

## D'VAR TORAH

2<sup>ND</sup> DAY ROSH HASHANAH – Oct 4, 2016 /5777

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Today, the 2nd day of Rosh HaShanah, we return to a Torah reading that inevitably raises complex and disturbing questions: The “AKEDAH” - The Binding of Isaac. Some call it The Sacrifice of Isaac.

Every year we approach the Akedah, with angst and trepidation. Every year we ask ourselves, “Why would Abraham even consider such a terrible act” or “Why would God ever order such a ritual.” or “Did Avraham even hear right?” The story is terse, short and filled with ambiguous language. But the simple narrative makes neither Avraham nor God very appealing.

How can we begin to defend Abraham? Or for that matter, how can we defend even God?

This year I would like to present an UPLIFTING view. Please remember that word, UPLIFTING, because, hopefully, it will return and resonate.

But first, I would like to call on our venerable drummer, Whaleman and Minister of Love, Stuart Goldman, to read a poem and set a direction for this d'var. The poem is called “On Children” by the great 20<sup>th</sup> century poet and philosopher, Kahlil Gibran, author of the widely read “The Prophet.”

*And he said:*

*Your children are not your children.*

*They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.*

*They come through you but not from you,*

*And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.*

*You may give them your love but not your thoughts.  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not  
even in your dreams.  
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.  
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.*

*You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.  
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you  
with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.  
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;  
For even as he loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is  
stable.*

The clear meaning of this poem is that we are all called upon to sacrifice our children. BUT, the sacrifice is OUR SACRIFICE, not the sacrifice of the children.

It is this parsha in Torah that teaches us how, and how **not**, to do it.

One way of understanding sacrifice, is a "letting go" of something to which we are very attached. Twice before God tried to teach Abraham about sacrifice in the sense of "letting go"! And both times Abraham missed the teaching.

The first time Abraham hears God say "*Lech Lecha, Go for yourself, leave your land, your family and the house of your father.*" This command Abraham "gets" but he sees it personally, and as we shall see, is not yet able to apply this teaching to others.

Leave your father's house, leave your parents. Avraham must head out to find his own path. Who makes the sacrifice? Not Avraham, the son, but Terach, the father, or let's say, both of his parents. So note that this was to be the sacrifice of Terach, Abraham's father, not the sacrifice of

Abraham who was instructed, as the son, to find his own way in the world .

The second time, in the same parsha, Abraham is very troubled when his wife, Sarah, asks Abraham to eject Hagar, his surrogate wife, and Ishmael, his son, from the camp. But God says, “Listen to your wife, I already told you not to worry about Ishmael, I will bless him and he will become the father of twelve great tribes.” NOTE THAT ABRAHAM LOVED ISHMAEL AND THIS sending him away WAS TO BE ABRAHAM’S SACRIFICE, NOT ISHMAEL’S!

However, Abraham, whose love of God bordered on the fanatical with unchecked Chesed, still, did not GET IT! Later, he hears God say, “Make your son, Isaac, an *OLAH* for Me.” Now in Torah the word *OLAH* has two meanings: it can mean a burnt offering, or it can mean a raised offering. It was in Abraham’s mind -- in his pre-programmed way of understanding the instruction -- to make his son, Isaac a burnt offering.

AND

It was only when the knife was actually raised to *shechet*, that is to slaughter Isaac, that Abraham clearly hears the voice of an angel of God say, “Don’t lay a hand on him!” Notice the vocabulary change from *OLAH* to *SHECHET*. (By the way, nowhere in the text do we ever find the word *KORBAN*, bringing near, the more common word that we translate as sacrifice.)

It’s as though God finally got through by having the angel scream at Abraham, “Avraham! AVRAHAM!! I didn’t say burn him up, I said lift him up, by making him a raised offering you will UPLIFT him. If you slaughter him how can he be raised up? How can he serve Me by making his own way in the world?”

This version stands on its head the traditional rendition of what God meant, after Abraham finally learned that we can also serve God through restraint, when God says, “I see that you have not withheld your beloved son from Me.”

THE ULTIMATE RESULT OF SLAUGHTERING ISAAC WOULD INDEED BE TO WITHHOLD ISAAC FROM SERVING GOD IN ISAAC'S UNIQUE WAY. JUST AS ABRAHAM HAD HIS UNIQUE WAY OF SERVING AFTER HEARING "LECH LECHA."

So the *uplifting*, to return to that word, the uplifting message is that we parents do have to let go. We do know the pain and loss of sacrificing our attachment to our children, and letting them go. But we let go of our children for their own development and well-being, so that they can follow their own dreams and aspirations in their own way.