

Voices of the Parents:  
Akedah Intro  
Rosh HaShanah 5775  
Rabbi Sari Laufer

Leah Solomon is an LA native who made Aliyah 15 years ago. She is raising 3 sons in Jerusalem, and writes about Israel, Palestine, and raising and educating kids against the background of the ongoing conflict. This summer, she wrote a widely-shared piece called: [Making Sense of Our Son's Deaths](#). In it, she shares:

When my eldest was born, before he had even been cleaned of the gunk and blood covering his tiny body, a bizarrely incongruous thought popped into my mind: "One day, this baby will go to the army." I was shocked. In a million years, I never would have imagined this would be my first thought upon the birth of my firstborn....So this strange thought must have had something to do with the terrible war we were fighting in Lebanon, and the fact that the maternity ward at Hadassah Ein Karem was overflowing with refugees from the north who came here to give birth safe from the threat of Hezbollah's rockets. But wherever that shocking thought came from, there it was, and so began my life as a mother<sup>1</sup>.

In traditional synagogues this Rosh HaShanah morning, the Torah is opened to words less terrifying, but no less challenging, than the words we will hear in just a few moments. In traditional synagogues, the reading for the first day of Rosh HaShanah is the story of Hagar and Ishmael, banished into the desert. It is tomorrow that they will read the words of the Akedah, the binding of Isaac. The two readings are buffered by our Haftarah, the story of Hannah fervently praying for a child. These three stories tell, amongst other things, the pain of parents—the unspeakable pain. Read every year, these stories are painful. Read this year, against the backdrop of this summer's war in Israel and the scary unknown future in the middle east—they are chilling. Maybe this year, of all years, we should listen to the voice of the parents.

The voice of Racheli Frenkel, whose son Naftali was kidnapped and murdered by Palestinian terrorists, offering her condolences—publicly—to the family of Muhammed Abu Khdeir, murdered by Jewish extremists. No mother or father should ever have to go through what we are going through, she said, and we share the pain of Mohammed's parents<sup>2</sup>.

The voice of a Palestinian father paying a shiva call to the Frenkel family, saying: Things will only get better when we learn to cope with each other's pain and stop getting angry at

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<sup>1</sup> <http://leahjsolomon.wordpress.com/2014/08/31/making-sense-of-our-sons-deaths/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.timesofisrael.com/rachelle-fraenkel-offers-condolences-to-abu-khdeirs-family/>

each other. I see before me a Jewish family who has lost a son opening the door to me,” he added. “That’s not obvious. It touched my heart and my nation.<sup>3</sup>”

The voice of the Israeli soldier, a father himself who writes a note: To the children of Gaza, I hope we will share a better future together.”

The voice of the mother in Gaza who says: I too want my children to run and play safely and freely.

God’s command to Abraham is terrifying. The end of the story is heartbreaking. Abraham and Isaac never speak again. Abraham and God never speak again. Abraham and Sarah never speak again. Abraham and Hagar never speak again. Abraham and Ishmael never speak again.

Leah Solomon continues to write about her son:

Every time rockets and bombs start falling, I am profoundly aware: “One day this baby will go to the army.” Only now the baby comes up to my shoulder, and only ten years remain instead of eighteen, and my desperate hopes that “by the time he is ready there will be no need” seem more and more farfetched<sup>4</sup>.

Today, we are too close to that brokenness, to the feeling that any relationship, any trust, any possibility of a real way forward has been lost. There have been too many broken promises, there have been too few partners. The world is shifting, tilting too dangerously. The ground, moral and geopolitical, is too unstable. Maybe, as some Midrashim suggest—Isaac was sacrificed on the mountain.

But today is Rosh HaShanah. It is the dawning of a New Year, it is the creation of new worlds. And so I cannot, I will not, leave it there. When Abraham died, Isaac and Ishmael come together to bury him. Not all relationships end broken in this story, not all hope is lost.

As the rockets began to fly, Israeli leftist and author David Grossman was speaking at the...interestingly timed, Ha’Aretz sponsored Israel Conference on Peace. He wrote:

*Among the two peoples today, the agents of despair and hatred have practically taken over, so it may be hard to believe that the picture I’ve described is truly possible. But a situation of peace will start to produce the agents of hope and closeness and optimism; it will give rise to more people who have a practical interest, unrelated to ideology, in creating more and more ties with members of the other people. Perhaps eventually, after some years, a deeper attachment will evolve, even genuine friendship between*

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<sup>3</sup> <http://forward.com/articles/201500/families-of-slain-israeli-and-palestinian-teens-tu/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://leahjsolomon.wordpress.com/2014/08/31/making-sense-of-our-sons-deaths/>

*these two peoples, and those human beings. Such things have happened. But for now let us suffice with all those mundane situations in which Israelis and Palestinians could live with one another like human beings.*

*We cannot afford the luxury and indulgence of despair. The situation is too desperate to be left to the despairing, for accepting despair amounts to an admission that we've been defeated. Defeated not on the battlefield, but as human beings. Something deep and vital to us as humans was taken away, was stolen from us, the moment we agreed to let despair to have a dominion<sup>5</sup>.*

When Abraham died, Isaac and Ishmael come together to bury him. Not all relationships end broken in this story, not all hope is lost.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/israel-peace-conference/1.601993>