

Rosh Hashanah Day 1 5770
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The Torah portion for the first day of Rosh Hashanah is about Isaac's birth to the aging Sarah and Abraham. At Isaac's birth, Abraham was 100 years of age and Sarah was 90. Sarah was surprised and delighted that her prayers for a child were answered. In a four thousand year old rhetorical question, she asks: "Who would have said to Abraham that I would be nursing or that I would bear a child in Abraham's old age?"

The miracle here is not Abraham, although at a hundred, most men would express some admiration for the old patriarch, but, of course, Sarah, whose biological clock should have long ticked past her child bearing years.

The portion goes on to describe Sarah as protective of her son. She prevailed on Abraham to cast out the Egyptian, Hagar, another of Abraham's wives, who had born Abraham a son named Ishmael. Sarah was distraught at Ishmael's mocking behavior. Sarah also expressed dismay that this servant woman's child would inherit with Isaac.

God does two things in this drama: One, God tells Abraham to do as Sarah tells him, because it is through Isaac that Abraham's heritage will be preserved. Abraham packs up Ishmael and Hagar with a loaf of bread and a sack of water and ships them out to wander in the desert.

Second, God heard Ishmael's voice when the water ran out and Ishmael lay dying of thirst in the shadow of a desert bush. God provides Ishmael water and tells Hagar, "Take the boy and hold him with your hand, for I shall make for him a great nation."

The portion ends with a story about Abraham's covenant with Abimelech, Abraham's Philistine neighbor. There is even a nice little piece about how the two of them resolved a dispute around the theft of some water. We could use some of those skills today.

From the second Torah, we hear the commandment to listen to the sound of the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah. There is also a description of the ritual sacrifices.