

# Sarai's Diary

The Biblical story of the founder of our faith, from the moment he first appears as Abram, to his passing away as Abraham, spans approximately 5,000 words. 450 of these words are Abraham's, but only 38 were said (or thought) by his wife. Abraham is mentioned 192 times in Genesis and 44 times in the rest of Tanakh, while Sarah is mentioned only 55 times in Genesis and only once more in Isaiah. Wouldn't it be nice if we were able to hear the stories of Abraham's travels and trials through the eyes of our Matriarch Sarah (aka Sarai)? Well, fortunately enough, thanks to an amazing discovery of ancient scrolls (and extensive reconstruction, with the help of some commentators), we can present here, for the first time, fragments from Sarai's diary:

Haran, Spring of 367 ATF (after the flood)

Dear diary, in a few hours we will become nomads again, but this time permanently, not just for the trip from here to there. I should have complained and resisted. Born and raised in the greatest metropolis of all, Ur of the Chaldeans, I had to travel to this Haran, a village in comparison. My father-in-law, Terah, decided one day that we should all, only God know why, move to Canaan, and so we went, the old Terah with my husband Abram, his nephew Lot, and myself. Then for some reason the old man decided to settle in this corner of the world. I didn't mind. Not that it would matter. No one cares much about a woman's opinion or interests. But this, this is difficult, I don't know if I want to leave. I have made friends here, and I like my little house where I have my own room and privacy. I really became attached to this place, weird as it seemed initially. And now I am supposed to be excited about living in tents, on the road, surrounded by flocks searching grazing fields. No houses for nomads, only tents. A tent for Abram, a tent for me (privacy, yay!).

I can already see the announcements by the chroniclers of my husband's life: "Another divine test for the great man!"; "Abram abandons Haran for Canaan"; "Abram is chosen by unknown deity!" And what am I? Chopped hay? Am I not asked to abandon my hometown? Am I not tested? Is a woman nothing more than a dangling participle at the end of her husband's important sentences? Don't get me wrong. I am ready to go because this is the divine commandment. I look up to Abram because I admire his courage and spirit, and I know very well why God chose him. He is an educator, a guide and a master. He walks the path of righteousness and justice and he

imparts his beliefs with all those who are willing to listen. So why am I so agitated? I guess it is because deep inside I always hoped that it will be our own child that Abram will educate. I wanted to believe that the it will be through that product of our union that I will not only realize my potential as a mother but will take active part alongside my husband in the education of our future nation, as God has promised us. And now I am to travel to Canaan, presumably to establish a new nation, with a 65 years old body which will never carry a child.

But enough ranting! Who knows, maybe moving to Canaan will bring me luck. I heard stories of barren women who were blessed after years of solitude, just because they move to a new place, especially to Canaan (or so they say...). I guess I should get going and shoulder this new task with my husband. Maybe we WILL be the progenitors of a numerous nation.

Egypt, Summer of 369 ATF

Dear Diary, Sarai again. Sorry for not writing for so long. You know, it is a bit hard to write on the road, in tents, riding or walking, drawing water and watching over our flocks and servants. Bethel, Ai, Negev, I cannot keep track of all our stops. But now I have time to write because I am in a palace. Yes, you heard (or read) correctly – a palace. But it was not Abram who built it for me. No sir! I am a prisoner of Pharaoh. Abducted by a tyrant and separated from my husband, I am locked up in this palace. Strangely enough, no one comes near me. It seems as if everyone contracted some kind of disease, except for me, but they keep distance from me as if I were the source of their suffering...

I'm back in my quarters, Abram not far from me, still agitated and upset. Turns out it was me... God plagued them for abducting me... It's heartwarming to know that God cares so much for you, but I should not have been there in the first place. I told Abram, I told him: see now, God told you to come to Canaan, so Canaan it is! Why go to Egypt? "Let us stay here and God will take care of us," I said, but he wouldn't listen. I know he wanted to save us from the famine but we ended up in a much greater danger. At least he asked for my opinion, which is something most men would never even think of nowadays.

Plains of Bethel, Winter of 377 ATF

Time flies! Can you believe it? Ten years passed since we moved to Canaan.

Time crawls! Ten more years of unanswered prayers, tears shed secretly, envy of the careless young mothers and their toddlers. Ten more years of feeling abandoned by God. Is God trying me? Why is He doing this to me? Where are the promises He made to my husband?

I remember so clearly my wedding day? Such joy! Such innocence! I thought it would be only a matter of time before I became a mother, holding a precious baby in my arms. But with every year passing year cruel reality made the dream seem more remote and unreachable. While everyone was celebrating motherhood and parenthood, sweet voices of children ringing in their homes with joy and happiness, I was left felt alienated and rejected by God and men (or should I say women?) alike. I could feel their furtive glances as I was passing by, as if I was carrying a curse, a terrible disease.

God alone can count the tears I shed, day after day, year after year, praying, yearning for a child who will redeem me from my solitude, from my agony and my shame. When the Divine order came to leave Haran, it was very difficult to go and leave Mom and Dad behind, but I think that subconsciously I was glad to just go away and leave behind the pity and hypocrisy. Yes, let's go to a place where no one knows me and start all over. Maybe I will get lucky. Maybe the move will bring a change, a blessing. But I guess this is not what God wants.

Abram says I am a righteous woman and that God enjoys my prayers and supplications. I appreciate that, but enough is enough. I don't want to be special and I promise that if God grants me a child I will pray and thank Him even more. I will pray for all barren women, if prayers are what He wants...

Be'er Sheva desert, Spring of 377 ATF

I'm so excited! I have a solution! Surrogate mother! I have learned of some respectful families who have gone through this process successfully. All you need is assign one of your maids as a surrogate mother and have your husband marry her. We all sign a contract which clarifies that the baby will be mine and my husband's. I will finally be a mother, and I have the perfect candidate. Hagar, the Egyptian girl. She is so sweet and submissive, and she has tremendous respect for me. I cannot wait to talk to Abram tomorrow...

...that little snake! That tricky, treacherous, no-good maid suddenly think she is the lady of the tent just because she is pregnant. She taunts me with subtle comments and quips: I'm tired; I'd

love to bring you some water, Mistress Sarai, but I woke up with nausea; My back, sorry I can't pick this for you; I shoot a glance to Abram, furious, but these things pass right over his head. As far as he is concerned she should get rest and maybe I should tend to her. He doesn't even feel that she harasses me! This is simply not the kind of things a man can understand. Is this my new trial? Am I being tested again?

I don't know what to do. I love and respect Abram. But why is his quest of justice reserved only for foreigners? If God told him tomorrow that He is destroying Sodom and Gomorra, I know very well he will stand up and fight for them, arguing with the Almighty in favor of those wicked people. And I am right here in front of him, abused daily by this Hagar. Do I not deserve justice?

Today I blew up. I couldn't take it anymore. "Justice," I told him, "I demand justice! Don't stand idly by while she spills my blood!" And he finally gave me permission. He waived his part in the contract and told me that she is all mine. So, that's it, the gloves are coming off.

Be'er Sheva Desert, Day five of New World Order

Now she knows my wrath. Made her worth her price in labor, and not the labor she was hoping for, no delivery for her. Let her fetch water and tend to the flocks and cook and wash my feet and know that she is the maidservant and I am the mistress. Justice is served!

Be'er Sheva Desert, Day six of New World Order

It's over; she's gone. We don't know where or when, but she has disappeared from Be'er Sheva. I should be happy, I should be celebrating, but I'm not. I feel terrible. I didn't mean it to happen like that. All I wanted was to have a child we could call our own, but things got out of hand. I got carried away on tidal waves of anger and frustration, years of sterility, endless nights of crying and, worst of all, the notion that my husband doesn't understand me. I took it all on her and I am not so sure I did the right thing.

Dear diary, it's the middle of night but I must write. I am shaking. I just had a terrible nightmare. We both ended up having children who became nations, and now, my descendants were persecuted, tortured, exiled, and killed by her children. And that voice kept echoing in my mind "she is your maidservant. Do whatever you want..."

Sarah's Diary, 22 Years Later

Qiryat Arba', aka Hebron, Land of Canaan, 399 ATF (After the Flood)

Dear diary, here I am again. You wouldn't recognize me. Even my name has changed. I am Sarah now, the princess, not Sarai, my princess. But I'm rushing ahead. First things first.

Don't blame me for 22 years of silence. So many things happened since Hagar disappeared into the night. She came back shortly afterwards, with a big smile on her face and stories about angels and divine promises. She gave birth to a boy. Abraham's son. Not my son, since we have annulled the contract. I had to watch her and Abraham attending to that kid day after day. I felt empty for fifteen long years, and I guess you could say that I was mourning. Couple that with my envy, jealousy, and anger, and you'd figure out why I didn't feel like writing.

Then one day three weird visitors came to my tent to tell me that I am going to be a mother, and of course I was incredulous, but it happened. I finally had my own child! My baby! At 90! Who would have believed that? Even Abraham didn't believe when God first told him that I will bear him a son. How could I have written then? I was consumed with caring for my little Yitzhak. My laughter, my jewel, joy of my life! And I also had to keep an eye on the maidservant's son. I cannot even bring myself to say his name. I told Abraham to get rid of him, but he still thought of him as his son and wouldn't let go, until God intervened and told him to listen to me.

Back then I thought God was on my side. I was so happy to have Abraham all to myself and to see that he finally he realized that he only has one son.

But all that is gone. I don't think I will ever be happy again. I wake up screaming from my nightmares just to live through another day of eyes-wide-open anxiety. I check on Yitzhak constantly. I want to make sure that he is safe and that he is not taken from me suddenly, while my thoughts keep going back to that horrible day, exactly one year ago. But I can't keep it anymore. That's why I dug you out and sat down to write again...

It all started on that dreadful night, when Abraham told me casually, over dinner, that he might take Yitzhak with him for some kind of a field trip the following day. I reminded him that in the six years which have passed since the world first saw the shining smile of my baby, there was never a moment when we were apart. He said that he knows that and that I should take a break

and that I shouldn't worry too much and that the kid is safe with him and that he needs to start learning some practical skills from his father. He said that there is this new theory that fathers and sons should spend some quality time alone for bonding. Bonding, hah, had I only known.

We left the matter at that, without me voicing a consent for the trip, but when I woke up the next morning, shortly after sunrise, Abraham was gone. And with him, my treasure. I ran outside to ask the servants if they have seen my son. They said that they haven't but that two servants are also missing, as well as Abraham's donkey and several tools, including a slaughtering knife. At that moment, I didn't realize what was the purpose of the "field trip". No! I don't think that I would ever imagine that this thing, which I can't even write, is possible. I thought that he was taking him on a hunting and camping excursion, and I was fuming. He is only six years old, for crying out loud, we don't need another maidservant's son, shooting and hunting. That is what I thought as I set out to look for them. Had I known that when he said bonding he meant binding and that the knife was meant for my own son, I would have caught up with them earlier, but as alarmed as I was, I didn't think that the danger looming over my dear baby's head comes from his father and not from wild animals.

Three days! Three days I was wandering, looking for them, asking travelers for information. They probably laughed at me, thought I was out of my mind. A 96-year-old woman, hysterical, alone on the dangerous roads, claiming to search for her lost toddler and his father. But I finally got to the land of Moriah and there, at the foot of a mountain, I see two of my servants dallying in the sun, chewing some leaves and chatting, carefree and relaxed as if the world has not come to an end. I shook them up. Screamed at them. "Why did you go without telling me? I am the Lady of our household. You don't do things behind my back." They were clearly taken aback and muttered some silly excuses, but I was already in the next phase. "Where is my child? Where is my precious treasure? Where did he go with his father?"

They seemed surprised that I was so upset and said that they have been traveling for three days with Abraham as he was searching for the perfect place to worship God. When they arrived at this place, which for them was identical to a hundred others they saw along the way, Abraham got very excited, they said, the way he used to act when God spoke to him. He asked them to wait for him here and he started scaling the mountain with Yitzhak, apparently with the aim of building an altar. "An altar?", I asked, "are you sure about that?" They replied with the positive,

saying that Abraham tied the woodfire bundle to Yitzhak's back, and with the knife and torch in his hand, went up the mountain. For a moment, I was dumbfounded. "But the animal!", I exclaimed, "what about the animal? Did you catch a mountain goat or did you bring a lamb?" "No, Mistress Sarah," they answered, "there was no animal."

I think that was the moment when the enormity of the situation dawned at me. For three days, running or dragging my feet in that never-ending journey, I probably knew deep inside what was happening but I refused to believe it. I should have known the moment he was gone, because otherwise, why would he disappear like that, so early in the morning, without even saying goodbye? My knees buckled, my heart sank, and for what seemed like eternity I just stood there frozen, shaken, but unable to move, drained of energy, drained of life.

I finally came to myself and started running up the mountain. I don't know how I found the strength. I guess it is mother's love. Climbing the mountain, sobbing and crying out my beloved child's name, I made it to the top, only to see my husband raising his knife-holding hand over the helpless tiny figure of my son, bound like an animal and lying on a layer of firewood. Yes, you read correctly! My husband, the father of my child, Abraham the Prophet, defender of truth and educator par-excellence, was about to wield his knife and take the life of another human being, who was none other than my precious Yitzhak. I screamed his name one last time and blacked-out.

I woke up with the sweet worried voice of Yitzhak. "Mommy, mommy, wake up, don't sleep so much..." Was I dreaming, or did I live through a nightmare? I cautiously opened my eyes, just a slit, to see Yitzhak's beautiful little face. His eyes lit up when he saw me and a wide smile spread over his face. His laughter, ringing like heavenly bells, clearly showed how relieved he was. I opened my eyes a little more and there was Abraham, wiping the blood off the slaughtering knife. It was then that the smell hit me, as if my senses were waking up one by one, the pungent smell of burnt animals.

"What is going on?" I demanded, "I need to know!". Abraham then sat with me to tell me the whole story. How God told him to sacrifice Yitzhak and how he couldn't bring himself to break the news to me. How he took our son, MY son, and walked with him for three days, unable to utter one word. How they got to the mountain and built the altar. How he bound Yitzhak and was about to slaughter him, and how at the last moment he heard my frantic screams and

simultaneously an angel who told him that the goal was achieved. He ended up slaughtering a wandering ram caught in the thicket, hence the blood-stained knife and the smell, he explained.

I asked him again and again, right there on Mount Moriah and maybe a thousand times since then why he didn't stand up to God and say that he will not do it. I told him he should have offered his own life, that he should have argued just as he did for Sodom that Yitzhak does not deserve to die, that human sacrifices go against the ideas that God taught him. I told him all that but he kept saying: "what could I do? God asked me to show my loyalty by sacrificing my son to him!"

I disagree. I told him that God wanted to test him. He wanted him to say no. But since Abraham went along with it, God stopped it only at the last minute, teaching us and our future generations that God does not want human sacrifices, and probably not even animal sacrifices. I also think that God taught us that we should not ask for too big of a sacrifice of someone who loves you dearly, because he will not be able to say no, so he will suffer and do as you wish.

I got to go now and take care of the new place. I forgot to tell you that I just moved to Qiryat Arba' and I don't know if I could ever go back to Be'er Sheva'...

Publishers note:

The events as described in Sarah's diary have been disputed by commentators, Midrashic authors, and theologians, who see the Binding of Yitzhak through different lenses. To learn more about that dispute, as well as the schism between the Sephardic and Ashkenazi schools of thought regarding martyrdom, see my lectures on the topic on YouTube

Shabbat Shalom

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