



The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

Vayeira 5782

The Prerequisite For Greatness

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered November 8, 1952)

Now that the debates are all over and the smoke from the verbal battles of the recent campaigns cleared, we can begin to seriously analyze some of the moral overtones of what has been thought, said and done. One issue which can stir the imagination of a religious teacher is that of "greatness." Both candidates have been described as "great" even by their opponents. And both have spoken reverently of the "greatness" which is the future of America.

May I use this issue not as a text, but as a pretext; I wish to discuss with you not the greatness of nations but the striving for greatness in individuals and in institutions. No man worth his salt, and no institution worthy of its members, will ever be satisfied with remaining mediocre, half-baked and only half-good-- because half-good means also half-bad. A real man will, in all humility, strive for greatness. This desire for greatness may be only a dream, but it is human to dream. No animal or machine ever dreams, or daydreams. Shakespeare writes: "But be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." This morning we are not going to discuss those who are born great- for that is a gift of G-d. Nor are we going to discuss those who have greatness thrust upon them-that is the gift of society. We are more interested in the second class: those who achieve greatness. And our problem is, how does one achieve greatness? Or better, realizing that greatness is not something that happens to you suddenly, but acquired slowly and painfully, we should ask: how does one mature into greatness? In short, what, according to religion, is the prerequisite for greatness?

Our Rabbis found the answer to that question in today's Sidra; and they had some remarkable things to say on that matter. Remember how G-d, in that dramatic revelation, promised Abraham a son; well, Sarah bore that son unto Abraham, and the child was called Isaac. And then,

the Torah tells us: "*Vayigdal hayeled vayigamel*," usually translated as: "And the child grew up and was weaned." Our Rabbis, however, gave another meaning to that verse, and they indicate that it means not that Isaac became a big boy, but that he became a great man; that "*vayigamel*" means not weaned, but matured. The Bible, believe the Rabbis, is not speaking about infants growing into childhood, but about men maturing into greatness. In fact, some of our Rabbis thought that that event referred to what might today be called graduation from a university. For, they said, Abraham had written many books on "*Yichud Ha'shem*," about the unity of G-d, and Isaac had spent many years studying them. "*Vayigdal hayeled vayigamel*" refers to the completion of this intensive study by Isaac, and the beginning of his own creative work. So, then, the Rabbis see in this verse a reference to the maturing into greatness of Isaac. And how was this accomplished? How did he become great?

A Palestinian Rabbi of the Midrash, commenting on our text, supplies an astonishing solution. He says: "*vayigdal hayeled vayigamel - she'nigmal mi'yetsar ha'tov le'yetsar ha'ra.*" He was weaned from the "yetser tov," from the Good Desire, to the "yetser hara," the Evil Desire. The sign that Isaac had become great was that he developed a strong yetser hara, a powerful Evil Desire. What a remarkable statement to come from a great Rabbi: Is acquiring a Yetser Ha'ra really a sign of greatness and maturity?

And, my friends, lest you think that his is an isolated opinion, or that there must be some printing mistake, listen to this statement by another great Sage: commenting on G-d's reaction to the world He created as "*hineh tov meod*," he adds: "*hineh tov - zeh yetser tov; hineh tov meod-zeh yetser hara.*" G-d said "Behold, it is very good," and this Sage added, "it is good" refers to the Yetser Tov; but when G-d says "very good" He refers to the Yetser Hara. And when the other Rabbis expressed astonishment at this remark, he explained: ולא נשא, לא בנה אדם בית, ולו יצר הרע,

אשה, ולא הוליד בנים, ולא נשא ולא נתן בסחורה. *"If not for the Evil Desire, men would not build homes, they would not marry and they would not engage in business activities."*

What our Rabbis meant is obvious, and it bespeaks a brilliant insight into human nature. When they refer to the Yetser Hara, to the Evil Desire, our Rabbis do not intend the doing of evil; rather, they refer to the energies and the zeal and the enthusiasm spent in pursuing those evil goals. If a man took the initiative which he uses to build a reputation, the passion with which he pursues physical pleasure and the drive he uses for business and profit, and he used all that energy for good and constructive purposes, then *"hineh tov meod,"* then that is indeed "very good" - it is superb!. That Yetser Hara has such tremendous power, such infinite might, that if only a portion of it were used properly, the world could become a wonderful place to live in. Imagine what would happen if our scientists and military men would use their tremendous zeal for creating bigger and better atom bombs for the purpose of combating disease. That Yetser-hara power would probably find the cure for cancer in a year. Imagine what would happen if the finest brains at the U.N. would use the energies of their Yetser-haras for finding a real formula for Peace-why we would be the luckiest generation in the world.

The tragedy is that for medicine, for peace, for learning for all constructive matters, we use only our Yetser Tov. The word "tov" means not so much, "good" as "goody-goody." There is no human being who would not declare himself in favor of good health or world peace. But how many people are there who would be willing to offer more than their lip service; who would be willing to offer, for it, their most powerful drives and passions and initiative? Every Jew likes a synagogue, but how many Jews are willing to work for it with the same Yetser Hara with whom they work for their own profits? Every Jew thinks that the study of the Torah is good. But how many are willing to apply the same Yetser Hara to education that they do to studying the complex tax-laws which affect them personally? The Yetser Tov will not do; it is too lazy, too apathetic, too indifferent. Maturity and greatness require the giant forces of the Yetser Hara.

It is this awakening of the Yetser Hara, and harnessing it for constructive purposes, what the psychologists call the "sublimation of the libido," which is the prerequisite for greatness. It was this Yetser Hara, expressed as stubbornness and unrelenting determination, that made Issac rise to the occasion of the Akedah, the attempted sacrifice atop Mt. Moriah. It was the Yetser Hara, in the form of arrogance and pride which made Mordecai

stand up to and defy a Haman. It was this Yetser Hara, as contempt for danger and passion for country, which created a State of Israel. The Yetser Tov would never have sufficed; only the Yetser Hara can accomplish such things.

I remember, several years ago, when I first began to study under the famous Rabbi Soloveitchik at Yeshiva University, that he one day gave his opinion on a matter of Halacha or Jewish Law. No one of the students questioned him, we readily accepted the scholar's verdict. The next day he came to class and announced that he had made an obvious and glaring error, and he was extremely irritated at our failure to notice it; and, in a moment of anger, he rebuked us and said, "the trouble with you is that you come here with your Yetser Tov and you check your Yetser Hara at the door. Never mind the Yetser Tov, I want the Yetser Hara here." The sages of the Talmud, similarly, said: *"Ha'gadol me'chaveiro, yitsro gadol heimenu"* - he who is greater than his friend, his Yetser Hara is also greater.

My dear friends, on this, my first official Shabbos with you, I come armed with dreams of greatness. Not for me, not for you, but for us. From now on, our destinies are linked, and the growth of one will parallel that of the other. And I regard it as my mission, therefore, to awaken within us the untapped sources of the Yetser Hara. The Yetser Tov, with its "goody-goody" indifference and lethargy, cannot and will not do. In order to achieve the "vayigdal... yayigamel," maturity and greatness, we must be prepared to outgrow our yetser tov and exploit the latent powers of the yetser hara. There is an ancient Talmudic maxim, *"Im paga bach menuval zeh, mushchayhu le'beis hamidrash,"* if you meet that scoundrel, the Yetser Hara, pull him into the synagogue. Yes, draw him into the synagogue, but to convert him and put him to work, not to get rid of him. For no Beis Midrash, no synagogue, no center can grow and mature into greatness without the Yetser Hara. Pull him into shul, and let the passions previously used for business and profit and pleasure be used *"lehagdil Torah u'le'haadirah,"* for the furtherance of the Torah and Judaism.

To that purpose of awakening and harnessing the Yetser Hara, to that end of galvanizing and electrifying and shaking our fellow Jews out of their long sleeps, must we dedicate ourselves today. I can do no more than pledge that I shall do my utmost to accomplish this prerequisite for greatness. And I ask you to join with me on this great adventure. For this is the time for greatness. Pettiness and smallness should find no harbor with us. Great opportunities beckon us on to, with G-d's help, a future - filled with greatness.

Read more at www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage.

Moving On

Rabbi Joshua (*The Hoffer*) Hoffman z"l

In the beginning of this week's parsha we are told of Avraham's prodigious efforts in caring for the needs of three wayfarers who came by his tent. The rabbis tell us that since Avraham was recuperating from his bris milah, God did not want to trouble him with guests and, therefore, made the weather intensely hot, so that no one would travel. However, because Avraham was so keen on extending hospitality to guests, and was pained by the lack of passersby, God sent three angels in the guise of humans in order to provide Avraham with an opportunity to invite guests into his tent. As soon as Avraham saw the travelers he ran to provide them with what they needed. The Talmud (Bava Metziah, 86b) notes that as a reward for whatever Avraham did for these guests by himself, God provided a similar provision for his descendants in the wilderness, and as a reward for whatever Avraham did for them through someone else, his descendants were also rewarded through a shaliach, meaning a messenger, or an intermediary. Thus, for example, since Avraham prepared the cattle for the meal himself, the Jewish people in the wilderness received the quail directly from heaven. However, since Avraham provided water through a messenger, the Jews in the wilderness received water through Moshe hitting a rock. Why was it so important for Avraham to provide for these guests by himself?

Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Neriah, in his *Ner LaMaor*, explains that the initial provisions for guests should, in general, be taken care of by the man of the house, because women are very punctilious in serving guests, making sure that the table is set properly, that there are napkins on the table, and so forth. The guests, however, may be very hungry, and they need to be taken care of as soon as possible, without any time being expended on the niceties of the service being provided. Therefore, Avraham needed to act quickly, in order to make sure that his visitors would not go hungry waiting for the table to be set. Interestingly, the *Yalkut Reuveni* cites a kabalistic source which says that the reason Sarah merited giving birth to Yitzchak is that she accommodated Avraham in his efforts to care for these guests. According to Rav Neriah, this source is understandable, because Avraham tended to their needs differently than a woman usually would have done. I would like to suggest a different explanation of why it was so important for Avraham himself to tend to his guests, based

on what we know of who they actually were.

As we noted at the outset, the three wayfarers who came to Avraham were angels in the guise of men. The Maharal, in his commentary to Rashi, Gur Aryeh, points out that Avraham was used to seeing angels, but, in this case, God arranged that he not discern the true nature of his visitors, so that he would be able to perform what, to his mind, was the regular mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*, or tending to guests. The Torah tells us that Avraham had the guests wash their feet before entering his tent, and the midrash, cited by Rashi, says that this was because Arab travelers were wont to worship the dust of their feet as idols. The Maharal explains that they did so because Arab merchants were constantly on the move, and therefore worshipped the forces that they thought controlled the roads, in order to ensure that they would complete their journeys safely and successfully. Based on this observation, we can understand why it was so important for Avraham to tend to these travelers by himself, as much as possible.

Rabbi Yehudah Shaviv, in his work *Mi Sinai Ba*, cites a Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah*, 39:9) which notes, in effect, that Avraham began his series of tests with God's command to leave his homeland, which begins with the words 'lech lecha' - go for yourself - and ended the series with God's command to bring his son to the altar, which also begins with the words 'lech lecha.' These bookends, says Rabbi Shaviv, denote Avraham's constant movement, and, on a larger scale, his constant process of growth and self-improvement. Perhaps, then when Avraham saw these Arab travelers, and realized that they worshipped the powers that they thought controlled the roads, he felt that, in essence, they had the ability, as travelers, to learn the importance of constant growth and self-improvement, as reflected in their constant travelers, but place it in the context of a relationship with the true God, creator of the universe. Avraham tried to do this by offering himself as an example. Even though he was an elderly man and had just undergone the painful process of circumcision, he leaped into action when he saw these men, and tended to their needs largely by himself. In this way, he tried to demonstrate that a person has the capacity to constantly grow, and need not rely on some outside force to manage his life. In this way, Avraham tried to assist his guests not only in terms of their physical needs, but in terms of their spiritual needs, as well.

Everything Depends on Your Ratzon

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh

(Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from a shiur given at Gruss Kollel on November 5, 2020)

At the beginning of Parshas Vayeira that we read this week, we have three Malachim who came to visit Avraham, and Rashi quotes from Chazal that one Malach doesn't do two jobs. And here, one of the Malachim came to announce an impending birth of Yitzchak, another came to heal him after his Bris Mila, and the third one was on his way to destroy S'dom. And all the Achronim ask a kasha: If one Malach doesn't do two jobs, and some of the Malachim had a job to do in Avraham's house, and another had a job to do in S'dom, why didn't Hashem send one set of Malachim to do their jobs at Avraham's home and another set to S'dom?

There are many answers to this question, including a famous Meshech Chachmah. But the Rav explained that the Malach who went to overturn S'dom couldn't do his job unless he went to the house of Avraham Avinu first. Why? Because the people of S'dom were *ro'im ve-chata'im la-Hashem me'od*—they were very evil, depraved, and corrupt. But maybe they could have claimed that not everyone is fortunate enough to live in a proper religious environment. People live in different times and different places. Eretz Yisroel, in those days, was a very tough place to be frum. It was full of Avoda Zara and every imaginable depravity. The Chumash tells us that the Kena'anim practiced the biggest to'eivos in Eretz Yisroel, at the places they lived in the old days. It was too hard; there was too much temptation; there wasn't a good religious framework. And the people in S'dom could easily say that we don't deserve a punishment—it's not our fault. In these circumstances, we couldn't be properly frum. Therefore, the Rav says that the Malach first had to go to Avraham's home. Avraham lived in the same country as the people of S'dom—only a few hours walk away. He lived in the same country, at the same time, in the same place, in the same social setting. Yet, Avraham Avinu did the polar opposite of the people of S'dom. He worshiped Hashem, and he was machnis orchim, etc. And not only did he do that, but he taught others to live likewise—as the pasuk says: *hanefesh asher asu be-Charan*. And Rambam talks about how Avraham got thousands of people to join him and taught them his derech. The Malach went to Avraham Avinu's home and saw that even at the same time and location, someone could be an Eved Hashem and live up

to all the values of the Torah. And when he went to S'dom, he told the Sodomites: you guys live in the same place and circumstances as Avraham. If he and his household—*banav u-vnei beiso acharav*—can do it, then you can do it also. And if you don't, then you are responsible. And that's why the Malach who went to destroy S'dom went to visit Avraham first—to see that the Sodomites could have acted differently. That was a big theme, not only in the Rav's drashos but also in the Rav's life. When the Rav came to America, it wasn't the same place where we grew up. When he came to America, it was the goldene medina in terms of gashmius—however, it was the “graveyard” of Judaism, Torah, and mitzvos. Everyone in Europe knew that you couldn't be frum in America. The big chidush of the Rav was that when he arrived in America, he said, I will be an American and then some—but who says that being an American means that you can't be frum? Forget about just being frum. Who says that being an American means you can't be a Brisker lamdan, have all the Brisker k'peydos, have a high level of Talmud Torah, and sophistication in Avodas Hashem? A hundred years ago, there were many gedolim, who moved to America, and who were as great as the Rav. They all stayed frum and continued learning. They locked themselves in a room and wrote lots of seforim that someone might read someday, but they gave up on everyone else. Because “you can't have frumkeit in America.” They said to themselves, I'll stay frum, and I'll die, and what can you do—that's life. And the Rav said, no—you can do it wherever you are. No place tells you whether you can or can't succeed. It's all a matter of whether you want to—if you have a ratzon. And that's what the Rav learned from our Parsha—Avraham teaches us that no matter where you are, you can be a Tzadik, and you can be a Ben Torah. You can be an Avraham Avinu wherever you are, or you can be a S'domnik wherever you are. And, on the one hand—do not underestimate the importance of being in the right religious setting. No one is going to say, “don't go to yeshiva” or “don't live in a religious neighborhood,” etc. Yet, on the other hand, we should not rely too much on the setting. Ultimately, the hard work must be done by you on the inside. And wherever you are—even in the best Yeshiva in the world—if you don't work on yourself, you will end up like S'dom. And even if

you are in the biggest wasteland in the world, if you really care and you put in the effort, and you really believe that it's possible—then you can end up like Rav Soloveitchik

and his talmidim. And like Avraham Avinu and his talmidim. Shabbat Shalom.

The Altar and the Heart

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Avraham has spent his entire career identifying the one God of this diverse universe. He didn't just detect a Creator through the beauty of Nature or the structured order of the cosmos. Avraham sensed a moral spirit at the foundation of our world. He innately sensed that Hashem didn't just randomly create our world but cares about his creatures and their welfare. For two thousand years, Nature seemed cold and impassive and G-d seemed distant, angry and militant. Avraham revolutionized religion, preaching of a compassionate G-d who lovingly created this world and who mercifully sustained life. Avraham yearned to better understand this ethical spirit and to fashion his own identity in this moral image.

Finally, after two millennia of chaos and confusion, commitment to G-d and human interest were synchronized. The will of Hashem was translated into the human heart. Religious commitment and human prosperity were aligned. A dark world which had pitted frail humans against angry gods was now rebooted. The will of Hashem and the whisper of the human heart were finally in synch.

All this changed on the mountain top of the akeidah. Having proven that he could serve Hashem by understanding His will, Avraham was now asked to prove if he could serve when he could not possibly decipher Hashem's will. There is no human heart nor human conscience which can justify a father murdering a child. Yet, Hashem commanded this unthinkable deed and Avraham issued his simple, unadorned one-word consent: "hineni". Avraham could not possibly fathom this strident command which undermined everything he had learned of Hashem. Heroically, he surrenders human judgement to the Divine mystery. In doing so Avraham, carved the cornerstone of monotheism- the ability to suspend human logic and surrender human convention to the unknowable word of Hashem.

Ironically and sadly, about six hundred years later the first Jewish monarch, Shaul Hamelech would fail to live up to Avraham's achievement. Faced with the irrational and seemingly immoral task of committing genocide and murdering the entire Amalek nation, a horrified Shaul can't

imagine that a merciful G-d would demand such atrocity. Distracted by moral self-arbitration, he spares an elderly chieftain thereby failing his own akeidah moment. Because of this flinch Shaul is stripped of Jewish monarchy.

The akeidah story is perennial. It is the story of human beings submitting their judgement in deference to Divine instruction. Avraham establishes the akeidah as the template of religious success.

Though the actual text of the Torah tells the story of human submission, our Chazal portray a very different story-one which my Rebbe, HaRav Yehuda Amital would annually underline when discussing the akeidah. Several midrashim "color in" distinctly human shades to the akeidah. Repeatedly, Chazal paint the story of a father and a son who, though challenged to act beyond human logic, refuse to empty themselves of human emotions.

One midrash speaks of Yitzchak's last-minute concerns, while bound to the altar. He worried about his aged father's welfare: who would tend to his senior father's increasing needs now that he himself would be "out of the picture". Additionally, Yitzchak encouraged his father to gently break the news of his death to his worried mother. Otherwise Sarah would be overcome with grief and possibly even turn suicidal. Though Yitzchak rallied to fulfill the heavenly will, he didn't muffle the natural love and concern for his aged parents.

A second midrash speaks of Avraham agonizing over the pending sacrifice of his son and fervently praying to Hashem to rescind this unbearable decree. Though Avraham acknowledges that the akeidah will forever alter religious history, he none the less davens for its repeal. As a merciful father he cannot sheepishly accept this decree. Of course, if the will of Hashem remains unchanged, he will accede, but he campaigns for the cancellation of the akeidah. Ultimately his prayers are answered.

Perhaps the most well-known midrash to "humanize" the akeidah depicts the tears rolling down the cheeks of a sobbing Avraham. Some may wonder: how could Avraham weep as he performs the Divine will and reshapes religious history? Emphatically, the midrash "responds": how could

he NOT cry! Though Hashem summoned him to perform the unspeakable, he does not renounce his fatherly love for his child. Avraham stands atop the mountain as a full-hearted human being submitting to God, not as a barren robot who has vacated all human emotion or fatherly love.

By coloring in these human emotions, Chazal provide a more complex and nuanced image of the akeidah. The litmus test of religion is our submission to the Divine will. We believe that with sufficient effort and imagination we can reconcile Hashem's will with human instinct and with human welfare. Divine commands are beneficial for human experience – both individually and collectively. There is a fundamental moral backbone to the Torah which is synchronous with our basic sense of right and wrong. Hashem endowed humanity with a moral compass and He crafted the Torah based upon that morality. We expect the revealed and direct word of Hashem to accord with the moral conscience he vested within the human heart. The two are meant to coincide.

However, every Jew arrives at an “akeidah moment” standing before the unintelligible will of Hashem. At some point, we are all baffled by the mystifying will of Hashem which appears to be irreconcilable with human interest or human conscience. There is only one correct answer to this trial: submitting human instinct and intuition to the higher

wisdom of Divine command.

Chazal's more nuanced version of the akeidah urges us that while submitting to Hashem's will, we should not abdicate human emotions. Facing the grand mystery, Avraham does not divest his fatherly love- but performs his duties despite the emotional storm raging within. Hashem desires humans, not robots and certainly not cold-blooded killers.

The midrash portraying Avraham's tears concludes with a phenomenal phrase: [though he was tearing] his heart “joyful” at the prospect of fulfilling Divine will. It may seem odd that he was saddened with tears but thrilled to fulfill Divine command. That is precisely why the human heart is multi-chambered. As we encounter his will, Hashem expects us to process different and sometimes contradictory emotions.

Each generation faces its own akeidah moments. The previous generation's akeidah was the horror of the Holocaust and the prospect of rebuilding Judaism in the shadow of a frightening Divine mystery. Our generation faces many dilemmas in which the Divine will appears to contradict basic human instincts or current scientific convention. Just as Avraham stood, we are expected to submit to the will of Hashem without abdicating our humanity or our conscience.

Full Service Hachnasas Orchim

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

This week's parsha, Parshas Vayeira, opens with the famous visit of the three angels to the home (tent) of Avraham and Sarah. Avraham is ninety-nine years old and healing from his bris milah (see Ch.17). Sarah is eight-nine years old. The angels have arrived to heal Avraham, to inform Sarah that at this time next year she will have a son, and to go on from the tent of Avraham to destroy Sodom and Amorah (Ch.19).

The opening pasuk of the parsha teaches us about bikkur cholim, visiting the sick, as G-d has come to visit Avraham on the third day post circumcision; וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאַלְנֵי מַמְרָא - and Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre, and he was sitting at the entrance to his tent, like the heat of the day (Bereishis 18:1). Rashi teaches (and see Sotah 14a): וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו לְבַקֵּר אֶת הַחֹלֶה. אָמַר: רַבִּי חָמָא בַר חֲנִינְיָא, יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי לְמִילְתּוֹ הָיָה, וּבָא הַקַּב"ה וְשָׂאֵל בְּשִׁלּוּמֵי - And Hashem appeared to him: To visit the sick. It was the third day after his circumcision (which is the day of greatest

pain) and Hashem came to inquire after his welfare.

The opening pasuk of the parsha further teaches us about hachnasas orchim, welcoming guests. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent? Should he not have been resting in bed, convalescing and recuperating from his bris milah, particularly if on this day, the pain was the most intense?

Rashi teaches: פתח האהל. לראות אם יש עובר ושב ויבניסם - he was sitting at the entrance to his tent to see if there were passersby, and he would invite them into his home.

And behold, he lifted his eyes and there were three men standing upon him! And he ran to greet them and invited them to rest in the shade of the tree, while a sumptuous meal was prepared in their honor.

How great is the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim? Based on this parsha, the Sages teach (Shabbos 127a) גְּדוּלַת הַקְּנֻסָּת אֲוֹרְחִין מִהַקְּבֵלַת פְּנֵי שְׂכִינָה, welcoming guests is greater than

receiving the Divine Presence, as Avraham left his visit with G-d to welcome the guests into his home.

Our great forefather, Avraham Avinu, cared for all aspects of his guests' needs. In his Peninim on the Torah, Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum teaches a beautiful chiddush (novel Torah interpretation) into Rashi's words (as quoted above): פתח האהל לראות אם יש עובר ושב ויכניסם בביתו.

"Rashi states that Avraham Avinu sat at the entrance of the tent in order to see עובר ושב, if there were passersby, who might be going back and forth. Interestingly, Rashi bases his exegesis on the Medrash which uses the word 'orchim,' guests, in contrast to the words that Rashi selects in its stead, עובר ושב."

In deviating from the lashon (text) of the Medrash, and substituting the words עובר ושב for the lashon ha'medresh of "orchim," what lesson can be learned from this Rashi? Rabbi Scheinbaum answers as follows:

"Ha'Rav Mordechai ha'Kohen z'l, renders these words of Rashi homiletically. עובר is the root word of 'aveirah,' sin, and שׁב is the root word of 'teshuvah,' repentance. We learn from here that inclusive in the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim, hospitality to wayfarers, which generally addresses their physical needs, is to care for their spiritual needs. Avraham served his guests food, gave them water to wash, and a place to rest; but he also cared for his guests' spiritual needs and deficiencies. He reached out to all people, seeking to infuse them with belief in the Almighty (see Rashi to Bereishis 12:5 and 21:33).

"Therefore, Avraham sat at the פתח־האהל, 'entrance/opening' of the tent. Homiletically, this can be understood as: he attempted to find an opening, a reason to inspire the travelers, an opening to catalyze the path away from sin - עובר - and motivate them to repentance - ושב. Avraham sought to bring the sinner (עובר) to the level of teshuvah (ושב).

Parenting from the Parsha: Children are a Gift from Hashem

Rabbi Yossi Goldin

How was Avraham able to do it? No matter how many times we read the famous story of Akeidat Yitzchak, the question continues to leap off the page.

Avraham spent his whole life davening and hoping for a child, together with his wife and life partner, Sarah. Finally, at the age of 100, G-d gives him the precious gift of a son and all of Avraham's hopes and dreams for the future of

"Hence, Avraham Avinu performed a 'full service' hachnasas orchim by ministering to the spiritual, as well as physical, needs of his guests" (Peninim on the Torah, Eleventh Series, p.22).

The legendary tzadekes, Mrs. Henny Machlis a'h (who passed away in Oct. 2015 at the age of 58 years old), was a world-renowned machneses orchim, who hosted hundreds of guests for the Shabbos meals each and every week. Henny a'h was the epitome of one who understood that welcoming guests is to take care of both their physical and spiritual needs.

"Once a woman who was a professional opera singer came for Shabbos. She got up in the middle of the meal and wanted to sing. A woman singing in front of men is prohibited by halacha, but to silence her would have been insulting. Henny went over to her and calmly explained the prohibition of kol isha. Then she added, 'Even though you can't sing right now, we women are very interested in hearing you. So after the meal we will have an opera recital downstairs. No men allowed. We'll close the door. And only the women will get to enjoy you. We really would be honored to hear you sing.'

"Relating the story one of her daughters concluded, 'That woman was very weird.' Rabbi Machlis' response to his daughter's comment encapsulates the Machlis attitude towards every Jew: 'What do you mean she was weird? She was Jewish!'" (Emunah with Love and Chicken Soup, p.167).

With this beautiful interpretation of עובר ושב, we can appreciate even further the greatness of our first forefather, Avraham, and his approach to welcoming guests. Indeed, this is a worthy model for us all to emulate, as we strive to bring ourselves, and others, closer to Hashem.

the Jewish people are pinned on this one child. Suddenly, seemingly inexplicably, G-d commands Avraham to do the unthinkable- to kill his precious son and offer him as a sacrifice to G-d.

How did Avraham carry out this Divine demand? As great as Avraham was, and as unique a relationship as he had with Hashem, how was able to garner the strength and willingness to carry out a command that goes directly

against our nature as parents, which desires to protect and care for our children against all?

While, ultimately, we will never know what went through Avraham's mind during the moments of this ultimate *nisayon*, perhaps we can suggest one specific realization regarding parenthood that Avraham must have reached; a realization that enabled him to fulfill G-d's commandment.

Avraham understood profoundly that, ultimately, his son did not belong to him. He recognized, in a real way, that every child is in truth a gift from G-d. And while he was privileged to play a role in the child's creation, and in raising, loving, and caring for that child throughout its life, the child did not "belong" to him. And just as G-d gave Avraham the gift of a child as He saw fit, He also had the right to demand that Avraham return the gift when He deemed it appropriate.

This realization did not mean that Avraham loved his child any less, or that fulfilling G-d's command was easy for him. While the text of the Torah itself is silent regarding this issue, the Midrashim do paint a clear picture of Avraham struggling internally over his obedience to G-d's commandment. Avraham was clearly torn. Yet Avraham's awareness of God's true rights to Yitzchak lay the foundation for his ability to carry out this seemingly impossible command.

We noted last week that as parents, we are privileged to take part in the creation of our children, and are also given the opportunity to give to them unconditionally and endlessly. One byproduct of this reality is that we sometimes tend to view our children as "objects" that we own and control. Rather than viewing each child as a gift that G-d has entrusted us with, we view them as belonging to us.

Rav Wolbe, in *Zria U'binyan B'Chinuch*, points out that when parents take this attitude toward their children, it can be incredibly destructive. As a result, the parents feel that they have the right to maintain a sense of control over the child. They may then arrive at certain expectations of, or take certain actions towards, their child in the "name of chinuch", when in reality these expectations and actions

come from a very self-centered and egoistic place. He brings a number of very poignant examples:

1) Jealousy- If a parent sees a neighbor's child acting in an exemplary way, he may become jealous and want to show himself and others that his kid is better. He will then force his child to act in a certain way not out of a desire to educate him, but simply because he is jealous of his neighbor.

2) Kavod- If a parent is expecting guests, and he may require of his children that they talk and act in a specific way, in order to impress these guests. As a result, the impressed guests will praise the parents, enhancing the parents' own self-image.

3) Anger- If a person feels that others are disrespecting or disobeying him, he can easily be moved to anger. The potential for anger within the context of parenthood is therefore very great, as parents may feel that their child must obey everything they say. When that inevitably does not happen, powerful anger can result.

In each of these examples, the parents could easily defend their actions by claiming that they are simply trying to be *mechanech* their kids and treat them to act and behave appropriately. It all depends, however, on the attitude and motivation driving the parent's behavior and actions. If parent acts out of sincere desire to educate their children and teach them how to behave correctly, then the actions taken are correct. If the underlying motivation driving the parents is a belief that their children are their "objects," whose function is to make the parents, themselves, look better and feel better, then there is a fundamental flaw in the perception of the parent- one that will ultimately taint the way that the child is educated.

It is safe to say that had we been tested in the way that Avraham was, we would have failed miserably. Yet imbedded in the greatness of Avraham's action is a fundamental approach to parenthood that must form the basis and foundation for all that we do as parents. We must realize and recognize deeply that our children are gift from G-d whom we are commanded to love, shepherd, and take care of like no one else in the world. But ultimately, they do not belong to us.

The Akeida

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

It took quite a few years of preparing weekly Torah messages for me to work up the courage to finally bite the bullet, and address the challenging issue of the

עֲקִידָה —Akeida, the binding of Isaac, which is found in this week's parasha, parashat Vayeira.

In Genesis 22, the closing chapter of parashat Vayeira, we

learn that G-d tests Abraham. He calls to Abraham (Genesis 22:2), and says: *קח נא את בנך את יחידך אשר אהבת את יצחק, וְלֵךְ, לְךָ אֶל אֶרֶץ מוֹרְיָה; וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אֶחָד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, even Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you.”*

Abraham gets up early in the morning, takes with him his two young men, and Isaac, and, on the third day, arrives at the mountain. There he binds Isaac, places him on the altar, and lifts up the knife to slaughter him. Thankfully, (Genesis 22:11-12), an angel of G-d calls out to Abraham from heaven and says: “Lay not your hand upon the lad, neither do anything to him, for now I know that you are a G-d fearing man, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” Abraham lifts his eyes, sees a ram caught in the thicket by its horns, and offers up the ram as a burnt offering instead of his son, Isaac. The narrative of the Akeida, is one of the most notable portions in the Hebrew Bible, and one of the most enigmatic. The Akeida has had a great influence on the Jewish people, one that has profoundly reverberated throughout Jewish history. For the people of Israel, the Akeida represents the Jews’ preparedness for unconditional surrender to G-d and readiness for martyrdom. The well-known Chanukah story of the martyrdom of Hannah and her seven sons, recorded in the Second Book of Maccabees, refers to the Akeida. In one version, Hannah says to her youngest child, “Go to Abraham our father and tell him that I have bettered his instruction. He offered one child to G-d; I offered seven. He merely bound the sacrifice; I performed it.” And, so, the Ramban, concludes that the test of the Akeida is not for the benefit of the tester, but for the benefit of the testee. G-d will only test those who He is certain can succeed. It is in this same vein that the Abarbanel says that the word נִסָּה –nissah, which is often translated as tested, here really means a banner. It is G-d who attests, or provides testimonial to the world, through the absolute devotion of Abraham and Isaac.

The commitment shown by Abraham when asked by G-d to perform the Akeida was truly extraordinary. When confronted with the possible destruction of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham protests passionately. But here, Abraham is silent. He accepts G-d’s request without a word of protest. Obviously, he could have said to G-d, “Yesterday you told me” (Genesis 21:12), *כִּי בְיָצֵחַ יִקְרָא לְךָ יוֹרֵעַ, “that through Isaac your seed will be known.”* Instead, Abraham performs G-d’s bidding thoroughly out of love. G-d didn’t tell him to immediately

rush out to perform the Akeida. And, yet, (Genesis 22:3), *וַיִּשְׁכֶם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר*, Abraham gets up early in the morning, and starts out on this most painful mission. All this, despite the fact that Abraham was well aware of the profound suffering that he, and especially his wife, Sarah, as a barren woman, had endured waiting for this child. Both he and Sarah had yearned so desperately for a child. It was only then, under this profound duress, that Abraham agrees to take Hagar as a concubine, all for the sake of being a father. Now, the likely death of his beloved Isaac, leaving Abraham without a proper heir, would render all of Abraham’s labor in vain. All meaning in his life would be lost.

The Akeida proclaims a new and vital message to the world. Once and for all, the Akeida puts an end to the acceptance of the abominable practice of child sacrifice, especially when performed in the name of G-d, which was rife among the ancient people.

Writes Rabbi Joseph Hertz:

In that age, it was astounding that Abraham’s G-d should have interposed to prevent the sacrifice, not that He should have asked for it. A primary purpose [of the Akeida], was to demonstrate to Abraham and his descendants after him that G-d abhorred human sacrifice with an infinite abhorrence... It was the spiritual surrender alone that G-d required, [not physical sacrifice]. (The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Genesis, additional notes, p.201)

It is therefore profoundly telling and revealing, that in the biblical story of the Akeida, G-d instructs Abraham to sacrifice his son, while a lesser power, an angel, overrides G-d’s instructions and tells Abraham (Genesis 22:12), *אַל תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל הַנֶּעֱר, וְאַל תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוּמָה*, “Lay not your hand upon the lad, neither do anything unto him.”

Can we possibly conceive of a more powerful means of proclaiming the message of the sanctity of human life than the Akeida?

May we, the Jewish people, never be called upon again to make these ultimate sacrifices. Let us say to the angel of G-d: “We’ve proven the point, now just allow us live in peace.”