

Midrash on The White Ram

On the last day of creation, in the twilight of the first Sabbath, (Avot 5:9) God made a beautiful white ram. God put the ram in Gan Eden (the Garden of Eden) and said, "Wait here until I call you." And there the ram waited and waited.

Meanwhile, Adam and Eve disobeyed the LORD and were exiled from the garden. They left the beauty of paradise, yet the ram stayed and waited.

The ages passed, and the other animals left the garden. Still the ram patiently waited.

Then one day God woke the ram and said, "Today is the day." The ram jumped up and began to run. He knew what he had to do.

The evil one appeared and said, "Stop! Don't leave this beautiful garden. It will mean your death!" But the ram said, "I must save the child!" and he ran out of Eden. He ran over rocks and boulders, he leapt over stony crags. He knew exactly where he was going.

The evil one next appeared disguised as a field of fresh green grass. "Stop here!" he cajoled. "Eat and rest. There's no need to hurry." But the ram replied, "I must save the child!" and ran even faster through the dusty desert. The evil one waited and then appeared as a sparkling fountain of water in the waste places. He cried out, "Ho, all who are thirsty, stop and drink! Rest -- there is no hurry!"

But once again the ram replied, "I cannot stop! I must save the child!" Further still along the way, the evil one appeared as a hungry lion and roared, "Stop! Or I will rend you to pieces and devour you!" But the ram stoutly replied, "I must save the child" and leapt over the ferocious lion.

Finally the ram arrived at the sacred mountain (Moriah).

At the top he saw a child tied and bound to an altar and a weeping man. "Wait!" cried the ram, running with all his strength. "I am here! Take me!" But the evil one, disguised as a bush of brambles, caught the ram's horns and said, "You shall go no further!" The ram struggled to get free, crying out, "Abraham! Here I am! Take me!" but Abraham did not hear.

The ram then heard the voice of God saying to Abraham, "Stop! I asked you to sacrifice your only son, Isaac, to test your love and trust in me. Now, instead of Isaac, sacrifice this ram. I made him in the twilight of the last day of creation for this very moment -- to take Isaac's place on the altar." Abraham then saw the ram and untied his son. After he freed the ram from the thicket of brambles, the ram bounded upon the altar.

"Abraham," said the ram, "when you blow through one of my horns, God will hear the sound and remember Isaac and me -- the white ram that took his place. And He will forgive the sins of Isaac, and the sins of his children, and his children's children, and so

on, always, until the end of time."

Then the ram lay down on the altar and his soul flew away into God's hands. And from the ram's ashes the mortar for the altar of the Temple was said to be made; from his bones, the foundations of Jerusalem were laid, from his bowels, the strings of David's harp, and from his hide, the prophet Elijah made a cloak. And from his two horns were made two shofars: one was blown when Moses received the Ten Commandments, and the other will call the children of Israel home. And now, when we hear the sound of the shofar, we remember the sacrifice of the white ram for Isaac and his children.

(Adapted from Mordicai Gerstein's retelling of the famous midrash in his children's book, *The White Ram*, Holiday House, 2006)

More detail on the ram:

<http://www.lookstein.org/articles/resurrection.pdf>

(From Pirkay DeRabbi Eliezer ch. 31)

Rabbi Chaninah ben Dosa said: Nothing went waste from that ram. His ashes became the foundation of the inner altar, as it is written, "Aharon will make atonement on its horned corners once a year."⁶⁷

The sinews of the ram are ten, corresponding to the ten strings of the lyre on which David played. His hide became the girdle around the thighs of Eliyahu [the prophet], as it is written, "They said to him, 'A man, full of hair, with a girdle of hide wrapped around his thighs...' "⁶⁸

The horns of the ram: The left one's voice was heard on Mt. Sinai, as it is written, "There was the voice of the Shofar."⁶⁹

And the right horn, which is larger than the left, will be sounded in the future when the exiles are gathered, as it is written, "It will be on that day that He will blow a large Shofar."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Shemot 30:10.

⁶⁸ Melakhim II 1:8.

⁶⁹ Shemot 19:19.

⁷⁰ Yeshayahu 27:13.