

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYERA

Haftarah: Melachim II 4:1-23

OCTOBER 31, 2015 18 HESHVAN 5776

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RESPONDING TO COMMENTS:

A couple of weeks ago, I posted an article titled a message from Jerusalem. I received it from a friend and added it without reading it. There was no author listed and when I later tried to get the author's name, I was unsuccessful. And I apologize as I don't typically make that mistake. And it was a mistake to post something with no author.

The writer noted that: "Unfortunately, today we don't have prophets and people that can tell us why the wrath of Hashem is upon us. But, we do have the Torah Ha'Kedoshah, which is true, and the words of Chazal, which are true, to guide us through these blinding times." And some of you complained that the article was in fact harsh and spoke as if the writer did know. To be fair, many of you found it inspiring. Either way with no author, I should have left it out.

Editors Notes

Lech Lecha - Rising Under Pressure

When we first meet Abraham and G-d is telling him to go to the land, the Torah tells us that Abraham was 75 years old. He is given according to Maimonides the first of ten tests, while according to most others, this is the second.

The Midrash fills us in on the early years and what that first test was.

We know that the King at the time was Nimrod, the mighty hunter, son of Cush and grandson of Ham. He is feared by both man and animal. His very name is synonymous with rebellion. He is the one "who made the entire people rebel against God". He represents the dark side and seems to use the dark side or idolatry in consolidating power. He built the Tower of Babel, made himself a deity insisted that the people worship him.

Abraham discovers G-d and takes it upon himself to publicize monotheism which puts him at odds with Nimrod. Nimrod is threatened by Abraham and has him thrown into prison giving him the choice to recant

or to be condemned to death by fire. The people gather to watch the rebel burn alive for disloyalty and disrespect towards the gods. Abraham accuses Nimrod of returning people to the way things were before the flood. Abraham is not willing to back down and he is bound and thrown into the fire. Hashem was with him and the fire did not touch him. It only burned the rope which bound him. The midrash continues that for three days and nights thousands witnessed Abraham walking in the midst of the flames until even Nimrod begs him to come out.

The obvious question is that once someone is willing to give his life for G-d, and actually steps into the furnace, what's the point of all the other tests? Aside from the last which is to bring his own son as a sacrifice on the alter, the other tests seem to pale. The rabbis explain that even after a test, someone can fall and it's passing the subsequent test which lifts the person not only to where they were but even higher.

Rabbi Shabtai Sabato writes that "our lives are replete with tests – milestones that help us advance step by step and climb up from one rung to another. Some of the tests are administered to us by our fellow men, while others are orchestrated by Hashem. Mortals need to run tests on others – for instance, a teacher tests his students – in order to ascertain their level and abilities. Hashem, however, already knows perfectly well the strengths and abilities of His creations. Rather, the tests He administers aim at giving us a chance to prove our abilities and make the best of our potential. When we succeed, we find that we have been uplifted – not only in our own eyes, but also in the eyes of those around us."

Although we pray each day to avoid any tests and any difficulties, many times if not always (though we usually don't understand how), tests and difficulties are there for our benefit. For some reason, many of us only truly excel under pressure. It's the difficult times which reveal our true and deepest strengths. Conversely, when we don't feel pressure, when we feel that things are going just fine, when we don't perceive a test, we don't do our best and consequently we mess up.

Last week I saw how the fact that "we" didn't feel pressure over the past year led to a realization that we messed up and I fear that as a result "we" will start feeling the pressure, painful pressure, and will have no choice but to step up.

Last week I attended the World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem. The delegates came from Israel, the

United States and the rest of the diaspora. The breakdown was a bit more than 200 from Israel broken down based on the party breakdown of the Israeli Knesset. The 155 delegates from the diaspora not including the United States are broken down along the same lines. If the Americans were appointed in the same way, then the Congress would simply mirror the Knesset, But Americans though are different. Aren't we always? Our representatives are appointed based on direct elections.

Our party Ohavei Zion was represented by four delegates which sounds OK for our first time effort. The Zionist Organization of America, one of the oldest, and one of the largest, pro-Israel/Zionist organizations in the United States led by Morton Klein and backed by Sheldon Adelson had seven delegates including from the community, Murray Mizrahi and Isaac Sutton. Bringing together organizations which included, World Mizrahi, AMIT, Bnei Akiva, the Orthodox Union, the Rabbinical Council of America, the National Council of Young Israel, Torah Mitzion, Touro College, Religious Zionist of America and Yeshiva University under a single banner, the group was represented by 25 delegates. Standing together we had 36 delegates out of 145.

The Conservative community had the same 25 as the Orthodox Ashkenazim. The Reform had 56 but when they stood with their partners they had about 84 or when combined with the Conservatives 109. Those numbers do not break down along the Knesset numbers and that meant that the overall makeup of the Congress was different.

Prime Minister Netanyahu's conservative coalition is made up of Likud, Kulanu, Habayit Yehudi and the Religious parties. The left has been trying for years to wrestle power from Netanyahu. It was during the Congress that they got to flex some muscle. The disenfranchised left was able to align with the highly organized Reform to push through vote after vote totally at odds with present policy. And we can't think that these votes are meaningless. Although Netanyahu is strong enough to resist, a more center left prime minister would use the resolutions of the Congress to push policy rightfully stating that these resolutions are "the will of world Jewry". And regardless of the present government, the Congress controlling many organizations in Israel has the funds and power to highly influence direction of education, aliyah and so much more.

And when the changes start to happen, "we" will feel the pressure. When we see changes at the Wall and changes in the courts, when we see education funding not going our way, we will worry. And perhaps we will wake up.

Many of the votes were close. One by one vote, many by less than ten. When we realize that the

Brooklyn, Deal and Florida Sephardic communities should have no less than ten thousand votes or twenty seats, the Persian community which promised five thousand votes would have brought another ten seats, the ZOA should have had twenty seats and the coalition of Ashkenazim would have had at least 25,000 votes for fifty seats. But our complacency led to apathy.

Abraham felt the pressure, again and again, test after test and he succeeded. We're about to feel the pressure as a result of our apathy. Let's hope it brings out the best in us. Let's hope we can emulate our father Abraham and prove to ourselves and to each other that we can rise to the occasion. G-d knows we can. Now it's up to us to realize it. It's time to come together and start working towards next time. Its never too early.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

**PS ... I know why I like Rabbi Elie Abadie so much ... he looks at the bright side and adds a positive view. I need to remind myself of that
The Rabbi writes:**

Dear Congregants and Friends,

As you may already know, this past week, my wife Estie and I, Rabbi David Bibi and Rabbi Sion Setton participated in the 37th Zionist Congress that took place in Jerusalem, Israel. We represented the Sephardic Community of the United States under the banner of Ohavei Zion - World Sefardic Zionist Organization. You may remember, we ran the elections from January to April 2015, and we asked you to vote and participate.

Our participation was historic, as it was for the first time that an official Sephardic party from outside Israel ran in the elections and participated.

We made strides in the Congress and our presence was felt. There were media coverage and write ups in the social media about our participation.

For first time, ultra-Orthodox Shas party includes women in delegation to World Zionist Congress - Jewish World News - Yair Ettinger Oct 26, 2015 2:46 AM

Ohavei Zion, the slate of the Shas-affiliated World Sephardic Zionist Organization, failed to achieve its main goal at the 37th World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem last week: The plenum voted down, by a large majority, its bid for official recognition of the

Sephardi Zionist Orthodox stream throughout the Jewish world. But that failure could not erase the dramatic precedent set by the list which, for the first time, was a full participant in the conference, with five women in its 17-person delegation.

Hundreds of conference-goers listened as Estie Abadie spoke from the stage about the importance of erasing the differences between the various streams of Judaism, in the spirit of tolerant Sephardi Judaism.

"The Sephardim have something to offer to the Jewish people, in the sense that we never had the division among Orthodox, Reform and Conservative. We always understood that we're all Jews, so we look to get away from divisions. That's the positive message of Ohavei Zion," Abadie told Haaretz after her speech.

The other women members of the delegation are Shifra Sananas, daughter of Shas chairman and Economy Minister Arye Dery; Margalit Steinberger, daughter of Council of Torah Sages member Rabbi David Yosef (himself a son of the late Shas spiritual leader, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef) and wife of delegate Yehuda Steinberger; Nava Antebi, the wife of delegation member Ariel Antebi, in-laws of Rabbi David Yosef; and Aliza Ouzan, who has served in a number of positions within Shas. All five are close to the top ranks of Shas or related in some way to top men in Shas; Abadie's husband, Rabbi Elie Abadie, is also a member of the delegation but that still does not detract from the magnitude of the precedent for Shas, which would not consider being represented in the Knesset by women.

The precedent is not the result of a new policy in the ultra-Orthodox party. In 2010, Shas joined the World Zionist Congress on the orders of Ovadia Yosef, earning the opprobrium of United Torah Judaism and of the Ashkenazi Edah Haredit. The justification given for the founding of Ohavei Zion, which although affiliated with Shas also includes Likud supporters, was the need for Sephardic representation in the Zionist institutions together with the possibility of enjoying the kinds of attractive jobs that figures in the other religious parties were already filling. Nevertheless, it's doubtful that Shas would have taken the same decision today, under its present leadership.

Shas participated in the congress for the first time in 2010, when a resolution requiring each list to comprise at least 30 percent women was passed; this year was the first time Shas fielded a mixed slate. "They thought that by passing the rule we'd go home,

but we're not going home," Yigal Bibi, one of the founders of Ohavei Zion, said. "It turned out well for us; the women were the most active, in my opinion. It was a pleasant surprise."

Yizhar Hess, the CEO and executive director of the Masorti (Conservative) Movement in Israel, wrote on his Facebook page in the wake of Estie Abadie's speech: "When there's no choice, it turns out that women can also serve in the parliament of the Jewish people on behalf of a Haredi party."

But Yigal Bibi, himself a former MK for the National Religious Party, says Shas views the presence of women in a delegation representing the party in the congress as a one-off. "It'll take a long time for them to get into the Knesset, but that too will come," Bibi said, adding, "After all, once there was Deborah the prophet," referring to the Biblical figure, who was also a judge. "I imagine that she spoke before soldiers."

The Abadies, who together make up half of the American contingent of the Ohavei Zion delegation, are not exactly typical Shas representatives. She was raised in the religious Zionist movement; he is a physician who is a senior lecturer at New York's Yeshiva University, in addition to being the pulpit rabbi of the Edmond J. Safra Synagogue, on the Upper East Side. Their son immigrated to Israel and served in the Golani Brigade, including in Operation Protective Edge in 2014.

"Sephardi Judaism is a moderate Judaism, a Judaism that recognizes the value of the person, of the man and the woman, and the ability of everyone to contribute to the Jewish people and the Jewish community. We wanted to pass a resolution [saying] the World Zionist Congress won't ignore the world Sephardi communities, because many of them don't participate in WZO," Elie Abadie said.

PSS ... Now Google the event and see how the reform are celebrating !!!! We need to start working on next time from now!

I received the following story and it was really incredible. And after investigating, almost all of it is true ! It is 14 years since 9/11 and here is a wonderful story about that terrible day. Delta Flight 15... (true story) Here is an amazing story from a flight attendant on Delta Flight 15, written following 9-11: On the morning of Tuesday, September 11, we were about 5 hours out of Frankfurt, flying over the North Atlantic.

All of a sudden the curtains parted and I was told to go to the cockpit, immediately, to see the captain. As soon as I got there I noticed that the

crew had that "All Business" look on their faces. The captain handed me a printed message. It was from Delta's main office in Atlanta and simply read, "All airways over the Continental United States are closed to commercial air traffic. Land ASAP at the nearest airport. Advise your destination."

No one said a word about what this could mean. We knew it was a serious situation and we needed to find terra firma quickly. The captain determined that the nearest airport was 400 miles behind us in Gander, Newfoundland.

He requested approval for a route change from the Canadian traffic controller and approval was granted immediately -- no questions asked.

We found out later, of course, why there was no hesitation in approving our request.

While the flight crew prepared the airplane for landing, another message arrived from Atlanta telling us about some terrorist activity in the New York area. A few minutes later word came in about the hijackings.

We decided to LIE to the passengers while we were still in the air. We told them the plane had a simple instrument problem and that we needed to land at the nearest airport in Gander, Newfoundland, to have it checked out.

We promised to give more information after landing in Gander. There was much grumbling among the passengers, but that's nothing new!

Forty minutes later, we landed in Gander. Local time at Gander was

12:00 PM!..... that's 11:00am EST.

There were already about 20 other airplanes on the ground from all over the world that had taken this detour on their way to the U.S.

After we parked on the ramp, the captain made the following announcement: "Ladies and gentlemen, you must be wondering if all these airplanes around us have the same instrument problem as we have. The reality is that we are here for another reason." Then he went on to explain the little bit we knew about the situation in the U.S. There were loud gasps and stares of disbelief. The captain informed passengers that Ground Control in Gander told us to stay put.

The Canadian Government was in charge of our situation and no one was allowed to get off the aircraft. No one on the ground was allowed to come near any of the air crafts. Only airport police would come around periodically, look us over and go on to the next airplane.

In the next hour or so more planes landed and Gander ended up with 53 airplanes from all over the world, 27 of which were U.S. commercial jets.

Meanwhile, bits of news started to come in over the aircraft radio and for the first time we learned that airplanes were flown into the World Trade Center in New York and into the Pentagon in D.C. People were trying to use their cell phones, but were unable to connect due to a different cell system in Canada. Some did get through, but were only able to get to the Canadian operator who would tell them that the lines to the U.S. were either blocked or jammed.

Sometime in the evening the news filtered to us that the World Trade Center buildings had collapsed and that a fourth hijacking had resulted in a crash. By now the passengers were emotionally and physically exhausted, not to mention frightened, but everyone stayed amazingly calm. We had only to look out the window at the 52 other stranded aircraft to realize that we were not the only ones in this predicament.

We had been told earlier that they would be allowing people off the planes one plane at a time. At 6 P.M., Gander airport told us that our turn to deplane would be 11 am the next morning. Passengers were not happy, but they simply resigned themselves to this news without much noise and started to prepare themselves to spend the night on the airplane.

Gander had promised us medical attention, if needed, water, and lavatory servicing. And they were true to their word. Fortunately, we had no medical situations to worry about. We did have a young lady who was 33 weeks into her pregnancy. We took REALLY good care of her. The night passed without incident despite the uncomfortable sleeping arrangements.

About 10:30 on the morning of the 12th, a convoy of school buses showed up. We got off the plane and were taken to the terminal where we went through Immigration and Customs and then had to register with the Red Cross.

After that, we (the crew) were separated from the passengers and were taken in vans to a small hotel. We had no idea where our passengers were going.

We learned from the Red Cross that the town of Gander has a population of 10,400 people and they had about 10,500 passengers to take care of from all the airplanes that were forced into Gander! We were told to just relax at the hotel and we would be contacted when the U.S. airports opened again, but not to expect that call for a while.

We found out the total scope of the terror back home only after getting to our hotel and turning on the TV, 24 hours after it all started.

Meanwhile, we had lots of time on our hands and found that the people of Gander were extremely friendly. They started calling us the "plane people." We enjoyed their hospitality, explored the town of Gander and ended up having a pretty good time.

Two days later, we got that call and were taken back to the Gander airport. Back on the plane, we were reunited with the passengers and found out what they had been doing for the past two days. What we found out was incredible.

Gander and all the surrounding communities (within about a 75 Kilometer radius) had closed all high schools, meeting halls, lodges, and any other large gathering places. They converted all these facilities to mass lodging areas for all the stranded travelers. Some had cots set up, some had mats with sleeping bags and pillows set up.

ALL the high school students were required to volunteer their time to take care of the "guests." Our 218 passengers ended up in a town called Lewisporte, about 45 kilometers from Gander where they were put up in a high school. If any women wanted to be in a women-only facility, that was arranged. Families were kept together. All the elderly passengers were taken to private homes.

Remember that young pregnant lady? She was put up in a private home right across the street from a 24-hour Urgent Care facility. There was a dentist on call and both male and female nurses remained with the crowd for the duration.

Phone calls and e-mails to the U.S. and around the world were available to everyone once a day. During the day, passengers were offered "Excursion" trips. Some people went on boat cruises of the lakes and harbors. Some went for hikes in the local forests.

Local bakeries stayed open to make fresh bread for the guests.

Food was prepared by all the residents and brought to the schools. People were driven to restaurants of their choice and offered wonderful meals. Everyone was given tokens for local laundromats to wash their clothes, since luggage was still on the aircraft. In other words, every single need was met for those stranded travelers.

Passengers were crying while telling us these stories. Finally, when they were told that U.S. airports had reopened, they were delivered to the airport right on time and without a single passenger missing or late. The local Red Cross had all the information about the whereabouts of each and every passenger and knew which plane they needed to be on and when all the planes were leaving. They coordinated everything beautifully.

It was absolutely incredible!

When passengers came on board, it was like they had been on a cruise. Everyone knew each other by name. They were swapping stories of their stay, impressing each other with who had the better time. Our flight back to Atlanta looked like a chartered party flight. The crew just stayed out of their way. It was mind-boggling.

Passengers had totally bonded and were calling each other by their first names, exchanging phone numbers, addresses, and email addresses

And then a very unusual thing happened.

One of our passengers approached me and asked if he could make an announcement over the PA system. We never, ever allow that. But this time was different. I said "of course" and handed him the mike. He picked up the PA and reminded everyone about what they had just gone through in the last few days. He reminded them of the hospitality they had received at the hands of total strangers. He continued by saying that he would like to do something in return for the good folks of Lewisporte.

He said he was going to set up a Trust Fund under the name of DELTA 15 (our flight number). The purpose of the trust fund is to provide college scholarships for the high school students of Lewisporte. He asked for donations of any amount from his fellow travelers. When the paper with donations got back to us with the amounts, names, phone numbers and addresses, the total was for more than \$14,000!

The gentleman, a MD from Virginia, promised to match the donations and to start the administrative work on the scholarship. He also said that he would forward this proposal to Delta Corporate and ask them to donate as well.

As I write this account, the trust fund is at more than \$1.5 million and has assisted 134 students in their college education.

I just wanted to share this story because we need good stories right now. It gives me a little bit of hope to know that some people in a faraway place were kind to some strangers who literally dropped in on them.

It reminds me how much good there is in the world.

In spite of all the rotten things we see going on in today's world this story confirms that there are still a lot of good people in the world and when things get bad, they will come forward.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading Va'yera - Sedom is destroyed, Akedat Yitzhak

- 1- Three malachim – angels - come to visit Abraham. Abraham feeds them. Sara hears that she will have a baby.
- 2- Abraham hears Sedom will be destroyed and pleads with Hashem to spare them
- 3- The malachim come to save Lot
- 4- Sedom is destroyed. Abimelech takes Sara. Yitzhak is born.
- 5- Abraham sends away Yishmael and Hagar
- 6- Abraham and Abimelech make a peace treaty
- 7- Akedat Yitzhak

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

“Then Hashem said to Abraham, ‘Why is it that Sarah laughed saying, ‘Is it even true that I shall give birth, though I have aged?’” (Beresheet 18:13)

Rabbi Avigdor Miller shares with us a lesson for life. Hashem did not divulge to Abraham that Sarah had said also that he had become old. Abraham would not resent this, because he too had said, “Could there be born to one that is 100 years old?” (17:17). Yet G-d wished to spare him the knowledge that Sarah considered him an old man. Abraham was too noble-minded to be irked by this, and indeed would fully agree with her. Yet even for the noblest of men, no matter how old they are, it is preferable that they do not know that their wives consider them old, and it is recommended that a wife never express such an opinion. (The same is true of a husband concerning his old wife.) To each other, they should forever remain youthful, and they should endeavor always to maintain their early impression of

each other. This is what G-d teaches by omitting from Sarah's words the expression, “And my master has become old,” although such an omission borders on untruth. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"And Yitzhak said to Abraham, 'Where is the sheep for the sacrifice?'" (Beresheet 22:7)

The Midrash tells us that Abraham and Yitzhak both went out to do the Akedah (Binding on the Altar) with the same zeal, love and dedication. The Satan, attempting to prevent them from doing this great misvah, came up with many arguments, all in vain. Then the Satan turned to Yitzhak and said to him that all of his prized possessions would go to Yishma'el, his half brother, if he let himself be sacrificed. It says in the Midrash that at that point, Yitzhak hesitated, and that's when he asked his father, "Where is the sheep for the sacrifice?"

We see from here a powerful lesson. All other arguments were not able to penetrate Yitzhak and prevent him from his self-sacrifice, but when he realized he would lose his possessions to his brother, that was enough to make him stop for a moment. The power of jealousy, of someone else taking from me is such that even a perfectly righteous person, such as Yitzhak Abinu could be affected, even momentarily. We see many incidents where friends, partners, brothers and families are torn apart because of this kind of jealousy. We become blinded by our interpretation of the facts, and we don't hear the other side or acknowledge that we could be wrong! The only way to view the situation objectively is through a third party who is neutral and has no personal considerations. The fact that our forefather, Yitzhak, was able to overcome his hesitation and do the Akedah shows that we have it within us to rise above jealousy and pettiness. If we look for the truth, Hashem will help us find it. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

IN THE GROOVE

“How was your day?” Bella asked her husband as he came through the door and dropped his briefcase on the couch.

“Routine,” Matt replied. “Just the same old thing, day after day. You know, I get up in the morning anticipating excitement in my life, but somehow, by the end of the day, I realize that I lead a pretty boring life. I go to the synagogue at the same time every day, and pray and learn with the same people. I even sit in the same seat all the time. Then, after a quick bite, I am off to work in the same train daily. I pretty much handle the same kinds of issues at work all the time, and then come home to a similar routine every night.”

"It sounds as though you are complaining, my dear," Bella replied calmly, with a smile on her pleasant face.

"Well, it seems like other people are having all the fun," Matt responded. "Is it so bad to want a surprise once in a while to spice up my life?"

"Surprises can be good, but they can also be bad," Bella wisely commented. "There were people who left their homes in the morning in the Holy Land to go about their business, who never got home because a terrorist had other plans. I also hear some tragic news about that nice young man Simon who lives in the green house on the corner. He went for a routine check-up, only to discover that he had a terrible disease. I don't think boring is so bad."

Life is full of surprises. Some are very pleasant and some are very tragic. When things fall into a groove, don't complain. The same old routine is not so bad when you consider some of the alternatives. When Hashem puts a little routine into your life, thank Him for the kindness of keeping your life on a good track without too many unpleasant surprises. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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Our God and God of Our Forefathers**

Parashat Vayera contains one of the most famous stories in the Torah – the story of Akedat Yishak ("The Binding of Yishak"). God tests Abraham's loyalty by commanding him to offer his beloved son, Yishak, as a sacrifice. Abraham obeys the command, travels to the site where the sacrifice is to take place, and prepares to slaughter Yishak, until an angel calls to Abraham and tells him not to proceed with the sacrifice.

According to most opinions, the command of the Akeda was the tenth and final of the ten tests to which God subjected Abraham. It stands to reason, then, that this was the most difficult of the tests. After all, when a person is tested, the tests get progressively more difficult, not easier. But it appears, at first glance, that at least one of Abraham's earlier tests was more difficult than this one. As the Midrash famously relates, when Abraham was still young, the wicked king Nimrod sentenced him to death for challenging pagan beliefs and advocating the belief in one God. Abraham refused to retract his condemnation of paganism even at the threat of death, and Nimrod threw him into a furnace. Miraculously, Abraham emerged unscathed.

On the surface, the test of the furnace was a more difficult challenge to Abraham than the rest of the Akeda. As hard as it must have been for Abraham to sacrifice his son, God had explicitly commanded him to perform this act, and he knew he had to comply. But when Nimrod threatened to have Abraham killed, nobody told Abraham to give his life. In fact, God had not spoken to him at all at that point. Abraham was prepared to give up his life voluntarily, without being commanded to do so. Moreover, the miracle of the furnace took place when Abraham was young and all alone in his opposition to idolatry. It must have been very difficult for him in that situation to agree to surrender his life. The Akeda, however, occurred when Abraham was already a renowned, well-established figure with a large, loyal following, a position that gave him more confidence in undertaking difficult measures to obey God.

In what way, then, was the Akeda a more difficult test?

The answer is that the command of the Akeda defied logic. Until that point, Abraham was able to explain in rational terms everything he believed and everything he did. He convinced people of the fallacy of paganism and the truth of monotheism through sound reasoning and logic. But the sacrifice of his son was utterly irrational. Besides violating the most basic creed of ethics and morality, it also contradicted God's earlier promise to make a great nation from Yishak. It made no sense for God to proclaim that a nation will emerge from Yishak, and then command Abraham to kill him before he begot children.

Until the Akeda, Abraham demonstrated a faith that came through inquiry and analysis, through logical thinking and reasoning. He preached monotheism on the basis of rational thought, engaging his contemporaries in theological debates and presenting compelling arguments for the existence of a single Creator. But at the Akeda, Abraham was called upon to demonstrate a different kind of faith – "Emuna Peshuta" – simple, straightforward belief that did not depend on any kind of logic. He believed in and accepted the divine command without questions, even when he could not explain it on the basis of rational thinking.

In the beginning of the Amida prayer, we describe God as "Elokenu V'Elokeh Abotenu" – "our God and God of our forefathers." Hashem is both "our God," and the "God of our forefathers." He is "our God" in the sense that His existence makes sense to us, it is something we can understand and explain. But this type of faith can only go so far. God must also be the "God of our forefathers," the God that we've heard

about through tradition. We accept this belief because this is what we've been taught by our parents, who were taught this from their parents, and so on. Even when we encounter questions that we cannot answer, we retain our belief in the "God of our forefathers," the Creator whose existence has been taught through tradition for millennia.

Toward the end of the daily prayer service we recite the "En K'Elokenu" prayer, which begins by proclaiming, "There is no one like our God." In the next section, we ask, "Mi K'Elokenu?" – "Who is like our God?" This prayer expresses the proper attitude we must have toward faith. First, we must establish the simple belief that "En K'Elokenu," there is one Creator of the universe, a belief that cannot be shaken by any questions or philosophical inquiries. Once this faith has been firmly established, we can then go on to ask the question, "Mi K'Elokenu?" We are encouraged to ask, to explore, to study, and to inquire, to make Hashem "our God," but only after we've firmly and unequivocally established the faith in "the God of our forefathers," firmly believing in God's existence irrespective of rational argumentation

Rabbi Wein THE SAME OLD SCRIPT

For about the last century, the Arabs have played out the same script over and over again in their attempt to destroy Jewish control over the Land of Israel. And that script is basically to inspire their religiously fanatical followers to riot and kill Jews randomly with no strategic or tactical benefit to their cause. The rallying cry has always been that somehow the Jews intend to physically raze the al-Aksa Mosque built on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem centuries after the Temple that stood there was destroyed by the Romans.

This was the cause advanced by the cursed Grand Mufti of Jerusalem in mounting the pogroms of the 1920's against defenseless Jewish civilians throughout the Land of Israel. It was the call to Arab arms and pogroms throughout the 1930's. The Bosnian SS Division that fought together with the Nazis in World War II, did so on the basis of somehow saving al-Aksa from destruction at the hands of the Jews.

This is what justified Auschwitz in the hearts and minds of millions of Moslems the world over during and after World War II. And in all of the painful Arab-Israeli conflicts that have taken place over the past nearly seventy years, the big lie about the Jewish intent to destroy the al-Aksa Mosque has been featured prominently.

So it should come as no surprise that the current wave of violence and murder against Jews – with no purpose except to kill Jews – that the calumny of al-Aksa should again be circulated to a new generation of ignorant, poor and indoctrinated Arabs.

The Palestinians have been very poorly served by Arafat and Abbas. Instead of pursuing the interests and benefits of their people and truly delivering them a state, an economy and a chance at a peaceful and productive existence, the Palestinian Authority has been emulated exactly by the Israeli-Arab politicians, who see their role not as ever truly serving their constituency but rather as an attempt to destroy the very country of whose parliament they are members.

This is almost a fifth column group that Israel bewilderedly seems to accept as a given part of its democratic country. Every attempt to somehow address this issue has never been enforced by the judiciary or legal powers that exist in our country. Why don't our leaders address the Israeli-Arabs directly, regularly and honestly?

Instead, they allow these barely hidden supporters of violence and hatred to control the debate and to gain the attention of the Arab citizens of Israel. This is beyond my realm of comprehension. The way it is now, any Arab leader, religious or secular, who will condemn the direction of the Palestinian Authority and of the Israeli-Arab politicians will be viewed as being treacherous to Islam.

This script of meaningless but murderous violence is a natural reaction to the indoctrination, habits and history of the Arab society in the Middle East and especially in the Land of Israel. And tragically, it reappears periodically out of the frustration of failure that so dominates the Moslem society of the Middle East.

Israel has suffered greatly over its existence from this Arab fixation to destroy it, no matter the cost or the numbers of previously disastrous failures. The current spate of violence will also eventually abate but the underlying issues and causes will fester unless there is a basic change in the mindset of the Arab street and its political leaders.

Once and for all, there must be a realization and acceptance of the reality of the existence of the Jewish state in the Land of Israel. Being the eternal optimist, which is a natural by-product of Judaism and Jewish tradition, I sincerely hope that such a change in the Arab mindset is possible, even if it is not currently foreseeable.

Until that changed mindset arrives, Israel has no choice but to protect itself from random violence by whatever means it possesses. And the cluck-clucking do-gooders of the media, the EU, the UN will blame Israel no matter what Israel does to protect its citizens from uncontrolled terrorism. We have become accustomed from the time of Abraham to being unpopular.

We would like to be perceived as a noble and lovable people. But that is not going to happen and, in fact, it never happened in history. That is the reality of the situation and there is no use pretending otherwise. So expect the same old script to be in vogue for the foreseeable future

Vayera 5776 Victor Bibi

According to the commentary of Ibn Ezra, a rain of salt was part of the upheaval in the destruction of the city of Sedom. It appears from the verses in our parasha that at least initially it was exclusively sulfur and fire that were used. "And Hashem made sulfur and fire rain down upon Sedom" (Bereshit 19). Ibn Ezra's assertion is apparent from a pasuk in Davarim 29:22, that salt indeed had been used. In the verse following the destruction of the area, we see the reference (19:26) that Lot's wife had looked behind him and she was turned into a pillar of salt. Evidently the salt had been gathered up from what had fallen and transformed her into this mineral. Interestingly enough, Josephus writes (2000 years ago) that in his time the pillar could still be seen. It was also known in the time of the Talmud. (Berakhot 54). Based on the fact that the divine name Havaya YHVH (associated with mercy), is used in the upheaval, **ידס לע ריטמה יהו** I propose that the salt that descended upon the area was not aimed to destroy but possibly to purify the land.

This cleansing property of salt can be found in the narrative of the prophet Elisha purifying the waters of Yeriho by casting salt into its' springs. As the people of the city of Yeriho told Elisha that the water was bad, "He responded: Get me a new jar with salt in it... He went out to the source of water and threw salt there and said. Thus said Hashem: I have cured this water; there shall no longer be from it death and bereavement. So the water became cured, until this day..." (Kings II 2:19-22). The salt here being a vehicle to purify the deathly waters of Yeriho. Based on this we can possibly assume that the Salt of Sedom might have served as an additive to the destruction; sent by the merciful one in order to some

extent purify the cities and not to serve as a vehicle of destruction.

We can safely assume that biblical Sedom was situated by the **חלמה ים** Dead Sea. Significantly at the southern end there is mountain of salt that covers an area of 18 square miles known today as Sedom Mountain. Although now covered by layers of dirt, the area beneath it is solid salt.

According to a simple understanding of the Talmud, the Salt of Sedom **חלמה ים** finds itself in bread. It is said to be very potent with a potential to damage ones eyes if not washed away subsequent to a meal. Its potency, a result of an admixture of the acrid potassium chloride (chemical compound) of the Dead Sea. According to some of the earlier authorities, this danger being the primary reason the Rabbis declared it obligatory for one to wash his fingers at the conclusion of a meal prior to the recital of Birkat Hamazon.

If this salt has such a potential to injure consumers; why would it be a fixed ingredient in breads baked as far north as Amoraic Bavel (the area that the Talmud Bavli was composed)? The Gemara assumes that the Salt of Sedom is prevalent in all locals! The Rabbis of the Talmud do not even entertain the notion that the Salt of Sedom might not be included in the dough! It is a given fact! Why? This behooves us to look at this from a different perspective.

On a deeper level, we must say that the Salt of Sedom is a spiritual ingredient of a bread meal that attaches itself to the hands of the consumer in order to offer him some type of purification. Since all would agree that each time we consume a meal of bread, even if preformed for the most part for the sake of heaven it is always accompanied by some self gratification.

This seemingly minor infraction does have a consequence. Since it mimics (albeit in a minor way) the sin of our forefather Adam HaRishon who also ate from the Es HaDaat in self gratification. The hands are among the culprits of this self gratification hence require a potent spiritual cleansing in the form of Melah Sedomit at the conclusion of the meal.

We are taught by R. HaAri (Shaar Hamisvot Ekev) that at each meal there is a spiritual accuser standing by us to see how we plead to this infraction, similar to the offense committed by our forefather Adam. We can enter a plea of innocence thereby allowing the accuser to bring us to trial concerning our thoughts in consuming the meal. If we ate completely for the sake of heaven (in contrast to Adam), then we will be

found guiltless. If not, this complete denial may expose us to an uncertain outcome; with the possibility of being found guilty.

The second option is to admit that we have not eaten completely for the sake of heaven; and thereby acknowledge that it was necessary for the Salt of Sedom to attach itself to the 14 joints on the fingers of each hand (Sidour HaRashash). This results in a minor almost insignificant award being granted the accuser. Our Rabbis have declared that considering our nature we should all opt to admit our deficiency. So at the conclusion of the meal immediately prior to the recitation of Birkat HaMazon our Rabbis (Hulin 105) have obligated us to wash our fingers and theoretically declare. "I have not eaten completely for the sake of heaven. Thereby, the Salt of Sedom has attached itself to my fingers. I hereby admit to this and hence I am obligated to wash them. This is my admission and plea agreement I am making with my accuser. Hence I declare "Mayim Aharonim is for Hovah". Namely, the last waters is for the accuser named Hovah. (Based on the Zohar Terumah 154)

We have suggested based on the Zohar that the word הַבוּחַ Hovah is the name of the accuser. In addition to the Zohar sighted, there are a few hints that Hovah is a word not merely advising us of the obligation to wash, but is a hint that the washing is part of a plea deal. When Abraham gave chase of the four kings who had captured Lot, we are told that he chased them until הַבוּחַ Hovah (14:15). The Midrash (Tanhuma) notes that this place was called הַבוּחַ Hovah due to the idolatry that would take place there in the future. Evidently the name of the place is associated with idolatry, which is surely part of the domain of the accuser. This also conforms with the often used Rabbinic dictum that when one fulfills certain precepts he is said to be released from the grasp of the accuser Hovah. הַבוּחַ יְדֵי אָצִי. This is the more literal interpretation versus the simple translation of "fulfilled an obligation". This is why the Talmud ascribes the word הַבוּחַ to Mayim Aharonim and does not substitute Misva as it does with Mayim Rishonim.

The law remains (Shulhan Arukh 181:1) that even if we are not concerned with the physical Salt of Sedom (Tosafot) we are always subject to the spiritual Salt of Sedom. (Kaf HaHayyim 181:1). Accordingly all should be particular in this manner in washing a part of all 14 joints of the fingers of each hand and immediately without extraneous interruption begin Birkat Hamazon.

Shabbat Shalom, Victor Bibi

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks To Bless the Space Between Us

There is a mystery at the heart of the biblical story of Abraham, and it has immense implications for our understanding of Judaism.

Who was Abraham and why was he chosen? The answer is far from obvious. Nowhere is he described, as was Noah, as "a righteous man, perfect in his generations." We have no portrait of him, like the young Moses, physically intervening in conflicts as a protest against injustice. He was not a soldier like David or a visionary like Isaiah. In only one place, near the beginning of our parsha, does the Torah say why God singled him out:

Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

Abraham was chosen in order to be a father. Indeed Abraham's original name, Av ram, means "mighty father", and his enlarged name, Avraham, means "father of many nations".

No sooner do we notice this than we recall that the first person in history to be given a proper name was Chavah, Eve, because, said Adam, "she is the mother of all life." Note that motherhood is drawn attention to in the Torah long before fatherhood (twenty generations to be precise, ten from Adam to Noah, and ten from Noah to Abraham). The reason is that motherhood is a biological phenomenon. It is common to almost all forms of advanced life. Fatherhood is a cultural phenomenon. There is little in biology that supports pair-bonding, monogamy and faithfulness in marriage, and less still that connects males with their offspring. That is why fatherhood always needs reinforcement from the moral code operative in a society. Absent that, and families fragment very fast indeed, with the burden being overwhelmingly borne by the abandoned mother.

This emphasis on parenthood – motherhood in the case of Eve, fatherhood in that of Abraham – is absolutely central to Jewish spirituality, because what Abrahamic monotheism brought into the world was not just a mathematical reduction of the number of gods from many to one. The God of Israel is not primarily the God of the scientists who set the universe into motion with the Big Bang. It is not the

God of the philosophers, whose necessary being undergirds our contingency. Nor is it even the God of the mystics, the Ein Sof, the Infinity that frames our finitude. The God of Israel is the God who loves us and cares for us as a parent loves for and cares for a child.

Sometimes God is described as our father: "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?" (Malachi 2:10). Sometimes, especially in the late chapters of the book of Isaiah, God described as a mother: "Like one whom his mother comforts, so shall I comfort you" (Is. 66:13). "Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you" (Is. 49:15). The primary attribute of God, especially whenever the four-letter name Hashem is used, is compassion, the Hebrew word for which, rachamim, comes from the word rechem, meaning "a womb".

Thus our relationship with God is deeply connected with our relationship with our parents, and our understanding of God is deepened if we have had the blessing of children (I love the remark of a young American Jewish mother: "Now that I've become a parent I find that I can relate to God much better: Now I know what it's like creating something you can't control").

All of which makes the story of Abraham very hard to understand for two reasons. The first is that Abraham was the son told by God to leave his father: "Leave your land, your birthplace and your father's house." The second is that Abraham was the father told by God to sacrifice his son: "Then God said: Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the land of Moriah, and there sacrifice him as a burnt offering on the mountain I will show you." How can this make sense? It is hard enough to understand God commanding these things of anyone. How much more so given that God chose Abraham specifically to become a role model of the parent-child, father-son relationship.

The Torah is teaching us something fundamental and counter-intuitive. There has to be separation before there can be connection. We have to have the space to be ourselves if we are to be good children to our parents, and we have to allow our children the space to be themselves if we are to be good parents.

I argued last week that Abraham was in fact continuing a journey his father Terach had already begun. However, it takes a certain maturity on our part before we realise this, since our first reading of the narrative seems to suggest that Abraham was

about to set out on a journey that was completely new. Abraham, in the famous midrashic tradition, was the iconoclast who took a hammer to his father's idols. Only later in life do we fully appreciate that, despite our adolescent rebellions, there is more of our parents in us than we thought when we were young. But before we can appreciate this there has to be an act of separation.

Likewise in the case of the binding of Isaac. I have long argued that the point of the story is not that Abraham loved God enough to sacrifice his son, but rather that God was teaching Abraham that we do not own our children, however much we love them. The first human child was called Cain because his mother Eve said, "With the help of God I have acquired [kaniti] a man" (Gen. 4:1). When parents think they own their child, the result is often tragic.

First separate, then join. First individuate, then relate. That is one of the fundamentals of Jewish spirituality. We are not God. God is not us. It is the clarity of the boundaries between heaven and earth that allow us to have a healthy relationship with God. It is true that Jewish mysticism speaks about bittul ha-yesh, the complete nullification of the self in the all-embracing infinite light of God, but that is not the normative mainstream of Jewish spirituality. What is so striking about the heroes and heroines of the Hebrew Bible is that when they speak to God, they remain themselves. God does not overwhelm us. That is the principle the kabbalists called tzimtzum, God's self-limitation. God makes space for us to be ourselves.

Abraham had to separate himself from his father before he, and we, could understand how much he owed his father. He had to separate from his son so that Isaac could be Isaac and not simply a clone of Abraham. Rabbi Menahem Mendel, the Rebbe of Kotzk, put this inimitably when he said, "If I am I because I am I, and you are you because you are you, then I am I and you are you. But if I am I because you are you and you are you because I am I, then I am not I and you are not you!"

God loves us as a parent loves a child – but a parent who truly loves their child makes space for the child to develop his or her own identity. It is the space we create for one another that allows love to be like sunlight to a flower, not like a tree to the plants that grow beneath. The role of love, human and Divine, is, in the lovely phrase of Irish poet John O'Donohue, "to bless the space between us".

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL
“And he said: My masters, if I find favor in your eyes, please do not pass away from your servant” (18:3)

In order to gain their consent, Abraham honored them and he lowered his own dignity. Abraham was important. He was wealthy (13:2). He had 318 men of war (14:14), he had gained a great victory (14:15), and he had been visited by prophecies from G-d. And he would have been justified in considering himself as a man of illustrious dignity. He had no foreknowledge of the nature of the wayfarers. And no matter how important they might have been, yet no one deserved that Abraham should run to greet them and bow down and entreat them to partake of hospitality, and call them “my masters”, while Abraham termed himself “your servant”.

Sometimes the question is asked: Why is the fundamental principle of good traits of character not mentioned in the Torah?

Actually it is an explicit command reiterated in numerous instances of varied nature. But here the Torah dilates at great length on a model of behavior which serves as a source of numerous lessons in desirable traits of character. The description of Abraham's conduct in this unusually detailed portion emphasizes by its lengthiness and by its explicitness how much weight G-d puts on the subject of kindness together with humility.

It is certain that had we been present we would have considered Abraham's behavior as excessive. The deeds of the very great men are considered irrational by men of lesser stature (see 18:1, 24:20).

“The man of the Spirit is a madman” (Hoshea 9:7) in the eyes of others.

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