The Torah Spring

בס"ד

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המעין

Vayera וירא

In this week's *Parashah*, we read about the *Akeidah* / binding of Yitzchak. *Midrash Rabbah* describes various tactics that the *Yetzer Ha'ra* used to try to dissuade Avraham from obeying *Hashem* and passing this test. One of those tactics was telling Avraham, "You misunderstood. *Hashem* never told you to slaughter Yitzchak, and if you do, you will be nothing more than a common murderer." The *Midrash* records that Avraham responded, "*Al m'nat kein*"--loosely translated, "I will take that chance." [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' Alter Chanoch Henoch Hakohen Leibowitz *z"l* (1918-2008; *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim in Queens, N.Y.) observes: Avraham did <u>not</u> answer the *Yetzer Ha'ra*, "I know I am right. *Hashem* did command me to do this." Avraham could not prove to the *Yetzer Ha'ra* or to himself that he was correct. Indeed, no human being--not even Avraham--can ever know something without any shadow of a doubt. What the Torah expects of us is to act based on what we know to be true, not to be paralyzed by endless "what if" scenarios.

R' Moshe Chaim Luzzato *z"l* (*Ramchal*; Italy and *Eretz Yisrael*; 1707-1747) writes in *Mesilat Yesharim* that it must be "clear and true" to a person that he was created in order to come close to *Hashem* by serving Him. Again, R' Leibowitz notes that nothing can ever be "clear and true" to the point that a person has no doubts. Rather, *Ramchal* means that those things which a person does know, he should know clearly. And, when he has doubts, he should know how to weigh those doubts properly so that his fears and worries are controlled by his intellect, not the other way around. (Quoted in *Shema Bni*, Vol. I, p.3, note 5)

Shabbat

"You established the *Shabbat*, found favor in its *Korbanot* / sacrificial offerings . . ." (From *Shabbat Mussaf*)

R' Yitzchak Sorotzkin *shlita* (former *Rosh Yeshiva* in the Telshe Yeshiva; now in Lakewood, N.J.) asks: Why do the authors of our prayers suggest that the *Korbanot* of *Shabbat* find favor in *Hashem*'s eyes more than other *Korbanot*?

He answers: *Midrash Tanchuma* relates that Moshe asked *Hashem*, "How will it be known that You have been appeased for the sin of the Golden Calf?" *Hashem* answered (in the words of *Shmot* 25:8), "They shall make a *Mikdash* / Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them." *Hashem* continued, says the *Midrash*: "In the *Mikdash*, they shall bring *Korbanot* to Me, but of all of them, I will prefer the smell [of the *Ketoret* / incense]." Know that this is true, says the *Midrash*, for the altar of the animal sacrifices was outside, while the altar of the *Ketoret* was inside, in the holier part of the *Mikdash*. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

Why does *Hashem* prefer *Ketoret* over other *Korbanot*? R' Sorotzkin explains: *Ketoret* symbolizes unity among the Jewish People, for it includes foul-smelling *Chelbanah*, representing the wicked, along with the fragrant spices, representing the righteous. In fact, the word "*Ketoret*" itself means "tied" or "bound together." Therefore, *Hashem* prefers *Ketoret*.

Likewise, continues R' Sorotzkin, *Shabbat* is a day of unity, an escape from the competitive rat-race of the weekdays. Thus we say (in *Shabbat Mincha*), "You are One and Your Name is One, and who is like Your people *Yisrael*, one nation on earth!" We further describe *Shabbat* as "a rest of love and benevolence . . . a rest of peace and serenity." Just as *Ketoret* finds special favor in *Hashem*'s eyes every day because it symbolizes unity, so all of the *Korbanot* of *Shabbat* find special favor in *Hashem*'s eyes because *Shabbat* is a day of unity.

(*Gevurat Yitzchak: Shabbat* #28)

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"Avraham woke up early in the morning . . . and he went to the place of which *Elokim* had spoken to him." (22:3)

Midrash Tanchuma relates that the Prosecuting Angel placed a river in Avraham's way, forcing him to wade through it and cry out to *Hashem* for salvation. The *Gemara* (*Megillah* 15a) relates, similarly, that Mordechai had to cross a body of water to implement Esther's instruction that the Jewish People fast for three days. This, says the *Gemara*, is hinted to by the verse (*Esther* 4:17), "Mordechai passed over and did exactly as Esther had commanded him."

R' Yehuda Loewe *z"l* (*Maharal* of Prague; died 1609) explains: This "body of water" refers to the Prosecuting Angel, whose goal is to "wash away" everything good. The gentile nations who oppose the Jewish People also are likened to bodies of water, as in the verse (*Shir Ha'shirim* 8:7), "Many waters cannot extinguish the fire of this love, nor rivers wash it away." The Prosecuting Angel and the nations of the world try to come between the Jewish People and *Hashem*, but they will not succeed in washing away the love that exists between us and Him.

(*Ohr Chadash* 4:17)

"Yitzchak spoke to Avraham his father and said, 'My father.' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' And he said, 'Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the offering?' And Avraham said, '*Elokim* will seek out for Himself the lamb for the offering, my son.' And the two of them went together." (22:7-8)

Rashi z"l writes at the beginning of *Parashat Toldot* (25:19) that the scoffers of the generation questioned whether Yitzchak was Avraham's son or the son of Avimelech, king of the *Plishtim*, who had taken Sarah (see earlier in our *Parashah*, 20:2-4). [Until here from *Rashi*]

R' Betzalel ben Shlomo *z"l* (1640-1691; *Darshan* / preacher in Slutsk and Przemysl) asks: Given this, how could *Hashem* command Avraham to offer Yitzchak as a sacrifice? Would killing Yitzchak not play into the hands of those who claimed that Avraham was not Yitzchak's father?

R' Betzalel answers: This is exactly what Yitzchak and Avraham were discussing in our verses, as follows:

Yitzchak suspected that Avraham was planning to offer him as a sacrifice, so he asked, "My father?"--*i.e.*, are you indeed my parent?

Avraham answered, "Here I am, my son"--meaning: Yes, I am.

Yitzchak then asked: If so, why do you have wood and fire, but no lamb? What will people say if you bring <u>me</u> as a sacrifice?

Avraham responded: "*Elokim* will seek out for Himself the lamb for the offering, my son"--*i.e.*, the fact that *Hashem* will accept you as a sacrifice for Himself proves that your lineage is pure and you have no blemish.

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"The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting at the gate . . ." (19:1)

Midrash Rabbah notes that Avraham had clear vision, and he thus perceived his guests as "people" (18:2), while Lot had less clear vision, and he thus perceived them as angels. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' Yisrael Garber *z"l* (1921-2019; New York and Yerushalayim) asks: Does this not sound backwards? He explains: With his higher level of understanding, Avraham was capable of conceiving that *Hashem* would use human beings as His emissaries. To Lot, man was too lowly for that; only an angel could be G-d's emissary. (*Tal Le'Yisrael*)



"Elisha said to her, 'What can I do for you? -- Tell me, what do you have in the house?' She answered, 'Your maidservant has nothing in the house except for a cruse of oil'." (Melachim II 4:2--from the Haftarah)

R' Avraham Rivlin shlita (Mashgiach Ruchani emeritus of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, Israel) writes: The Jewish People are compared to sand on the beach, and they are compared to the stars. "Sand" represents the ways in which we are all the same, while "stars" represent what is unique about each person. Every person must recognize and cultivate what makes him or her unique, not to gloat over others, but to use that uniqueness constructively for the common good. This, R' Rivlin writes, is the meaning of Hillel's rhetorical questions (Avot 1:14), "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am for myself, what am I?"

R' Rivlin continues: This is what Elisha was teaching the woman in our verses: "What do you have in the house?" Do not tell me what you do not have, for that never brings salvation! And, when the woman answered that, indeed, she had nothing in her house but a little oil, Elisha explained to her that it was from there that her salvation would come.

(*Iyunei Moadim* Vol. VI p.350)

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R' Betzalel continues: But in the end, *Hashem* told Avraham <u>not</u> to bring Yitzchak as an offering! Was *Hashem* not giving the scoffers fodder for their slander once again?

R' Betzalel answers: *Hashem* addresses this concern later, in *Parashat Toldot* (26:2-3), where we read: "Hashem appeared to [Yitzchak] and said, 'Do not descend to Egypt; dwell in the land that I will show you. Sojourn in this land . . ." *Rashi* explains: "Do not go down to Egypt for you are an *Olah Temimah* / a burnt-offering without a blemish, and residence outside the Holy Land is not befitting you." From the fact that *Hashem* prohibited Yitzchak from leaving *Eretz Yisrael*, the world knew that Yitzchak was an *"Olah Temimah"* / "A perfect burnt offering," not tainted by Avimelech.

(*Korban Shabbat* #1)