

In the spirit of this week's Torah commentary, I am delighted to invite you to join the Board of Rabbis and our congregational partners for the opening night event of our acclaimed **One People, One Book** community learning series. We are proud to present **Def Jew Poetry Slam** on Tuesday, November 10, 7:30 PM at University Synagogue, 11960 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles. We encourage you to [download this flyer](#) and to share the invitation with family, friends and colleagues.

To RSVP, please go here: <http://tinyurl.com/psalmslam>.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Mark S. Diamond

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Torat Malakhim (Torah from the City of Angels)

November 7, 2009 20 Heshvan 5770

Rabbi Mark S. Diamond

Executive Vice President

The Board of Rabbis of Southern California

Torah Portion: *Vayera* (“The Eternal One appeared...”), Genesis 18:1-22:24

Haftarah Portion: II Kings Chapter 4, verses 1 to 37

The concluding chapter of this week’s Torah portion is the haunting narrative of *akedat Yitzhak*, the binding of Isaac. God puts Abraham to the test by ordering him to take his favorite son to an unknown location and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering to the Lord. The ever-faithful patriarch rises early the next morning and sets out with his son and two servants. Three days later, Abraham spots the designated location where he is to sacrifice his son. The father completes the arrangements for the offering, and lays his son on top of the altar. At the very moment when he is set to slay his son, a heavenly voice cries out to Abraham and halts the deed. Miraculously, a ram appears nearby and is offered up by Abraham in place of his son.

The Torah narrative raises a host of pointed questions regarding the conduct of father, mother and son. Why does Abraham not protest the Divine command to kill his son? How is it possible that Isaac lies down upon the altar and calmly awaits death at his father’s hand? Where is mother Sarah throughout this ordeal?

As I read and reread traditional and modern commentaries on Genesis 22, I am especially drawn to the insights of poets who grapple with the awe and mystery of the story of the binding of Isaac. With appreciation to my friend and colleague Rabbi Stephen Pearce, I am pleased to share three poetic interpretations of the Akedah. I trust that they will spark further study and reflection on this timeless Torah text.

The Parable Of The Old Man And The Young (1916)

by Wilfred Owen

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife.
And as they sojourned both of them together,
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
And builded parapets and trenches there,
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! an Angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him, thy son.
Behold! Caught in a thicket by its horns,
A Ram. Offer the Ram of Pride instead.

But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

Sarah and the Binding of Isaac (Excerpt)

A Modern Midrash on Genesis 22

by Karen Soria

...Sarah struggled to stop the dream, to snatch away her son. But the dream slipped out of her grasp as she felt the universe spinning around her and images whirling about her: altar, wood, firestone, Isaac; wood, firestone, Isaac, Abraham; altar, Isaac, Abraham, knife; firestone, Isaac, Abraham; altar, Isaac, Abraham, knife; firestone, Isaac, Abraham, knife; Isaac, Abraham, ram. The images flashed too quickly for her to separate them. But a ram--she had seen a ram. Abraham, lift your eyes and see! He lifted the knife. Blinded by a fear and light greater than any she had ever known, Sarah screamed, "Abraham! Abraham!"

And Abraham heard the angel of the Lord calling him.

Aching Isaac

by Stephen S. Pearce

Aching Isaac
remembering
the long days
and nights
before the last journey's
mountain ascent
flashing silvery knife,
bleating frightened ram,
fire's pungent smoke,
blood stained hands,
old man's mutterings,
youth's disappointment,
questioned:
"Abba, are you all right?"
the stammering old man
talked
to God
to aching Isaac,
to himself
on ever foggy nights.

The abba who struggled with son
knife in hand,
rope at side
wood piled high,
is not the abba
who once held tight this now grown child.
Yielding pasty gray hands
hold ruddy arms
while supplanted abba
weeps in thickets of confusion
concealing
seedtime harvest.

Embarrassed,
aching Isaac
chronicles a more noble tale.

Shabbat Shalom