

The climax of this week's *Parashah* is the *Akeidah* / Binding of Yitzchak on the altar, as *Hashem* commanded Avraham. The *Shulchan Aruch* states (*O.C.* 1:5), "It is good to recite the *Akeidah* [every morning]." In most *Siddurim*, a short prayer is printed before the *Akeidah* passage in which we ask: "Remember on our behalf . . . the *Brit* / covenant, . . . and *Shevu'ah* / oath that You swore to our father Avraham at Mount Moriah . . ."

R' Zvi Yisrael Thau *shlita* (founder of Yeshivat Har Ha'mor in Yerushalayim) writes in the name of R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook *z"l* (1865-1935; first *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*) that the word "*Brit*" / "covenant" signifies the creation of a connection, a permanent relationship, that is integral to our existence. Something that is confirmed by a *Brit* cannot be uprooted by any outside circumstance, by time, by place or by choice. In turn, the word "*Shevu'ah*" / "oath" signifies *Hashem's* promise to ensure the actualization of the *Brit*, notwithstanding all of the events in history that seem to be designed to derail its fulfillment.

What is the subject matter of this *Brit*? R' Thau writes: The answer to this is also found in our daily prayers, where we quote the verse from *Nechemiah* (9:8), "You established the *Brit* with him (Avraham) to give him the land . . ." This indicates that the connection between the Jewish People and *Eretz Yisrael* is the subject of a *Brit*. It is absolute! That is a foundation of our belief system that must stand before us always, R' Thau writes. (*Ve'shavta Ha'aretz* p.106)

Shabbat

R' Aharon Roth *z"l* (1894-1947; *Shomer Emunim Rebbe* in Hungary and Yerushalayim) relates a parable:

A king built a new palace--more glorious and splendorous than any palace that had ever been built before. When the palace was completed, the king's joy was beyond description, and he held a dedication ceremony that befitted the occasion. All types of delicacies were served, and the king distributed gifts freely to all the participants.

This king's domain included distant provinces populated by relatively simple working-class folk. They had never seen the capital city and had no understanding of the uniqueness of the king's wonderful new palace. Nevertheless, they, too, were the king's subjects, and he wanted them to rejoice along with them. Therefore, the king decreed that, on the appointed day, every one of his subjects should eat meat and other delicacies, drink wine, and sing songs praising the king's greatness.

R' Roth explains: The "king" is *Hashem*, the "palace" is Creation, and the day of the "dedication ceremony" is *Shabbat*. *Hashem's* joy on *Shabbat* is beyond our comprehension because His Handiwork is more incredible than we can imagine. We are the simple working class people of the parable, living in the king's distant realms, far removed from the wonders of the universe, and even more distant from the indescribably amazing spiritual worlds that *Hashem* made. Nevertheless, *Hashem* wants us to celebrate with Him by eating good foods, drinking wine, and singing *Zemirot* that praise Him and *Shabbat*--so long as we are, indeed, with Him. (*Shulchan Ha'tahor* p.256b)

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“Now I know that you are a G-d-fearing man, since you have not withheld your son, your only one, from Me.” (22:12)

Did *Hashem* not know before this that Avraham was G-d-fearing? R' Yosef Yozel Horowitz z"l (1847-1919; the *Alter* of Novardok) explains:

The real battle against the *Yetzer Ha'ra* occurs when a person is tested and responds with action. Resolving to defeat the *Yetzer Ha'ra*--even making plans to do so--is not victory. Only when one suppresses the *Yetzer Ha'ra* in practice has he been victorious.

Likewise, the *Alter* writes, all of a person's potential to be G-d-fearing and all of his plans to be G-d-fearing do not earn him the title “G-d-fearing.” Only when he demonstrates through action that he is G-d-fearing can he be given that appellation.

Thus, *Hashem* could not have said before now, *i.e.*, before the *Akeidah*, “I know that you (Avraham) are a G-d-fearing man.” Though *Hashem* knows the future, so He knew that Avraham would rise to the occasion at the *Akeidah*, Avraham before the *Akeidah* merely had the potential to be G-d-fearing. He did not earn the title “G-d-fearing” until he acted. Accordingly, “Now I know that you are a G-d-fearing man” means: Now I know that you have become a G-d-fearing man in practice.

(*Madregat Ha'adam: Ma'amar U'vacharta Va'chaim* ch.2)

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R' Menachem Mendel Schneerson z"l (1902-1994; *Lubavitcher Rebbe*) asks: We read (*Yechezkel* 16:49), “Behold, this was the sin of S'dom . . . she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and the needy.” This implies that S'dom was destroyed because its inhabitants did not give charity, not because of what they did to one girl who did give charity!

In reality, however, there is no contradiction, says the *Lubavitcher Rebbe*. The S'domites' behavior toward the charity-giving girl was, indeed, the last straw that sealed their fate. What, however, led them to behave so cruelly? The fact that they did not give charity. Once one has cruelly resolved never to give charity, it is only a small step to act with excessive cruelty to someone who does give charity, as the S'domites did.

But giving charity is not one of the Seven Noachide Laws! Why, then, were the S'domites punished for not practicing that *Mitzvah*?

The *Lubavitcher Rebbe* explains (among several other answers): The Jewish People's role in the world is to study the Torah and perform *Mitzvot*. The role of non-Jews is to create a functioning society within which we, the Jewish People, can fulfill our role, thereby elevating the world. By willfully refusing to create a functioning society where charity and other good behaviors could be practiced, the S'domites forfeited their right to exist. (Otzar Likkutei Sichot Vol. I: *Vayishlach* 1)

“For I have loved him (Avraham), because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice . . .” (18:19)

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes that, with a few exceptions, all character traits have a place in moderation. To cite two examples: A person should not be stingy, but neither should he give away all of his belongings. A person should not be quick to anger, but neither should he be unfeeling. And so with other traits.

Rambam continues: This is the way we are commanded to conduct our lives, thereby fulfilling the commandment (*Devarim* 28:9), “You shall go in His ways.” Our Sages interpret this to mean, “Just as He is called ‘Gracious,’ so you shall be gracious; just as He is called ‘Compassionate,’ so you shall be compassionate; just as He is called ‘Holy,’ so you shall be holy. . . This is called the “way of *Hashem*,” and this is what Avraham taught his children, as stated in our verse. [Until here from the *Rambam*]

R' Ephraim Kirschenbaum *shlita* (rabbi in Bet Shemesh, Israel) writes: Based on *Rambam*'s understanding that our verse is referring to Avraham's teaching his children to imitate G-d's compassion (and other traits), it appears that our verse is referring in particular to Avraham's *Hachnassat Orchim* / welcoming guests, which is described in the immediately preceding verses in our *Parashah*. Indeed, we read that Avraham directed “the lad,” *i.e.*, his son Yishmael, and other members of his household, to help feed those guests (*Bereishit* 18:7). Based on the proximity of the verses, it appears that *Hachnassat Orchim* was the *Mitzvah* that demonstrated Avraham's complete attachment to the ways of *Hashem*.

In this light, adds R' Kirschenbaum, we can understand our Sages' teaching that *Hachnassat Orchim* is greater than welcoming the *Shechinah*, which we learn from that fact that Avraham interrupted a “visit” from *Hashem* in order to welcome his guests (see *Rashi* to *Bereishit* 18:3). Speaking to *Hashem* is only knowing *Hashem* abstractedly, while welcoming guests is imitating *Hashem*--being G-d-like through action.

(*Huyedot Aharon* p.116)



“Hashem said, ‘Because the outcry of S'dom and Amorah has become Rabah / great, and because their sin has been very grave.’ (18:20)

The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 109b) teaches that the word “*Rabah*” (רבה) alludes to the fact that the fate of S'dom and its sister cities was sealed because of the atrocities they committed against a *Rivah* (ריבה) / young lady who was caught giving charity, which was against those cities' laws.

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