

Akedath Yitzchak and Avraham's Mistaken Presumption

Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo

The most tragic figure in the Bible is God, said the famous Talmudic scholar Saul Lieberman. Indeed. No one has been more misunderstood than God. But let's be honest; it's His own fault. After all, one day He appears in the Torah as the Creator of the universe, full of mercy and love, while the next moment He's utterly annoyed when He doesn't get His way--especially when His creations do not listen to His commands.

He splits the Red Sea for the Jews, saving them from their arch enemies, the Egyptians, and then leaves them without food and drink in the desert until they rebel and ask whether He really exists. The paradoxes abound.

In several instances He rescues His people who are in Exile, while at other times He does not stretch out His hand when the Jews suffer one pogrom after another. He first carries them on His wings in Spain, but then makes them undergo the cruel Inquisition. He helps them find a safe haven in some northern European countries, but subsequently allows a Holocaust of such brutality that one is nearly forced to conclude that He no longer cares and has simply left. To further confuse His people,

He performs miracles during the establishment of the State of Israel, later followed by the as-

tounding victory of the Six-Day War, only to make a sudden about-face and throw Israel's citizens into the disastrous Yom Kippur War, which claims the lives of many Israeli soldiers and traumatizes the entire nation. God seems to yo-yo through history, alternating between fits of anger and offers of mercy. By displaying these many inconsistencies He becomes downright impossible to handle.

Who else ever had such a track-record of the most radical paradoxes? And this is not all. Things get worse. This God requires unconditional submission to His demands and threatens to wipe out His people if they do not listen to Him. To add to the confusion, He seems completely surprised when many of His creations start sincerely wondering why they should follow Him. It is especially the Jewish people, the "apple of His eye," who constantly experience these devastatingly unsettling paradoxes. They pay the highest price, and the consequences are too overwhelming to deny:

The Jews start asking themselves what they should do with this God. Many feel no longer obligated to observe His commandments. Some deny His existence, but most see this denial as a copout and conclude that He is indeed the most tragic figure in history, and one needs to show Him mercy and be somewhat obedient.

Such is also the history of the first Jew. Avraham is promised by God that he will give birth to a child who will father a special nation that will promote this God and His ethical demands.

KJ Schedule Parashat Vayera

Erev Shabbat

Friday, October 18th

Shaharit/Morning Prayer	6:30 am
Shir Hashirim	5:45 pm
Shabbat Candle Lighting	5:57 pm
Minhah/Arbith	5:57 pm

Shabbat / Parashat Vayera

Saturday, October 19th

Shaharit/Morning Prayer	8:30 am
Minha, Seudah Shlisheet, Arvit	5:10 pm
Motzei Shabbat / Havdallah	6:55 pm

Weekdays

Sunday, October 20th

Shaharit	7:30 am
KJ Kids Sunday School	10 am to 12 noon

Monday to Friday, October 21st to 25th

Shaharit/Morning Prayer	6:30 am
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Erev Shabbat

Friday, October 25th

Shaharit/Morning Prayer	6:30 am
Shir Hashirim	5:35 pm
Shabbat Candle Lighting	5:49 pm
Minhah/Arbith	5:49 pm

From the beginning it is clear that God is more in need of this nation than Avraham is. After all, His prestige depends on it. Through this nation, He and His purpose for the world will be known. Avraham can't wait to start his great mission, and once he has a son he will do anything to build up this unique nation for the sake of this God. Who would not want to

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

serve such a God and take on this great assignment? Finally, Avraham gets his son, but the blow is not too far off. Not only is it disastrous, but it seems set up to destroy any possible belief that this is a merciful and wonderful God. To his utter shock, Avraham is asked to sacrifice his son as a token of his complete commitment to this very God! The God, who is in dire need of this nation, and therefore of Avraham's son, ruins His prestige and undoes his goals in one stroke--no son and no nation! And it is God who undermines Himself by doing so. He appears to be committing spiritual suicide. After all, what will become of Him without this nation?

What is Avraham to do now? Should he rescue God from Himself and refuse to give a hand to this suicide attempt? Or should he perhaps become an atheist? After all, such a God cannot exist! But Avraham goes for neither of these options. His total commitment to this God prompts him to make the greatest mistake of his life. *Helistens* and is prepared to give up his son without even a fight, thinking that this is what it means to be really religious--even if it undermines God's prestige and brings an end to His goals.

Avraham still lives in the world where man submits unconditionally to any god, whatever its demands. He is still a child of his times; subordination is seen as the pinnacle of religious devotion. Only when God, by way of His angel, shouts *No!* "Do not lay a hand on the boy" (1), just a second before his knife touches the skin of his son, Avraham wakes up from his so-called religiosity.

Avraham still has to learn that his willingness *not to kill* his child far surpasses his earlier

(Continued on page 3)

Seudah Shlisheet

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Did you know that Kahal Joseph has one of the most beautiful ballrooms on the Westside for your private event? Do you know that we have an amazing, kosher catering kitchen? And a modern playroom for younger visitors? Do you know someone looking for a beautiful location for their special event? Let them know Kahal Joseph is available! KJ is fabulous for parties up to 200 guests. Contact Sarah Bouchoucha at [310.474.0559](tel:310.474.0559).



SAVE THE DATE

Sunday, November 24th

*The Sisterhood's Annual
Children's Hanukkah Party*

Readings for Shabbat Vayera

Torah: Genesis/Sefer Beresheet,
Hertz edition pages 63 to 76

Haftara: Kings II / Melachim Bet
Hertz edition pages 76 to 79

In Memoriam

We remember these yahrzeit anniversaries for October 19th to 26th, 2013. It is customary to light a memorial candle, donate tzedaka, and attend service s the preceding Shabbat.

15 Heshvan / Shabbat, October 19th
Eliyahu ben Yaacob

16 Heshvan / Sunday, October 20th
Reuben Jacob *Reuven Hayeem ben Yaacov*

17 Heshvan / Monday, October 21st
Molok Aghalar Bension *Malka bat Menashe*
Eric Kelly *Eliyahu ben Saleh Moshe Kadoorie*
Touba Rancar *Tova bat Sarah*
Haim Saleh *Haim ben Aziza*
Mida Simon *Masooda bat Ghala*

18 Heshvan / Tuesday, October 22nd
Diana Aaron *Dina bat Masooda*
Gabriel Solomon *Gavriel ben Shlomo*
Yeshaiah ben Yaacov Shalom

20 Heshvan / Thursday, October 24th
Mordechai Harkham *Mordehai ben Hacham David*
Victoria Nissan *Victoria Zeubaida bat Lulu*
Esther Robbins *Esther bat Matana*

21 Heshvan / Friday, October 25th
Joshua Moses *Yehoshua ben Ephraim Moshe*

22 Heshvan / Shabbat, October 26th
Khuzna Levi *Khuzna bat Esther*

Refuah Shlemah

Vera Levi

Joseph Sharaf / Yossef ben Jamila
Maurice Ovadia / Moshe ben Noosha

Tilda Levy / Tilda bat Miriam

Pnina Herzbrun / Pnina bat Esther

Michael Herzbrun / Michael Baruch ben Sarah
Please renew each name listing every two weeks.

Names not renewed will be taken off the list. If you would like to add a member name to the list call 310-474-0559 or e-mail dafna@kahaljoseph.org

(Continued from page 2)

commitment to make an end to his son's life. The angelic messenger calls "Avraham, Avraham!" repeating his name twice because the command to desist and *not* sacrifice is harder to accept than the original commandment to kill. It goes against the trend of what it means to be religious. Yet, *not* to listen is greater proof of commitment to this "Jewish" God than is the willingness to sacrifice in honor of this God. The wake-up call is loud and clear! The impact of this message is far more shocking and forceful than that of the earlier call to kill. This God is an entirely different God. Capricious and unpredictable but, strangely enough, also demonstrating that human life is holy and may not be taken except in self-defense.

Until this incident, Avraham believed that it was only permitted to object to God if He was about to damage His reputation by doing a great injustice such as destroying the cities of Sodom and Amora. In that sense, he surpassed Noah whose reticence prevented him from even protesting when God told him that He would destroy all of mankind with the flood. Avraham had already realized that the Jewish God is different from all the other gods among whose followers he lived. To let the world perish is not what this God desires. So Avraham fights back. But once he loses the battle and is unable to convince God to leave these cities of Sodom and Amora alone, he concludes that Noah must have been right after all. There is no point in fighting God's will.

What Avraham fails to see is that while he loses this battle, God clearly encourages Him to give it a sincere try so as to win. After all, God *listens* to his arguments. When Avraham contends that if there were to be 50, 40, 30, 20, even 10 tzadikim, then these cities should be spared, God does not respond by telling him to mind his own business. On

the contrary, He clearly indicates that He might be convinced, if Avraham's arguments were better or the circumstances different. But Avraham apparently fails to get this point. He seems to conclude that since he didn't succeed, there is no point in arguing with God any longer. Why, after all, would God listen to man's subjective arguments? What could man possibly know about God's reasoning? So Avraham doesn't argue with God when He asks him to sacrifice his son. God may be incomprehensible, but He is consistent. He knows what He is doing. Who am I to argue?

This God, however, Who is the Creator of heaven and earth, teaches Avraham not to give up. He shows him that He is open to discussion and would have listened to his arguments in favor of his son. Now that Avraham is silent, God takes up the argument that Avraham ought to have made but didn't. What Avraham should have done for God, God now does for him. He tells Avraham, *You ought to have fought Me. You should have told Me, "Far be it from You! Shall the whole world's Judge not do justice?"* (2) God now needs to save Himself and His mission despite Avraham's religiosity! He must ensure that the Jewish people will come into being, notwithstanding Avraham's readiness to forgo that possibility.

Avraham is thus exposed to an aspect of God that is both blasphemous and ethical. This God appears to be unstable, but He is also a God of incomprehensible magnitude, power and moral supremacy: One Who is prepared to listen to man, take him seriously, and even be defeated by him! Who can make sense of this God? Avraham begins to learn that this God is tragic because He makes Himself appear as a God Who lacks all qualities of a real god, but in truth is greater than all idols.

God appears to experience all the human emotions: love; anger; involvement; indignation; regret; sadness; and so on. By so doing, He gives the seal of divinity to the very essence of our humanity. He implicitly says to man: "You cannot know what is above and what is below, but you can know what is in your hearts and in the world. These feelings and reactions and emotions that make up human existence are, if illumined by faith and rationality, all the divinity you can hope for. To be humane is to be divine: as I am holy, so you shall be holy; as I am merciful, so you shall be merciful." Thus, there is only one kind of knowledge that is open to man, the knowledge of God's humanity (3).

Suddenly, Avraham learns that to be religious is to live with a God Who carries contradictions and incongruities. Consistent gods are idols because they do not teach man how to live in a world that is full of dichotomies and inconsistencies. To be religious means to know how to navigate unresolvable conflicts, to be bold enough to negotiate, and to stand upright even when failing. It is in the unresolved that real life is lived. Only *that* can lead man to true religiosity. Avraham learns that a God Whom one fully understands is only half a God. Because a life without dichotomies is a life not lived. The overwhelming paradoxes are what portray life in its full force and reality.

Indeed, this God of many contradictions is the only God man can really worship: tragic, yet sublime. To serve Him means not only to obey, but also to protest.

At Mount Sinai, Moshe warned the Israelites, "Be careful not to climb the mountain & touch its edge" (4). How true is the Kotzker Rebbe's interpretation--be careful when you climb the mountain, not to touch *just* its edge. Go all the way!



To our dearest community members,

On behalf of the Israel Defense Force,

The Kelly family would like to welcome you to a dinner and evening of inspiration, in loving memory of David Kelly Z"l, a distinguished member of our community, and his relative Shlomo Dabora Z"l who served in the Palma" during the birth of the state of Israel.

The Israel defense force is excited to introduce a new project to the Kahal Joseph Congregation, in loving memory of David Kelly Z"l, and Shlomo Dabora Z"l.

The dinner is hosted by the Kelly family, and will take place on November 3rd, 2013 at the Kahal Joseph Synagogue, located on 10505 Santa Monica Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90025

Dinner will start at 5:00PM

RSVP is required by October 28.

Please call Hannie Kelly: 310-925-2123

Or email Malki Perla at: malhecker21@gmail.com

*Warm regards
Hannie Kelly and Family*



Rabbi Hagay Batzri, Ronald T.iny and Safra Veseifa Project



Dr. David Gerbi

From Fear to Faith: Refugee, Rebel, and Peacemaker

Moderated by Dr. Joan Chodorow

Panelists: Rabbi Tal Sessler, PhD, Judith Hecker, PhD
Wendy Wyman-McGinty, PhD, Barry Miller, PhD.

Wednesday, October 23, 2013

5:30 pm cocktails, 7:00 pm presentation
Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel

After 2,000 years of existence in Libya, the Jewish community was exiled, following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. David Gerbi was twelve years old. As most refugees do, he internalized the lessons of helplessness, but later, fate and his own determination drove him to take action. As an adult, he went to Libya during the revolution, where he worked with victims of psychological trauma. He returned to Tripoli, with the intention of restoring the main Jewish synagogue, which had been desecrated and bricked up since the expulsion of the Jews. Although he has had his life threatened numerous times, he continues to this day to reconcile the exiled Libyan Jewish Community with the new government of Libya. Along the way, he has met Muammar Ghaddafi, American Congressmen and a Nobel laureate. His story is an astonishing journey of hope and healing as he continues to work towards creating a sacred space in the midst of what has been.

Advance tickets: \$25, At the Door: \$30, RSVP Melissa@sephardictemple.org 310-475-7000

This event is dedicated to the memory of U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens

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and The Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel Men's Club*

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