her behavior) treats Abraham well. He leaves a

second message, and Ishmael, seemingly sensing his father's affection and concern, decides to move his family back to his father's home.²⁵

The inclusion of this tradition in ShY serves three purposes: 1) It creates a context for the subsequent midrashic tradition (discussed in the following section); 2) The underlying emotions of the original story are made explicit, further humanizing our characters; and 3) raises the suspense, extending the familial drama into the next parts of the story. With Ishmael back in the picture, Isaac's inheritance is no longer guaranteed.

The next chapter for Isaac and Ishmael occurs back where their story began, in Isaac's tent, the site of Ishmael's attempted murder. This added detail intimates that a dramatic event is imminent, and that our two brothers will clash once more, and anticipates the forthcoming argument where the two brothers will debate which of them is more loved.

¹ Abraham teaching Isaac is a late theme in rabbinic literature.

² This is a reflection of the textual tradition found in Seder Olam Rabbah 1.5; PRE 31:5; Bereshit Rabbah 55:4; Tanhuma Buber Vayeira 42

³ ShY Ch. 6;8

⁴ See Genesis 17:18-21

⁵ Genesis 16:12

⁶ See ShY Ch. 6 above

⁷ In the Qur'an, God is referenced as "God of your fathers, of Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac," (Qur'an 2:133) and the chain of tradition includes both sons as well, "what has been sent down to Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob..." (Qur'an 2:136; 3:84; 4:163; etc.)

⁸ See Genesis 21:20

⁹ ShY Ch. 8, which is reflective of the language in Genesis 21:20.

וַיְהִי אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַנֶּעֱר וַיַּגְדֵּל וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבָּר וַיְהִי רֹכֵחַ קֶשֶׁת:

God was with the boy and he grew up; he dwelt in the wilderness and became a bowman.

¹⁰ In ShY, Cain also uses the tools of his profession to murder his brother. For Cain, a farmer, it is a part of his plow. Ishmael, an archer, his bow and arrow. (ShY Ch. 1) The Cain/Abel typology clearly is clearly an antecedent.

¹¹ Genesis 21:10

¹² Genesis Rabbah 53:11

¹³ See Jubilees 17:2

¹⁴ The language adapted for Abram's worry about Isaac from Genesis 21:11 is now applied to Sarah: "וירע בעיניה מאד על בנה." (ShY Ch. 8)

¹⁵ ShY Ch. 8 indicates that Isaac is five years-old and Ishmael is nineteen at the time of this event.

¹⁶ For texts such as PRE, written after the emergence of Islam, casting the ancestor of Muhammad, Ishmael, as a murderer rather than an idolater was preferable.

¹⁷ PRE 30

¹⁸ Ginzburg Legends of the Jews 1:5 196

¹⁹ ShY Ch. 8

²⁰ Hagar and Ishmael's first destination is Egypt, her birthplace according to ShY. (ShY 8)

²¹ See Firestone.

²² A History of Prophets and Kings by Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari

²³ ShY names Ishmael's first wife as Meriveh, meaning strife or contention. Her name carries several resonances. Literarily, her name is symbolic of her contentious behavior. Contextually, her name might connect with her nationality, yet another subtle hint about the future struggles with Egypt. Third, as Merivah is noted as a struggle with God in Torah, one could interpret her behavior and attitudes towards Ishmael and Abraham as an affront to God. (See Firestone, Journeys 221)

²⁴ A nice reference back to Abraham's expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael

²⁵ PRE states that after his father's visits, Ishmael travels to see his father. ShY takes this one step further, having Ishmael actually move back home. (PRE 30, ShY 8)

ויתפאר ישמעאל על יצחק לאמור, בן שלוש עשרה שנה הייתי כאשר דיבר ה' אל אבי למול אותנו. ואעש את דבר ה' אשר דיבר אל אבי, אתן את נפשי אל ה', ולא עברתי את דברו אשר צוה את אבי.

ויען יצחק את ישמעאל לאמור: למה תתפאר עלי בדבר הזה על מעט בשר מבשרך אשר צוך ה' להסיר אותו מעליך. חי ה' אלוהי אברהם כי אם יאמר ה' לאבי קח נא את יצחק והעלהו לפני עולה, לא מנעתי את נפשי כי אעשה את הדבר בשמחה.

And Ishmael boasted to Isaac, saying: “I was thirteen years old when The Eternal spoke to my father to circumcise us. And I fulfilled the thing that The Eternal spoke to my father, I gave my soul to The Eternal, and I did not transgress the word that God commanded my father.”

And Isaac answered Ishmael, saying: “Why do you boast to me about this thing, about a little bit taken from your flesh that The Eternal commanded to be removed from you? As The Eternal lives, God of Abraham, for if The Eternal would say to my father, ‘take, please, Isaac and bring him up before me as a sacrifice,’ I would not withhold myself from it, for I would do it this thing, and I would do this joyfully.

By beginning this chapter with Isaac and Ishmael, diverting from the biblical narrative of the Akedah which starts with Abraham, the author indicates that the forthcoming story will feature an ensemble cast, rather than Abraham in the principal role with his family playing a supporting role. The method of storytelling here adds depth and nuance to the Akedah, allowing the reader to see the event from several perspectives.

This debate between Isaac and Ishmael is present throughout Aggadah,¹ generally as a explanation of the ambiguous wording of Genesis 22:1, “וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה-it was after these words.” The “words” the text refer to are the words spoken in this brotherly argument. Read with the second half of the verse in mind, “and God tested Abraham...” one sees their worthiness contest as part of the larger test of Abraham. However, in the

larger context of ShY, this scene is the continuation of the brotherly dispute, wherein two brothers, pit against each other since youth, compete to be viewed as most meritorious in the eyes of the other.

Genesis Rabbah offers different renderings of this debate. In one, it is God who originates the idea that Isaac would sacrifice himself if asked; Isaac only declares that he would cut off a limb. In the second, however, it is Isaac who asserts his willingness to be sacrificed to God. This second interpretation seems to be the more enduring of the two, as it appears in different forms in the later midrashim Tanhuma ha-Nidpas, Tanhuma Buber, and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.

Interestingly, these other midrashim are more explicit about what Isaac and Ishmael are trying to prove: who is more beloved;² who is superior;³ or who is most deserving of inheritance.⁴ Given this textual tradition, it is interesting that ShY does not state the initial question up for debate overtly. Perhaps, however, as the preceding events have already established their rivalry, such a statement would be redundant.

Both Tanhuma Buber and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan begin with questions of inheritance:

Tanhuma Buber

Isaac was reflecting on when he had contended with Ishmael. [Now Ishmael had complained] and said: I am older than you. I shall inherit the world because I am my father's first-born, and the first-born always inherits twofold.⁵

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan

Ishmael said, "It is right that I should be my father's heir, since I am his first-born son. But Isaac said, "It is right that I should be my father's heir, because I am the son of Sarah his wife, while you are the son of Hagar, my mother's maidservant."⁶

For these interpretations, seemingly neither birth order or mother is substantial to win the debate. It is their deeds which will determine their worthiness. This idea reflects an Islamic idea: [Abraham] said, ‘And of my descendants?’ He said, ‘My covenant does not extend to the evil doers.’⁷ The covenant, therefore, is not determined solely by lineage, but by faith and deeds.⁸

This is the foundation of ShY as well, although less overtly. Ishmael sees himself as part of his father’s covenant, apparent by his usage of the common plural, “circumcise us.” Although in Genesis 17, Ishmael is circumcised as part of God’s instructions to Abraham, God does not differentiate between Ishmael and all other current and future males related to or associated with Abraham. Here, God proclaims Isaac as the rightful covenantal heir. It is in Abraham’s actions, which occur only once God leaves Abraham’s presence, that Ishmael is set apart from the rest of the men.⁹

Still, Ishmael is suggested to have a strong relationship with God, as discussed above. Here, he is depicted as the prototype for a “*muslim*,” one of the “true believers...who submit [entirely] to the divine will.”¹⁰ The Quran portrays Ishmael as righteous, patient, and truth:

And remember in the Book Ishmael: Surely he was true to the promise, and he was a messenger, a prophet. And he commanded his people with the prayer and the alms, and he was pleasing before his Lord. ¹¹

And Ishmael...was among the patient. We caused them to enter Our mercy. Surely they were among the righteous. ¹²

Yet even in the Qur’an, Ishmael is mentioned in connection with his father as many times as he isn’t, while Isaac almost always appears alongside with Abraham. Isaac proves to be a more willing and joyous sacrifice. One Islamic interpretive tradition suggests that both Isaac and Ishmael were meant to be

sacrificed, but one was redeemed at random, suggesting that both were worthy.

Ultimately, the matter is resolved not by the brothers or their parents, but by God,

who hears Isaac's words and decides to test their verity.

¹ See Genesis Rabbah 55:4; BT Sanhedrin 89b; Tanhuma ha-Nidpas Vayera 18:1; Tanhuma Buber Vayera 42:1; Targum Pseudo-Jonathan 22:1

² Genesis Rabbah 55:4

³ Tanhuma ha-Nidpas Vayera 18:1

⁴ Tanhuma Buber Vayera 42:1; Targum Pseudo-Jonathan 22:1

⁵ Tanhuma Buber Vayera 42:1

⁶ Targum Pseudo-Jonathan 22:1

⁷ Qur'an 2:124

⁸ Comment on Qur'an 2:124, A.J. Droge, *The Qur'an: A New Annotated Translation*, (Equinox: Bristol, CT 2013), 13.

⁹ Genesis 17:9-14; 18-21; 23-26

¹⁰ Rueben Firestone, "Isaac," *The Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, Vol. 2 (2002), 561-562.

¹¹ Qur'an 19:54-55

¹² Qur'an 21:85-86

וישמע ה' את הדבר אשר דיבר יצחק אל ישמעאל וייטב בעיני ה', ויאמר לנסות את אברהם בדבר הזה.

ויהי היום ויבואו בני האלוהים להתייצב על ה' ויבוא גם השטן בתוכם, להתייצב על ה' להשטין את בני האדם לפני ה'. ויאמר ה' אל השטן מאין תבוא, ויען השטן את ה' ויאמר משוט בארץ ומהתהלך בה. ויאמר ה' אל השטן מה דברך אליי על כל בני הארץ, ויען השטן את ה' ויאמר כי ראיתי את כל בני הארץ אשר יעבדוך ויזכרוך בעת בקשם מלפניך דבר. והיה כאשר תיתן להם את הדבר ההוא אשר יבקשו מלפניך, ושבו להם ועזבוך ולא יוסיפו לזכור אותך עוד.

And God heard the words that Isaac spoke to Ishmael, and it was pleasing in the eyes of God, and God decided to test Abraham in this thing.

And that day, the divine beings came to station The Eternal, and Satan¹ was also among them, to station themselves before The Eternal to accuse humanity. And The Eternal said to Satan, "Where did you come from?" And Satan answered The Eternal, saying: "I have been roaming over all the earth." And The Eternal said to Satan: "What do you have to say to me about humanity? And Satan answered The Eternal, saying: I have seen every human who serves You and only remembers You at the time that they request something from You. And when You give them what they asked from You, they turn away; they abandon You and they don't remember You anymore.

Genesis 22:1

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָאֱלֹהִים נָסָה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי:

Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham," and he answered, "Here I am."

As mentioned previously, this chapter in ShY shows the Akedah from several perspectives. The argument between Isaac and Ishmael introduces the perspective of Abraham's sons, who will later be shown experiencing the event separately. (See below) Now, the narrative turns from an earthy to a heavenly lens, telling the story from the perspective of God, and the divine beings, namely Satan. Although this adversarial figure is absent from Genesis, both Jewish and Islamic sources read him into the story.²

This section of ShY demonstrates the power of this style of narrative midrash. Often quoting the Torah's language to retell the biblical stories, here, ShY expands its intertextuality outside of clearly related biblical verses. Here, language and themes from The Book of Job are appropriated into this narrative. This typifies Narrative Midrash, reproducing extraneous biblical sources, interweaving weaving them without citing sources. Four verses from Job are quoted almost verbatim:

ShY	Job Job 1.6
<p>ויהי היום ויבאו בני האלהים להתייצב על ה' ויבוא גם השטן בתוכם, להתייצב על ה' להשטין את בני האדם לפני ה'.</p> <p>And that day, the divine beings came to before The Eternal, and Satan was also among them, to station themselves before God to accuse humanity before God.</p>	<p>וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיָּבֹאוּ בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים לְהִתִּיצֵב עַל־יְהוָה וַיָּבֹא גַם־הַשָּׁטָן בְּתוֹכָם:</p> <p>One day the divine beings presented themselves before the Eternal, and the Adversary came along with them.</p>
<p>ויאמר ה' אל השטן מאין תבוא, ויען השטן את ה' ויאמר משוט בארץ ומהתהלך בה.</p> <p>And The Eternal said to Satan, "Where did you come from?" And Satan answered The Eternal, saying: "I have been roaming over all the earth."</p>	<p>Job 2.1</p> <p>וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיָּבֹאוּ בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים לְהִתִּיצֵב עַל־יְהוָה וַיָּבֹא גַם־הַשָּׁטָן בְּתוֹכָם לְהִתִּיצֵב עַל־יְהוָה:</p> <p>One day the divine beings presented themselves before the Eternal, and the Adversary came along with them to present himself before the Eternal.</p>
	<p>Job 1.7; 2:1</p> <p>וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־הַשָּׁטָן מֵאֵין תָּבֹא וַיַּעַן הַשָּׁטָן אֶת־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר מְשׁוּט בָּאָרֶץ וּמִהֲתִהַלֵּךְ בָּהּ:</p> <p>The Eternal said to the Adversary, "Where have you been?" The Adversary answered the LORD, "I have been roaming all over the earth."</p>

Satan's main concern is with the fickle behavior of humanity. Satan's concerns join the rich aggadic tradition of angelic beings questioning the value of humanity. Angels debate about whether humans should be created at all, argue that they are more worthy of receiving Torah; and often try to influence God to act unfavorably towards

humanity.³ ShY creates a literary parallel between the upper and lower world: Just as the two sons compete for worthiness, so too, do the divine beings engage in a sibling rivalry with their human counterparts.

Like Job, Abraham and his family become caught up in this cosmic conflict, and Satan antagonizes each of the main characters-Abraham, Isaac, Sarah, and God separately, combining several interpretive traditions. These interactions will be addressed in subsequent sections.

¹ Although the concept of Satan is somewhat problematic to a contemporary Jewish audience, I have chosen to render “השטן” as “Satan,” rather than the more ambiguous “the Adversary” in order to preserve the literary character of ShY.

² The theme of angels arguing is an enduring theme of rabbinic tradition.

³ Genesis Rabbah 53:14; Leviticus Rabbah 23:2; among others.

הראית את אברהם בן תרח אשר בתחילה לא היו לו בנים ויעבדך ויבנה אליך מזבחות בכל אשר ילך שם והקריב עליהן קורבנות, ויקרא בשמך לכל בני הארץ תמיד. ועתה כאשר נולד לו יצחק בנו ויעזוב אותך ויעש משתה גדול לכל יושבי הארץ, ואת ה' שכח. כי מכל אשר עשה לא הקריב לפניך קורבן עולה או שלמים או שור אחד או כשב או עז אחד, מכל אשר שחט ביום הגמל את בנו. גם מיום אשר נולד בנו היום שלושים ושבע שנה לא בנה לפניך מזבח ולא הקריב אליך עליו קרבן, כי ראה כי נתת לו אשר ביקש מלפניך ויעזבך.

Have you not seen Abraham, son of Terach, who in the beginning had no sons, and he served you and built You altars in every place that he went, and offered sacrifices on them, and he perpetually proclaimed Your Name to every person on the earth? And now, when his son Isaac was born, he has abandoned You and made a great feast for all the inhabitants of the land, and he has forgotten The Eternal. For in all that he did, he did not bring a burnt offering, or a peace offering, or one ox, or a lamb, or one goat, from everything that he slaughtered on the day of his son's weaning. Furthermore, from the day that his son was born to today, he is now thirty-seven years old, and he has not built You an altar and not brought forth any sacrifices to You, for he saw that You gave to him what he asked of for You, and so he abandoned You."

Abraham and Isaac become stand-ins for all of humanity. When Abraham needed something from God, he was steadfast. However, when Isaac is born, Abraham forgets to thank God for this miracle. Instead, he holds a big feast in celebration of Isaac's weaning:

Genesis 21:8

וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד וַיִּגְמַל וַיַּעַשׂ אֲבְרָהָם מִשְׁתֶּה גָדוֹל בְּיוֹם הַגְּמֹל אֶת־יִצְחָק:

The child grew up and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

ShY details the lavish affair. Abraham's father and brother, extended family, political allies; and "all the great people of the land" along with their servants came. At the feast, there was much eating, drinking, and rejoicing, which ShY emphasizes through repetition.

The rabbis are seemingly disturbed that the covenanted Abraham would behave in such a manner, forget his end of the deal, as no sacrifice mentioned in the Torah. As they consider Abraham to be a rabbinic Jew who observes mitzvot, it is important that he maintains his commitment to covenantal responsibilities. They place their displeasure in the mouths of the ministering angels:

Genesis Rabbah

[In] God and God's court, it was the ministering angels who spoke thus: "Thus Abraham rejoiced and made all others rejoice, yet did not set aside for God a single bullock or ram."¹

A parallel Talmudic aggadah identifies one divine being in particular:

Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Yossi ben Zimra: "After the words of Satan." For it says (Gen 21:8), "And the child grew up and was weaned." Satan said to the Almighty: "Sovereign of the universe! To this old man You graciously granted the fruit of the womb at the age of a hundred, yet of all that banquet which he prepared, he did not have one turtle-dove or pigeon to sacrifice before you!"²

ShY incorporates both midrashim, where Satan, alongside the other divine beings point out both the tremendous miracle God performed for Abraham, as well as his lack of a sacrificial acknowledgement. Thus, the logical next action is for God to come up with a substitute sacrifice, for which Isaac has already planted the seed.

¹ Genesis Rabbah 55:4

² BT Sanhedrin 89b

ויאמר ה' אל השטן, השמת לבך אל עבדי אברהם כי אין כמוהו בארץ איש תם וישר לפני וירא אלוהים וסר מרע. חי אני כי אם אמרתי לו הקרב נא את יצחק בנך לפני לעולה לא ימנעהו ממני, ואף כי אומר אליו הקרב לפניי עולה מן הצאן או מן הבקר. ויען השטן את ה' ויאמר, בי אדוני דבר נא אל אברהם כדבר הזה אשר דיברת אם לא יעבור וימיר את דבריך היום.

The Eternal said to Satan, “Have you noticed My servant Abraham? For there is no one like him on the earth; he is a blameless and upright man before Me, he fears God and turns away from evil! As I live, if I were to say to him, ‘Please bring Isaac, your son, before Me as a sacrifice,’¹ he would not withhold him from Me, just as if I were to say to him to bring before Me a sacrifice from sheep or from cattle.” And Satan answered the Eternal, saying: “Please, My Lord, speak to Abraham about what you said, to see whether he won’t transgress and diverge from your words today.

Here, ShY returns to the Job language:

ShY	Job 1.8; 2:3a
<p>ויאמר ה' אל השטן, השמת לבך אל עבדי אברהם כי אין כמוהו בארץ איש תם וישר לפני וירא אלוהים וסר מרע.</p>	<p>ויאמר יהוה אל־השטן השִׁמָּת לְבָבְךָ עַל־עַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב כִּי אֵין כָּמוֹהוּ בָּאָרֶץ אִישׁ תָּם וְיָשָׁר יִרְאֵ אֱלֹהִים וְסָר מִרָע:</p>
<p>The Eternal said to Satan, “Have you noticed My servant Abraham? For there is no one like him on the earth; he is a blameless and upright man before Me, he fears God and turns away from evil!</p>	<p>The Eternal said to the Adversary, “Have you noticed My servant Job? There is no one like him on earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil!”</p>

In Tanach, Job is the paradigmatic innocent sufferer, and ShY assimilates his story into Abraham’s. This is not a big leap, as the two men have several shared attributes. Both are generous and hospitable.² They are God-fearers,³ yet both question God’s Divine justice.⁴ both are wealthy and have amassed a large household.⁵ Job, like Abraham, hosts a large feast prior to his tests.

However, Job does not become one of the patriarchs of the Jewish people. Desiring to elevate Abraham above Job, some sages suggest that he acted righteously out of fear of punishment and that he was not nearly as generous as Abraham.⁶ Yet another

tradition suggests that Job's questioning of God was harsh, unlike Abraham's.⁷ ShY, too, diminishes the character of Job. He is cast as a counselor to Pharaoh, and advises him to decree that any male baby born to an Israelite woman be put to death. Read in this light, Job's is punished, not tested. It is Abraham who must suffer God's tests.

The tradition that Abraham faced ten tests is prevalent in the Aggadah.⁸ Despite Satan's accurate report of the ungrateful Abraham, God stands up for him. Abraham has already proved himself in nine tests, but one final test is required to cement his legacy. Interestingly, while Isaac, Ishmael, and Satan are concerned with proving their worthiness to God, here it is God that needs validation of his servant's loyalty.

¹ God and Isaac use nearly identical language, creating a literary resonance between the heavenly and earthly realms.

² Genesis Rabbah 30:8; 48:9; ShY 7; BT Megilah 28a

³ Job 1:1; Genesis 22:12; Tosefta Sota 6:1

⁴ Job 9:22; Genesis 18:25

⁵ Job 1:3; Genesis

⁶ BT Sota 27a; Baba Batra 16a

⁷ Midrash Tanhuma Buber Vayeira 7:4; Genesis Rabbah 49:9

⁸ See Pirkei Avot 5:3; Avot D'Rebbe Natan 33:2; PRE 26-31

בעת ההיא היה דבר ה' אל אברהם ויאמר אליו אברהם, ויאמר הנני. ויאמר קח נא את בנך את יחידך אשר אהבת את יצחק ולך לך¹ אל ארץ המוריה, והעלהו שם לעולה על אחד ההרים אשר יראה לך בו שם ענן וכבוד.

At that time, The Eternal spoke to Abraham, saying to him: “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”² And [God] said, Take, please, your son, your favorite son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and bring him up there for a sacrifice³ on one of the mountains which will be shown to you, for there will be a heavy cloud.⁴

Genesis 22:1-2

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־נָא אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יִחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אַהַבְתָּ אֶת־יִצְחָק וּלְךָ־לֵךְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרְיָה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אֶחָד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ:

Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, “Abraham,” and he answered, “Here I am.” And God said, “Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go forth to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you.”

Again, we see an excellent demonstration of narrative midrash. The language in these lines in ShY closely resemble the Genesis verses while seamlessly incorporating earlier textual traditions. In the biblical material, Abraham is traveling to a still unspecified mountain. While Abraham knows to look for God’s signal, the reader is given no clues. ShY takes midrashic comments on Genesis 22:4 (when Abraham sees the sacrificial spot from afar) and incorporates them here. This small detail creates a sense of excitement and engagement on the part of the reader, who can now watch for the dense cloud with increasing dread as Abraham and Isaac approach the sacrificial spot.

¹ The first test, of Lech L’cha, is mirrored with this final test, indicated by this textual allusion. Abraham knows something is coming. In essence, the tradition sees his life as a journey from *lech l’cha* to *lech l’cha*.

² Abraham has heard these words before. By responding “*Hineini*,” he indicates that he recognizes that he will be asked to make another sacrifice. For discussion on the meanings of “*Hineini*” in the Abraham story, see Rabbi Norman J Cohen, *Hineini in Our*

Lives: Learning How to Respond to Others Through 14 Biblical Texts and Personal Stories. (Jewish Lights: Woodstock, VT), 2005.

³ I have chosen to translate “עולה” more simply as “sacrifice” rather than “burnt offering,” for a more visceral, dramatic effect.

⁴ This signifies the presence of the Eternal is dwelling in that place. Source?

ויאמר אברהם בלבו איך אעשה עד אשר אפריד את יצחק בני משרה אמו, להעלותו לפני ה' לעולה. ויבוא אברהם האהלה וישב לפני שרה אישתו, וידבר אליה כדברים האלה. בננו יצחק גדל ולא למד עבודת אלוהיו זה ימים, עתה אלך לי למחר ואביאנו אל שם ואל עבר בנו ושם ילמד את דרכי ה'. כי ילמדוהו לדעת את ה' ולדעת כאשר יתפלל לפני ה' בכל עת ויענהו, ולדעת שם את דרך עבודת ה' אלוהיו. ותאמר שרה טוב דיברת, לך אדוני ועשה לו כאשר דיברת. ואולם אל תרחיק את בני מעלי ולא ישב שם ימים רבים, כי נפשי קשורה בנפשו מאוד. ויאמר אברהם אל שרה, בתי חלה נא את פני ה' אלוהינו אשר יעשה עמנו טובה.

And Abraham said to himself, “How can I do that which will separate Isaac, my son, from Sarah, his mother in order to sacrifice him before God as an offering?” And Abraham came to Sarah’s tent, and sat before Sarah, his wife, and spoke to her these words. “Our son, Isaac is grown, and has not learned the service of God during this time.¹ Now, tomorrow I will go, and bring my son with me to Shem and to Ever, to teach him the ways of God.² For they will teach him to know God and to know that when he prays to God, God will answer him in every moment, and to know there the way of serving the Eternal, his God.”³ And Sarah said: “What you have said is good. My lord, go, and do what you have spoken. But do not distance my son from me, and do not dwell there many days, for my soul is very tied to his soul.”⁴ And Abraham said to Sarah, “My daughter, please implore the Eternal our God, to do good with us.”⁵

This is a stunning addition to the biblical narrative. Abraham, perhaps having already reconciled himself to sacrificing his son, or perhaps comforted, knowing that he has another son does not express any self-doubt. Instead, he feels deep concern for Sarah, who is about to lose her only son without her consent.

His concern is warranted, Sarah’s love for her son his intense. ShY brings language from two other places in the Tanach to illustrate how deeply she is connected to her son. The transplantation of the phrase “נפשו קשורה בנפשו” into this narrative adds great emotional depth. The first source is in Genesis, when Joseph’s brothers have come to Egypt to escape famine. Although he recognizes them, he hides his identity. As a test,

Joseph frames Benjamin and has him taken away. Judah begs Joseph not to take Benjamin away from Jacob, as Jacob and Rachel have already mourned one child. Emphasizing the close connection between Benjamin and his father, Judah cries:

וְעַתָּה כִּבְאִי אֶל־עַבְדְּךָ אָבִי וְהַנֶּעֱר אֵינֶנּוּ אִתָּנִי וְנַפְשִׁי קְשׁוּרָה בְּנַפְשׁוֹ: וְהָיָה כִּרְאוֹתָיו כִּי־אֵין הַנֶּעֱר וְנָמַת...⁵

“Now, if I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us—since his own soul is so bound up with his—when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die.”⁶

The intertextual conversation between these textual applications is poignant. Jacob and Sarah’s trauma is woven into Sarah, offering a window into Sarah’s pain. She has lost family as well, having left her home, and was twice kidnapped, barren until old age. Her life was extended by the birth of Isaac, and her legacy ensured. Without him, she has neither.

The same phrase is applied to a second pair, David and Jonathan.

וַיְהִי כִּכְלֹתוֹ לְדַבֵּר אֶל־שָׁאוּל וְנַפְשׁ יְהוֹנָתָן נִקְשְׁרָה בְּנַפְשׁ דָּוִד וַיֵּאָהֲבוּ וַיֵּאָהֲבֵהוּ יְהוֹנָתָן כְּנַפְשׁוֹ:

When [David] finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan’s soul became bound up with the soul of David; Jonathan loved David as himself.⁷

A different kind of love is represented here. From this we can understand the intimate relationship between Sarah and her son, and how deeply she loves him. Sarah’s love, however, extends beyond either relationship in the biblical text. Our author is careful to add “מֵאֵד” into this account, indicating that Sarah’s love is stronger than either Jacob’s love for Benjamin or Jonathan’s love for David.

Lastly, the inclusion of the word “קשורה” offers an alternative to the kind of love present between Isaac and Abraham. Sarah’s love, a mother’s love, is represented by this

intimate “קשר-connection.” Abraham’s love, on other hand, is symbolized by the coercive act of “עקידה-binding.” Sadly, however, Abraham’s binding will keep him safe, while Sarah’s ties will ultimately result in her death.

¹ This tradition is also found in Tanhuma ha-Nidpas , Vayera 22:6. There, However, Abraham’s concern with telling Sarah because of her close relationship with her son, but on the perceived female fragility.

² Genesis Rabbah 56:11 states that Isaac went to study at the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever AFTER the Akedah. ShY adapts this tradition for this moment, in order to give Sarah an excuse to take Isaac away from home.

³ This alludes back to Satan’s statement above that Isaac has never served God.

⁴ This is a spiritual connection, but also knowing that she will die when she learns of the sacrificial event, the reading of soul as “life” suggests that Sarah’s life is also tied to her son’s.

⁵ Abraham tells Sarah to pray to God to keep them safe. Perhaps he now understands the power of her prayer to bring about divine intervention.

⁶ Genesis 44:30-31a

⁷ I Samuel 18:1

ותקה שרה את יצחק בנה וילן איתה בלילה הוא, ותשקהו ותחבקהו ותצוהו עד הבוקר. ותאמר לו בני איך תוכל נפשי להיפרד ממך, ותשקהו ותחבקהו עוד ותבך עמו. ותצוה את אברהם אביו עליו, ותאמר שרה לאברהם בי אדוני השמר נא בבנך ושים את עיניך עליו כי אין לי בן אחר ולא בת כי אם הוא. אל נא תעזבנו אם ירעיב האכילהו לחם ואם יצמא השקהו מים, ואל תניחהו ללכת ברגליו ולא לישב בשמש. וגם אל תעזבהו ללכת בדרך לבדו ולא תאנסהו מכל אשר ידבר, ועשית לו ככל אשר יאמר אליך. ותבך שרה עוד בכי גדול אל יצחק בלילה ההוא, ותצוהו עד הבוקר.

And Sarah took Isaac, her son, and he slept with her that night, and she kissed him and embraced him,¹ and instructed him until the morning.² And she said to him, “My son, how can my soul depart from you?”³ and she kissed him and embraced him more, and cried with him. And she instructed Abraham, his father, concerning him, And Sarah said to Abraham, “Please, for my sake, my lord, keep your son safe, and set your eyes on him, For I have no other son, no daughter, just him. Please do not abandon him, if he is hungry, feed him bread, and if he is thirsty, give him water, and do not let him walk by foot, or sit in the sun. Also, don’t allow him to walk on the way alone, and do not force him to do what he does not want, and do for him all that he tells you.” And Sarah cried more, wailing greatly to Isaac that night, and instructed him until the morning.

Isaac seems to be more Sarah’s son than Abraham’s. In the Torah, Abraham doesn’t himself refer to Isaac as “my son” until he is about to sacrifice him in Genesis 22:7. Furthermore, when Sarah uses the label, Abraham has concern for “his son,” referring to Ishmael.^{4 5} In ShY, Abraham only calls Isaac his son when thinking about, or speaking to Sarah until they are up on the mountain together. In a midrash that is highly concerned with relationships between people, perhaps the most dramatic event in any relationship occurs between the two most interpersonally distant characters. Sarah’s words reflect this distance; they are not gentle reminders rather genuine concern that Abraham might not know how to care for his own child.

Yet, the concerns Sarah raises seem out of place for her thirty-seven-year old son, especially for what is meant to be a short trip. Perhaps this prophetess⁶ has sensed what future awaits her son.

Sarah uses the “mothering” language as a code; her words are an intertextual mosaic. As Sarah’s speech does not exist elsewhere in midrashic tradition, using this biblical language allows her to speak in a way that connotes authenticity. However, her language does more than simply allow her to sound authentic. The textually literate reader learns much about Sarah’s intentions through an intertextual reading.

בִּי אֲדֹנָי:

She begins by addressing Abraham, “בִּי אֲדֹנָי,” “my lord.” The phrase appears twelve times in Tanach, often spoken in a desperate tone, asking God or an earthly judge to have compassion or reverse a decision.⁷ Of the twelve, four are found in the context of a parent praying about a child or future child.⁸ Perhaps Sarah is not beseeching Abraham, but God?

The textual language between ShY’s Sarah and the story of Joseph and his brothers in Egypt continues here. After Benjamin is taken, Judah uses the language in a moment of desperation, he addresses Joseph/Pharaoh’s minister with “בִּי אֲדֹנָי.”⁹ His words reflect a sense of humility. He knows they might be undeserving of such kindness, nonetheless, he tries to save his brother’s life. Sarah, too, knows the improbability that either God or Abraham will heed her prayer, nevertheless, she tries to change one of her “Lord’s minds.

Sarah’s words appear in the mouth of another once-barren woman. Hannah is also facing separation from her only child, whom she vowed to dedicate to Temple service

once he was weaned. When that time arrives, she brings Samuel, her son, to Eli, the priest, addressing him with “בי אדוני.”¹⁰ These two mothers, having been given miracle babies, must both give their sons back to God. Their only hope is their impassioned pleading that their child be kept safe.

השמר נא:

She tells Abraham “השמר נא,” the same words that Jonathan uses to warn David that Saul, Jonathan’s father, intends to kill him. Both Sarah and Jonathan are faced with competing loyalties. Should they undermine their patriarch in order to warn their beloved of the fate that awaits them? This intertextual reading suggests that Sarah is aware of God’s plan. If Isaac is present for this conversation, perhaps Sarah is altering Isaac of the danger ahead.

ושים את עיניך עליו:

Similar language is used by Nebuchadnezzar when asking his guard to protect the prophet Jeremiah during the siege of Jerusalem.¹¹ Why?

קִחְנוּ וְעִינֵיכֶם שִׁים עָלָיו וְאַל־תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוּמָה רָעָה כִּי אִם בְּאִשְׁרֵי יְדִבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ בֶּן עֲשֵׂה עִמּוֹ:

“Take him and look after him; do him no harm, but grant whatever he asks of you.”

כי אין לי בן:

Avshalom, after his daughter is raped, and his three sons presumably died young¹² laments in II Samuel 18:18, “אֵין־לִי בֶן בְּעָבוּר הַזֶּכִּיר שְׁמִי...” meaning, “I have no son to keep my name alive....” Sarah will also be left without a child to continue her legacy. Although the language is not an exact match, her words echo, and even have a similar

assonance to Abram's words to God in Genesis 15: אין לי/הן לי. Sarah seems to be reminding Abram what it feels like to be heirless.

אל נא תעזבנו:

Moses, looking for support in the wilderness asks Hobab to journey with them, saying, “אל־נָא תַעְזֹב אִתָּנוּ,” “Please do not abandon us!”¹³ Sarah is worried that Isaac will not be able to navigate the unfamiliar territory if he is left alone.

אם ירעיב האכילהו לחם ואם יצמא השקהו מים:

Sarah turns to the practical wisdom of the Proverbs:

אִם־יָרֵעַב שִׁנְאָדָּה הָאֹכִלְהוּ לֶחֶם וְאִם־צָמָא הַשִּׁקְהוּ מַיִם:

If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; If he is thirsty, give him water to drink.¹⁴

Although he might not have much experience with childrearing, he is an accomplished soldier, and might know how to treat the enemy.

ועשית לו ככל אשר יאמר אליך:

This might be a play on the second half of Jeremiah 39:21. Sarah is indicating to Abraham now that he doesn't *only* need to make sure he is well-fed, but that he should have agency in whatever will happen while they are away.

Through the employment of biblical verse, Sarah's instructions are both a superlative example of narrative midrash, but also powerfully communicate her message to Abraham. It is striking that Sarah's voice is so literarily rich. She is transformed from a silent figure to an assertive, concerned mother who embodies words of prophets and patriarchs.

¹ This is reminiscent of Esau and Jacob's reunion in Genesis 33:4, in which they embrace and hug. Although they are reuniting, and Sarah and Isaac are separating, the allusion adds another layer of emotions to this stirring interaction.

² One wonders what Sarah taught Isaac. Midrash tells us that she proselytized, and ShY notes that Sarah taught Hagar her ways. I was only able to find one source that indicated Sarah studied Torah, (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7.28.1) and no sources on her teaching Torah.

³ Sarah's previous statement "My soul is very tied to his soul" is found here in a new iteration. The author juxtaposes the language of "קשורה" of the previous statement with "להיפרד," meaning "to separate."

⁴ Genesis 21:10-11

⁵ For further discussion this point, see Phyllis Tribble, "Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing," *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Tribble and Russell. (Westminster John Knox: Louisville 2006) 53, 68n66.

⁶ Exodus 15:20

⁷ Two such examples are found in Exodus 4:10; 4:13, where Moses pleads with God to choose another messenger and Numbers 12:11, in which Aaron asks God to allow Miriam to live.

⁸ I Kings 3:17, 26; Judges 13:8; I Samuel 1:26

⁹ Genesis 44:18

¹⁰ I Samuel 1:26

¹¹ Jeremiah 39:12

¹² Radak on II Samuel 18:18.3

¹³ Numbers 10:31

¹⁴ Proverbs 25.21

ויהי בבוקר ותיקח שרה בגד טוב ונאה מאוד מן הבגדים אשר איתה בבית¹, מאשר נתן לה אבימלך. ותלבוש את יצחק בנה ותשם לו מצנפת על ראשו, ותשם אבן יקרה על המצנפת. ותיתן להם צידה לדרך, ויצא וילכו יצחק ואברהם אביו וילכו עמהם מעבדיהם לשלחם בדרך. ותצא גם שרה עמהם ותלך בדרך איתם לשלחם, ויאמרו לה שוב לך האהלה. ותשמע שרה את דברי יצחק בנה ותבך בכי גדול, ויבך גם אברהם אישה עימה. ויבך גם יצחק בנה עמה בכי גדול מאוד, וגם אשר הלכו לשלחם בכו בכי גדול עד מאוד. ותחזק שרה ביצחק בנה ותאחזהו בין זרועותיה ותחבקהו ותשקהו, ותוסף עוד לבכות עמו. ותאמר שרה, מי יודע אם אראה אותך עוד בני מהיום הזה. ויבכו עוד בכי גדול, ואברהם ושרה ויצחק וגם אשר הלכו עמהם בדרך לשלחם בכו בכי גדול עימהם. ותשב לה אחרי כן שרה מעל יצחק בבכיה רבה, וישובו כל שפחותיה ועבדיה עמה האהלה, ואברהם הלך עם יצחק בנו להעלותו עולה לפני ה' כאשר ציוהו. ויקח אברהם גם את שני נעריו עמו, את ישמעאל בן הגר ואת אליעזר עבדו וילכו יחד עימהם.

And in the morning, Sarah took a very fine, beautiful garment from the clothes that were with her in the house, from that which Avimelech had given to her. And she dressed Isaac in it, and she placed a turban on his head, and placed a precious stone² on the turban. And she gave to them provisions for the road, and Isaac and Abraham, his father, went out with their servants to accompany them on the way. And Sarah also went out with them to go on the way with them in order to send them off, and they said to her: "Return to the tent." And Sarah heard the words of Isaac, her son, and she began to weep, and Abraham also wept with his wife, and also Isaac, her son, wept with her, and also those that went to accompany them, wept greatly. And Sarah grabbed hold of Isaac, her son, and held him in her arms, and embraced him and kissed him, and continued to cry with him. And Sarah said, "Who knows if I will see you again, my son, after today?" And Abraham and Sarah and Isaac all cried together.³ And all who accompanied them on the way to send them off, wept with them, and Sarah left, and all her handmaids and servants returned with her to her tent. And Abraham went with Isaac his son, to bring him up as an offering before The Eternal as God commanded him. And Abraham also took his two lads with him, Ishmael, son of Hagar, and Eliezer, his servant, and they went together with them.

Despite her devastation, Sarah puts herself together and prepares her son and husband for their journey. She prepares Isaac for his journey with two important items, the garment that Midrash Rabbah teaches Avimelech gave to her. The garment is well

suited for the task at hand, as Aimelech is seen in the tradition as the consummate High Priest. With the addition of the turban, also part of the priestly garb, with a stone within it, Isaac is ready to begin his priestly education.⁴

Perhaps, however, as the language used by ShY is borrowed from Genesis 27:15, where Rebecca dresses Jacob in Esau's finest garments in order to trick his father, Sarah is attempting to manipulate Abraham as well, that he may bless the correct son. This is especially important, as the two accompanying servants mentioned in Genesis 22:3 are named as Eliezer and Ishmael, two of Abraham's "sons," vying for his inheritance. (See following section.)

¹ This language alludes to Genesis 27:15:

וַתִּקַּח רִבְקָה אֶת־בְּגָדֵי עֶשָׂו בְּנֵהּ הַגָּדֹל הַחֲמֹדֹת אֲשֶׁר אָתָּה בִּבְיֹתָ וַתַּלְבִּישׁ אֶת־יַעֲקֹב בְּנֵהּ הַקָּטָן:

Rebekah then took the best clothes of her older son Esau, which were there in the house, and had her younger son Jacob put them on. Perhaps both Sarah, and Rebecca received these special garments from Avimelech!

² Recall that Sarah is represented by precious stones. She is giving her son an amulet for protection, and also a piece of herself.

³ Note the role that weeping plays in this narrative. Isaac, midrashically is highly impacted by tears.

⁴ Exodus 29.6

ויהי הם הולכים בדרך, וידברו הנערים ביניהם כדברים האלה. ויאמר ישמעאל אל אליעזר הנה אברהם אבי הולך את יצחק להקריבו עולה לה' כאשר ציוהו, והיה בשובו ונתן לי את כל אשר לו לרשתו כי אני בנו בכורו. ויען אליעזר את ישמעאל ויאמר אליו, הלא אברהם גירש אותך ואת אמך וישבע לבלתי הוריש לך מכל אשר לו מאומה. ולמי יתן את כל אשר לו ואת כל חמדותיו הלא לעבדו הנאמן בביתו אשר עבדתיו יומם ולילה ואעש כל אשר יאמר אלי, כי לי יוריש את כל אשר לו אחרי מותו.

And while they were going on the way, the lads spoke with each other these things: Ishmael said to Eliezer, "Behold, Abraham, my father, is going to sacrifice Isaac as an offering to God, as he was commanded. And when he returns, he will give me all his inheritance, for I am his firstborn son." And Eliezer answered Ishmael, saying to him, "But Abraham banished you and your mother and swore to not to bequeath to you anything from all that he has. And to whom will he give everything that he has and all his treasures, to no one but his faithful servant in his house who has served him day and night and did everything that he said to me, for I will inherit all that is his after his death.

Finally, Ishmael reveals his true motivation. How does he know that his father will sacrifice Isaac? Ishmael, like our midrash, is putting together the pieces. For Ishmael, it is not a coincidence that he and Isaac debate about who is more beloved, and then the next day they pack up their things and head for the mountains.

To add some dramatic tension, the character of Eliezer is also present. There are both biblical and midrashic precedent for him to think he might be the recipient of Abraham's inheritance.¹ Instead, as we find out, he will be tasked with ensuring that Abraham's legacy continues through a wife for Isaac. In Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer, where this source appears, God resolves their conflict by letting them know that neither will inherit.²

¹ Genesis 15:2

² Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer 31.

ויהי בלכת אברהם עם יצחק בנו בדרך, ויבוא השטן וידמה לאברהם כתואר איש זקן מאוד עניו ושפל רוח מאוד. ויגש אל אברהם ויאמר אליו, הכסיל או בער אתה אשר אתה הולך לעשות הדבר הזה היום מבנך יחידך. כי נתן לך האלוהים בן באחרית ימך לעת זקנתך ותלך ותשחטו היום על לא חמס, והאבדת את נפש בנך יחידך מן הארץ. הלא ידעת אם לא שמעת כי אין הדבר הזה מאת ה', כי לא יעשה ה' לאיש כרעה הזאת בארץ לאמור לו לך שחוט את בנך. וישמע אברהם את הדבר הזה, וידע כי דבר השטן הוא אשר ביקש להתעותו מדרך ה'. ולא אבה אברהם לשמוע בקול השטן, ויגער בו אברהם וילך לו.

And it came to pass, when Abraham was with his son, Isaac, on the way. Satan came and to Abraham, in the guise of a very humble and modest old man. And he met Abraham, and said to him, "Are you are a fool or ignorant, that you would go to do this thing today to your only son. For God gave you a son in your last days, late in life, and you are going to go and slaughter him on this day, he who did no wrong? And you will lose the soul of your only son from the earth? Did you not know or did you not hear, but this is not from God, for The Eternal would not do such evil to a man in the world, saying to him, "go and slaughter your son?" Abraham heard this, and knew that it was the word of Satan, who wished to distract him from the way of the Eternal. And Abraham did not want to hear the voice of Satan, and Abraham rebuked him and went on his way.

Satan, like everyone else in this chapter, is desperate to prove that he is a more worthy servant than the humans. This tradition has roots in both Jewish and Islamic tradition. In one Hadith, Satan sees that this might be his only chance, saying, "By God! If I cannot deceive the people of Abraham with this, I shall never be able to do it."¹ Satan appears to humans as their mirror, but important aspects are different. He is sort of their alter-ego. Abraham loves both of his sons, but Satan states that he only has one son in the presence of his other son, and another whom he loves like a son. Abraham is faithful, so Satan encourages distrust. In Midrash Tanhuma ha-Nidpas, Satan's suggests that God was not speaking to Abraham, but rather a מִשְׁטֵן, essentially calling God, Satan.² Satan seems to appear to everyone as their alter-ego, even God.

וישב השטן ויבוא אצל יצחק, וידמה ליצחק כתואר איש בחור יפה תואר ויפה מראה מאוד. ויגש אל יצחק ויאמר אליו, הלא ידעת אם לא שמעת כי אביך הזקן הכסיל הזה מביאך לשחטך היום חנם. עתה בני לא תשמע אליו ולא תאבה לו כי הזקן הוא כסיל, ולא תאבד את נפשך היקרה ואת תאריך הנאה מן הארץ. וישמע יצחק את הדבר הזה ויאמר לאברהם אביו, השמעת אבי את אשר דיבר אליי האיש הזה כזה וכזה דיבר. ויען אברהם את יצחק בנו ויאמר אליו, הישמר לך ממנו ואל תשמע אל דבריו ואל תאבה לו, כי שטן הוא לנו להעבירנו ממצות אלהינו היום. ויגער אברהם עוד בשטן, וילך לו השטן מעליהם.

And Satan returned and went to Isaac, and appeared to Isaac as a young man, with an attractive and very handsome appearance. And he approached Isaac, and said to him: Don't you know, or haven't you heard that your old, foolish father, is bringing you today to slaughter, for nothing? And now, my son, do not listen to him, and do not consent, for the man is old and foolish, and do not let your precious soul be lost, and your pleasant appearance be lost from the earth. And Isaac listened to this thing, and said to Abraham, his father, "Have you heard, my father, what this man said to me?" He spoke thusly. And Abraham answered Isaac, his son, and said to him, "Guard yourself from him, and do not listen to his words, and do not agree with him, for he is Satan, here to cause us to transgress the commandments of God today. And Abraham rebuked Satan again, and Satan went away from them.

Not to be discouraged from his goal, Satan tries a new victim, the unsuspecting Isaac. The author uses the same language as in the prior section, each person has a parallel encounter with him. Each scene is a window into each character's experience of events, each is tested and tried in their own way.

Painfully, Abraham does not confirm or deny what Isaac hears. Although Isaac says "my father" when speaking to him, evoking images of his question to Abraham in Genesis 22:7, Abraham does not respond with the anticipated "Here I am, my son." Instead, he seems to remain distant, focused on the task ahead of him. The only person in this scene that refers to Isaac as "my son" ironically, is Satan.

In Midrash Tanhuma ha-Nidpas, Satan tries to provoke Isaac using the image of his mother:

“Oh, unfortunate son of an unhappy mother, many days your mother fasted before your birth, and now this demented old man is about to sacrifice you.” Isaac replied: “Even so, I will not disregard the will of my Creator, nor the command of my father.”

Although Satan does not explicitly take the same approach with Isaac in ShY, the image of Sarah is alluded to when he says that Isaac’s soul and pleasant appearance will be lost. Their connection, as mentioned previously, is represented by their “soul link,” and his pleasant appearance comes from Sarah’s beauty and her dressing him in her finery.

¹ Al Tabari 293

² Tanhuma ha-Nidpas, Vayera 22:10

וירא כי לא יכול להם ויסתר לו מפניהם וילך ויעבור לפניהם אל הדרך ויהי להם כנחל גדול מלא מים על הדרך, ויגיעו אברהם ויצחק ושני נעריו עד המקום ההוא ויראו נחל גדול ועצום מאוד במים אדירים.¹ ויבואו בתוך הנחל ויעברו בו, והמים עוברים לרגליהם. וילכו בנחל ההוא הלוך וטבוע ויגיעו המים עד צואריהם, ויבהלו כולם יחד מהמים. ויהי הם עוברים בנחל, ויכר אברהם את המקום ההוא וידע כי אין שמה מים במקום ההוא. ויאמר אברהם אל יצחק בנו, יודע אני את המקום הזה אשר אין בו לו נחל ולא מים. עתה השטן הוא אשר יעשה לנו את כל אלה, להעביר אותנו ממצוות אלוהינו היום הזה. ויגער אברהם בשטן ויאמר אליו, יגער ה' בך השטן לך² נא מעלינו כי במצות אלוהינו הלכנו. ויפחד השטן מקול אברהם וילך לו מעליהם.

And he saw that he could not overcome them, and he hid himself from them, and went and passed before them on the road, and he transformed himself into a great river, full of water on the path, and when Abraham and Isaac and the two young lads reached that place, they saw great and very vast river and its mighty waters.³ And they went into the river and crossed it, the water reaching their feet. And they went further into the river, and about to drown, and the water reaching their necks,⁴ and they all panicked together because of the water. And as they crossed the river, Abraham recognized this place, and knew that there was no water there. And Abraham said to Isaac, his son, I know this place has no river nor water. Now, Satan is the one who did all these things to us, to cause us to transgress God's commandments on this day. And Abraham rebuked Satan, and said to him: "May the Eternal rebuke you, Satan, please, leave us, for we have followed our God's commandments." And Satan feared the voice of Abraham, and he went away from them.⁵

Abraham has a second river-side epiphany, realizing what he needs to do in order to protect themselves. While in other midrashic accounts,⁶ it is Abraham's prayer that saves the group, here it is Abraham's ability to see past Satan's trickery. When Abraham prays, he mentions God's request to sacrifice Isaac. By omitting that piece of the tradition, Isaac still is unsure of the plan, having only heard it from Satan.

¹ Textual reference to Exodus 15:10, the Song of the Sea.

² Language taken from Zechariah 3:2

³ Tanhuma ha-Nidpas provides this as the reason it took three days to reach Moriah.

⁴ Textual reference to Psalms 69:2

⁵ This story becomes a source text for Tashlich, indicating the power of the event for encouraging introspection and realization.

⁶ Tanhuma ha-Nidpas Vayera, Midrash va-Yosha on Exodus 14:30

וישב המקום ההוא ליבשה כאשר היה בתחילה¹, וילך אברהם ויצחק אל המקום אשר אמר לו האלוהים. ויהי ביום השלישי וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא את המקום אשר אמר לו האלוהים מרחוק. וירא עליו עמוד אש מן הארץ ועד השמים וענן כבד על ההר, וכבוד ה' בענן. ויאמר אברהם אל יצחק בנו, הראית בהר ההוא אשר אנחנו רואים מרחוק את אשר אני רואה עליו. ויען יצחק ויאמר אל אביו, ראיתי והנה עמוד אש וענן וכבוד ה' נראה בענן עליו. וידע אברהם כי יצחק בנו נרצה לעולה לפני ה'. ויאמר אברהם אל אליעזר ואל ישמעאל בנו, הראיתם גם אתם את אשר ראינו בהר ההוא מרחוק. ויענו ויאמרו לא ראינו דבר רק הר כהרי כל הארץ ראינו, וידע אברהם כי לא נרצה לפני ה' ללכת עימם. ויאמר אליהם אברהם שבו לכם פה עם החמור ואני ויצחק בני נלכה לנו עד ההר ההוא, ונשתחוה שם לפני ה' ונשובה אליכם. וישבו שמה אליעזר וישמעאל במקום ההוא, כאשר ציום אברהם.

The place became again a dry place as it originally was, and then Abraham and Isaac went to the place that God had mentioned. On the third day, Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place that God had mentioned to him from afar. And he saw a pillar of fire, that extended from the land to the sky, and a dense cloud on the mountain, and the presence of The Eternal in the cloud. And Abraham said to Isaac, his son, "Have you seen on the mountain we see from afar, what I see upon it? And Isaac answered his father, saying, "I looked and behold a pillar of fire and a cloud and presence of The Eternal appeared in the cloud." And Abraham knew that Isaac, his son, was accepted as a burnt offering before The Eternal. And Abraham said to Eliezer and Ishmael, his son, "Did you also see what we saw on that mountain from afar?" And they answered, saying, "No, we didn't see a thing, we saw only a mountain like all the other mountains of this land," and Abraham knew that they weren't desired by God to walk with them to go before The Eternal. And Abraham said to them, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and Isaac, my son, we will go ourselves to this mountain, and we will worship there before The Eternal, and [then] we will return to you. And Eliezer and Ishmael stayed there in that place, as Abraham commanded them.

Genesis 22:4-5

בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם מֵרֶחֶק: וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־נָעֲרָיו שְׁבוּ־לָכֶם פֹּה עִם־הַחֲמוֹר וְאֲנִי וְהַנֶּעֱר וְנִלְכָּה עַד־כֹּה וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנִשְׁוֹבָה אֵלֵיכֶם:

On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his servants, "You stay here with the ass and the boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you."

The scene is even more awesome than Abraham anticipated. The dense cloud God mentioned, which appears in Genesis Rabbah² is joined by the pillar of fire described in Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer.³ Rather than combine the two natural phenomena, as is done in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, as a “burning cloud,”⁴ the two exist side by side. In PRE, this pillar of fire is a symbol of safety for Adam. Should the reader feel assured that God will protect Isaac? Or is the pillar of fire, which extends from earth to heaven, a vehicle for Isaac as a burnt offering? The term Anan Aikedah, meaning burning cloud, is a play on the very word, Akeidah itself!

Both the account in Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer and Genesis Rabbah, when Abraham asks the two lads (Ishmael and Eliezer in PRE), they are unable to see God's signs in front of them. However, because ShY places their argument before this moment, we must question whether Ishmael and Eliezer are pretending not to see the cloud. In both earlier texts, Abraham insults the boys, assigning them to stay with the donkey, because their inability to see the pillar of fire made them as dumb as an “ass.” Still, God's signs have finally proven Isaac's worthiness to Abraham. For the first time, we hear Abraham call Isaac “my son” in his presence.

¹ See Exodus 14:22; 15:19 which depict the previously mighty waters drying up. For more on the connection between the Akedah and the splitting of the sea, see Rachel S. Mikva, *Midrash vaYosha*, (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen, Germany), 2012. 41-62.

² Genesis Rabbah 56:1

³ Pirkei D'Rebbe Elieze Ch. 31

⁴ Targum Pseduo-Jonathan to Genesis 22:4

ואברהם לקח עצים לעולה וישימם על יצחק בנו, ויקחו את האש ואת המאכלת וילכו שניהם אל המקום ההוא. ויהי בלכתם ויאמר יצחק אל אביו, הנה אש והעצים איתנו ואיה השה להקריב לפני ה' לעולה. ויען אברהם את יצחק בנו לאמור, בני כך בחר ה' להיות לו לעולה תמימה תחת השה. ויאמר יצחק אל אביו, כל אשר דיבר אליך ה' אנוכי אעשה בשמחה ובטוב לב. ויאמר אברהם עוד אל יצחק בנו היש בלבך מחשבת דבר בזה או עצה אשר איננה נכונה, הגד נא לי בני אל תכחד ממני. ויען יצחק את אברהם אביו ויאמר אליו, חי ה' אבי וחי נפשי אם יש בלבי להימין ולהשמיל על הדבר אשר דיבר אליך ה'. וגם עצם מעצמי ובשר מבשרי לא זע ולא נד מהדבר הזה וגם מחשבת כל דבר או עצה רעה אין בלבי בדבר הזה, כי אם לב שמח וטוב נפש אני בדבר ה' אך אמרתי ברוך ה' אשר חפץ בי היום לעולה לפניו. וישמח אברהם מאוד בדברי יצחק, וילכו ויבואו שניהם אל המקום ההוא אשר דיבר ה'. ויגש אברהם לבנות את המזבח במקום ההוא, ויהי אברהם בונה ויצחק יתן בידו אבנים וחומר עד אשר כלו לבנות המזבח.

And Abraham took wood for the offering and placed them on Isaac, his son, and they took the fire stone and the knife and the two of them went to that place. And while they were walking, Isaac said to his father, "Behold, we have the fire stone and we have the wood, but where is the sheep to sacrifice to the Presence, The Eternal as an offering?" And Abraham answered Isaac, his son, saying, "My son, the Eternal has chosen you to be an unblemished offering in the place of the lamb." And Isaac said to his father, "All that the Eternal has spoken to you, I will do with happiness and a full heart." And Abraham again said to Isaac, his son, "Is there thought in your heart or counsel concerning this which is not correct? Tell me, please, my son, do not withhold anything from me." And Isaac answered Abraham, his father, saying to him, "As God lives, my father, as my soul lives, there is nothing in my heart, to sway me to right or to the left about this thing that the Eternal God spoke to you. And also, bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh has not stirred or wandered from this thing, and there is no consideration or evil counsel in my heart about this thing, but rather my heart is happy and my soul is joyous, in the word of the Eternal, so I say, 'Blessed is the Eternal who desires me on this day as an offering before God.'"¹ And Abraham rejoiced in the words of Isaac, and they continued on, and the two of them came to the place of which The Eternal had told them. And Abraham proceeded to build the altar in that place. And Abraham was building, and Isaac handed him stones and clay until they finished building the altar.²

Genesis 22:6-9a

ויקח אברהם את־עצי־העלה וישם על־יצחק בנו ויקחו את־האש ואת־המאכלת וילכו שניהם יחדו: ויאמר יצחק אל־אברהם אביו ויאמר אבי ויאמר הגני בני ויאמר הנה האש והעצים ואיה השה לעלה: ויאמר אברהם

אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה־לּוֹ הַשָּׂה לַעֲלֹה בְּנִי וְיִלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו: וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיָּבֶן שָׁם אֹבֶדֶה
אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together. Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he answered, "Yes, my son." And he said, "Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son." And the two of them walked on together. They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Abraham built an altar there;

Finally, Abraham informs Isaac of what is to happen. Powerfully, he seeks his son's consent. Perhaps Isaac, recalling his debate with Ishmael, as well as his encounter with Satan, has already been preparing his thoughts, and has decided to allow himself to be offered. The story here feels entirely different, rather than a coercive and violent action, we see a father and son, joyfully serving their God, together.

Yet the author of ShY is already hinting to us that Isaac will not be sacrificed. The language from Genesis 22:13, when a ram is sacrificed "תַּחַת בְּנִי," in place of Isaac, is used for the reverse situation here.

¹ Isaac is portrayed as a willing sacrifice, and the perfect sacrifice at that. See parallels in Jubilees, Pesikta Rabbati 40, Shibbolei HaLeket 9a-b.

² Abraham and Isaac build the altar together. This mirrors the Islamic tradition, where Ishmael and Abraham build the Kaba together in Mecca.

ויקח אברהם את העצים ויערכם על המזבח שהוא אשר בנה, ויקח את יצחק בנו ויאסרהו לשומו על העצים אשר על המזבח לשוחטו לעולה לפני ה'. ויאמר יצחק אל אביו אבי עקדני מאוד וקשור אותי ואחר תשימני על המזבח, פן אשוב ואנוע ואנתק מחזקת המאכלת אשר בבשרי ואחלל את קורבן העולה ויעש אברהם כן. ויאמר עוד יצחק אל אביו, אבי בעת אשר תשחטני ותשרפני לעולה קח עמך הנשאר מאפרי והבאת לשרה אמי ואמרת אליה זה ליצחק ריח. אך לא תדבר אליה את הדבר הזה בשבתה לפני באר או במקום גבוה, פן תשליך את נפשה עליי ותמות. וישמע אברהם את דברי יצחק, וישא אברהם את קולו ויבך בדבר יצחק הדברים האלה וירדו דמעות אברהם על יצחק בנו. וגם יצחק בכה מאוד ויאמר אל אביו, מהרה חושה אבי ועשה בי רצון ה' אלוהינו כאשר צוך.

And Abraham took the branches and arranged them on the altar that he had built, and took Isaac, his son, and tied him up, to place him on the wood that was on the altar in order to slaughter him before the Eternal. And Isaac said to his father, "My father, really bind me tightly, and tie me up and afterwards, place me on the altar, lest I turn away and I move and break free of the grip of the knife that is in my flesh, and I will desecrate the sacrificial offering." And Abraham did so. And Isaac said more to his father, "My father, while you are slaughtering and burning me as an offering, take with you the remnants from my ashes¹, and bring them to Sarah, my mother, and say to her, 'This is the fragrance of Isaac.' But do not tell her this thing while she is sitting in front of a well or in a high place, lest she cast away her soul on my account and die." And Abraham took to heart the words of Isaac, and raised his voice and wept over Isaac, his son. And Isaac also cried greatly, and said to his father, "Hurry, quickly, my father, and fulfill through me the desire of the Eternal God, which God commanded you.

Genesis 22:9

וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר־לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֵּבֶן שָׁם אֲבְרָהָם אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיַּעֲרֹךְ אֶת־הָעֵצִים וַיַּעֲקֵד אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּשֶׂם אוֹתוֹ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִמַּעַל לְעֹצִים:

They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Isaac's service is to his parents. He is concerned with two things, making sure that his father's sacrifice is not rendered impure,² and making sure that his mother has closure. In Midrash Tanhuma ha-Nidpas , Isaac agrees to the sacrifice, but with reservations:

“If he has chosen me,” Isaac replied, “I shall willingly surrender my soul to Him, but I am gravely concerned about my mother... Isaac said to him: “Father, do not tell my mother about this while she is standing at the edge of a pit or a roof lest she hurl herself down and die.”³

This concern for Sarah appears earlier, from Abraham:

At that very moment, Abraham thought, “If I inform Sarah, women are light-headed about little things; all the more so about such a big thing. But if I don’t tell her and steal him away, when she doesn’t see him, she’ll kill herself. He said to her, “Prepare us some food and drink, and we’ll celebrate today.” She said to him, “What’s the reason for this celebration?” He said to her, “Old people like us give birth to a son—it is incumbent upon us to celebrate!” Amidst the celebration he said, “You know, I was 3 years old when I encountered [recognized] my Creator. This lad is getting older and hasn’t been educated. There is a place far away where they educate boys. I’ll take him and educate him there.” She said, “Go in peace.” Without further ado, “He arose early in the morning.” Why [so early] in the morning? He thought, “Sarah may change her mind and not let me go. I’ll get up early, before she does.”

Although both men are concerned for Sarah’s well-being, Isaac’s comes from a place of truth, Abraham, trickery. Isaac now feels responsible for repairing the damage done, first, by the deceit, and second, by the sacrifice itself. As discussed previously, Sarah and Isaac’s relationship is represented by the word “נפש,-soul” which appears again in this context. Although the content is very similar from that of the Tanhuma ha-Nidpas version, the shift in language is unique to ShY. Isaac wants Sarah to know that he participated willingly in the sacrifice, which he indicates by telling Abraham to say to Sarah, “This is the fragrance of Isaac.” This is a play on the phrase “רוח נחם,” which ostensibly is a reference to the “pleasing smell” to God of the sacrifices offered, e.g., Leviticus 23.12, but may allude here to the “pleasing and willing spirit” of Isaac.

Something in what Isaac says elicits sorrow from Abraham. He weeps, and Isaac joins. The theme of tears in the Akedah is found throughout midrashic tradition. In many of these traditions, it is the tears, either by Abraham or an angelic interceder that stop

Abraham from the sacrifice. Here, however, there are no magic tears, only raw human emotion.

¹ Isaac's ashes are seen in many later traditions. See Midrash vaYosha on Exodus 14:30; Tanhuma ha-Nidpas Vayeira 23:4

² This tradition appears in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis 22:10; Genesis Rabbah 56:8; Tanhuma ha-Nidpas Vayeira 23:4; Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer 31; Pesikta Rabbati 40:6

³ Tanhuma ha-Nidpas Vayeira 23:4-5

ויהי לב¹ אברהם ויצחק שמח בדבר הזה אשר ציום ה', אך עין במר תבכה ולב שמח. ויעקוד אברהם את יצחק בנו וישם אותו על המזבח ממעל לעצים, ויפשוט יצחק את צוארו לפני אביו על המזבח. וישלח אברהם את ידו לקחת את המאכלת, לשחוט את בנו לעולה על המזבח. ויגשו מלאכי רחמים בעת ההיא לפני ה', וידברו אליו בעבור יצחק לאמור: אנא ה' מלך רחום וחנון² אתה על כל אשר בראת בשמים ובארץ ואתה מחיה את כולם, תנה כופר ופדיון תחת יצחק עבדך וחון ורחם על אברהם ועל יצחק בנו אשר עשו את דברך היום. הראית ה' אשר יצחק בן אברהם עבדך עקוד וקשור לזבח על המזבח כבהמה, עתה יהמו נא רחמיה' עליהם. בעת ההיא נראה ה' אל אברהם ויקרא אליו מן השמים ויאמר אליו, אל תשלח ידך אל הנער ואל תעש לו מאומה כי עתה ידעתי כי ירא אלוהים אתה בעשותך את הדבר הזה, ולא חשכת את בנך את יחידך ממני. וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא והנה איל נאחז בסבך בקרניו, הוא האיל אשר ברא ה' אלוהים בארץ ביום עשותו ארץ ושמים. ויכן ה' אלוהים את הכבש ההוא מהיום ההוא והלאה, להיותו תחת יצחק לעולה. והאיל ההוא הלך וקרב לפני אברהם, ויאחז בו השטן ויסבך את קרניו בסבך לבלתי קרב אל אברהם למען אשר ישחט אברהם את בנו. וירא אברהם את האיל ההוא הולך וקרב לפני אברהם, והשטן יחדלנו. וילך אברהם ויקחהו ויביאהו לפני המזבח, ויתר את יצחק בנו ממאסרו וישם תחתיו את האיל ההוא.

וישחט אברהם את האיל על המזבח, ויעלהו לעולה תחת יצחק בנו. ויז אברהם מדם האיל על המזבח ויקרא ויאמר, זה תחת בני וזה יחשב היום כדם בני לפני ה'. והיה כל הדבר אשר יעשה אברהם בכבש ההוא על המזבח, וקרא ואמר זה תחת בני וזה יחשב היום לפני ה' על בני. ויכל אברהם את כל העבודה על המזבח ותרצה העבודה לפני ה' ותחשב כיצחק, ויברך ה' את אברהם ואת זרעו ביום ההוא.

And the heart of Abraham and Isaac was happy about this thing that the Eternal commanded, but the eye wept bitterly, while the heart was happy. And Abraham bound Isaac, his son, and placed him on the altar on top of the wood, and Isaac stretched out his neck towards his father on the altar. And Abraham reached out his hand to take the knife, to slaughter his son as an offering on the altar. And at that time the Angels of Compassion went before the Eternal, and they spoke to God on behalf of Isaac, saying, "Please, Eternal, You are a Compassionate and Gracious Ruler on all that you created in the Heavens and in the Earth and you sustain all of them, provide a ransom and redeem Isaac, Your servant, And have compassion on Abraham and on Isaac, his son, as they fulfilled your word today." God, did you see Isaac, son of Abraham, Your servant bound and tied as a sacrifice on the altar like a beast. "Now, please, may Your mercy be stirred for them." At that moment, The Eternal appeared to Abraham³ and called out to him from the Heavens, and said to him, "Do not touch the boy, and do not do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, for in your doing of this thing,

you did not withhold your only son from me. And Abraham lifted his eyes and saw, behold, a ram was caught in the thicket by his horns. This is the ram that the Eternal God created in the land on the day that God made the Earth and the Heavens. The Eternal God had prepared that ram from that day on, for it to be in place of Isaac as an offering. And the ram moved toward Abraham, but Satan grabbed hold of him and tangled his horns in the thicket to prevent it from it from approaching Abraham so that Abraham would slaughter his son. And Abraham saw the ram moving closer toward him, and that had Satan stopped him. And Abraham went, and took it, and brought it to the altar, and freed Isaac, his son, from the bindings and placed the ram in his place.

And Abraham slaughtered the ram on the altar, and he raised it up as an offering in the place of Isaac, his son. And Abraham sprinkled the blood of the ram on the altar and he called out, saying, “This is in place of my son, and will be considered on this day, as the blood of my son before the Eternal.” And all was done by Abraham with the ram on the altar, and he called and said, “This is in place of my son, and this should be considered today, before the Eternal, in place of my son. And when Abraham finished his worship on the sacrificial altar, the worship was acceptable to the Eternal, and it was considered to be in place of Isaac, and the Eternal blessed Abraham and his seed on that day.

Genesis 22:11-13

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִי מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי׃ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי־הַנֶּעֱר וְאַל־תַּעַשׂ לּוֹ מְאוּמָה כִּי עֲתָה יִדְעָתִי כִּי־יִרְאָה אֱלֹהִים אֹתָהּ וְלֹא תִשָּׁכַח אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ מִמֶּנִּי׃ וַיֵּשָׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיִּרְאֵהוּ אֵיל אַחֵר נֹאֲחָז בִּסְבָּךְ בְּקֶרְנוֹ וַיִּלָּךְ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאֵיל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה תַחַת בְּנוֹ׃

Then an angel of the LORD called to him from heaven: “Abraham! Abraham!” And he answered, “Here I am.” And he said, “Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me.” When Abraham looked up, he looked, and behold, a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.

Genesis 22:15-16

וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם־יְהוָה כִּי יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא תִשָּׁכַח אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ׃ כִּי־בָרַךְ אַבְרָהָם וַיְהִי אַרְבָּה אֶת־זַרְעוֹ כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיַּכְחוּל אֲשֶׁר עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם וַיִּרְשׁ וַיַּרְעֶךָ אֶת שְׁעַר אֲיִכּוֹ׃

...Saying, “By Myself I swear, the LORD declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one, I will bestow My blessing upon you and make

your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes.

Although the other diving beings have been swayed, Satan is still determined to prove Abraham's unfitness. However, Abraham again sees through his tricks, and finds the ram to sacrifice in Isaac's place.⁴

One line in particular emphasizes very complex emotions, "but the eye wept bitterly, while the heart was happy." Even if they were willing to answer God's call, neither can they rid themselves of the feeling of sadness that accompanies the potential loss of life.

¹ Note the singular "לֵב." Abraham and Isaac move forward with one heart and mind.

² The Angels remind God of God's attributes. See Exodus 34:6; Jonah 4:2

³ In the Torah, it is an angelic messenger who cries out to Abraham. In ShY, the angels ask God for compassion, and it is God who is moved to call out.

⁴ See parallel in al-Tabari 293.

וילך השטן אל שרה וידמה אליה כתואר איש זקן שפל ועניו מאוד, ואברהם עודנו מקריב העולה לה'. ויאמר אליה, הלא ידעת את כל המעשה אשר עשה אברהם ליצחק בנך היום. כי לקח את יצחק ויבן מזבח וישחטו ויקריב אותו על המזבח, ויהי יצחק צועק ובוכה לפני אביו ואין מביט אליו ואין מרחם עליו. וידבר השטן את הדברים האלה עוד לשרה פעמים, וילך לו מלפניה. ותשמע שרה את כל דברי השטן ותחשוב כי איש זקן הוא מבני האדם אשר היה אצל בנה ויבא ויגד לה כדברים האלה, ותשא שרה את קולה ותבך ותצעק צעקה גדולה ומרה על בנה ותפל את נפשה לארץ ותזרוק עפר על ראשה. ותאמר בני יצחק בני מי יתן מותי אני תחתיו היום הזה. ותוסף עוד לבכות ותאמר, צר לי עליך כי גדלתיו וטפחתיו ויהפך ששוני עליך לאבל. כי היתה תאותי אליך לצעקה ותפילה עד אשר ילדתיו לתשעים שנה, ועתה היית למאכלת ולאש היום הזה למנה.

אך מתנחמת אנוכי עליך בדבר ה' בני, כי מצות אלוהיך עשית כי מי יוכל לעבור את דברי אלוהינו אשר נפש כל חי בידו. צדיק אתה ה' אלוהינו כי כל מעשיך טובים וישרים כי שמחה גם אני בדברך אשר ציוית, אך עיני במר תבכה ולב שמח. ותיתן שרה את ראשה בחיק אחת משפחותיה, אחר כן ותדום כאבן.

And Satan went to Sarah, and he appeared to her in the guise of a very old man, very humble and modest appearance. While Abraham was still sacrificing the offering to God, he said to her, "Don't you know everything that Abraham did to Isaac, your son, today? For he took Isaac and built an altar and slaughtered and sacrificed him on an altar, and Isaac shouted and cried before his father and he did not look at him or have compassion on him." And Satan spoke all these things again and again to Sarah, and went away from her. And Sarah heard all the words of Satan and she thought that it was an old man from the servants that was with her son, and he came and told her these things. And Sarah raised her voice and she wept and shouted out bitterly about her son, and her soul sank to the earth and she threw dust on her head, saying, "My son, Isaac, my son, would that I would be allowed to die in place of you?" And she continued to cry, saying, "I am pained for you, for I raised you and cared for you and my joy for you has turned into mourning, for I yearned for you, crying and praying until I gave birth to you at was ninety years old, and now you have been consumed by fire on this day as a portion.

But I am comforted by you, with the word of the Eternal, my son. Because you did fulfill God's commandments, for who can transgress the words of God, in whose hand is every living soul?¹ You are righteous, Eternal God, for all your deeds are good and just, and I am glad for all that you command,

although my eyes weep bitterly, my heart is happy.” And Sarah laid her head in the lap of one of her servants, and after that she was still as a stone.

Satan finally succeeds in tricking someone. In other traditions, Sarah is not fooled by Satan, or puts her faith in Abraham. Here, she cries out in sadness, using the same words as Abraham and Isaac. The parallelism, a significant feature of the Narrative Midrash, creates a strong flow of narrative.

Perhaps Sarah is the most “Job-like,” since we learn that she has felt tested all these years. She even uses Job’s words in her lament. It is a heartbreaking moment. This journey started with Sarah’s tears, for fear that she would lose her child. The reader gains a unique insight into Sarah’s anguish of barrenness over all these years. Although he is saved, she is tricked into mourning his loss, instead of celebrating a happy reunion. Still, she seems to remain faithful to God, never questioning God’s demand, simply grieving what she lost.

¹ Textual allusion to Job 12:10

ותקם אחרי כן ותלך הלוך ושאלה ותלך עד חברון ותשאל את כל הולכי הדרך אשר תפגע בדרך, ואין דובר אליה דבר לאמור מה נעשה בבנה. ותבוא עם שפחותיה ועבדיה בקרית ארבע היא חברון ותשאל על בנה ותשב שמה, ותשלח מעבדיה לבקש אנה הלכו אברהם ויצחק. וילכו לבקש אותם בית שם ועבר ולא מצאו, ויבקשו בכל הארץ ואין. והנה השטן בא אל שרה בדמות איש ויבוא ויעמוד לפניו, ויאמר אליה שקר דברתי אלייך כי לא שחט אברהם את יצחק בנו ולא מת. ויהי כשמעה הדבר וששה ותשמח מאוד מאוד אל בנה, ותצא נפשה משמחתה ותמת ותאסף אל עמיה.

ואברהם בכלותו את עבודתו וישב עם יצחק בנו אל נעריו, ויקומו וילכו יחדיו בארה שבע אל ביתם. ויבקשו את שרה ולא מצאוה, וישאלו עליה ויאמרו אליהם הלך עד חברון לבקש אתכם אנה הלכתם כי כזה וכזה הוגד לה. וילכו אברהם ויצחק אליה חברונה וימצאוה כי מתה, וישאו כולם את קולם ויבכו עליה בכי גדול. ויפול יצחק על פני אמו ויבך עליה, ויאמר אמי אמי איך עזבתני ותלך אנה ואנה¹ ואיכה עזבתני. ויבכו אברהם ויצחק בכי גדול וכל עבדיהם בכו איתם אל שרה, ויספדו עליה מספד גדול וכבד.²

After that, she arose, and walked around, inquiring and she went as far as Hebron, and she asked everyone that walked along the way whom she met, and no one said anything about what was happened to her son. And she came with her handmaidens and servants to Kiryat Arbah, which is Hebron, and she inquired concerning her son and she dwelled there, and she sent some of her servants to ask where Abraham and Isaac went. And they went and inquired about them in the academy of Shem and Ever, and they couldn't find them, asking everyone in the land, though turned up nothing. And behold, Satan came to Sarah in the guise of a man and he came and stood before her, and said to her, "What I said to you was false, for Abraham did not slaughter Isaac, his son, and he is not dead." And when she heard this, she was effervescent, and was very, very happy about her son, and her soul departed from her due to her joy and she died, and she was gathered to her people.³

And when Abraham had finished his worship, and returned with Isaac, his son, to his lads, they arose and went together to their home in Be'er Sheva. And they looked for Sarah and did not find her, and they asked about her, and they were told that she went to Hebron asking about where they had gone, as this is what she had been told. And Abraham and Isaac went after her in Hebron, and found out that she had died, and they all raised their voices and they wailed for her. And Isaac fell upon his mother and cried for her, saying, "My Mother, My Mother, how could you abandon me; how could you abandon me?" And Abraham and Isaac wailed, and all their servants cried with them for Sarah, and they mourned her with a great and heavy lament.

Sarah's heartbreaking story gets a happy ending. She finds out that Isaac is alive, and instead of dying from sadness, as in depicting in many midrashim, she dies from her surpassing

joy.⁴ Notably, ShY says both that her “soul departed” and “she died,” signifying that she knows Isaac is safe, and she can let go of her soul tethered to him.

While all of this was going on, however, Isaac and Abraham are still on the mountain. Finally, when they finish their worship, they return to their own heartbreak. In the biblical narrative, Isaac does not return with his father. However, ShY has built up the relationship between Sarah and Isaac a great deal, and it is only proper that he should have a chance to mourn her. Their experience searching for Sarah mirrors her own, a tragic tale of missed connections.

Isaac’s lament is powerful, borrowing from the language of the Tanach, putting Sarah in place of names for God:

ShY	Psalm 22:2
אמי אמי איך עזבתני	אלי אלי למה עזבתני
My Mother, My Mother, how could you abandon me?	My God, my God, why have You abandoned me;

The language of “אנה, אנה” connotes a restlessness, an endless wandering without his mother. The word has a second meaning, found in the Book of Isaiah.⁵ It is a deep lament, used when your whole world has collapsed.

¹ II Kings 5:25

² This is the language used for Jacob when he dies. See Genesis 50:10.

³ Midrashically, this also functions to fill in the gap in of Genesis 23:2, which explains how Sarah gets to Hebron, where she dies.

⁴ Genesis Rabbah 58:5; Targum Pseudo-Jonathan 22:20; Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer 32; Leviticus Rabbah 20:2

⁵ Isaiah 3:26; 19:8

PART IV

A SIGN FOR THE MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS, AND SONS:
AN OVERVIEW OF THE FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SEFER HA-YASHAR

מעשה אימהות סימן אימהות A.

What Happens to the Mothers is a Sign for the Mothers

Our in-depth exploration of Sefer HaYashar ends with the death of our matriarch, Sarah, and the mourning of Abraham and Isaac. This piece of the narrative embodies much of what is powerful about ShY, as it demonstrates the midrash's robust and intimate encounter with the human condition while addressing the exegetical question of Sarah's absence from post-Akedah Genesis. We are invited into an event only imagined in the margins of Torah, that of Abraham and Isaac mourning the loss of their beloved mother and wife. Sarah's death, a mere footnote in the biblical text, is transformed into a profound homily on love and loss. Through this narrative, we are drawn into their world, and their voices reverberate back into our world.

Most resonant are the voices of women, heard for the first time in this way. This is perhaps the most significant feature of ShY: the expanded female voice. The biblical female figures are given shape and speech, and particular attention is paid to the experience of women as individuals. There are over eighty women and groups of women mentioned in ShY, and of the individual women, all but ten are named.¹ Not only are these women given names, but they are given personalities—they have attributes and actions outside of the physical or procreative realm. For example, Tzilah and Adah are forgiving; they show compassion for their husband, Lamech after he accidentally kills Cain, their grandfather.² Paltit, a daughter of Lot is depicted as generous. Unfortunately for her, her generosity is taken advantage of by the depraved inhabitants of Sodom,

¹ See Appendix I

² ShY 1

leading to her capture and subsequent death.³ Sarah, as mentioned in the previous section, is a teacher; she instructs Isaac and Hagar.⁴ Hadurah, the wife of Asher, is wise;⁵ and Miriam is a prophetess, prophesying Moses' birth.⁶ Serach is a musician and consoler.⁷ Malchit, Ishmael's second wife is hospitable, while Merivah, Ishmael's first wife is mean-spirited and abusive.⁸ These added details, however small, transform the often one-dimensional female characters of the Torah, and allow for a diverse female readership to see themselves reflected in the text.

As mentioned above, the overwhelming majority of women in ShY are named, suggesting that they have identities defined by more than just their husband or family. Moreover, women in ShY are responsible for doing most of the naming of children, demonstrating a creative capacity in women that extends beyond the ability to create life. The moment of naming is one of self-reflection and imagination, seen in the following examples:

Eve naming Abel:

וְאֵת שֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִי קָרָא הֶבֶל כִּי אָמְרָהּ בְּהֶבֶל בָּאנוּ בָאָרֶץ וּבְהֶבֶל נֻקָּח מִמֶּנּוּ

And the name of the second son she called "Hevel," for she said, "In 'hevel-nothingness' we come into the earth, and in 'hevel-nothingness' we are taken from it."⁹

³ Shy

⁴ ShY 6;9

⁵ Hadurah, Serach ben Asher; Jania

⁶

⁷ Hadurah, Serach ben Asher; Jania

⁸ ShY 8

⁹ ShY 1

Eve's statement is surprisingly existential for someone who only just began existing. Using language evocative of Kohelet, she foreshadows Abel's ultimate end.

Tzilah naming Adah:

ותהר עוד ותלד בת, ותקרא את שמה נעמה כי אמרה אחרי בלתי היתה לי עדנה ונועם.

And she conceived again, and bare a daughter, and she named her Naamah, for she said, "After I was withered, I have obtained renewal and delight."¹⁰

Reminiscent of the language Sarah uses when she finds out she will have a son,¹¹ the formerly barren Tzilah says this when she gives birth to her daughter at a late age. Tzilah's infertility was a result of a "potion" women drank to allow them to retain their youth and beauty. In her explanation of the name, we see a woman who realizes that pleasure does not come from beauty or youth.

Yocheved naming Miriam:

ותהר האישה ותלד בת ותקרא שמה מרים, כי בימים ההם מיררו מצרים את חיי בני ישראל. ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותקרא שמו אהרן, כי בימי הרותה החל פרעה לשפוך דמי זכורי בני ישראל.

And the woman conceived and **bore** a daughter, and she called her name Miriam, for in those days the Egyptians had embittered the lives of the children of Israel. And she conceived again and **bore** a son and she called his name Aaron, for in the days of her conception, Pharaoh began to spill the blood of the male children of Israel.

Here, we see names that reflect the world of the mother. Miriam and Aaron receive names that preserve the history of their mother.

¹⁰ ShY 1

¹¹ Genesis 18:12

In addition to these “naming ceremonies,” another excellent source of character development for the women in ShY is found in their prayers. Sarah’s prayers are discussed at length in the commentaries on chapters six and nine. In addition to Sarah’s poetic and evocative prayers, ShY depicts Rebecca and Rachel praying as well. Here, both women pray for children.

Rebecca:

ShY writes that Rebecca goes to Isaac and asks him to pray for her, as Abraham prayed for Sarah to have a child. Together, they go to Moriah to beseech God to open Rebecca’s womb.¹² This detail reveals a great deal about how ShY imagines the relationship between Isaac and Rebecca. Surely, he must have shared with her the details of this traumatic event. They go to a place that represents both life and death for Isaac; his own life spared, his mother’s taken. The two of them stand in that very spot as a way of saying to God, “Your covenant almost died once, will you let it die now? As you let me live, let us have a child so that your covenant might endure!” Although Isaac’s prayer is the one that is recorded, placing Rebecca at the scene implies that she, too, was praying.

Rachel:

ורחל עודנה עקרה בימים ההם. ותתפלל רחל אל ה' בעת ההיא ותאמר, ה' אלוקים זכרני נא ופקדני נא כי עתה ייגרשני אישי כי לא ילדתי לו בנים. עתה ה' אלוקים שמע נא את תחנוני לפניך וראה עניי ונתת לי בנים כאחת השפחות ולא אשמע חרפתי עוד.

And Rachel was still barren in those days, and Rachel prayed unto the Eternal at that time, and she said, O Eternal God, Please remember me and visit me, for now my husband will cast me off because I have borne him no children. Now, Eternal God, hear my supplication before your, and see my

¹² ShY 11

affliction, and give me children like one of the handmaids, so that I will no longer heed my affliction.¹³

Rachel's prayer reflects the language of the psalms.¹⁴ Her language reflects her desperation. Unlike Rebecca, she can not go to her husband and ask him for a child, possibly a reflection of Jacob's refusal in the original Genesis text.¹⁵ Instead, she turns to God for help. Their relationship is cemented when Rachel is granted her first child, Joseph. In naming Joseph, she responds to God's hearkening with another prayer:

ותהר רחל ותלד בן ותאמר, אסף אלוקים את חרפתי. ותקרא את שמו יוסף לאמור יוסף ה' לי בן אחר.

Rachel conceived and bare a son, and she said, The Eternal has taken away my affliction, and she called his name Joseph, saying, May the Eternal grant me another son.¹⁶

Like Sarah and Isaac, this mother-son pair have a deep bond which is developed throughout the midrash.

מעשה אימהות סימן לבנות.

What Happens to the Mothers is a Sign for the Daughters

A midrash from Genesis Rabbah proposes, "whatever happens to the fathers is a sign for their sons."¹⁷ The midrash points out several patterns and similarities between the patriarchs, suggesting that what happens to the father will inevitably happen to his son.

ShY applies this principle to its female characters. Read as a single narrative, ShY proves

¹³ ShY 11

¹⁴ Psalms 119:170; among others

¹⁵ Genesis 30:1-2

¹⁶ ShY 11

¹⁷ Genesis Rabbah 40:6

to be a series of expanding, but repeating threads. For example, Sarah's experience of being hidden in a box while crossing a border is repeated with her great-granddaughter, Dinah. Although both traditions exist in the midrashic canon, including them both allows the two women's experiences to be read as part of a larger theme. Although we do not hear Dinah speak about her experiences in her own words, we can read Dinah's traumatic experience with using the language of her great-grandmother.

A second example of a repeated theme is barrenness. Infertility is a consistent experience for the matriarchs and midrashic women. A total of seven women in ShY are described as barren. For all the the other women, God opens their womb. Although potentially problematic, I'd like to suggest that the it is the act of pregnancy and giving birth that brings women into the covenant, as it mirrors the male entrance into the covenant, starting with Sarah and Abraham:

Abraham

Call

Abraham responds to Lech L'cha

Test

Childlessness: First Abraham has no biological son, then must send away his first born

Physical change

Circumcision

Blood:

The covenant is ensured

Sarah

Call

Sarah responds to Lech L'cha

Test

Barrenness

Physical change

Pregnancy

Blood:

The covenant is ensured

Although this argument could be made using other midrashim, or even the biblical text itself, it is the inner-textuality here that bolsters the argument. Sarah is told that she is

covenanted to God *herself* at the same moment Abraham is instructed to circumcise himself and future generations. Once both go through a bodily change, they are primed for covenant. Only after they bleed, however, is their covenant complete. Later, we see this idea return, when Tzipporah realizes that she needs to circumcise her children in order to protect them. With this in mind, it is possible to consider the bareness, and eventual childbirth, present in ShY as a signifier of covenant. Perhaps these have a special relationship with God, which requires the full process of covenanting for entrance.

The signs of the mothers proscribe ideal behaviors for future generations as well. One such exemplary behavior is seen in ShY's representation of Tzipporah, based on a folk legend.

In this story, Moses is placed in captivity by Tzipporah's father, who withholds any food or water from him. For seven years, Tzipporah sneaks him food. Once he is finally released, Tzipporah's compassion is emphasized. This Midianite woman, ShY says, "walked in the ways of the daughters of Jacob, she was no less righteous than Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah." Through her acts of kindness and compassion, Tzipporah becomes a mother of Israel herself, signifying for all women what it takes to "walk in the ways" of our mothers.

C. מעשה אימהות סימן לבנות

What Happens to the Mothers is a Sign for the Sons

The women in ShY do not only serve as models for other women within and outside of the text. Throughout its narrative, we can see how woman impact men as

well. In many places, women serve as the conscience of the Torah text. As outsiders, they can question justice in ways that perhaps the male figures can not. We see this in the figure of Batya, who comes to Moses in the midst of the plagues, asking if she, who saved Moses, will be subject to the forthcoming death of the first-born. When he assures her that she will be kept safe, she further emphasizes the injustice of injuring and killing innocent people.

Furthermore, the increased presence of women in the text creates more room for all of the characters, men and women, to act with emotion. Sarah is the first to cry, and her tears enable her husband and son to cry as well. This impact is perhaps most visible in the relationship between Joseph and Sarah. Although the two never meet, their experiences are paralleled. In fact, a close read of the text highlights their similarities. Within ShY: both are taken into Pharaoh's house; both respond to challenging situations with tears; and both must refuse the sexual advances of a foreigner. Both have name changes; both are represented by the same set of precious jewels. In many ways, Joseph expands Sarah's story. His actions are amplifications of Sarah's; he is able to respond with passion and emotion because Sarah does. Remarkably, their parallels might never have been revealed in another text. It is the narrative nature of this text that allows for such a reading, as we can see their stories as not just linked by lineage, but connected thematically, for *what happens to the mothers is a sign for everyone*.

* * *

Outside of the textual context, Isaac's mournful cry, "My mother, my mother, how could you abandon me?" evokes the profound absence of our mothers in the Torah.

The contemporary reader is much like Isaac searching for his mother: We look for footprints, follow them to places where they were, only to find out that they are no longer there. Glimpses of their story are found in the aggadic tradition, but we are often left with incomplete or androcentric portraits of our matriarchs. ShY, however, resurrects our mothers. In fact, in one section Rachel actually speaks to Joseph from beyond the grave. She calls out from her place in the Torah's margins, "I have heard the voice of your weeping," she offers consolingly. "I have seen your tears; I know your troubles. Your sorrows join mine."¹⁸ Our tears join hers, and together, as reader and read, create a Torah written in tears.¹⁹ Rachel and I cry together, out of sadness for the lost voices, and in hope for their continued reclamation.

¹⁸ Creative translation based on Ch. 10 of ShY

¹⁹ BT *Baba Batra* 15b

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