

CHEVRAH TORAH 5778...Seeking ✨ Spirituality

Shabbat VAYERA

Genesis 22:1-19

KEY KOSHI:

HOW/WHY IS THE COMMAND TO ABRAHAM FOR AKEDAT YITSCHAK,
THE BINDING OF ISAAC, A QUESTION OF ABRAHAM'S/OUR FAITH?

WHAT CAN ABRAHAM'S RESPONSE TEACH US ABOUT THE SPIRITUALITY WE ASPIRE TO LIVE?

P'SHAT—AWARENESS... The beginning of knowing about God is simply paying attention, being fully present where you are

22:1] Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham," and he answered, "Here I am." 2] And He said, "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you." 3] So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God told him. 4] On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar. 5] Then Abraham said to his servants, "You stay here with the as. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you."

6] Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together. 7] Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he answered, "Yes, my son." And he said, "Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" 8] And Abraham said, "God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son." And the two of them walked on together.

9] They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10] And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son. 11] Then an angel of the Lord called to him from heaven: "Abraham! Abraham!" And he answered, "Here I am." 12] And he said, Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored

1 וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַהֲאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־
אֲבִרְהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲבִרְהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִנִּי :
2 וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־נָא אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יִצְחָק אֲשֶׁר־אֲהַבְתָּ
אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ מֹרְיָה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם
לְעֹלָה עַל אֶחָד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ :
3 וַיִּשְׁכֶם אֲבִרְהָם בַּבֶּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׂ אֶת־חֲמֹרוֹ וַיִּקַּח
אֶת־שְׁנֵי נְעָרָיו אִתּוֹ וְאֶת יִצְחָק בְּנֵוֹ וַיִּבְקַע עֵצִי
עֲלֵה וַיִּקֶם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אָמַר־לוֹ
הָאֱלֹהִים : 4 בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַיִּשָּׂא אֲבִרְהָם אֶת־
עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם מֵרֶחֶק : 5 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִרְהָם
אֶל־נְעָרָיו שְׁבוּ־לָכֶם פֹּה עִם־הַחֲמֹר וְאֲנִי וְהַנֶּעַר
נִלְכָה עַד־זֶה וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנָשׁוּבָה אֵלֵיכֶם :

6 וַיִּקַּח אֲבִרְהָם אֶת־עֵצֵי הָעֹלָה וַיִּשֶׂם עַל־יִצְחָק
בְּנֵוֹ וַיִּקַּח בַּיָּדוֹ אֶת־הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת־הַמַּאֲכָלֶת וַיֵּלְכוּ
שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו : 7 וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל־אֲבִרְהָם אָבִיו
וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִנִּי בְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנֵה הָאֵשׁ
וְהָעֵצִים וְאֵיךְ הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה : 8 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִרְהָם
אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים יְרָאֵה־לוֹ הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה בְנִי וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם
יַחְדָּו :

9 וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּבֶן
שָׁם אֲבִרְהָם אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיַּעֲרֹךְ אֶת־הָעֵצִים
וַיַּעֲקֹד אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנֵוֹ וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתוֹ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ
מִמַּעַל לָעֵצִים : 10 וַיִּשְׁלַח אֲבִרְהָם אֶת־יָדוֹ וַיִּקַּח
אֶת־הַמַּאֲכָלֶת לְשַׁחַט אֶת־בְּנֵוֹ : 11 וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו
מִלֶּאֶד יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִרְהָם |
אֲבִרְהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִנִּי : 12 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־יְהוָה יְדֹדְךָ

one, from Me.” 13] When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burn offering in place of his son. 14] And Abraham named that sit Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, “On the mount of the Lord there is vision.”

15] The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16] and said, “By Myself I swear, the Lord declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one, 17] I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes. 18] All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command.” 19] Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer-sheba; and Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba.

אֱלֹהֵינֶעֱר וְאַל־תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מֵאֻמָּה כִּי | עֲתָה יִדְעֹתִי
כִּי־יִרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶתְה וְלֹא חֲשַׁכְתָּ אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־
יַחֲדָךָ מִמֶּנִּי : 13 וַיֵּשֶׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא
וְהִנֵּה־אֵיל אַחַר נֶאֱחָז בַּסִּבְךָ בְּקִרְנָיו וַיִּלְךָ
אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאֵיל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה תַחַת בְּנוֹ :
14 וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא יְהוָה |
יִרְאָה אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הַיּוֹם בְּהַר יְהוָה יִרְאָה :

15 וַיִּקְרָא מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָהָם שְׁנִית מִן־
הַשָּׁמַיִם : 16 וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם־יְהוָה כִּי יַעַן
אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא חֲשַׁכְתָּ אֶת־בְּנֶךָ
אֶת־יַחֲדָךָ : 17 כִּי־בִרְךָ אֲבָרְכֶךָ וְהִרְבֵּה אֲרַבֶּה אֶת־
זַרְעֶךָ כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל־שֵׁפֶת הַיָּם
וַיִּרְשׂ זַרְעֶךָ אֶת שְׁעַר אֹיְבָיו : 18 וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּזַרְעֶךָ
כָּל־גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ לְקַב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקִלִּי : 19 וַיָּשָׁב
אַבְרָהָם אֶל־נַעֲרָיו וַיִּקְמוּ וַיֵּלְכוּ יַחְדָּו אֶל־בְּאֵר
שָׁבַע וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם בְּבֵאֵר שָׁבַע :

REMEZ—UN-SELF-AWARENESS... God showed Moses a Torah of black fire written on white fire.

The negative ground on and by which all things can be read is itself a message.

V.1 *Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. God said to him, "Abraham." And he answered, "Hineni."*

ABARVANEL... This tenth trial is the only one to be labeled as "a Test," because, unlike the other nine which Abraham was required to carry to completion, this one was only a test—a task never to actually be done.

PLAUT... The literary pattern of this section is reminiscent of the first passage of the Abraham story: a divine command issuing forth to set out toward an unknown place. The same unusual reflexive phrasing contains the directive: *LECH L'CHA*... It is almost as though the external elements of the tale, while clear enough, hide deeper meanings under the cover of simple words.

SARNA... This information is imparted to the reader, not divulged to Abraham... The purely probative nature of the divine request is emphasized... The reader now knows that the son will not be slaughtered. But is the father's faith in God of such transcendent quality as to overcome his natural love for his heir in full consciousness that obedience to God's cruel request would mean the end of all his hopes and dreams, the nullification of the promises he had so often heard from the mouth of this self-same God?

RaDAK... It is very difficult to explain the matter of God "testing" someone, seeing that God knows in advance the outcome. What then is the point? If the point was to demonstrate to the world that Abraham passed such a test, how could this be accomplished if only he and his son were present. He even left the lads behind... Even if Abraham told someone what had transpired, who would have believed him?... We know that Abraham loved Isaac more than he loved himself... The thought of this act must have been more than upsetting. If, nonetheless, he was prepared to carry it out without hesitation, this was indeed a feat all Abraham's descendants would marvel at—a demonstration of his unwavering love for God..

RASHI... *Hineni*... Such is the response of the pious—of readiness to do the bidding of the one addressing them.

TALMUD... A God who asks man what the text appears to ask is not the true God but one whom man has fashioned in his own image... Man often believes that God wants him to sacrifice his children/future to an imagined demand, but then it is not God but man who is cruel. [Adapted, Ta'anit 16a]

V.4 *On the third day, Abraham lifted his eyes, and saw the place from afar.*

Prof E.AUERBACH... We are told nothing about the journey except that it took three days, and even that we are told in a mysterious way. Abraham and his followers "*arose early in the morning..And on the third day, Abraham lifted his eyes and saw...*" That gesture is, indeed, the only occurrence of the entire journey... The impression given is that the journey took place in a vacuum. It is as if, while he traveled on, Abraham looked neither to the right nor the left... The journey is like a silent progress through the indeterminate; a holding of the breath, like a blank duration between what has passed and what lies ahead...

B'REISHIT RABBAH... "*Abraham lifted his eyes, and saw the place from afar.*" What did he see? He saw a cloud enveloping the mountain, and said: This is the place where the Holy One has told me to offer Isaac up." Abraham then said to Isaac, "My son, do you see what I see?" And he replied, "Yes." Said Abraham to the two servants, "Do you see?" "No," they answered. "So, you two, stay here with the ass..." **ETZ HAYIM...** Abraham, perceiving the distance between those who are sensitive to God's Presence and those who are blind to it, understood... what he saw. He saw *HaMakom—the Presence of God on the mountaintop was afar off*.

V.10-11 *Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son. Then an angel of the Lord called to him from Heaven: "Abraham! Abraham!!" And he answered, "Hineni."*

B'REISHIT RABBAH... When the Patriarch Abraham stretched forth his hand, taking the knife to slay his son, the angels wept, as it is written, "*Hark, the mighty above cry aloud; the Messengers on High weep bitterly.*" [Isa 33:7] "*And the angel of the Lord called unto him...*"

R' Chiya taught: Repeating. This is an expression of love. R' Eliezer taught: The repetition indicates that he spoke to him and to future generations. For there is no generation which does not contain men like Abraham, and no generation without men like Jacob... R' Isaac taught: "Abraham stretched forth his hand..." While tears streamed down his face, dropping into Isaac's eyes. And the angels amassed Above, what did they cry? "*The highways lie waste. The wayfarer has ceased; the Covenant is broken.*" [Isa 33:8]

V.12-13 *And he said: Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do a thing to him. For now I know that you fear God... And Abraham lifted his eyes, and saw a ram...*

RaDAK... God repeated to ensure Abraham's attention!.. The term "*YiReH--fear*" mentioned here is none other than "AHaVaH—love," seeing that the fear was beyond the physical, but a matter of his soul's suffering. Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son to demonstrate that his love for this abstract, invisible God was greater than any physical love

TANCHUMA YASHAN... *For now I know*... he This cannot imply that God did not know before, but rather is understood as Now I know how to answer those who question the cause of My love for you, seeing that you are *Yireh-Adonai*... [GUR ARYEH]

D'RASH—READING BETWEEN THE WORDS...

SeFAS EMES...

“For now I know that you fear God...” But was not Abraham’s service out of love? And is not that higher than serving God out of fear? Why, then, should Torah attribute to Abraham the “fear of God”...?

Just this was Abraham’s trial. He who had left his land and his birthplace, who’d thrown himself into the fiery furnace, would not have considered it a trial to offer up his son. Of course a person like Abraham, one who serves out of love, would be drawn to follow God’s Will with his whole heart and every fiber of his being...But in this case, it really was not God’s will that he slaughter Isaac at all! Abraham’s heart, discerning this, felt not one ounce of love for God in connection with this act, since it was not God’s Will from the start. That was the trial. And that is why it says *“He saw the place [HaMakom] from afar,”* meaning that he saw God—HaMAKOM was far from him since this command was not at all God’s Will. Now, after love had gone, all Abraham had left was fear...

That is why Abraham insisted that God try him no further, and prayed that God never again be far from him. For Abraham’s path was sacred service that sprang from love...

Rabbi ART GREEN...

This is a startling interpretation, one that restores the equanimity in the relationship that seems so greatly thrown off balance in this tale. As one who stands in an ongoing love relationship with God, Abraham senses that this command could not bespeak the true will of his Lover. The command is real, and Abraham has to follow, but he does so with faith that the God whom he has known in love cannot will this thing. His God is far from him as he goes towards that mountain. Having survived that trial, one in which he felt abandoned by a God of love, Abraham is given the strength to say, “No more!” Never again should I or my children have to choose...In this Akedah, both man and God are tried, tested and refined—never to be the same again.

SOD—The SELF of the UNIVERSE... God's "I am" has the psycho-theological force not of dissolving individual selves but of reminding us that we were never individual selves in the first place...Our selfhood endures by virtue of its participation in some greater Self,

Prof JAMES GOODMAN... [prof of History & Creative Writing, Rutgers University University]

Kierkegaard thought a man's relation to other men ought to be determined by his relationship to God, a God for whom all things are possible, including making himself known and heard...Part of Abraham's trial was, and part of the terrible loneliness of faith is, the knowing and not knowing, the certainty that lies so close to doubt, the proximity of the sacrifice that would be holy to the temptation to sacrifice that would be sin....

...What that means is that there have been, and there still are, commentators, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish, who insist that God didn't ask, wouldn't ask, and there have been, and still are, commentators who insist that God most certainly did. And what that means is that there are some who say that God should not have asked and there are others who reply that there is no "should" independent of God.

...That means there are some who, teaching the Old Testament to Christian children, omit the near sacrifice altogether, skipping from Isaac's birth to his marriage, or who tell the story quickly and talk a lot about Abraham's love of God. And there are others who explain it bluntly...It would be very scary and might even seem impossible, but "God wants to see that we trust Him all the way."

...That means that there are still some who imagine that Abraham killed Isaac, including the biblical scholars who believe or suspect that the story was an E sacrifice story, transformed into an aborted sacrifice story by a later editor, perhaps with the simple addition of verse 11-14 and the phrase "*a second time*" in verse 15. Take those lines out and you will read a sacrifice story too...As Richard Elliott Friedman puts it, "Isaac never again appears as a character in E."

And there are others—many others—who are as sure as they are sure of anything that Abraham stopped and sacrificed a ram instead....

That means that there are Jewish commentators who argue that Jews don't suffer or die for God, that Jews live for God, that the God of pain and suffering is a false god. And there are Jewish commentators who argue that they most certainly do. For the latter, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, one of the twentieth century's seminal Jewish philosophers, Talmud scholars, and teachers of Modern Orthodoxy, is an irresistible authority. Soloveitchik once said that he "recoiled" from all the talk of how "the observance of mitzvot is beneficial for digestion, for sound sleep, for family harmony, and for social position." The religious act may end in joy, but it "is fundamentally an experience of suffering." God says: "Offer your sacrifice!" It started with Abraham: "He was not to fool himself in thinking that he'd get another son." Or that he would ever forget Isaac: "Out of your sleep you will call for Yitzchak, and when you wake up you will find your tent desolate and forsaken." Nevertheless, God demanded that sacrifice, and what began on that mountain continued

in the great Temples built upon it and then in the synagogue and throughout our religious lives today: “Build an altar, arrange the pieces of wood. Kindle the fire. Take the knife to slaughter your existence for My sake. Thus commands the awesome God. This approach is the basis of prayer. Man surrenders himself to God. He approaches the awesome God and the approach expresses itself in the sacrifice and Akedah of oneself.”

Dr. J.H. HERTZ...

Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his most sacred affections on the altar of his God evoked and developed a new ideal in Israel—the ideal of martyrdom....As persecutions persisted throughout our history, the binding of Isaac was ever in the mind of men and women who might at any moment be given the dread alternative of either apostasy or death...

Many today have no understanding of such martyrdom. They fail to see that it represents the highest moral triumph of humanity—unwavering steadfastness to principle, even at the cost of life. They equally fail to see the last influence of such martyrdoms upon the character of the nation whose history they adorn. Those who are thus blind to unconquerable courage naturally display hostility to the whole idea of the Akedah...As Geiger exclaimed, “Only a Moloch requires human sacrifice!” But in all human history, there is not a single noble cause, movement or achievement, that did not call for sacrifice...Science, Liberty, Humanity, all took their toll of martyrs...Israel is such a people...Few chapters of the bible have had a more potent influence on the life and soul of men than our Akedah.

Rabbi LARRY KUSHNER...

The Name of the mountain MoRiYaH, means awe-full. Tradition claims it will become the site of the Temple—the center of the world in the World to Come. Sinai, where Torah was given, is ownerless and unknown. The holiest place known to Jews is the scene of a near sacrifice. The Temple is built where the older generation almost kills the younger but forbears at the last possible moment. Only a three-day’s journey from home. If you raise your eyes, you can see it off in the distance.