

Avraham and the Akeida: The Silent Sacrifice

עָנְתָה אֱמוּנָה לְדָר בְּמִרוּמַיִם / וְדַעְתִּי גַם אֲנִי כִי הוּא טוֹב וְהוֹלֵךְ תָּמִים
אֲבָל עַל יְחִידוֹ לֹא קָנָה רַחֲמִים / וְשָׁלַח יָד כְּאֶזְרֵל לְשִׁפְךָ דָּמִים
וְכָל כֶּן לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹנְךָ בְּלֵב תָּמִים / וּבְטוֹחַ כִּי אַתָּה טוֹב וּמְלֵא רַחֲמִים
אֲבָל הִנֵּה לוֹ לְהִתְחַגֵּר לְפָנֶיךָ וּלְבַקֵּשׁ רַחֲמִים / וְלִתְשׁוֹךְ יְחִידוֹ מֵאֵשׁ פְּחָמִים
הוּא לֹא רִיחַם לוֹלֵי רַחֲמֶתָה בְּעַל הַרְחָמִים.

The Torah came to G-d to say:
I, too, know he follows the righteous way,
But for his son, no compassion was shown
And he was ready to shed blood of his very own
He was so willing to fulfil what You wished him to do
That he left the task of compassion to you.
But he should have pleaded for one so dear
And saved his son from fire and fear.
There would have been no mercy on its way
had You, Master of Compassion, mercy failed to display.

THE PROBLEM OF CHOICE:

1. Ramban:

(א): והאלוהים נסה את אברהם
ענין הנסיון הוא לדעת, בעבור היות מעשה האדם רשות מוחלטת בידו, אם ירצה יעשה ואם לא ירצה לא יעשה, יקרא "נסיון" מצד המנוסה, אבל המנסה יתברך יצווה בו להוציא הדבר מן הכח אל הפועל, להיות לו שכר מעשה טוב לא שכר לב טוב בלבד ודע כי השם צדיק יבחן (תהלים יא ה), כשהוא יודע בצדיק שיעשה רצונו וחפץ להצדיקו יצווה אותו בנסיון, ולא יבחן את הרשעים אשר לא ישמעו. והנה כל הנסיונות שבתורה לטובת המנוסה

2. Soren Kierkegaard: Fear and Trembling p42-44 Wilder Publication 2008

Avraham is therefore at no instant a tragic hero but something quite different, either a murderer or a believer. The middle term which saves the tragic hero. Abraham has not. Hence it is that I can understand the tragic hero but cannot understand Abraham, though in a certain crazy sense I admire him more than all other men.

Abraham relationship to Isaac, ethically speaking is write simply expressed by saying that a father should love his son more dearly than himself. Yet within its own compass the ethical has various gradations. Let us see whether in this story there is to be found any higher expression for the ethical such as would ethically explain his conduct, ethically justify him in suspending the ethical obligation toward his son, without in this search going back to the teleology of the ethical..... It was not for the sake of saving a people, not to maintain the idea of the state, that Abraham did this, and not in order to reconcile angry deities.....

With Abraham the situation was different. By his act he overstepped the ethical entirely and possessed a higher telos (purpose) outside of it, in relation to which he suspended the former. For I should very much like to know how one would bring Abraham's act in relation to which he suspended the former. For I should very much like to know how one can bring Abraham's act in relation with the universal and whether it is possible to discover any relation between what Abraham did and the universal....except the fact he transgressed it.

3. Izbicer Rebbe: Mei Ha-shiloah

The essence of the trial of the binding of Isaac lies in the fact that the prohibition of killing was clear to him, even more so slaughtering his own son. For clearly it was easy for Avraham to follow the command of the Lord with all his soul, even to sacrifice himself. Only in this case, as the Zohar states this word came to him through a dm glass. That is, an explicit word did not reach him, and he was perplexed in his heart, and so could have decided the doubt either way. Now had he even a small measure of self-interest towards Isaac, as a father to a son, he would have decided the matter for himself not to offer him as a sacrifice. For he had many thoughts and ideas, and was confused by them, as the midrash writes, 'I had available response: yesterday you told me that Isaac would be my seed, and now you tell me 'take thy son', But I did not respond in this way. instead I conquered my mercy in order to do your will". And this was the essence of the trial.

Gellman: Avraham Avraham p79/80 on the Izbicer: "what was the nature of Abraham's trial, then if the Divine command was ambiguous between commanding the killing of his son and the mere placing of his son upon the alter? It was for the Izbicer, to test how Abraham would act in this state of uncertainty. It was the test of Abrahams authenticity before God.

On account of the ambiguity in the Divine word, Abraham was in danger of falling into self deception: Abraham could easily have convinced himself that God could not possibly have meant for him to *kill* Isaac. If in becoming convinced of this, however, Abraham had been influenced by his feelings towards Isaac, and was not deciding purely from a sincere attempt to discern the Divine intention, he would have been deceiving himself into thinking that he had done all he could to obey God's command....this would have been to fail the test, in succumbing to self-deception....according to the Izbicer, to pass the test, Abraham had to overcome the temptation to use rationality as an excuse for succumbing to his own feelings of his love for his son and for that reason refuse to perform the sacrifice. Abraham was being asked to ignore the contradiction when deciding how to act. His decision was not to issue from considerations of objective truth or logic, but from elsewhere.....Abraham, therefore, in order to pass the test, must rid himself of his personal attachment to his son and not be swayed by his love for him. Abraham was being tested, to see whether he could bring himself to a state wherein he would act only for the sake of God, wanting to do only what God wants to what he, Abraham would want.....

The willingness to act without clarity in the face of ambiguity is the essence of the trial of Abraham on the *existentialist* interpretation of the Izbicer. To be willing to so act is to be a lover of God....to demand certainty for oneself before being willing to act is to refuse to take the risk of deciding, and to take refuge in what for the Izbicer, in any case only the *illusion* of certainty. When deciding in the face of ambiguity one is driven to authenticity, 'authenticity' understood as the absence of self-deception, before God"

4. Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, Tal Chermon, pp. 49-50

Avraham had to give up on everything that he felt and understood as a human being – as a most superior human being; he had to erase all his thoughts and ideas, all the feeling of goodness in him, in order to fulfil God's command. This teaches us in a most drastic manner that we do not fulfil God's commandments because it is good for us to do so, or because we understand them, or because we experience pleasantness in their performance, but rather because they are God's commandments.

5. Yeshayahu Leibowitz: Accepting the Yoke of Heaven p25

In my previous talk I discussed what appears to us as two different degrees of emuna: that of believing in God as a result of a divine promise, 'I will protect you' and as opposed to this the conduct of Avraham at the Akeida where he is granted the title 'one who fears God'. The first stand of Avraham in faith can be interpreted as his being conscious of God's relation to him; the second expresses his being conscious of his relation to God, and the difference between the two that which was later defined in Jewish religious thought as the difference between *shelo lishma* – not for its own sake and *lishma* – for its own sake (from the mishanic period there is a differentiation made between studying Torah for its own sake – as an end in itself – and studying it 'not for its own sake' – as a means for some other purpose . Expanding on this one must differentiate between worship of God as an end in itself , or worshipping him as a means to for satisfying some human need or want).

The highest symbol of the Jewish faith is the stance of Avraham on Mount Moriah, where all human values were annulled and overridden by the fear and love of God. The Akeida is man's absolute mastery over his own nature. 'Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey.' Abarbanel explains that saddled his ass means that he overcame his materiality, that is his physical nature – a pun on the phonetically similar hamor (donkey) and homer (matter). The matter or nature includes all the benevolent sentiments as well as man's conscience; all the factors in man's makeup which an atheistic humanism regards as 'good'...from such a standpoint (daily performance of Mitzvot), the question of 'what does religion offer to me' must be completely dismissed. The only proper question is 'what am I obligated to offer for the sake of religion

Judaism, Human Values and the Jewish State pp. 14/15

It was Abraham who first burst the bounds of universal human bondage—the bondage of man to the forces of his own nature. Not everyone is Abraham, and not everyone is put to so terrible a test as that of the Aqedah. Nonetheless the daily performance of the Mitzvot, which is not directed by man's natural inclinations or drives but by his intention of serving God, represents the motivation animating the Aqedah. From such a standpoint, the question, "what does religion offer me?" must be completely dismissed. The only proper question is: "what am I obligated to offer for the sake of religion?"

6. Rav Soloveitchik: Al Ha-teshuva, p. 167, Hebrew edition

The son does not "belong" to him [i.e. Abraham] and there is no room here for any arguments, symposiums or other evasive manoeuvres. "And the Almighty called to him." The attribute of Judgement calls. It is a command which demands fulfilment without hesitation. Abraham hears the command—he accepts and obeys.

(RCA Convention, 1975)

What do we surrender to the Almighty? We surrender two things: first, we surrender to the Almighty the every-day logic, or what I call mercantile logic, the logic of the businessman or the utilitarian person, and we embrace another logic—the logic m'Sinai. Second, we surrender the everyday will, which is very utilitarian and superficial, and we embrace another will – the will m'Sinai.

Majesty and Humility

Man is indeed a liar, because he is involved in an unresolvable contradiction, in an insoluble dialectic, because he is caught like Abraham's ram in a thicket of antinomies and dichotomies. He swings like a pendulum between two poles: the thesis and the antithesis, the affirmation and negation, identifying himself with both of them or with neither.....

In what areas of human endeavour does Judaism recommend self-defeat? Self-defeat is demanded in those areas in which man is most interested, where the individual expects to find the summum bonum, the realization of his most cherished realm or vision, where, in the opinion of pragmatic man, it is absolutely necessary for the individual to win, since losing the battle would mean total failure and frustration. It is precisely in those areas that God requires man to withdraw, God tells man to withdraw from whatever man most desires. It is true of the father of the nation, as well as of plain and ordinary people. Abraham was told to withdraw, and to defeat himself, by giving Isaac away. He listened; God accepted Isaac but did not retain him. God returned him to Abraham. Abraham found victory in defeat.

7. Erica Brown in Wisdom from All my Teachers ed. Sks, Handelman

Submission is a frightening concept for a modern reader because it implies a loss of personal autonomy. Today it is a pejorative word, classically, however, submission within a religious context is religiously edifying.....religion must have as much silence as it does noise, as much limitation as it does freedom. Without a full complement of terms for religious experience we may be denying ourselves moments of transcendence.

SUBMISSION V AUTONOMY – LISTENING TO OUR MORAL INTUITION – WAS AVRAHAM WRONG?

8. Immanuel Kant: The Conflict of the Faculties

Abraham should have replied to this putative Divine voice: "That I may not kill my good son is absolutely certain. But that you who appear to me are God is not certain, and cannot become certain, even though the voice were to sound from the very heavens.

9. Bereshit Raba 39:6

השופט כל הארץ לא יעשה משפט אם עולם אתה מבקש אין דין ואם דין אתה מבקש לית עולם את תפיס חבלא בתרין ראשין בעי עלמא ובעי דינא אם לית את מוותר ציבחר לית עלמא יכיל קאים

10. Rashi 22:7

יראה לו השם - כלומר יראה ויבחר לו השם ואם אין שה לעולה בני, ואע"פ שהבין יצחק שהוא הולך להשחט וילכו שניהם יחדו בלב שוה

11. Rav Shlomo Riskin (Jerusalem post on parsha)

Rav Yosef Ibn Kaspi suggests that we not remove the dialogue between G-d and Abraham from the context of the ancient Near East from whence it originated and to which it applied - at least in the first instance. Abraham lived in a world of idolatrous child-offerings, a blood-thirsty god Molech who demanded that fathers demonstrate their fealty to him by placing their children on his fiery altar (tragically this ancient and cruel form of idolatry has returned with a vengeance to the present-day Middle East, with Palestinian parents, teachers and preachers encouraging children not only to blow themselves up in a raining fire of explosives but to take with them to the burning grave-pyre innocent Israeli mothers and babies). Hence Abraham was almost expecting the Divine voice to command, "Take now your son, your only son, the one whom you love, to the land of Moriah, and offer him up as a whole burnt offering" (Genesis 22:2). And given the fanatical religious climate of the Middle East, Abraham's silent acquiescence is to be expected of a person of faith.

From this perspective, the real test comes with G-d's second command, just at the crucial moment when "Abraham sent forth his hand and he took the knife to slaughter his son." The deus ex machina arrives as an angel of G-d from heaven, crying out, "Abraham, Abraham," do not send forth your hand to the lad, and do not do him any harm, for now I know that you fear G-d and you did not withhold your son, your only one, from Me. (Genesis 22: 10-12). Ibn Kaspi would argue that the entire point of this Biblical event is to teach against child sacrifice, to show how qualitatively different are the demands of a loving G-d of life and peace from the bloodthirsty cruelty of Molech and his Islamic - fundamentalist heirs. And for this Biblical commentator, Abraham truly passes this test when he obeys the second command of the angel, with the end of the verse I last cited perhaps to be translated, "for now I know that you fear G-d, and you did not remove (hasokh may well be translated to mean to remove, take away, cause to be absent) your son, your only one, because of Me (my first commandment)" (Genesis 22:12).

To a great extent, Rashi seems to be in fundamental agreement with the position of Ibn Kaspi. Apparently for Rashi, the ideal Divine will is for Abraham's children to live by G-d's laws in constant commitment, and not to die for them in a momentary act of martyrdom.

12. David Hartman: A Living Covenant: p43-44

The Akeida threatens covenantal adequacy because it seems to exclude ethics from the religious consciousness. Can we speak seriously of the category of the ethical in Judaism and yet allow for the possibility of God's intrusion into human life in a way that can destroy everything to which we can ascribe any value? For Leibowitz, the Akedah shows that any talk about the ethics of Judaism absolutely misses the point....What concerns me here is the fact that both the Sodom episode

and the Akedah and compatible with Abraham's religious consciousness. He reflects a paradox within the biblical drama.....The biblical and rabbinic traditions contain two contrasting themes: One that emphasise the dignity if human responsibility, intellectual adequacy, self confidence, and covenantal mutuality with God, and another that demands utter silence and resignation before the inscrutable transcendent will of God.....In Soloveitchik, both dimensions of the Judaic tradition - the assertive and the submissive- are given full expression.

A Heart of Many Rooms chap 1 p 12, 31

The biblical narrative of Abraham is, for example, a source of two different organizing images of God. There are thus two classical models of religious consciousness that can claim the biblical narrative of Abraham as their source....the God of Abraham therefore takes two very forms in the book of Genesis: a God who demands total surrender to His command and a God who invites independent and moral critique and judgement. These two paradigms have informed religious life as well as interpretation and exegesis throughout Jewish history.

The central norm of the covenantal framework is the assumption of moral responsibility. "I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse, choose life (devarim 30:19)The biblical sense of responsibility is essentially normative responsibility.

13. Jerome Gellman: Avraham Avraham

I want to suggest a different way with the idea of Sodom vs. the Akedah. On this way neither the Akedah story nor the Sodom episode serves as a paradigm fir Jewish spirituality, instead we are to see the two episodes as together pointing precisely to the lack of one-sided paradigm for Jewish spirituality....

Having previously at Sodom thought it inconceivable and God would act against morality. Abraham now accepts it and 'attentively listens to what God might say.' The juxtaposition of the two texts represents resistance to the idea that one's deepest selfhood can be identified in certitude with a single paradigm.

I propose that the deepest contemporary meaning of the Akeida revolves around the question of whether one is able to conceive of oneself as having been mistaken of having misunderstood or having failed to comprehend all aspects of the context in which we live and act. So understood, the issue surrounding the contrast between Abraham at Sodom and the Akedah is not over which paradigm is to dominate. On this approach, neither episode is paradigmatic. The Akedah message can be understood only in tandem with the Sodom story. At Sodom, Abraham expresses his deeply entrenched conviction concerning the impossibility of God acting against the present moral imperative....God then comes and challenges Abraham to convince the Person of Faith. With the Akedah command, God tells Abraham that he must not be so locked into his entrenched view that he is incapable of conceiving of it being wrong or different from what he now things, The purpose of the Akedah therefore is to break paradigmatic thinking....At the Akedah, Abraham does not learn a new paradigm, he learns to transcend paradigmatic thinking all together.

One's understanding of the world can be so challenged that one feels called to do what would never have been thought possible.

Pragmatically speaking, to be open in principle to alternative moral futures is what it means to be ready to hear the voice of God...to be able to change one's moral stance or judgment if that is what it should come to, is to heed the voice of God. *(in another place he writes: Abraham at the Akedah is infinitely resigned to the loss of Isaac and is infinitely primed to live with Isaac. What does that mean> it means that the Akedah is a metaphor for the readiness for any eventuality, including the eventuality that you might cone to see your most cherished conviction stand in need of replacement. It is to see that one day you yourself may want to change your convictions, and be prepared to change them without seeing yourself extinguished thereby. To be ready to listen at every moment and not be closed to the word.)"*

We should remember that the Akeida Abraham commits no deed. He does not Slaughter Isaac. Were we to learn from this episode total submission to God in fact, this story would be ill suited to the lesson. For that – Isaac would have had to have been sacrificed. On the contemporary metaphorical reading I am advancing, the existential meaning of Avraham's submission to God lies in his letting go of his favourite past understandings. Avraham receives a command and then has the command changed. He has a sacrifice, and then suddenly has no sacrifice, then just as suddenly has a sacrifice again in the form of the ram that he releases from the thicket in which it was entangled.

What fashions our person of faith is an openness to the possibility of a future different from the past affecting her or his most cherished plans and convictions. A person without faith is committed to clinging desperately to his or her values, beliefs and traditions come what may. Not constant change but constant openness to the future is what a person of faith lives by.

RECONCILIATING THE DIALECTICAL?

I: THE PROBLEM OF CHOSENNESS

14. <https://www.thelehrhaus.com/timely-thoughts/surrender-or-struggle-the-akeidah-reconsidered/>

Chosenness stirs ambivalent feelings for Abraham as well as for us, his descendants. For Abraham there is a conflict between his universalistic tendency (expressed in his deep concern for wicked Sodom, Lot, Ishmael, his angelic guests, and his special comrades) and the desire to father a particular people who will carry on his legacy and serve as a vehicle for the divine presence in the world. For us, millennia later, it can still be said that the most orienting belief that many of us

share is the notion that we are God's chosen people. Some view being chosen by God as a sacred responsibility toward humankind, while others view it as a sort of privilege or entitlement, an attitude that can devolve into clannishness and even xenophobia. Even if we set aside the odious expressions of the belief in chosenness, the doctrine raises inherent tensions between universal concerns for humanity and the particular concerns we are entitled to have for our people.

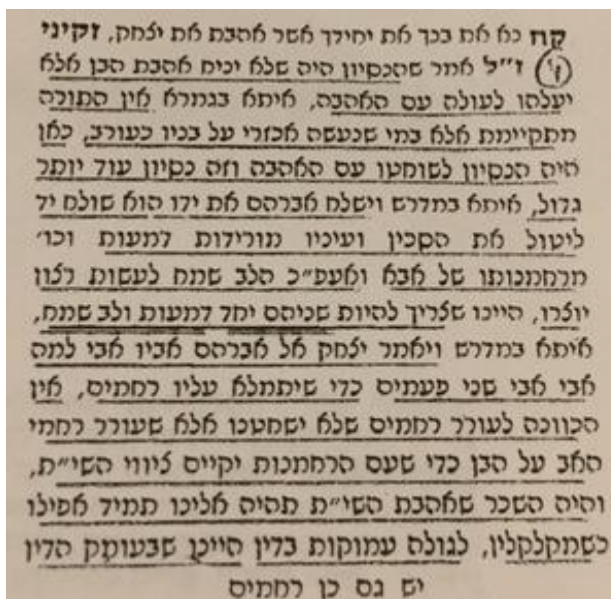
II: FAMILY (LOVE) V DIVINE WILL (FEAR) (HASIDIC COMMENTARY)

15. Chidushei Harim

ומה היה הנסיון כה גדולת הלא ראינו הרבה אנשים שמסרו את נפשם על קידוש השם, אלא בשעה שאמר לו הקב"ה לאברהם את בנך נעשה יצחק לבן דבוק לאברהם, שכמוהו עוג לא היה ולא יהיה, ורחמיו של אברהם ליצחק היה כה גדולים שלא היה להם שיעור, ושוב בשעה שאמר לו הקב"ה אשר אהבת נכנס אברהם כח אהבה עצומה ליצחק ממש לא לפי דרך הטבע....ועם אהבתו וחמלתו זו הלך אברהם לשחוט אותו וזה היה הנסיון

Rough Translation of relevant parts:

At the moment when Gd commands Avraham to do what he did Yitzchak became to him the closest he had ever been, and the mercy Avraham had for Yitzchak was the greatest it had ever been, with no limit. It is WITH this great love and mercy Avraham was commanded to go and sacrifice his son – this was the true test.



קח נא את בנך את יחידך אשר אהבת את יצחק, זקיני
(י) ז"ל אמר שהנסיון היה שלא יניח אהבת הבן אלא
יעלהו לעולה עם האהבה, איתא בגמרא אין התורה
מתקיימת אלא בתי שנעשה אכזרי על בניו כעורב, כלו
היה הנסיון לשחטו עם האהבה וזה נסיון עוד יותר
גדול, איתא במדרש וישלח אברהם את ידו הוא שולח יד
ליטול את הסכין ועיניו מורידות דמעות וכו'
מרחמנותו של אבא ואעפ"כ הלב שמח לעשות רצונו
יוצרו, היינו שצריך להיות שניהם יחד דמעות ולב שמח,
איתא במדרש ויאמר יצחק אל אברהם אביו למה
אביו אביו שני פעמים כדו שיתמלא עליו רחמים, אין
הכוונה לעורר רחמים שלא ישחטנו אלא שעורר רחמי
האב על הבן כדו שעם הרחמנות יקיים ציווי השי"ת,
והיה השכר שאהבת השי"ת תהיה אלינו תמיד אפילו
כשמקלקלנו, לגולה עמוקות בדיון הייטב שבועותק הדיון
יש גם כן רחמים

15. Rav Avraham Mordechai Alter: Imrei Emet: Sefer Bereshit

The test was that he should not leave the love of his son behind, rather he should sacrifice him with the love and this was an even greater test. As it says in the Midrash as he was picking up the knife his eyes were filled with tears, the tears of a merciful father, and even still the heart was happy to doing the will of his Creator. It needed to be the two feelings together, tears and a happy heart. The midrash tells us that Yitzchak calls his father 'avi' 'avi' twice why? In order that Avraham should be filled with mercy, not in order to prevent Avraham from sacrificing him, but rather so that with the mercy Avraham would perform the command of the Holy One Blessed be He. In the depths of Din there must also be Rachmim

16. Reb Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter: Sefat Emet Parashat

תשמ"ג Vayera

בפרשת העקידה אשר אהבת. פי' אמו"ז ז"ל כי בנקל לאדם להניח אהבת הבן בשביל קונו אבל השי"ת אמר לו כי בעוצם אהבתו אליו יעלנו לעולה ולא יניח האהבה וזה אשר אהבת ודפח"ת. ונראה עוד כי עיקר המכוון היה התדבקותם ביחד ולאשר כי מדת אברהם הי' החסד ומדת יצחק הגבורה היה אפשר לחשוב כי היו מתנגדים זה לזה לכן יצונו לשחוטו. ע"כ נאמר אשר אהבת יישר כחך שאהבת כי שרש האבות הם אחדות אחד הגם כי מדותיהם שונות ובאמת אחדות במדות נפרדים א"א להיות בשלימות ע"פ הטבע לכן ע"י העקידה נעשה למעלה מן הטבע

In the 'test' of the Akeida it is written 'and he saw the place (Gods presence) from afar'. For God was testing him about the characteristic of Yirah, because Avraham's basic nature was one of love and closeness. Now he was made to be far in order to enable the characteristic of Yirah to come about. Therefore this 'test' was not given to Yitzchak for his dominant attribute was that of Yirah.

17. Leon R. Kass: The beginning of Wisdom p348-350

Father Abraham, I submit is the model father, both of his family and of his people - yes even in his willingness to sacrifice his son - because he reveres God, the source of life and blessing and the teacher of righteousness, more than he loves his own. He is a model not because all fathers should literally seek to imitate him; almost none of us could, and fortunately thanks to him, none of us has to. He is a model, rather, because he sets an admirable example for proper paternal rule, in which the love of one's own children is put in the service of the right, the good, and the holy. Truth be told, all of us fathers, devote (that is 'sacrifice') our sons to some 'god' or another - to Mammon or Molech. To honour or money, pleasure or power, or worse, to no god at all. True, we do so less visibly and less concentratedly, but we do so willy-nilly, through the things we teach and respect in our own homes; we intent that the entire life of the sons be spent in service to our own ideals or idols, and in this sense we do indeed 'spend' or try to 'spend' the life of our children. But a true father will devote his son to - and will self consciously and knowingly initiate him into-only the righteous and godly ways.....

Finally the true founder knows and accepts the face that his innocent sons will suffer for the sake of the righteous community, and that their 'sacrifice' is no proof that they are not properly loved as sons. \ On the contrary, the true founder, like the true father, shows his love for his followers when he teaches them, often by example, that one's life is not worth living if there is nothing worth dying and sacrificing for

18. Danielle Mehler (Matan attendee Zichron branch)

"Can not each one of us relate to Avraham's ascent up the mountain? Especially those of us that brought our own children on Aliyah at God's command with the full knowledge we will be sending our precious children into battle, where their very lives will be at stake. I cannot think of a more affirmative action than this, where we, like Avraham do not allow ourselves "to sink into the depths of despair." We too have learned to accept this pain to answer a higher call. Though it would be easy in this seemingly upside down world to hide like Yona. Is it not in some way unethical to put our precious children on the front lines? For this reason I think we can no longer view Avraham's actions as inconceivable. Haven't we all called out "hinnei" by our own Aliyah?"

19. Extracts from an article featured in the Jerusalem Post magazine on Miriam Peretz (the mother who lost two of her sons in the IDF)

Eliraz in a letter to his father (before his untimely death in battle):

'You sacrificed your oldest son and you signed for your second. I have tested you in a way that even Abraham was not tested, You did it with pride you gave me the courage to continue. You should know that even during all the wars, I knew that I would not die. Even when the bullets screeched and I was wounded I did not lose hope. The opposite I sang the song of life'.

Miriam Peretz on her relationship with God:

It is always like a dance of emotions. I also dance with God. I am close to Him and I feel he is hugging me and then there is a distance where His touch is not so comfortable. So I am in deep dialogue with God. I am trying to understand what this is all about. I know there are no answers, but I feel close enough to know that I can talk with Him, question Him and yell at Him. I feel that he has given me answers in the small comforts. I see the answers in that I have grandchildren. I had four sons in the IDF and each time they returned from the battle I felt like He answered me, not in the regular way, but He answered.

Now I am angry and asking hard questions. Why did you choose me? Why my children? Try to explain to me what we have that you want so much.

20. Shai Zarchi: (Educator)

Blindness is a blurred sense of seeing. In contemporary times, 'blindness' describes those things a person doesn't see because they are difficult for him to bring to the surface of his consciousness. In an allegorical sense, one could say that blindness is a state of mind accessible to everyone – some type of blurring of senses that serves as a defence mechanism or a way of resolving difficult emotional situations.

Yitzchak's blindness always seemed to be a metaphorical blindness of spirit, one which the onset of old age turns into physical blindness. This is because in a certain way, Yitzchak feels Yaakov's deception and his blindness is more than anything an expression of the recognizable phenomenon of a father torn between his two children and unable to choose between them.

He chose Esav and gives Yaacov, and ultimately also blesses Esav, and his blurred vision is an embellishment for the dimming of the soul, one that allows him to swap the accepted 'Either / Or' in the status of inheritance with the 'Gam VeGam,' both this one and that one, an approach that is a practical and emotional solution of many fathers.

In this context, it's important to remember that Yitzchak reaches this disturbing status after the weight of his experience at the Akeidah – the great 'blind experience' of his father Avraham. Yitzchak already paid the full price of having a father who decided to take the 'either / or' approach, who cruelly preferred the love of God over the life of his beloved son. In fact, the greatest blindness was that of Avraham. His blindness was so great, that even though the story completely hides it, it slowly shoots out towards us from within the pages. Avraham's blindness is characteristic of the great innovators whose own story is always intertwined with some kind of big demanding personal sacrifice.

My grandparents were pioneers and were part of a huge revolution. They left their home, parents, family and country – forever; pushed away all their sub-conscious yearnings and tears and completely gave themselves over to the Zionist project. Their blindness was recognizable in many ways (and today seems to be something necessary and desirable that should be greatly admired).

They closed their eyes to the needs of their children, their parents, the world of their childhood, their language, their cultural roots and their private needs. And this closing of eyes was essential in that it allowed them to concentrate all their strength on the great project – building the homeland.

Avraham is the model of all great innovators, who, in order to establish the great monotheistic project, closed his eyes to all his past, and almost to all his future. As a great innovator he was forced to turn all his attention to one place – to 'the one'. Yitzchak, in contrast, reminds me of my generation, the 3rd generation of pioneers. A generation constantly attentive and sensitive to the array of voices, one not prepared or qualified to build one thing greater than the foundation. A human, paternal, sensitive decision whose blindness is a tool that serves that basic resolve of 'gam, vegam, vegam vegam'

I love and cherish Avraham and Yitzchak and their different blindness's and legacies.
 I belong to the generation of Yitzchak, and it's thus possible to deduce what can be expected from my generation and in particular what can not be expected. Will there ever be a generation that succeeds in merging the two, one that will be both revolutionary innovators yet also attentive to the array of voices.
 I think such a combination is still very very necessary.

III: SUBMISSION/ AUTONOMY/MORAL INTUITION/DIVINE CALL – A SUMMARY

21. Rav Benjamin Lau: Akeidat Yitzchak lezaro p106 (my translation)

And here I get to the story of the Akeida. I would like to offer a small chiddush, a problem for which at present I have no solution, but perhaps through this chiddush we will find one.....

God turns to Avraham and says to him 'take your son, your only son, the son you love, Yitzchak'. In contrast at the end of the episode when God sends an angel of God that calls to Avraham he says 'For now I know that you are God fearing, that you did not withhold your son, your only son from me'. It is not written here 'the one you love', as is done so previously! Something in the nature of the soul of a man screams here to heaven, when a father raises a knife to his son, he harms the very foundation of love. He is for certain 'God fearing', but he cannot be loving with a knife. It is an oxymoron.

The Alarming question is what exactly does God want from us? God tests Avraham, elevates him, but at the end of the day he does not want Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak. Because it is God Himself that says 'Do not send your hand on this youth and do not harm him' - because also this lad is mine and I do not want you to offer him up as a sacrifice.

As is known on Rosh Hashanah we do not blow a knife, we blow from the ram's horn, that came in exchange on sacrificing the son. God is a God that desires life. Three times through the story of the Akeida the leading word appears 'Hineni - I am here'. It is not a geographical term. It does not describe a place, he conveys rather a condition of one's soul. The meaning of 'Hineni' is the meaning of condition of my soul, we are speaking of man who stand before his sender and says to his sender 'Hineni'. I in my wholeness stand with you(.....)In the middle of climbing the mountain Yitzchak turns to his father and asks 'My father' and then comes the second time and Avraham says 'I am here my son - Hineni Beni'. Avraham is torn between הַנְּנִי and הַנְּנִי. There are two loves here, the love of a father for his son and the love of man for his creator - הַנְּנִי and הַנְּנִי בְּנִי. Tow which voice to heed? To the Divine voice that calls 'Take your son, your only son who you love'. Or to the voice that calls 'Father father'? Avraham continues along the way and then he takes the knife, but still does nothing. But before he manages to act he hears the voice of the Angel saying to him 'Avraham Avraham' - twice! Which Avraham are you? The one that is הַנְּנִי to God or the הַנְּנִי to your son? And here Avraham has to decide, and his answer: 'הַנְּנִי' that is to the Angel of God and not to my son(.....)

Many times we are asked by Chutznikim who are not aware of the dynamic existence of living in Israel 'Is it not dangerous', or 'how can you put your children in danger like that'. And we respond that we are דְּבִיקִים בַּחַיִּים - attached to life. We don't sacrifice our children to death, or send them Chalila to blow themselves up.....therefore acedias Yitzchak is so shocking every year, but we are a nation of the 'shofar' and not a nation of the 'knife'. We are attached to life and hold on to life and if life is dangerous we try to make it easier. We do not give up on life for life. Eretz Yisrael is our life, Am yisrael is our life and if they threaten our life we will protect it through life itself. This is the essence of our existence- not a nation of martyrs but a nation that 'עֲבָדָה וְשָׁמְרָה'.....when we speak about protecting our nation we do through the voice of the Shofar, from the understanding that the Holy One is a father seeks life and from an appreciation that a father is not cruel to his children. From an understanding that a father does not wave a knife chalila, to slaughter his son. With this we play a double game. On the one hand we are the sons of Avraham, that need to learn the deep message of the akeida, that we have a life of הַנְּנִי and at the same time we have a life of הַנְּנִי בְּנִי. We pray to The Holy One that he does not test us in this terrible conflict between הַנְּנִי and הַנְּנִי בְּנִי.

REFRAMING THE QUESTION:

22. Rav Shagar: Faith shattered and Restored chap 1: Uncertainty as the trial of the Akeida

The second question that arises in the context of the Akedah is not that of humans' obeying an ostensibly unethical divine command, but that of the very injustice of Gods ordering a trial involving the sacrifice of ones son. Can God act unjustly?

....

The third question returns to the issue of humans' following an apparently unethical divine command, how can a person be sure such a command really comes from God? Can man ever attain absolute certainty as to the will of God? (midrash of satan being the voice not God)....perhaps that is the essence of the ordeal-the ability to distinguish between the two voices. From an ethical standpoint Abraham is commanded to commit a crime, precisely the kind of crime against which he has railed his entire life. Moreover, the victim is to be his 'only son'.....such an action must spring from absolute certainty that the commanding choice is indeed Gods. The question of conviction thus emerges in all its harshness....

Could it be that Abraham was tested not regarding his ability to obey Gods commandment, but rather regarding his ability to disobey?....Satan's argument is that, in this instance, Orthodoxy's very demand for obedience and fear of God necessitates rebellion: through ethics, the imperative of conscience, the true fear of God is revealed.

Chapter 2:

For the sake of our discussions Postmodernism can be characterized as a position that holds truth to be a function of societal cultural constructs, and thus denies that certitude is possible, Post-modernism can also be characterized as a radical striving for freedom, i.e. the freedom of the individual to establish himself and his values.....

I am of the opinion that postmodernism and deconstructionism constitute a 'shattering of the vessels' (שבירת הכלים). Yet this very shattering grants us wide ranging freedom, and as far as religion goes - freedom to believe, even without absolute proofs and evidence.....

Here is where I see the constructive role of Postmodernism. Postmodernism typically leads down the road to nihilism, relativism, to a loss of a point of reference, to no longer being able to validate faith; yet it can lead us to discussions of faith (rather than just about faith), and free us to pray.

This postmodernist world, in my humble opinion, opens the door to a much higher level of belief. What drives my thoughts of God is not the idea of God's great omnipotence, but rather that God is not 'a thing'; God is the absolute pure, the fulfilled seeking, the infinite; as Maimonides says 'the Omnipresent but not of the world'. The 'devekut' (cleaving or intense spirituality) that this recognition generates flows from our understanding that divinity and belief are not truly accessible to language and objects This understanding releases us from our daily preoccupations, allows us to enter into the world of belief and prayer, and thus brings us to devekut (cleaving to God), deeper faith, and great dedication.....

In my opinion, the transition from a 'Religion of Truth' to a 'Religion of Belief' is the most profound point of Post-Modernism....

From a pedagogical standpoint, instead of speaking about 'the Truth', which in the Postmodernist conception has a pejorative connotation, let us speak of 'accepting the yoke of Heaven'. This is something altogether different. Our truest difficulty is to accept the yoke of Heaven; to accept responsibility. This decision is a paradoxical move. It is not based on arguments and proofs, but rather on the readiness of the person to become obligated, and to trust in the values that due to his decision become obligatory and absolute.

Thus, I hold a complex position in regards to distinguishing pluralism from relativism. Even though under certain circumstances I can understand the perspective of one person coming to kill another, I will do what I can to prevent him from sacrificing someone, and if I have no choice I will bring about his death. That is what God wants of me. If someone comes and asks me - 'Why don't you figure out what God wants from us?' - I would answer that it is not my problem. I am not to be held accountable for this question! The question I do ask myself is not about what is universally true, but rather a more intimate question - 'What does God want from you?' This question is in the forefront of my awareness in the here and now, and with this there can also be a strong and deep stand based on my values and faith, one that in extreme situations can go the limit, even risking self-sacrifice, or sacrificing another.

The Legacy of a 'near' Sacrifice:

23. Elie Wiesel: Messengers of God p73

There is no understanding of the three characters. Why would God, the merciful Father, demand that Abraham become inhuman, and why would Abraham accept? And Isaac, why did he submit so meekly? Not having received a direct order to let himself be sacrificed why did he consent? I could not understand. If God needs human suffering to be God, how can man foresee an end to that suffering? And if faith in God must result in self-denial, how can faith claim to elevate and improve man?....

I have never really been able to accept the idea that inhumanity could be one more way for man to move close to God. Kierkegaard's too convenient theory of occasional 'ethical suspension' never appealed to me.....Thus I place my trust in man's strength. God does not like man to come to him through resignation. Man must strive to reach God through knowledge and love. God loves man to be clear-sighted and outspoken, not blindly obsequious.....A double edged test. God subjected Abraham to it, yet at the same time Abraham forced it on God. As though Abraham has said 'I defy You Lord. I shall submit to Your will but let us see whether You shall go to the end, whether you shall remain passive and reason silent when the life of my son who is also your son is at stake!' And God changed His mind and relented. Abraham won. That was why God sent an angel to revoke the order and congratulate him; He Himself was too embarrassed. We now begin to understand why Abraham's name has become synonymous with hesed. For indeed he was charitable, not so much with Isaac as with God. He could have accused and proved Him wrong; he didn't. By saying yes-almost to the end- he established his faith in God and His mercy, thus bringing Him closer to His creation. He won and - so says that Midrash- God loves to be defeated by His children.....

But the story doesn't end there. Isaac survived; he had no choice. He had to make something of his memories, his experience, in order to force us to hope. For our survival is linked to his. Satan could kill Sarah, he could even hurt Abraham, but Isaac was beyond his reach. Isaac too represents defiance. Abraham defied God, Isaac defied death.... Let us return to the question we asked at the beginning: Why was the most tragic of our ancestors names Isaac, a name which evokes and signifies laughter? Here is why. As the first survivor, he had to teach us, the future survivors of Jewish history, that it is possible to suffer and despair an entire lifetime and still not give up the art of laughter. Isaac, of course, never freed himself from the traumatising scenes that violated his youth; the holocaust had marked him and continued to haunt him forever. Yet he remained capable of laughter. And in spite of everything, he did laugh.