

Temple Beth-El Shabbat AM Torah Study...Genesis 22:1-19

	FOX	JPS	HEBREW
1	Now after these events it was that God tested Avraham and said to him: Avraham! He said: Here I am.	Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham," and he answered, "Here I am."	וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַהֲאִלֹּהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִנִּי:
2	He said: Pray take your son, your only-one, whom you love, Yitzhak, and go-you-forth to the land of Moriyya/Seeing, and offer him up there as an offering-up upon one of the mountains that I will tell you of.	And He said, "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you."	וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־נָא אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יִצְחָק אֲשֶׁר־אַהֲבָתָּ אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ־לָךְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרְיָה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אֶחָד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ:
3	Avraham started-early in the morning, he saddled his donkey, he took his two serving-lads with him and Yitzhak his son, he split wood for the offering-up and arose and went to the place that God had told him of.	So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him.	וַיִּשְׁכֶּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת־חֲמֹרוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁנֵי נְעָרָיו אִתּוֹ וְאֶת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּבְקַע עֵצִי עֹלָה וַיִּקֶּם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אָמַר־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים:
4	On the third day Avraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.	On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar.	בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם מֵרְחֹק:
5	Avraham said to his lads: You stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad wish to go yonder, we wish to bow down and then return to you.	Then Abraham said to his servants, "You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you."	וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־נְעָרָיו שְׁבוּ־לָכֶם פֹּה עִם־הַחֲמֹר וְאֲנִי וְהַנְּעָר גֵּלְכָה עַד־כֹּה וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנָשׁוּבָה אֵלֵיכֶם:
6	Avraham took the wood for the offering-up, he placed them upon Yitzhak his son, in his hand he took the fire and the knife. Thus the two of them went together.	Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together.	וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵצֵי הָעֹלָה וַיִּשֶׂם עַל־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ אֶת־הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת־הַמַּאֲכָלֶת וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו:
7	Yitzhak said to Avraham his father, he said: Father! He said: Here I am, my son. He	Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he answered, "Yes, my son."	וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר

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	said: Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the offering-up?	And he said, “Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?”	הַנְּנִי בְּנִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ וְהָעֵצִים וְאַיִה הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה:
8	Avraham said: God will see-for-himself to the lamb for the offering-up, my son. Thus the two of them went together.	And Abraham said, “God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them walked on together.	וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה-לוֹ הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה בְּנִי וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו:
9	They came to the place that God had told him of; there Avraham built the slaughter-site and arranged the wood and bound Yitzhak his son and placed him on the slaughter-site atop the wood.	They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.	וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר-לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּבֶן שָׁם אַבְרָהָם אֶת-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיַּעְרֹךְ אֶת-הָעֵצִים וַיַּעְקֹד אֶת-יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיָּשֶׂם אֹתוֹ עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִמַּעַל לְעֵצִים:
10	And Avraham stretched out his hand, he took the knife to slay his son.	And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son.	וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת-יָדוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת-הַמַּאֲכָלֶת לְשַׁחֵט אֶת-בְּנוֹ:
11	But YHWH’s messenger called to him from heaven and said: Avraham! Avraham! He said: Here I am.	Then an angel of the LORD called to him from heaven: “Abraham! Abraham!” And he answered, “Here I am.”	וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו מֵלֶאדָּה יְהוָה מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִי:
12	He said: Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, do not do anything to him! For now I know that you are in awe of God—you have not withheld your son, your only-one, from me.	And he said, “Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me.”	וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל-הַנֶּעַר וְאֶל-תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוּמָה כִּי עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי-יִרָא אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה וְלֹא חָשַׁכְתָּ אֶת-בְּנִיךָ אֶת-יִחִידְךָ מִמֶּנִּי:
13	Avraham lifted up his eyes and saw: there, a ram caught behind in the thicket by its horns! Avraham went, he took the ram and offered it up as an offering-up in place of his son.	When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.	וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת-עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה-אֵיל אֲחֵר נֶאֱסָז בְּסֹבֵב בְּקִרְנָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת-הָאֵיל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה תַּחַת בְּנוֹ:

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14	Avraham called the name of that place: YHWH Sees. As the saying is today: On YHWH's mountain (it) is seen.	And Abraham named that site Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, "On the mount of the LORD there is vision."	וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שְׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא יְהוָה יִרְאֶה אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הַיּוֹם בְּהַר יְהוָה יִרְאֶה:
15	And YHWH's messenger called to Avraham a second time from heaven	The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven,	וַיִּקְרָא מַלְאֲךְ יְהוָה אֵל־ אַבְרָהָם שְׁנִיַּת מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם:
16	and said: By myself I swear—YHWH's utterance—indeed, because you have done this thing, have not withheld your son, your only-one,	and said, "By Myself I swear, the LORD declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one,	וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם־ יְהוָה כִּי יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא חָשַׁקְתָּ אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ:
17	indeed, I will bless you, bless you, I will make your seed many, yes, many, like the stars of the heavens and like the sand that is on the shore of the sea; your seed shall inherit the gate of their enemies,	I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes.	כִּי־בָרַךְ אַבְרָמָה וְהָרַבָּה אֲרַבָּה אֶת־זַרְעָךָ כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחֲלוֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל־ שְׂפַת הַיָּם וַיִּרַשׁ זַרְעָךָ אֶת שַׁעַר אֹיְבָיו:
18	all the nations of the earth shall enjoy blessing through your seed, in consequence of your hearkening to my voice.	All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command."	וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְזַרְעָךָ כָּל־גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ עַקְבֵּי אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלִי:
19	Avraham returned to his lads, they arose and went together to Be'er-Sheva. And Avraham stayed in Be'er-Sheva.	Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer-sheba; and Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba.	וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם אֶל־נַעֲרָיו וַיִּקְמוּ וַיֵּלְכוּ יַחְדָּו אֶל־בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם בְּבֵאֵר שֶׁבַע:

JPS...The Akedah: The Binding of Isaac (v. 1-19)

This section recounts the climactic event in the life of Abraham, the ultimate trial of faith. God asks the aged patriarch to offer up his son as a sacrifice. Abraham binds the child on the altar and poises the knife for the fatal thrust. But the deadly act is stayed by a heavenly voice.

The Akedah, as the story is popularly called--because of the Hebrew stem ‘-k-d, “to bind,” in verse 9—is organically connected with the preceding chapter. Abraham has lost one son and now seems about to lose the other. In both narratives, the child is saved by divine intervention at the critical moment, the only two biblical instances of an angel calling from heaven to human beings. In both cases there is a fortuitous discovery: a well of water in the earlier story, a ram in the thicket here.

Beyond its connection with the foregoing chapter, the Akedah brings to a close

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Abraham's spiritual odyssey that began with God's call at Haran. The curtain rises and falls on the patriarch as he receives a divine word that demands agonizing decisions. The first time God bids him to take leave of his father and to cut himself off from his past; now, in this last theophany that he is to receive, God asks that he sacrifice his beloved, longed-for son and thereby abandon all hope of posterity. On both occasions Abraham responds with unquestioning obedience and steadfast loyalty.

This correspondence between Haran and Moriah encases the biography of Abraham within a framework of unwavering faith. For added emphasis, the two crucial events are cast in a common literary mold so that chapters 12 and 22 share many connecting links. God's first call to Abraham is introduced by the declaration, "Go forth . . . to the land that I will show you"; and His last employs almost identical language, "Go forth . . . to the land of Moriah . . . on one of the heights that I will point out to you." The Hebrew phrase *lekh lekha*, "go forth," does not occur again in the Bible, a fact that underscores the deliberate and meaningful nature of its use in these two passages. In both instances, the precise ultimate destination of the trek is withheld, and in both the tension of the drama is heightened by the cumulative effect of several Hebrew epithets, the last of which is the most potent: "your land, your homeland, your father's house"; "your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love." Both episodes culminate in promises of glorious posterity, the second one containing striking verbal echoes of the first. One blessing was received at the terebinth of Moreh, the other at the similar sounding Moriah; and at both sites, it is stated, Abraham "built an altar there." Finally, just as the account of the initial call is preceded by a genealogy that introduces the main character of the next episode, so the story of the final call from God is followed by a genealogical note having the same function.

FOX...*The Great Test (22)*

This story is certainly one of the masterpieces of biblical literature. In a famous article by Erich Auerbach it is remarked how biblical style as exemplified here, in contradistinction to that of Homer and other epic bards, eschews physical and psychological details in favor of one central preoccupation: a man's decision in relation to God. The result of this style is a terrible intensity, a story which is so stark as to be almost unbearable.

Chap. 22 is a tale of God's seeming retraction of his promise (of "seed") to Avraham. The fact that other issues may be involved here (i.e., Israel's rejection of local and widely practiced ideas of child sacrifice) may be quite beside the point. Coming just one chapter after the birth of the long-awaited son, the story completely turns around the tension of the whole cycle and creates a new, frightening tension of its own. The real horror of the story lies in this threatened contradiction to what has gone before.

Most noticeable in the narrative is Avraham's silence, his mute acceptance of, and acting on, God's command. We are told of no sleepless night, nor does he ever say a word to God. Instead he is described with a series of verbs: starting-early, saddling, taking, splitting, arising, going (v.3; similarly in vv.6 and 9-10). Avraham the bargainer, so willing to enter into negotiations with relations (Chap. 13), allies (Chap. 14), local princes (Chap. 20), and even God himself (Chap. 18), here falls completely silent.

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The chapter serves an important structural function in the Avraham cycle, framing it in conjunction with Chap. 12. The triplet in v.2 (“Pray take your son,/your only-one,/whom you love”) recalls “from your land/from your kindred/from your father’s house” in 12:1, “go-you-forth” and “the land that I will tell you of” (v.2; the latter, three times in the story) similarly point back to Avraham’s call (12:1, “Go-you-forth...to the land that I will let you see”). There he had been asked to give up the past (his father); here, the future (his son). Between the two events lies Avraham’s active life as man of God, ancestor, and intercessor. After this God will never speak with him again.

In many ways this story is the midpoint of Genesis. It brings the central theme of continuity and discontinuity to a head in the strongest possible way. After Moriyya, we can breathe easier, knowing that God will come to the rescue of his chosen ones in the direst of circumstances. At the same time we are left to ponder the difficulties of being chosen one, subject to such an incredible test.

The story is also the paradigmatic narrative of the entire book. The Patriarch passes the test, and we know that the fulfillment of the divine promise is assured. Yet there is an ominous note: love, which occurs here by name for the first time, leads almost to heartbreak. So it will be for the rest of Genesis.

WOMEN’S TORAH COMMENTARY... In this episode, one of the most famous in Genesis, Sarah the mother is completely absent—a striking absence given that her only son is the subject of God’s instructions. Apparently she does not need to be tested.

V. 1

Some time afterward...

- **JPS...** As noted at 15:1, the phrase indicates an indefinite connection with foregoing events. Isaac was about three years old when Ishmael was expelled; he is now old enough to carry a load of firewood and to ask an intelligent question based on experience and observation.
 - **Note to 15:1:** Hebrew *'ahar ha-devarim ha-'elleh*, literally “after these things,” implies a sequence that is not necessarily immediate. Here, however, the close connection with the preceding events is unmistakable.
- **RASHBAM**¹... whenever we find the construction אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה *achar hadevarim haeleh*, what follows is conceptually immediately following what has been reported immediately before.... [if I understand the author correctly, he wants to tell us that although sequentially the matters related are not immediate chronologically, the Torah or Scriptures use the formulation to trace them to events which occurred some time back. Yitzchok was at least 37 years old before Avraham heard about the birth of Rivkah.... Ed.] Here too, the words mean that what follows occurred after Avraham and Avimelech had concluded their covenant according to which until the fourth generation Avraham’s descendants would not register a claim against lands owned by the Philistines at this time. God became very angry at this high-handed action by Avraham, seeing that he had given away lands which were part

¹ Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, or Rashbam, (c. 1085-c. 1158) was Rashi’s grandson and a leading French Tosafist out of Troyes.

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of what God had promised to Avraham and his descendants at the “covenant of the pieces” in chapter 15. We know that a condition of that covenant had been not to allow a single soul of the Canaanites to survive in that land, according to both Deuteronomy 20:16 as well as according to Joshua 13:3 and 15:45-47. Clearly lots had been cast concerning the lands owned by the 5 Philistine rulers, and who was to settle in those lands after the conquest.

- **CHIZKUNI²...** according to Rashi³, the “events” refer to the banquet arranged on the occasion of Yitzchok’s being weaned; Satan accused Avraham of not having offered a single sacrifice to God on that occasion. God replied that he would have been willing to offer even his own son as such an offering if asked.

A different interpretation of the words: *הדברים האלה, hadevarim haelleh*, “these words;” Yishmael had boasted to Yitzchok that he had voluntarily undergone circumcision at an age when it was most painful, to which Yitzchok had replied that he, Yishmael, had endured pain only on one organ, whereas he, Yitzchok, would be prepared to undergo such pain on his whole body, i.e. he would even give his life for God. The reason why Rashi chose the first interpretation is that the word *אחר achar* normally refers to an event that had immediately preceded the subject raised, whereas here the call for the binding of Yitzchok would then have occurred many years earlier. According to a statement by Rav Hunna⁴ in B’reshit Rabbah 44:6, the word for “after” that the Torah should have used should then have been “אחרי, acharei.”

A third interpretation of the words is that they refer to the treaty concluded between Avraham and Avimelech, when Avraham had voluntarily postponed the fulfillment of God’s promise to him without having first obtained God’s permission to do so. [It is a historical fact that sovereignty over the land of the Philistines was achieved by the Israelites only about 100 years prior to the destruction of the first Temple, (under King Yoshiyahu), over 800 years after Joshua conquered the rest of the Holy Land. This was part of the punishment for the Israelites not having carried out God’s command not to allow a single soul of the then residents to remain alive (if they did not emigrate). (Deuteronomy 20:16). In other words, although Avraham was the first to cause of the fulfillment of God’s promise to be delayed, he was not the last Israelite to do so. Ed.]

- **OR HACHAIM⁵...** The events referred to are Abraham's various adventures, the tortuous route to becoming Isaac's father at an advanced age. In the meantime Isaac had grown up since we find Abraham described as "living in the land of the Philistines for many years," and Isaac was born during the first year of Abraham's stay there. The test assumed much greater impact in view of the repeated promises God had made to Abraham concerning Isaac and his future. To be told at this stage to offer Isaac as a sacrifice and not to hesitate or challenge God's command or even ask for an explanation, was a tremendous act of obedience. Isaac too deserves great credit for submitting. Another reason that the Torah wrote "after these events" is, that only now could God refer to Isaac as Abraham's only son.

² Rabbi Hezekiah ben Manoah (1250-1310) was a French rabbi and student.

³ Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105) was a medieval French rabbi and author.

⁴ Rav Huna (c. 216 – c. 297) was the head of the Academy of Sura, a leader of a Jewish community, and halakhist and aggadist.

⁵ Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar (1696-1743), a Talmudist and kabbalist, wrote *Or HaChaim*, his commentary on the Torah.

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As long as Ishmael had not yet been expelled by Abraham the description "your only son" would not have been appropriate.

God put Abraham to the test/The God did prove Abraham...

- **JPS...** This information is imparted to the reader, not divulged to Abraham, in order to remove any possible misunderstanding that God requires human sacrifice as such. Therefore, the purely probative nature of the divine request is emphasized. As a result, the focus of tension shifts from Isaac to Abraham. Now the reader knows that the son will not be slaughtered. But is the father's faith in God of such transcendent quality as to overcome his natural love for his heir in full consciousness that obedience to God's cruel request would mean the end of all his hopes and dreams, the nullification of the promises he had so often heard from the mouth of this self-same God?
- **CHIZKUNI...** Avraham was not tested in order for God to convince Himself of his willingness to offer up his beloved son, seeing that such matters are known to Him, Who is omniscient; he was tested by the attribute of Justice which had dared question the degree of loyalty he could summon when so tested. Passing this test successfully would convince the people around him of the absolute obedience to any command God would issue to him. There was no way the nations of the world could challenge his faith thereafter.
- **RADAK⁶...** after what happened to Avraham with Avimelech and as a result of his pact he had resided among the Philistines for many years, so that he had decided to migrate to Beer Sheva. At that point he received the instruction from God concerning his only son (by Sarah). It is very difficult to explain the matter of God' "testing" someone, seeing that God knows in advance what the result of such a test is going to be. What then is the point of such a test? If the point was to demonstrate to the world at large that Avraham successfully passed such a test, how could this be accomplished in a setting where only Avraham and Yitzchok were present? He had even left the lads who had accompanied him behind so that there were no witnesses whatsoever to his carrying out a command which he had not even told Yitzchok about until the last possible moment! Even if Avraham had told someone what had transpired on the mountain, who would have believed him? The truth is that the purpose of the trial was to demonstrate to the world Avraham's love for God. It was not meant to demonstrate anything to the generation during which Avraham lived, but to prove this to subsequent generations of people who believed in the Torah which was handed down to us by Moses at the command of God Himself. All that is written in the Torah is meant to teach the extent to which we are expected to demonstrate our love for God if and when the occasion arises. We know that Avraham loved Yitzchok more than he loved himself, seeing that he was already old and did not expect anymore out of life. If Yitzchok were to die at that time before he had married and raised a family, he would not have enjoyed any true satisfaction in his life on earth. This thought must have been very upsetting for his father Avraham. If he was nonetheless prepared to carry out God's command without hesitation this was indeed a feat that all his descendants would marvel at. The fact that Avraham, who

⁶ Rabbi David Kimhi (1160-1235) was a French medieval rabbi, biblical commentator, philosopher, and grammarian.

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had prayed to God for sinners to be given a reprieve, did not even pray to God to spare the life of Yitzchok until he had at least married and started to raise a family, is meant to be an inspiration to all of us. Moreover, God Himself had provided Avraham with arguments which would have entitled him to at least defer sacrificing Yitzchok since he had told him that he, Avraham, would be known in history through Yitzchok. How could such a promise be fulfilled if Yitzchok were to die now? This story became the powerful message which Yitzchok transmitted to his son Yaakov, and which Yaakov transmitted to his sons. After the Torah was committed to writing the story became famous throughout the world, some people believing it, others not. Nowadays, after primitive paganism has ceased to exist in most of civilized society, most of mankind believes the story recorded in the Bible without hesitation. If large sections of mankind express some doubts about what is written in the Torah this concerns only whether everything written in the Torah as fact needs to be understood as historical, literal truth, or if many stories are to be understood as allegorical, but conveying the same ethical and moral messages. Similarly, these doubters believe that many of the practical commandments in the Torah were not meant to be fulfilled literally, but were examples demonstrating God's attitude to certain problems confronting man. The very fact that the majority of mankind does believe that Avraham did what the Torah writes he did, is proof that Avraham had lived the kind of life which inspired man to believe that one can love God more than anything else in the universe.

- **IBN EZRA**⁷... Some say that the word *nissah* (did prove, tested) is a variation of *nissa* (lifted up),⁸ with the *sin* replacing the *samekh*⁹ and the *heh* replacing the *alef*.¹⁰ However, the plain meaning of the entire chapter contradicts this interpretation.¹¹ The word *nissah* is thus to be taken literally. The philosophers teach that there are two kinds of knowledge, knowledge of events prior to their occurrence, and knowledge of what is presently in existence. The latter is the meaning of *God did prove*, and *for now I know* (v. 12).¹² Saadiah Gaon¹³ says that *did prove* means that God tested Abraham in order to demonstrate his piety to mankind; furthermore, he interprets *for now I know that thou art a God-fearing man* (v. 12) to mean that now I have made known to all that thou art a God-fearing man. But didn't Saadiah know that even Abraham's young men were not present when he bound Isaac and placed him on the altar?¹⁴ Others say that *and offer him there for a burnt offering* is to be interpreted as: bring him up to the mountain; this will be considered as if you brought him

⁷ Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra (1089-c.1167) was a biblical commentator and philosopher in the Middle Ages from Spain.

⁸ *The problem which some commentators found in a literal translation of nissah as prove is that it seemed to imply that God did not know what Abraham's response to his request would be. They thus interpreted nissa as coming from nun, sin, alef, meaning lifted up; i.e., God exalted Abraham by showing him to be a paragon of absolute obedience to the Lord's will. Cf. Bereshit Rabbah 80:55.*

⁹ *Nissah is spelled nun, samekh, heh ; nassah is spelled nun, sin, alef.*

¹⁰ *The heh in nissah, like the alef in nasa, is silent.*

¹¹ *The chapter deals with a test, a trial. Hence nissah means proved, tested, not exalted.*

¹² *God knew (now I know) what Abraham would do if tested. However, until Abraham offered Isaac, God's knowledge was knowledge of the potential or possible. He tested Abraham (did prove) to actualize His knowledge (Krinsky). He now knew what Abraham did, not only what Abraham would do.*

¹³ Rabbi Sa'adiah ben Yosef Gaon (882/892 – 942) was a rabbi, teacher, philosopher and commentator who wrote about Hebrew linguistics, halacha and philosophy.

¹⁴ *Cf. verse 5. In other words, no one was there to witness his act.*

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up as a burnt offering.¹⁵ However, Abraham did not understand his prophetic vision and hurried to sacrifice Isaac. God then told him, "I did not ask you to slay Isaac."

Still others say that God told Abraham: act as if you were bringing him up as a burnt offering.... In reality, all questions are removed by Scripture's first stating *that God did prove Abraham*.¹⁶ The reason God tested Abraham was in order to reward him.

- **OR HACHAIM...**The Torah adds the conjunctive letter ם before the word אלוקים to remind us that this was not Abraham's only test, only the most recent and most difficult one.
- **RAMBAN**¹⁷... The matter of "trial," in my opinion, is as follows: Since a man's deeds are at his absolute free command, to perform them or not to perform them at his will, on the part of one who is tried it is called "a trial." But on the part of the One, blessed be He, who tries the person, it is a command that the one being tested should bring forth the matter from the potential into actuality so that he may be rewarded for a good deed, not for a good thought alone.

Know further that *God trieth the righteous, (Psalms 11:5)* for knowing that the righteous will do His will, He desires to make him even more upright, and so He commands him to undertake a test, but He does not try the wicked, who would not obey. Thus all trials in the Torah are for the good of the one who is being tried.

- **RASHBAM...** As a result of Avraham's high-handed action, God now subjected Avraham to a painful test, something which was bound to cause him grief. Whenever the root נסה occurs, ...the connotation is an unpleasant one for the one being subjected to it. In this instance, God, so to speak, indicated to Avraham that he had been foolish to think that he could guarantee's Yitzchok's and his descendants well being into the future, as he might have to terminate his life before he even had produced any offspring who would be called upon to honor his father's deal with Avimelech. We find that the ark of the covenant spent seven months in Philistine captivity as a result of Avraham having made such an unauthorized pact with Avimelech (Samuel I 6,1). The seven months corresponded to the seven sheep Avraham had gratuitously given to Avimelech. God swore that as a result the Philistines would fight seven wars against the Israelites in which they would be victorious. These wars occurred during the time of Shimshon, Chofni, Pinchos, Sha-ul, and the three sons of Sha-ul who were killed.

Another approach: as a result of Avraham's high-handed act seven altars (public altars equivalent of temples) were destroyed by the enemies of the Jewish people after they entered the Holy Land Land, They were: Moses' Tabernacle, Gilgal, Nov, Shiloh, Givon and the two Temples in Jerusalem. (copied from Midrash Shemuel by the editor of Rash'bam)

According to still another version God's ark would repose in the land of the Philistines for 7 months.

¹⁵ The word translated as offer him (ve-ha'alehu) literally means bring him up.

¹⁶ God did not change His mind. He never intended for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

¹⁷ Nachmanides, or RAMBAN, (1194-1270) was a Sephardic Rabbi, philosopher, physician, Kabbalist, and biblical commentator.

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- **RABBEINU BAHYA**¹⁸... This is the portion dealing with the binding of Yitzchak, an event which is the cornerstone of the Jewish faith throughout the ages. Jews have placed their trust in their eternal future in the merit accumulated by both Avraham and Yitzchak as protecting them against extermination by their enemies.

We must not make the mistake of thinking that God tested Avraham in order to find out for Himself how Avraham would respond to this trial. It was a “test” only when viewed from the vantage point of his contemporaries who could not have known in advance how Avraham would respond to a trial which conflicted so absolutely with everything he thought he knew about what God wanted from man. God used this “test” in order to demonstrate to the people of his own time as well as to his descendants the greatness of this man’s devotion to God. He did not flinch for a moment nor even argue with God as he had done when advised of the impending judgment of the people of Sodom. We read of a general principle that God tests the righteous in Psalms 11:5 “God will examine (test) the righteous.”

The reason why this paragraph follows the report about what happened to Avraham and Sarah when they were in Gerar with Avimelech has been explained in the Midrash. The word נסה *nissah* is an expression similar to זעף *za-ef*, “to be angry, displeased.” Onkelos¹⁹ translates it thus in 40:6 where he explains the word זועפים as גסיסים. God had been displeased with the oath Avraham swore to Avimelech guaranteeing future immunity of Avimelech’s offspring from incursions by Avraham’s descendants. He should not have given the seven sheep to Avimelech. Eventually, (during the time of the High Priest Eli) the Holy Ark was captured and remained in the hands of the Philistines for seven months before the latter returned it having found that it was a source of curse for them. (compare Bereshit Rabbah 54:4).

The incident of the binding of Yitzchak was designed to demonstrate the extent of Avraham’s reverence for God as well as his love for God. Love is something which can exist on three levels:

- 1) Someone loves his king and because he loves him, he tells others about the king’s virtues and his accomplishments. Such a tribute to his king does not involve the one who extols the king’s virtues in any sacrifice. It does not cost him a penny to tell others complimentary things about his king.
- 2) Love on a higher level is someone who spends a great deal of his own money to make his king popular; however, even he draws the line at laying down his life on behalf of that king.
- 3) This subject not only tells the world about the greatness of his king and spends all his money advertising this fact, but he is also prepared to lay down his own life on behalf of his king.

Avraham’s love for God, the king of Kings, included all the levels we have just described. We know from 21:33 that he publicly proclaimed the greatness of God. He did so

¹⁸ Rabbi Bahya ben Asher (1255-1340) was a commentator on Tanach.

¹⁹ *Targum Onkelos* is the primary Jewish Aramaic translation of the Torah and is thought to have been written in the early 2nd century CE by Onkelos, a famous convert to Judaism (c. 25-120CE).

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because the other people of his generation attributed the order in the universe to horoscopes, etc. (Maimonides' Hilchot Avodah Zara 1:2). Avraham guided people along the path of true religion and monotheism. We are told in Job 5,8 saying exactly this, i.e. "I aim my words as proving that God is the cause of events." The speaker, Eliphaz, makes the point that fate is not blind but that an all-seeing God guides it. He does not assign your fate to the stars, leaving it all to them.

Avraham had also demonstrated the second level of love for God by the manner in which he entertained guests lavishly at great cost to himself, all in order to proclaim God's greatness. Our sages (Midrash Tehillim 110) illustrate this when they said that Avraham's tent had an entrance in all four directions. Any guest who entered by one door would leave by another so as to avoid feeling embarrassed by other travelers who would see him. We find support for this in 21:33: "he planted an orchard at Be'er Sheva;" we had already explained that this referred to Avraham providing food, shelter and escort for his visitors. Not only would he welcome guests but he would actually run after them to make sure they did not pass him by; He did this even while still suffering from the after-effects of the circumcision (18:2).

He had demonstrated the third and highest level of love for God when he laid down his life and preferred to be burned in Nimrod's furnace rather than desist from preaching the greatness of his Creator (Genesis Rabbah 38:11). This is why God called him (Isaiah 41:5) אברהם אהבי, "Avraham who loves Me."

In the matter of his binding Yitzchak in preparation for slaughtering him as an offering to God, Avraham demonstrated his love for God in a manner which is quite beyond comparison to any of the three levels we have mentioned. This was a level which goes way beyond martyrdom. Had Avraham even possessed 100 bodies, it would have been appropriate that he sacrifice all of them for the sake of his son Yitzchak. What he did here bears no resemblance to anything he had ever done before. This "test" was totally different from any previous tests which Avraham had passed with flying colors. Our imagination is quite inadequate to properly grasp the enormity of what was demanded of him and how he complied.

Avraham had longed to have a son such as Yitzchak for many decades. When Yitzchak was finally born, his love for him grew from year to year, and the certainty that such a miracle would not be repeated and that he would not have another if anything were to happen to Yitzchak must have crossed his mind many times. When he was suddenly commanded to kill Yitzchak with his own hands, we can hardly imagine how he must have felt on a journey of three days towards the unnamed site of the sacrifice, and how his reason must have assailed his feelings of reverence for God which alone could prompt him to go through with such an act. Avraham realized that in spite of all his love for Yitzchak, his love for God must take precedence in a situation where the two loves could not be reconciled. Had God told Avraham to slaughter Yitzchak immediately, without giving him three days during which he had to reflect on what he had been asked to do, the command would have been far easier to comply with. On the other hand, seeing that God gave Avraham three days

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to think about the enormity of what he had been asked to do made the decision to go through with it one that could not be attributed to a momentary spiritual high, to a spontaneous act, but it was an act which had been carefully considered and which reflected Avraham's deep-seated feelings of overriding reverence for God. This is what the sages in Bereshit Rabbah 55:5 must have had in mind when they said: "why was Avraham to offer Yitzchak only on the third day and not on the first day of his journey? Answer: in order not to give the gentile nations an opportunity to claim that he had been emotionally disturbed, that God's command had overwhelmed him so much that he went and slaughtered his son. This is why he performed this task with his own hands as a demonstration of both his love and reverence for God." The element of reverence referred to has nothing to do with the fear of being punished for non-compliance, and the love demonstrated had nothing to do with any compensation he hoped to receive from God in return for displaying this degree of love for His Creator. Any act dictated by love which looks forward to some kind of reward be it only at the back of the person's mind performing the deed, is not truly an act of love. There are people who drink a bitter-tasting medicine because they hope that in the end the beneficial results will compensate them for the galling experience.

When God said to Avraham (22:12) at the end of the paragraph "now I know that you are indeed a God-fearing individual," (and we know that God knew beforehand that Avraham would not flinch), this simply meant that as of that moment Avraham's potential had been converted into an actuality. Not only had God had proof of Avraham's deed, but He had observed with what alacrity and single-mindedness of purpose Avraham had applied himself to the task.

He could have taken with him a number of members of his household. He had taken only the two "lads" the Torah spoke of i.e. Eliezer and Ishmael (according to Targum Yonathan²⁰ as well as Rashi). Even these two "lads" did not accompany him to the top of Mount Moriah (22:5) as Avraham had told them: "remain here with the donkey, etc." He did not want them to come with him on "the last mile," in order that neither of them should attempt to stay his hand at the last moment.

- **Genesis Rabbah 38:11:** He (Terah) took him (Abraham) and gave him over to Nimrod. (Nimrod) said to him: Let us worship the fire! (Abraham) said to him: Should we not then worship water, which extinguishes fire! (Nimrod) said to him: Then, let us worship the water! (Abraham) said to him: Should we not then worship the clouds, which carry the water? (Nimrod) said to him: Then, let us worship the cloud! (Abraham) said to him: If so, Should we not then worship the wind, which scatters the clouds? (Nimrod) said to him: Then, let us worship the wind! (Abraham) said to him: Should we not then worship the human, who withstands the wind? (Nimrod) said to him: You are merely piling words; we should bow to none other than the fire. I shall therefore cast you in it, and let your God to whom you bow come and save you from it! Haran (Abraham's brother) was standing there. He said (to himself): what shall I do? If Abraham wins, I shall say: "I am of Abraham's (followers)," if Nimrod wins I shall say, "I am of Nimrod's (followers)."

²⁰ A western interpretation of the Torah from Israel (Jerusalem Targum) which includes aggadic material and translation.

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When Abraham went into the furnace and survived, Haran was asked: "Whose (follower) are you?" and he answered: "I am Abraham's (follower)!" So, they took him and threw him into the furnace, and his innards were burned and he died and predeceased Terah, his father. This is the meaning of the verse (Gen 11:28), "And Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah."

- **SFORNO**²¹... to demonstrate that Avraham's love for God as well as his fear of God was not merely potential but actual, much as God goodness is not merely potential but actual. The purpose of man's existence is to emulate the virtues of God, and by means of this "test" Avraham had an opportunity to demonstrate this. When God created man He had set Himself the objective of "let us make man in Our image etc.," i.e. as much like Divine beings as is it possible for a creature to be. (Genesis 1:26)
- **TUR HAARUCH**²²... Some commentators understand the word נָסָה to mean "elevate to a higher stature" in a spiritual sense, such as Kings II The meaning would be parallel to נִשְׂאוּ with the letter ו instead of ח.

He said to him, "Abraham"...

- **OR HACHAIM**... This introductory call by God was to prepare Abraham that God would ask him to do something difficult. Abraham understood this; this is why he said "I am ready (for whatever You are going to tell me to do)."
- **RADAK**... the vision took place at night, seeing that immediately afterwards the Torah reports Avraham as rising early in the morning.
- **FRIEDMAN**... The Greek and Samaritan versions have his name called twice here: "Abraham, Abraham." This parallels the call by the angel later (v. 11), by which Abraham is stopped from sacrificing Isaac. Thus the instruction to sacrifice him and the instruction to hold back are given equal weight. This also parallels the repetition of Moses' name in God's first words to him at the burning bush (Exod. 3:4) and the repetition of Samuel's name the first time God speaks to him (1 Sam. 3:10). This appears to be a mark of divine communication at significant moments in the biblical narrative. What stands out about Abraham is that it comes here in the Aqedah rather than the first time that God speaks to him. This marks the near-sacrifice as defining event in Abraham's life and in the destiny of his descendants.

Here I am...

- **JPS**...Hebrew *hinneni* expresses an attitude of attentiveness and receptivity. It is the only word Abraham utters to God in the entire episode.
- **RASHI**... Such is the answer of the pious: it is an expression of meekness and readiness (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayera 22).
- **FOX**...A term frequently used to convey readiness, usually in relation to God's command or address.

²¹ Rabbi Ovadia ben Jacob Sforino (1475-1550) was a biblical commentator, philosopher, and physician from Italy.

²² Tur HaAroch, a commentary on the Torah, is written by R' Jacob ben Asher (c. 1269 - c. 1343), known as Ba'al ha-Turim.

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V. 2

JPS... The enormity of God's request and the agonizing nature of the decision to be made are conveyed through the cumulative effect of the descriptive terms set forth in ascending order of endearment. This is the same device used in God's first call to Abraham in 12:1.

OR HACHAIM... *Tanchuma 22* on our verse describes Abraham as spending the whole night asking Sarah to permit him to take Isaac with him to teach him Torah.... Our verse also contains a hint that seeing that Isaac had not previously been tested, Abraham should broach the matter to him in a manner that would secure Isaac's willingness. Abraham should convince Isaac that by agreeing to serve as an offering to God he would achieve great moral stature.

FRIEDMAN... If the issue were only a matter of identification, just the name Isaac would have been sufficient; but the issue, we are told explicitly in the first verse of the story, is the test. The fourfold, heartrending identification creates background for all that is to come. Now Abraham's unquestioning obedience is understood against this background: "your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac." The otherwise minor temporal note that "Abraham got up early in the morning" to do the deed becomes a fact worthy of wonder and interpretation against the background of "your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac." The notation that he puts the wood for the sacrificial fire on Isaac himself to carry becomes an ironic image. Abraham's words to the servants who accompany them—"I and the boy: we'll go over there, and we'll bow, and we'll come back to you"—become not only enigmatic but emotionally charged. (Does his saying "we'll come back" suggest extraordinary faith? one last hope? Or is it constructed so as not to frighten Isaac?) The words of the dialogue between the father and son become charged by this background as well, as Isaac adds the phrase "my father" in his question addressed to Abraham, and Abraham adds "my son" in each sentence in response. (The words "son" and "father" occur twelve times in the story and are, in almost every case, unnecessary for identification.) The dialogue moreover begins and ends with the words "and the two of them went together," another mundane phrase turned into a remarkable one by what has preceded.

Take your son...

- **JPS...** The Hebrew adds the participle *na'* to the imperative, which usually softens the command to an entreaty, as noted in Sanhedrin 89b, Genesis Rabba 55:7, and Rashi's commentary. Abraham has absolute freedom of choice. Should he refuse, he would not incur any guilt.
- **OR HACHAIM...** God meant for Abraham to proceed immediately and not to ask for time before carrying out the command, such as happened with the daughter of Yiftach (Judges 11,37) who had asked to be given two months before becoming her father's sacrifice to God.
- **RAMBAN...** Since Isaac was the son of the mistress and he alone was to be the one to carry his name, He called him Abraham's only son. The description was for the purpose of magnifying the command, thus saying: "Take now thy only son, the beloved one, Isaac, and bring him up before Me as a burnt-offering."

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ALTER...your only one... Some scholars, bothered by the technical inaccuracy of the term, have followed an ancient reading of *yadid*, “favored one,” instead of the Masoretic *yahid*. This seriously misses the point that in regard to Abraham’s feelings, Isaac, this sole son by his legitimate wife, is his only one. The phrase “your son, your only one,” will return as a thematic refrain at the end of the story (verses 12, 16).

JPS...whom you love... This is the first use of the key biblical stem *’-h-v*, significantly in the parent-child relationship. Its next usage (24:67) is in the husband-wife relationship.

your son, your only one, the one you love, Isaac...

- **RASHI...** Abraham said to God, “I have two sons”. “He answered him, “Thine only son”. Abraham said, “This one is the only son of his mother and the other is the only son of his mother”. God then said, “the one whom thou lovest”. Abraham replied, “I love both of them”. Whereupon God said “even Isaac”. Why did He not disclose this to him at the very first? So as not to confuse him suddenly lest his mind become distracted and bewildered and in his confused state he would involuntarily consent, when there would have been no merit in his sacrifice, and so that he might more highly value God’s command and that God might reward him for the increasing sacrifice demanded by obedience to each and every expression used here (Genesis Rabbah 55:7).
 - **SIFTEI HACHAMIM**²³... *So that He not confuse him suddenly, and become bewildered...* I.e., so people will not say that Hashem confused him and that is why he did it, but otherwise he would have refrained....
- **OR HACHAIM...** Here the Torah alludes to three levels of love that God demands of each Jew, i.e. to love God with all his heart, all his soul, and all his financial resources (Deut. 6:5). The word *בִּנְיָ*, *bincha*, alludes to the heart; nothing is closer to a man's heart than the love for his children. Concerning love with one's soul, the Torah mentions *יְהִידְכָּ*, *yehidcha*; when a person has no children he is alone and considered as dead. Love with one's soul is therefore love with the only thing one has left to love with. The words *אֲשֶׁר אֵהָבָה*, *asher ahavta*, refer to one's possessions; God meant that Abraham loved Isaac more than all his other possessions. God's test consisted of Abraham demonstrating that though he loved Isaac from all these perspectives he was yet willing to give him up to God in the form of a total offering.
- **RADAK...** even though he is your only one and you love him very much as he has been born to you by your beloved wife when both of you were already well into your old age, and although My request is a very difficult one, I am asking you to do this.
- **FOX...** The name [Yitzhak] is left until the end of the phrase to heighten tension.
- **ALTER...** The Hebrew syntactic chain is exquisitely forged to carry a dramatic burden, and the sundry attempts of English translators from the King James Version to the present to rearrange it are misguided. The classical Midrash, followed by Rashi, beautifully catches the resonance of the order of terms. Rashi’s concise version is as follows: “*Your son*. He said to

²³ Sifte Chachamim was a commentary on Rashi’s commentary on Torah. It was written by Shabbethai ben Joseph Bass (1641-1718).

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Him, 'I have two sons.' He said to him, 'Your only one.' He said, 'This one is an only one to his mother and this one is an only one to his mother.' He said to him, 'Whom you love.' He said to him, 'I love both of them.' He said to him, 'Isaac,'" Although the human object of God's terrible imperative does not actually speak in the biblical text, this midrashic dialogue demonstrates a fine responsiveness to how the tense stance of the addressee is intimated through the words of the addresser in a one-sided dialogue.

RABBEINU BAHYA...and go for yourself, etc... Avraham underwent ten trials of his faith. The first one commenced with the words לך לך, *lech lecha*, "go for yourself," and the last one concluded with the introduction לך לך, *lech lecha*, "go for yourself." Avraham scored perfect marks each time (Avot 5:3). The first trial was "leave your country;" the last one was the binding of Yitzchak.

the land of Moriah...

- **JPS...** See Excursus 16 for a discussion of the problems and interpretations of the name.

- **Excursus 16: The Land of Moriah (22:2)**

This place-name is replete with difficulties. The context suggests some well-known locality, for Abraham knows at once where to go. The area is hilly and apparently sparsely wooded. It lies three days' journey from Beer-sheba on foot, though the direction is not stated. Yet "the land of Moriah" is never mentioned again in the Bible or in any independent extra-biblical source....

The derivation of the word is uncertain. Our chapter clearly reflects popular etymology based on *r- 'h*, "to see," which appears in verses 4, 8, and 14. It is this that lies behind the ancient versions' "vision" and probably also explains the Septuagint's "lofty country"—that is, visible from afar. The same association with *r- 'h* is suggested by the words "on Mount Moriah where He appeared (Heb. *nir'ah*) to David" in 2 Chronicles 3:1. It also finds expression in the explanation of R. Judah²⁴ in Genesis Rabba 55:9 that *moriah* means "the place I shall show you (Heb. *mar'eh*)."

A different etymology is implied by "you fear (Heb. *yere* ') God" in verse 12, which interprets the term as though it were composed of *mora' -yah*, "fear of the Lord," and most likely explains the Targums. Saadiah, too, renders the phrase "the land of worship" and R. Jannai²⁵ in Tanhuma *Va-yera* ' 46f. says that it is so called because it is "the places from which fear [of God] emanated to the world."

It is clear that the narrative reflects both verbs—*r- 'h* and *y-r- '—*as popular etymologies for *moriah*. The assonance in these two provides frequent occasion for word play elsewhere in the Bible; it is not unlikely that a similar device is at work here.

A third solution involves the stem *y-r-h*, "to teach," as suggested by Ta'anit 16a, Genesis Rabba 55:0, and Tanhuma *Va-yera* ' 45. Moriah is the place "from which teaching issued to the world." The identification with Jerusalem (*yeru-shalem*) found in 2

²⁴ Rabbi Judah bar Ilai, or Yehuda bar Ma'arava, was a halakhist and aggadist from the 2nd century in Israel.

²⁵ Rabbi Yannai was a halakhist and aggadist who lived in the 3rd century in Israel.

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Chronicles 3:1 may also reflect this connection. Hebrew *moriah* can well be a feminine form of *moreh*, “teacher.” Actually, the fact that there are place-names compounded of *moreh*, such as “the terebinth of Moreh” and Gibeath-moreh, renders this explanation most attractive, particularly since it has the first and last revelation of God to Abraham take place at sites with similar sounding names, thus contributing to the literary framework within which the biography of the patriarch is encased.

Jewish tradition associates Mount Moriah with the site of the Temple, the earliest source being 2 Chronicles 3:1: “Solomon began to build the House of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah.” The same identification is found in the Book of Jubilees 18:13 and is accepted by Josephus, the Targums, and the Talmud (Ta’an. 16a). Without doubt, verse 14, which mentions “the mount of the LORD,” is the main justification for the equation. Zion is called “the mountain of the LORD” in several biblical passages. One difficulty is that Jerusalem is not a three-day trek from Beer-sheba, and it would hardly have been necessary to carry a supply of wood to that region. Also, identifying the mount with Jerusalem means that the text cannot be earlier than David’s time. Indeed, the commentary on verse 14 by Joseph b. Eliezer Bonfils²⁶ explicitly states: “Moses did not write this verse, but the latter prophets wrote it.”

No explanation is given in the narrative for the choice of Moriah as the site of the Akedah. It may then have been a well-known and ancient place of worship. Indeed, there seems to be some testimony for this in the text. First, there is the repeated use of *ha-makom* (v. 3, 4, 9), ...often has the sense of “sacred place.” Then there is the undeniable fact that when Abraham tells his servants that they will go up to “the place” to “worship” (v. 5), it is taken as a perfectly natural thing to do. Further, Abraham builds “*the* altar” (v. 9). The use of the definite article, obscured in the English, implies more the restoration of an existing altar than the erection of a new one. This reasoning assumes added force once we realize that this is the only such usage with a definite article in connection with a patriarchal altar not previously referred to. Finally, the descriptive term “mount of the LORD” (v. 14) clearly implies a site with a cultic tradition.

The present state of our knowledge does not enable us to resolve the problems connected with “the land of Moriah.” We are probably dealing with a name so ancient that its original location and meaning were already lost by the time the biblical narrative was committed to writing.

- **KLI YAKAR**²⁷... It mentioned ‘go you’ meaning go to your essence, because from there the origin of human physicality was taken, from the place of which it is said “An altar of earth you shall make for Me...” (Shemot 20:21) as was explained in the portion of Lech Lecha (Bereshit 12:1). In the word Moriah, the yud hey appears superfluous, because it is said “I will go to the mountain of myrrh (mor)...” (Shir HaShirim 4:6) However, there is the place of the foundation stone, from which two worlds created with the letters yud hey were

²⁶ Joseph b. Eliezer Bonfils was a 14th century Spanish author who wrote *Tzafnat Paneach*, a supercommentary on Abraham ibn Ezra’s commentary.

²⁷ Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser (1809-1879) was a Hebrew grammarian and Biblical commentator from the Russian Empire.

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founded, because the gate of heaven is there, and there the union between the Holy One and Israel is made complete, like the cleaving of a man to his wife between whom the name yud hey mediates, and His beloved said fifteen (songs of praise) parallel to the fifteen (yud hey) steps which came up from the Court of Women. These letters are also a sign of the Holy Temple which would be built there after the fifteen generations from Avraham to Shlomo.

- **RASHI...** This is Jerusalem, and so we find in Chronicles (2 Chronicles 3:1) “To build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in Mount Moriah”. Our Rabbis have explained that it is called Moriah — Instruction — because from it (i.e. from the Temple built on that mountain) instruction הוראה came forth to Israel (Genesis Rabbah 55:7). Onkelos translates it by “the land of the Divine Service”. He takes it as having reference to the offering of incense brought in the Temple on Moriah in which there were myrrh (מור) nard and other spices.
- **TUR HAARUCH...** ...The word מוריה, means fear and reverence, as at that site God is being revered and people are in awe of Him. This is also what *Midrash Rabbah* had in mind when focusing on the line (verse 9), “Avraham erected there the altar.” Avraham did not build a new altar, but used an altar on which religious people in former years had offered their sacrifices to the God in heaven. Regarding the plain meaning of the text, the words אל ארץ המוריה mean that this was a region where a variety of spices could be found, including first and foremost מור, myrrh. Whereas the Torah here refers to the whole region as ארץ המוריה, Ezra, in a parallel reference in Chronicles calls only the mountain הר המוריה (Chronicles II 3:1) Avraham had been familiar with the region but not with the specific mountain God had in mind. This is why God instructed him to go to the general region, and once there, He would point out the specific mountain He had in mind. This mountain had already become a point on earth which God was especially fond of, and on which He had selected to make His terrestrial residence when the time was ripe. The merit Avraham would acquire by offering his beloved son there to God as a sacrifice would further endow this site so that prayers addressed to God from there in the Temple would be especially effective.
- **RAMBAN...** Onkelos matched that which the Sages interpreted in Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer 31, where they said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, showed Abraham the altar with a finger. He said to him, ‘This is the altar on which the first man sacrificed. This is the altar on which Cain and Abel sacrificed. This is the altar on which Noah and his sons sacrificed.’ For it is said, *And Abraham built ‘hamizbei’ach’ (the altar) there*, (v. 9). *mizbei’ach* (an altar) is not written here, rather, *hamizbei’ach (the altar)*. This is the altar on which the predecessors have sacrificed.”
- **ALTER...** Though traditional exegesis, supported by the reference to the Mount of the LORD at the end of the tale, identifies this with Jerusalem, the actual location remains in doubt. In any case, there is an assonance between “Moriah” and *yir’eh*, “he sees,” the thematic key word of the resolution of the story.

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and offer him up there as burnt offering...

- **CHIZKUNI...** When Avraham is supposed to have asked God: “how can I offer a burnt offering in the absence of the priest whose duty it is to perform such rites? God answered that Avraham had been appointed as a priest by Him already. (B’reshit Rabbah 55:7)....
- **RASHI...** He did not say, “Slay him”, because the Holy One, blessed be He, did not desire that he should slay him, but he told him to bring him up to the mountain to prepare him as a burnt offering. So when he had taken him up, God said to him, “Bring him down” (Genesis Rabbah 56:8).
- **RABBEINU BAHYA...** The letter ל in front of the word עולה is somewhat puzzling. Why did the Torah not simply write ויהעלהו שם עולה, and I would have known exactly what was meant? According to the plain meaning of the text the letter ל here means “instead.” The verse means: “offer him there in lieu of a burnt-offering.” ...If the meaning of our verse had been that God actually wanted Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak as a burnt offering, how could He have countermanded His own instructions afterwards? Avraham misunderstood God out of his great love for Him. He thought God really wanted him to slaughter Yitzchak and burn his remains as a burnt-offering. Seeing that God had only wanted to “test” Avraham, He did not command him to actually slaughter Yitzchak. This is the mystical dimension of Jeremiah 19:5, “which I did not command, nor ever said, nor had it ever occurred to Me.” [The prophet speaks of the abominable cult of human sacrifice. Ed. The Talmud Taanit 4, adds that the words: “it had never occurred to Me,” refer to the actual slaughtering of Yitzchak].

It is also possible that the wording of this commandment contains within it the mystical dimension applicable to the offering of any (animal) sacrifice. The word לעולה would be an allusion to the tenth emanation, the emanation which is the “link” from a terrestrial to a celestial dimension. The word לעולה then means: “as a means of rising to spiritually lofty dimensions.” It is remarkable that the same formulation appears again when Avraham had offered a ram in lieu of Yitzchak. The Torah writes; ויעלהו לעולה תחת בנו, “he offered it as a burnt-offering in lieu of his son.” By rights the Torah should merely have written ויעלהו עולה. We also find that when Yitzchak had inquired about the absence of the lamb for the offering, that he had said: ואיה השה לעולה “and where is the lamb for the offering?” When his father answered him he also used the word לעולה in his reply. It seems clear from the repeated use of the letter ל when there was no need for it, that we are dealing with an additional dimension of what underlies the entire episode of the עקדה, i.e. it was intended to be a preamble to ascension of the participants to a higher, loftier spiritual dimension. The Torah teaches here that the attainment of such loftier spiritual dimensions is tied to the offering of the bodies of the animals being sacrificed. We may combine the extra letter ל with the letter ה in the word המזבח in verse 9 [which was also superfluous seeing we had not previously heard about “the” altar], to make לה “for God”, i.e. for a loftier spiritual dimension.” The intelligent reader will draw the correct conclusions.

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upon the height...

- **IBN EZRA...** The temple was later built on this mountain. This is explicitly stated in Scripture: *So Solomon built the house on Mount Moriah.* (Cf. I Kings 6:14 and II Chron. 3:1. The verse quoted by I.E. does not appear anywhere in the Bible. It is a composite of these two verses.) It was not a very tall mountain.
- **RADAK...** even now God did not tell Avraham precisely on which mountain he was to offer up Yitzchok as a burnt offering. Instead, God only said: אשר אמר אליך, “which I will tell you”, just as at the time when Avraham had been told to leave Charan and move to the Land of Canaan in 12:1 he had been told only to move to a country which God would specify later on. At that time Avraham had correctly assumed that he was to set out in the direction of the Land of Canaan. The absence of this detail in both instances was to show us the readers that instead of questioning God on details, Avraham set out to undertake difficult tasks without looking for any excuse to delay carrying out God’s instructions. It would have been so easy to ask God why, if he was to offer Yitzchok as a sacrifice, he first had to travel a long distance to the site where this was to take place. After all, we are speaking about a man of 137 years of age. Actually, if we do not err, God had two good reasons why He told Avraham what to do in such an ambivalent fashion. Firstly, to give Avraham additional credit for complying with a command which was wrapped in a riddle, without questioning God about it. If God had asked him to do this at once near his home, Avraham would not have had time to recover from the initial shock after hearing God’s instructions. If, after having had time to digest the implications of what had been asked of him, Avraham proceeded without hesitating, this is even more to his credit. The second reason why God worded the instructions in the manner in which the Torah records them, is to teach us that the site where this binding eventually took place is such a holy site; moreover after Avraham named the site, we know that it is one where the attribute of Justice may be changed to the attribute of Mercy due to the manner in which man relates to God’s commands. Not only that, but man learned that sometimes the intention behind an action is worth more to God than the action itself, so that the binding of Yitzchok rated in God’s eyes as if his father had actually sacrificed him.
- **RASHI...** The Holy One, blessed be He, first makes the righteous expectant and only afterwards discloses fully to them his intention — and all this in order to augment their reward.

JPS... *that I will point out...* The mode of communication is not specified.