

Rosh Hashanah Day 2 5784

Models of Prayer

Source Sheet by Ariann Weitzman

Genesis 19:27-29

(27) Next **morning**, Abraham hurried to the place where he had **stood** before the Eternal [and argued on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah] (28) and, looking down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and all the land of the Plain, he saw the smoke of the land rising like the smoke of a kiln. (29) Thus it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain and annihilated the cities where Lot dwelt, God was mindful of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval.

Genesis 24:63-67

(63) And Isaac went out **walking/conversing/meditating*** in the field **toward evening** and, looking up, he saw camels approaching. (64) Raising her eyes, Rebekah saw Isaac. She alighted from the camel (65) and said to the servant, “Who is that man walking in the field toward us?” And the servant said, “That is my master.” So she took her veil and covered herself. (66) The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. (67) Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother’s death.

*translations differ, the verb used here is interpreted in each of these ways depending on context

Genesis 28:10-13

(10) Jacob left Beersheva, and set out for Haran. (11) He **encountered** a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the **sun had set**. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. (12) He had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and messengers of God were going up and down on it. (13) And standing beside him was YHVH who said, “I am YHVH, the God of your father Abraham’s [house] and the God of Isaac’s [house]: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring.

I Samuel 1:9-17

(9) After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose. The priest Eli was sitting on the seat near the doorpost of the temple of YHVH. (10) In her wretchedness, she prayed to YHVH, weeping all the while. (11) And she made this vow: “O YHVH of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to YHVH for all the days of his life; and no razor shall ever touch his head.” (12) As she kept on praying before YHVH, Eli watched her mouth. (13) Now Hannah was praying in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. (14) Eli said to her, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Sober up!” (15) And Hannah replied, “Oh no, my lord! I am a very unhappy woman. I have drunk no wine or other strong drink, but I have been pouring out my heart to YHVH. (16) Do not take your maidservant for a worthless woman; I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress.” (17) “Then go in peace,” said Eli, “and may the God of Israel grant

you what you have asked.”

These four models present very different modalities of prayer:

Abraham stands in awareness of hard truths.

Isaac walks in contemplation and finds comfort.

Jacob experiences a revelatory encounter.

Hannah pours out her heart in petition.

Do any of these models of prayer resonate with your own experience of prayer? What forms of prayer might be missing in this list?

The patriarchs' prayers are understood by the rabbinic tradition to occur at fixed times (morning, afternoon, evening, at the annual pilgrimage festival), and Hannah's prayer occurs in a ritually sacred space. Yet each of these prayers, in their context, is a spontaneous act. Our ancestors' spontaneity becomes the rabbinic model for our ideal regularity.

Abraham Joshua Heschel writes, "Jewish prayer is guided by two opposite principles: order and outburst, regularity and spontaneity, uniformity and individuality, law and freedom."

What in your own Jewish practice, including and beyond prayer, is guided by "order"? Which by "outburst"? In your own practice, do you value one principle over the other?