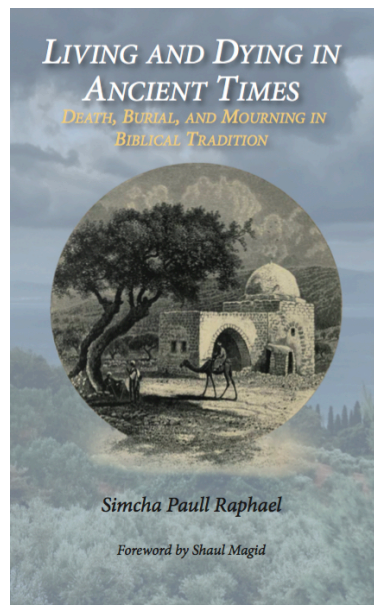


A TIME FOR TURNING AND RETURNING: PREPARING FOR THE HIGH HOLY DAYS

YITZHAK ON THE ALTAR: MYTHIC WISDOM OF ROSH HASHANAH TORAH

- 1. MYTHIC APPROACH TO TORAH/TORAH AS ALLEGORY/MYTH**
- 2. THE MIDRASHIC PROBLEM OF THE AKEDAH/BINDING OF ISAAC**
- 3. YITZHAK AT 37 - A SPIRITUAL INITIATION? MIDLIFE CRISIS?**
- 4. NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE - LIGHT OF THE SHECHINAH**
- 5. NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE - OUT OF THE BODY**
- 6. NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE - MEETING SOUL OF HIS MOTHER SARAH**
- 7. A SPIRITUAL DEATH/RE-BIRTH**
- 8. THREE YEARS IN GAN EDEN**
- 9. SPIRITUAL HEALING IN GAN EDEN**
- 10. SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION -
RE-ENTERS THE WORLD PREPARED FOR NEXT STEPS**
- 11. YITZHAK'S LIFE WISDOM**



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1. A MYTHIC APPROACH TO TORAH/TORAH AS ALLEGORY/MYTH

Every time that you find in our books a tale the reality of which seems impossible, a story which is repugnant to both reason and common sense, then be sure that the tale contains a profound allegory veiling a deeply mysterious truth; and the greater the absurdity of the letter, the deeper the wisdom of the spirit. — Moses Maimonides

2. THE MIDRASHIC PROBLEM OF THE AKEDAH/BINDING OF ISAAC

Avraham took the wood for the burnt offering & put it on his son Isaac. [Gen.22:6]

Avraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer Sheba [Gen. 22:19]

Sarah died in *Kiriath-Arba*; which is Hebron in the land of Canaan; and Avraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her. [Gen. 23:2-3]

3. YITZHAK AT 37 - A SPIRITUAL INITIATION? MIDLIFE CRISIS?

When the Holy Blessed One said to Avraham, Offer him up as a burnt offering before Me, Avraham came home and said to Sarah: "How long is your son Yitzhak to hang on to your apron strings, Is he not after all **thirty seven years old?** ... Come now, fix provisions for our journey, for he and I are off to the Great Study House." [Midrash Ha-Gadol [on Gen 22:8]

4. NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE - LIGHT OF THE SHECHINAH

When Yitzhak was on the point of being sacrificed as a freewill burnt offering, **he beheld the light of the Shechinah and his soul flew out of him**, but the Holy Blessed One revived him. [R. Judah of Barcelona, Commentary on *Sepher Yetzirah*, 125].

5. NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE - OUT OF THE BODY

And lo, when the knife touched Isaac's throat **his soul took wing at once...and flew clean out of him.** [PRE, Chapter 31]

6. NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE - MEETING THE SOUL OF HIS MOTHER SARAH

When the sword touched his throat his soul flew up into [the heavenly] Gan Eden, and he beheld the soul of his mother Sarah, who had died in the interim because Samael [Angel of Death] had gone and informed her that Abraham had already slaughtered Isaac. Whereupon she let out a scream and the soul departed. [Midrash Sechel Tov, p. 64]

Rabbi Shimon said: So we have learnt, that at the hour of a one's departure from the world, their father, mother and other relatives gather round, and one sees them and recognizes them, and likewise all with whom they associated in this world, and they accompany the soul to the place where it is to abide. [Zohar I, 218a].

7. A SPIRITUAL DEATH/RE-BIRTH

When Father Yitzhak was bound on the altar...and his sacrificial dust was cast on to Mount Moriah, Holy Blessed One immediately brought upon him dew and revived him. Forthwith the ministering angels began to recite, "Baruch Atta Adonai, Mechayah Ha-Metim". [*Shibbole Ha-Leket*, 9a-b]

8. THREE YEARS IN GAN EDEN

And Yitzhak, where was he? The Holy Blessed One brought him into Gan Eden, and there he stayed for three years. [*Midrash Ha-Gadol*, on Gen. 22:19]

9. SPIRITUAL HEALING IN GAN EDEN

What was he doing all that time in Gan Eden? They were healing him there. [R. Yitzhak bar Judah Ha-Levi, *Paaneah Raza*, 29a]

10. SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION - RE-ENTERS THE WORLD PREPARED FOR NEXT STEPS

Yitzhak remained on Mount Moriah for three years until he reached the age of forty, and then he married Rivka. [Joseph Ibn Kaspi, *Mishneh Kesef* on the Torah II, p. 63]

11. YITZHAK'S LIFE WISDOM

And it came to pass, that when Yitzhak was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said to him, My son; and he said to him, Behold, here am I. And he said, Behold I am old now, and I do not know how soon I may die; [Gen. 27:1-2]

