

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

	<b>FOX</b>	<b>JPS</b>	<b>HEBREW</b>
<b>1</b>	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 וַיִּבְחָלֵהוּ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי:
<b>2</b>	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 וְאֶשְׂר־אֹהֲבָתְךָ אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ־לְךָ אֶל־אֶרֶץ מִמְרִיָּה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אֶת־הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר־אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ:
<b>3</b>	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 וַיִּתְחַבֵּשׁ אֶת־תְּמָרוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁנֵי נְעָרָיו אֹתוֹ וְאֵת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּבְקַע עֵצִים לְעֹלָה וַיָּקֶם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אָמַר־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים:
<b>4</b>	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:
<b>5</b>	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־לְכֶם־פֹּה עִם־הַחֲמוֹר וְאֲנִי וְהַנְּעָר נִלְכָּה עַל־פֹּה וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנָשׁוּבָה אֵלֵיכֶם:
<b>6</b>	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:
<b>7</b>	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 אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר

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

	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 בְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ וְהָעֵצִים וְאַיִה הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה:
<b>8</b>	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 בְנִי וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו:
<b>9</b>	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 וַיְבַן שָׁם אַבְרָהָם אֶת-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיַּעֲרֹךְ אֶת-הָעֵצִים וַיַּעֲקֹב אֶת-יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתוֹ עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִמַּעַל לְעֵצִים:
<b>10</b>	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-כַּף וַיִּקַּח אֶת-הַמַּאֲכָלֶת לְשַׁחֵט אֶת-בְּנוֹ:
<b>11</b>	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:
<b>12</b>	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 וְאַל-תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוּמָה כִּי עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי-יִרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶתָּה וְלֹא חָשַׁכְתָּ אֶת-בְּנֶךָ אֶת-יְחִידְךָ מִמֶּנִּי:
<b>13</b>	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 אַחַר נֶאֱסָז בַּסִּבְוָה בְּקַרְנָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת-הָאֵיל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה תַּחַת בְּנוֹ:

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

<b>14</b>	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 שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא יְהוָה יִרְאֶה אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הַיּוֹם בְּהַר יְהוָה יִרְאֶה:
<b>15</b>	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 אֶל־אַבְרָהָם שְׁנִית מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם:
<b>16</b>	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 חָשַׁכְתָּ אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יְחִידִי:
<b>17</b>	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 אַבְרָם וְהָרְבָה אַרְבָּה אֶת־זַרְעוֹ כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחוֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם וַיִּרְשׁ זַרְעוֹ אֶת שַׁעַר אֹיְבָיו:
<b>18</b>	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 בְזַרְעוֹ כָּל־גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ עַקְבֵי אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלִי:
<b>19</b>	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־בְּעֵר 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.

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

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

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

negotiations with relations (Chap. 13), allies (Chap. 14), local princes (Chap. 20), and even God himself (Chap. 18), here falls completely silent.

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<sup>1</sup>...** 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

---

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

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

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 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.

- **CHIZKUNI**<sup>2</sup>... according to Rashi<sup>3</sup>, 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 Hunna<sup>4</sup> 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 HACHAIM**<sup>5</sup>... 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

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

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

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

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

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

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. 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.
- **RADAK<sup>6</sup>...** 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

---

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

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

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 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**<sup>7</sup>... Some say that the word *nissah* (did prove, tested) is a variation of *nissa* (lifted up),<sup>8</sup> with the *sin* replacing the *samekh*<sup>9</sup> and the *heh* replacing the *alef*.<sup>10</sup> However, the plain meaning of the entire chapter contradicts this interpretation.<sup>11</sup> 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).<sup>12</sup> Saadiah Gaon<sup>13</sup> 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

---

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

<sup>8</sup> *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.*

<sup>9</sup> *Nissah is spelled nun, samekh, heh ; nassah is spelled nun, sin, alef.*

<sup>10</sup> *The heh in nissah, like the alef in nasa, is silent.*

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

<sup>12</sup> *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.*

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

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

placed him on the altar?<sup>14</sup> 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 up as a burnt offering.<sup>15</sup> 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*.<sup>16</sup> The reason God tested Abraham was in order to reward him.

- **OR HACHAIM...**The Torah adds the conjunctive letter ך before the word אלוקים to remind us that this was not Abraham's only test, only the most recent and most difficult one.
- **RAMBAN**<sup>17</sup>... 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.

---

<sup>14</sup> Cf. verse 5. In other words, no one was there to witness his act.

<sup>15</sup> The word translated as *offer him* (ve-ha’alehu) literally means *bring him up*.

<sup>16</sup> *God did not change His mind. He never intended for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.*

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

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

- **RABBEINU BAHYA**<sup>18</sup>... 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.” Onkelos<sup>19</sup> translates it thus in 40:6 where he explains the word זועפים as נסיים. 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

---

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

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

### **Temple Beth-El Torah Study...Genesis 22:1-19**

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

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

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 Yonathan<sup>20</sup> 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)."

---

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

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

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**<sup>21</sup>... 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**<sup>22</sup>... Some commentators understand the word נסח to mean "elevate to a higher stature" in a spiritual sense, such as Kings II The meaning would be parallel to נשא with the letter ש instead of ט.

### *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.

---

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

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

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

### 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."

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

**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**<sup>23</sup>... *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 *בִּנְךָ*, *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 *יְחִידְךָ*, *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

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

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

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. Judah<sup>24</sup> 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. Jannai<sup>25</sup> 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

---

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

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

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

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 Bonfils<sup>26</sup> 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**<sup>27</sup>... 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

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

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

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

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 המוריה ארץ 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.

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

*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.

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

*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.

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

**V. 3-10... JPS...Abraham Meets the Challenge...** The patriarch makes no verbal response, not even *hinneni*, “Here I am!” He who was so daringly eloquent on behalf of the people of Sodom surrenders in total silence to his own bitter personal destiny. He does not question divine constancy. Early next morning, the old man rises to fulfill the divine charge. He performs a series of preparatory acts all described with an economy of words appropriate to the somber silence that pervades the scene. Remarkably, Sarah is ignored throughout the chapter. Early exegesis has Abraham concealing from his wife the true purpose of his journey lest she hinder him from doing God’s bidding.

### V. 3

*Abraham arose early in the morning...*

- **OR HACHAIM...** Abraham acted in line with what we know from Leviticus 7:38, that sacrifices may be brought only by day. Our sages also said (*Zevachim* 98) that one must not bring an offering at night. Abraham therefore set out at an hour that was suitable for bringing an offering. He did not know how far he had to travel and he wanted to have enough time left to offer the sacrifice once he would be at the right place. In view of God having addressed Abraham by day, perhaps he should not have waited until the following day; it is possible that he received the instructions in the late afternoon or that Isaac was not at home at the time. By reporting that Abraham rose early, the Torah explains that the day's delay was not due to any negligence on Abraham's part.
- **RADAK...** he rose early to carry out God’s bidding without telling Sarah anything about it. He was afraid that she might do harm to herself out of her love for Yitzchok.

**RASHI...he saddled his ass...** He himself: he did not order one of his servants to do so, for love disregards the rule imposed on one by his exalted position in life. (“Love” here means Love of God as displayed in obedience to His command.) (Genesis Rabbah 55:8)

*two of his servants...*

- **JPS...** An eminent personage would be accompanied by two attendants.
- **RASHI...** Ishmael and Eliezer. For a man of high standing should not travel without two men as attendants (Leviticus Rabbah 26:7) so that if one needs to ease himself and goes aside for this purpose the other will still remain with him (Midrash Tanchuma, Balak 8)
  - **SIFTEI HACHAMIM... Yishmael and Eliezer...** Rashi knows this because otherwise, what does “his two assistants” mean? Did Avraham have only two assistants? Perforce, it means his special assistants Yishmael and Eliezer. See Bamidbar 22:22 where I answered why Rashi explained Bilaam’s [need for] two assistants differently, [saying: “An esteemed person who travels should take along two people to serve him, and for one to serve the other.”] But the *Maharshal*<sup>28</sup> answered that Rashi explained that Bilaam’s assistants served one another because Bilaam was arrogant and needed service. But Avraham was humble and did not require service; he took care of himself. He took along

---

<sup>28</sup> Solomon Luria (1510-1573) was a teacher and Halachic authority from Poland.

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

two assistants only so he would not be alone when one of them needs to relieve himself. Thus Rashi explained here as he did.

**ALTER...and Isaac his son...** The crucial item is left to the very end. The narrator does not miss a chance in the story to refer to Isaac as “his son” and Abraham as “his father,” thus sharpening the edge of anguish that runs through the tale.

### *He split the wood...*

- **JPS...** Since the exact destination is as yet unknown to him, he cannot be sure he will find fuel there.
- **ALTER...** In a narrative famous for its rigorous economy in reporting physical details, this act of Abraham, wielding an axe and cutting things apart, is ominously singled out for attention.
- **RAMBAN...** This illustrates Abraham’s zeal in performing a commandment for he thought that perhaps there would be no wood in that place, and so he carried it for three days.
- **RABBEINU BAHYA...** Avraham did this already at this stage as he was concerned that when he would arrive at the site he might not find suitable kindling. This demonstrated that he was so eager to carry out God’s command that he carried the wood with him a distance of three days’ journey.

It is also possible that Avraham was aware of the halachic ruling that firewood for the altar which is worm-infested is unfit, and that this is the reason he took wood from his home which he had had a chance to examine for the presence of worms. According to Bereshit Rabbah (55:8) God paid Avraham his reward for having troubled himself to split the firewood when He split the sea of reeds for Avraham’s descendants to walk through on their march out of Egypt. This is alluded to in the text when the Torah describes the splitting of the waters in terms of splitting wood, i.e. ויבקעו המים, “the waters were split” (Exodus 14:21). There is an opinion expressed in the same Midrash that such an interpretation does not do justice to the event, but that both God and Avraham respectively each did what they could to bring about a desired result.

## V. 4

### *On the third day...*

- **JPS...** In biblical consciousness, three days constitute a significant segment of time, particularly in connection with travel. The long interval is crucial to the trial of faith, for Abraham’s instantaneous assent to God’s request may have been impulsive and emotional and without proper consideration. The long trek enables him to regain his composure. It allows time for sober reflection; yet his resolve is not weakened. His decision to obey God is thus seen to be an undoubting act of free will.
- **IBN EZRA...** That he set out from Beersheba.

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

*saw the place from afar...*

- **JPS...**Is it an existing sacred site, or does he instinctively know the spot? The sight of it “from afar” immediately stirs consciousness of the actuality of the impending horror. According to rabbinic legend, Abraham and Isaac, but not the attendants, saw a cloud hovering over one of the hills.
- **RABBEINU BAHYA...** According to Tanchuma Vayera 23, at that point Avraham asked Yitzchak: “Do you see what I see?” Yitzchak answered: “I see a beautiful mountain which has a cloud attached to it.” Thereupon Avraham said to the two lads: “Do you see anything unusual?” They said: “we do not see anything unusual at all, only deserts and a bare mountain.” Thereupon Avraham said to them: “you and the donkey stay here,” (seeing they had not noticed anything beyond what also the donkey must have seen). He added that he and Yitzchak would go somewhat further, i.e. ואני והנער נלכה עד כה. Avraham may have unwittingly chosen the expression כה (a Freudian slip) seeing that at the covenant between the pieces in Genesis 15:5 God had assured him כה יהיה זרעך, “so will be your descendants.” He must have wondered how this statement could be reconciled with what he was being asked to do at that time. Alternatively, he meant he would go to face the God who had assured him of numerous offspring at a time when he had not yet fathered even Ishmael.
- **SFORNO...** he was granted additional eyesight to espy this place from a greater distance than he would normally have been able to see.

### V. 5

*said to his lads...let me and the lad...*

- **ALTER...**An identity of terms, an ironic divergence of meanings—the young men who are his servants (in fact, his slaves) and the boy to whom he fondly refers, whom he thinks he is going to kill.
- **RABBEINU BAHYA...** It is remarkable that the Torah describes a man of 37 years of age such as Yitzchak as נער, “lad.” When you peruse Scripture you will see that this is not as remarkable as it appears at first glance. Joshua is described as a נער at a time when he was 56 years old (Exodus 33:11).

**ALTER...let me...** (Alter’s translation of the verse: “And Abraham said to his lads, ‘Sit you here with the donkey and let me and the lad walk ahead and let us worship and return to you.’”) The Hebrew uses a jussive form for the three verbs, a gentler mode of speech than a flat declarative about future actions.

**CHIZKUNI... you stay here...** Avraham was afraid that if he did not leave them behind they might attempt to stop him from slaughtering his son.

*with the donkey...*

- **CHIZKUNI...** he warned them not to let the donkey graze somewhere.

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

- **RADAK...** he did not take the donkey along so that the lads should not think that they were going to a distant location. Also, there would not be anyone guarding the donkey at the time when he would be occupied with binding and slaughtering Yitzchok. Furthermore, he did not want the donkey to enter such sacred precincts.

**RASHI...yonder/up there...** meaning a short distance: to the place in front of us. The Midrashic explanation (based upon the meaning of כה “thus”) is: I will see where will be (i.e. what will happen to) the promise which God made to me, (Genesis 15:5) “Thus (כה) shall thy seed be” (Genesis Rabbah 56:2).

### *bow down...*

- **FOX...**worship.
- **RADAK...** from these words the lads understood that Avraham would not only prostrate himself there in prayer but would offer an animal as part of such prayer. They reasoned this way, having observed that Avraham took kindling and a knife when going up the mountain. Normally, a reference to השתחויה includes slaughtering a sacrificial animal, as we know from Samuel I 1:3, describing Elkanah’s habits.
- **TUR HAARUCH...** “we will prostrate ourselves (before the [Lord) before returning to you.” According to Ibn Ezra Avraham said this in order not to reveal to Yitzchok as yet what he had in mind. Other commentators suggest that the line be understood as a question: “do you really think that all we will do there is say a prayer and immediately return to you?”

### *we will return...*

- **JPS...** Use of the plural form conceals the true purpose of the journey from Isaac.
- **IBN EZRA...** Some ask, how could Abraham say, *and (we will) come back to you* (v. 5)?<sup>29</sup> Others answer them by saying that Abraham intended to return with Isaac’s bones, and he disguised his intentions so that his young men would wait for him till he returned and Isaac would not know what was about to happen and flee.<sup>30</sup> Our sages, of blessed memory, say that Isaac was thirty-seven years old at the time of his binding. If this be a tradition, we will accept it. However, from a strictly logical point of view it is unacceptable. If Isaac was an adult at this time, then his piety should have been revealed in Scripture and his reward should be double that of his father for willingly having submitted himself to be sacrificed. Yet Scripture says nothing concerning Isaac’s great self-sacrifice. Others say that Isaac was five years old at the time of his binding. This, too, is unacceptable, since Isaac carried the wood for the sacrificial pyre.<sup>31</sup> It thus appears logical to assume that Isaac was close to thirteen years old and that Abraham overpowered him and bound him against his will. Proof of this can be seen from the fact that Abraham hid his intention from Isaac and told him,

---

<sup>29</sup> When he knew that only he would return. He should have said, “and I will return.”

<sup>30</sup> A prophet may tell an untruth if necessary.

<sup>31</sup> A child of five would be unable to carry that much wood.

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

*God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son* (v. 8). Abraham knew that if he said, “You are to be the burnt-offering,” Isaac would quite possibly have fled.

### V. 6

**JPS...Abraham took the wood...** That is, he took it off the beast of burden. He himself carried the dangerous articles—the firestone and the knife—so that the boy not be harmed and the sacrificial victim be unblemished at the moment of slaughter. There is a touch of bitter irony here: Isaac, unaware, cooperates in carrying some of the instruments of his own destruction. He whose name means “laughter” appears to be on the verge of becoming the personification of tragedy.

**JPS...firestone...** Since it is considered unlikely that a flame would be carried for three days, this seems a more likely rendering than “fire”. It could also mean a brazier.

### *knife/the cleaver...*

- **JPS...**The use of the rare Hebrew term *ma'akhelet* in Judges 19:29 in connection with the dissection of a human body and in Proverbs 30:14. in parallelism with “sword” proves that a large and heavy implement is intended, not an ordinary knife. There may be word play here: The instrument of death is *ma'akhelet*, and the rescuing agent is a *mal'akh* (v. 11).
- **ALTER...** ...the Hebrew term here is not the usual biblical term for knife, and makes a good argument that it is a cleaver. Other terms from butchering, rather than sacrifice, are used: to slaughter (verse 10) and to bind (verse 9 –a verb occurring only here but used in rabbinic Hebrew for trussing up the legs of animals).
- **RASHI...** means a knife. It is called מאכלה from אכל to eat, because it devours the meat, — just as you say, (Deuteronomy 32:42) “And my sword shall devour (תאכל) flesh”— or because it makes animal flesh fit for eating (מאכלה) (by killing the animal; because while the animal is living its flesh is unfit for eating). Another explanation: This knife is called מאכלה (and the term is never used of an ordinary knife) because Israel still eats of the reward given for it (Genesis Rabbah 56:3).
  - **SIFTEI HACHAMIM... Because Israel eats of its reward.** Rashi brought both explanations because according to the first one [“it consumes”] a question arises: Why not call it אוכלה? Thus Rashi explains, “it prepares.” But according to this [second] explanation, it should be called סכין, which is its simple meaning. Thus Rashi explains further: “Because Israel eats of its reward.” And the last explanation alone is insufficient, although it answers why it is called מאכלה and not אוכלה or סכין, because why does it say המאכלה, connoting something already known? Until this point a knife was not called a מאכלה! Scripture calls it so only now, because of this incident. Therefore, Rashi explains that “it consumes” and “it prepares,” and therefore it is a term that is used for every knife. (R. Meir Stern<sup>32</sup>)

<sup>32</sup> I am not sure who this is referring to. There is a contemporary R. Meir Stern who is a current dean of a yeshiva in the USA and a Talmud scholar.

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

*the two walked off together...*

- **JPS...** There is perfect rapport between the two, encompassed as they are in mutual solitariness and enveloped in silence. The tension between the unsuspecting innocence of the son and the unuttered agony of the father does not disturb the harmony.
- **FOX...** Between these two statements (v. 6 and 8) is Avraham's successful deflection of Yitzhak's question, and perhaps the hint of a happy ending.
- **RASHI...** Abraham who was aware that he was going to slay his son walked along with the same willingness and joy as Isaac who had no idea of the matter.

### V. 7-8

**JPS...** The oppressive silence is broken by Isaac's simple query, which is at once artless and penetrating. Is a suspicion of the awful truth beginning to dawn upon the boy? If so, the father's equivocal reply must surely sustain whatever doubts there are, especially in an age when human sacrifice is possible. The poignant tension inherent in the situation is heightened by the repetition of the words "father" and "son." The bond between the two remains unbroken. The brief dialogue over—the only such recorded between Isaac and his father—they continue their fateful trek in perfect harmony.

**FRIEDMAN...** Most remarkable of all is the exchange between Abraham and Isaac over the obvious absence of an animal to be sacrificed. Isaac says, "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" To appreciate the artistry of the wording of Abraham's answer, we must keep in mind that the Hebrew has no punctuation. The text says: "God will see to the sheep for the burnt offering my son"—which can be understood in two ways. The last two words can be read as a touching epithet:

"God will see to the sheep for the burnt offering, my son."

But they can also be read as a fearful irony:

"God will see to the sheep for the burnt offering: *My son.*"

—subtly conveying the truth that Isaac himself is to be the sheep for the sacrifice.

And so the short passage, which like the entire chapter expresses no emotions explicitly, reads like a tightly packed contained whose contents may burst in a moment:

And the two of them went together.

And Isaac said to Abraham his father; he said, "My father."

And he said, "I'm here, my son."

And he said, "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?"

And Abraham said, "God will see to the sheep for the burnt offering my son."

And the two of them went together.

The denouement of the story, in which Isaac is spared, is no less charged by all of this expressed and unexpressed background. Indeed, Abraham's feelings (relief? gratitude? reverence? confusion?) are likewise not a part of the narrative. There is rather a reminiscence of the original wording, as God twice says to Abraham that now all is well because "You didn't

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

hold back *your son, your only one*" (22:12, 15; cf. 22:2). As biblical interpreters noted centuries ago, the wording suggests that the reward at the end is in proportion to the difficulty of the test as expressed at the beginning.

**CLI YAKAR... *Father*.** Suspecting that Avraham intended to sacrifice him and not realizing that it was Hashem's command, Yitzchok tested him to see whether he still responded to the name "Father." ***Here I am, my son*.** Avraham assured him that he still his loving father. ***But where is the lamb*.** If he still loved him, what was he planning to offer? ***Elokim will show the lamb*.** Avraham hinted that he was indeed to be the offering, but it was Hashem who had chosen him.

**RABBEINU BAHYA...** "he said: 'here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt-offering?'" Avraham answered him that "God will select the lamb for the offering,--my son." From the way Avraham placed the colon in this verse, Yitzchak understood that he had been chosen to be the "lamb." In spite of this realization, the Torah continues: "they continued to walk together", i.e. they were of one mind. In order to make this point clear, the Torah had to repeat the sentence: "they walked together." The release of the information that Yitzchak was going to be the victim did not drive a wedge between his relations with his father. At the time the Torah wrote these words for the first time, Yitzchak did not yet know that he was going to be the sacrifice.

Many people asked who of the two principal characters in this drama displayed greater love and devotion vis-a-vis God? Was it Avraham who had to perform this commandment of slaughtering his son with his own hands, or was it Yitzchak who had to submit to being slaughtered? Some people argue that Avraham displayed greater strength seeing that it is easier to suffer something passively without resisting than to summon the emotional fortitude to kill one's beloved son with one's own hands. Besides, according to the general principle that passive participation in a sin or in the performance of a mitzvah is inferior to active participation, there can be no question that Avraham's part in this drama was by far the greater of the two.

Those who argue that Yitzchak's ("sacrifice") was the greater of the two, point to the difference between fulfilling a command by God and one by one's father. Avraham, after all, had been commanded to do what he set out to do by God Himself, whereas Yitzchak had to take his father's word for it that he had been so commanded. If, nonetheless, Yitzchak did not make an issue of the matter, this demonstrates his absolute faith both in God and in his father.

Personally, I believe the argument which claims that Avraham displayed greater strength of faith is the correct one. Yitzchak, though he had not been commanded to lay down his life by God directly, knew that his father was an accredited prophet, and that therefore he was under an obligation to consider his father's instructions as equivalent to God's instructions. We are told in Deut.18:19 concerning the commandment to listen to the instructions of an accredited prophet: "it shall be that the man who will not hearken to My words which he shall speak in My name, I shall exact it from him." This is the reason that Avraham and not Yitzchak was given

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

this commandment; God wanted to give Avraham the opportunity to fulfil His commandment and to demonstrate the power of his faith.

### V. 7

#### *Father!...*

- **ALTER...**The Hebrew is literally “My father,” but that noun with the possessive ending is the form of intimate address in biblical Hebrew, like *Abba* in postbiblical Hebrew.
- **RABBEINU BAHYA...** This verse contains four statements and I do not know why. In Bereshit Rabbah 56:5 the words “Yitzchak said to Avraham” are understood to mean that Samael came to Avraham and challenged him: “what kind of father are you? Are you really going to slaughter a son who has been born to you when you were already one hundred years old?” Avraham answered “nevertheless.” Thereupon Samael addressed Yitzchak saying: “you son of a disappointed mother! He (your father) is going to slaughter you!” Yitzchak answered: “nevertheless.” This is why the Torah wrote twice: “Yitzchak said to his father.” Why do the words “my father” appear twice? In order that his father’s parental mercy be stirred; the exclamation was like that of a man who is in difficulties and, referring to himself, says: “woe to me, woe to me.”

#### *fire and wood...*

- **FOX...**fire i.e., a torch or brand.
- **ALTER...** A moment earlier, we saw the boy loaded with the firewood, the father carrying the fire and the butcher knife. As Gerhard von Rad aptly remarks, “He himself carries the dangerous objects with which the boy could hurt himself, the torch and the knife.” But now, as Isaac questions his father, he passes in silence over the one object that would have seemed scariest to him, however unwitting he may have been of his father’s intention—the sharp-edged butcher knife.

### V. 8

**CHIZKUNI...***God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son...* Even though God had told him that his descendants would become known through his son Yitzchok (21:12), he was afraid that Yitzchok would be slaughtered. He had said to himself: “perhaps Yitzchok has already been intimate with a woman without my having been aware, and that woman had already given birth to a son or a daughter for him, so that God’s promise will be fulfilled even if he dies here.” After all Yitzchok was already 37 years old.

#### *see-for-himself...*

- **FOX...**Or “select.” See the name of the mountain in verse 14, “YHWH Sees.”
- **ALTER...**God will see to... literally, “see for himself.” The idiomatic force is “provide,” but God’s seeing lines up with Abraham’s seeing the place from afar, his seeing the ram, and the seeing on the Mount of the LORD. Beyond the tunnel vision of a trajectory toward child slaughter is a promise of true vision.

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

- **RASHI...** this means as much as: He will look out for and choose a lamb for Himself, and if there will be no lamb for a burnt offering, then, בְּנִי MY SON will be the offering. Although Isaac then understood that he was travelling on to be slain, yet.

### *offering-up...my son...*

- **FOX...** One might read it with a dash instead of a comma, to preserve what may be an ironic answer.
- **RADAK...** Avraham's reply to his son is capable of two interpretations. One interpretation would be that the word בְּנִי *b'ni*, my son, is a response to Yitzchok's cry or question, meaning "I am here my son; God will select the lamb for the burnt offering." In other words: "don't worry God already knows who is going to be the lamb for the offering. He will put it at our disposal." The second interpretation of Avraham's answer would arrange the words as follows: "God will select the lamb for the offering; who is the lamb? It is my son." Yitzchok understood from this that he had been chosen to be the offering. This is why the Torah continues, significantly that they walk together.

**ALTER...and the two of them went together...** The impassive economy of this refrainlike repeated clause is haunting: two people, father and son, together for what threatens to be the last time, together "in one purpose" (Rashi), the father to sacrifice the son.

### V. 9-10

**JPS...** The detailed, laconic description of the various preparatory procedures conveys something of the eternity of that terrible moment in time before the angelic voice is heard. Once again, not a word escapes the father's lips. Isaac too is speechless. The intensity of the anguish is beyond the ability of words to express.

**ALTER...** In contrast to the breathless pace of the narrative as a whole, this sequence inscribes a kind of slow motion: building the altar, laying out the wood, binding the child on top of the wood, reaching out the hand with the butcher knife—until the voice calls out from the heavens.

### V. 9

**RADAK...they arrived at the place...** this refers to Mount Moriah.

**RADAK...which God had told him...** when Avraham and Yitzchok had been walking together (after leaving the lads behind) God told Avraham the exact location, showing it to him in a prophetic vision. According to Bereshit Rabbah 56:2 He showed him either a column of fire over that mountain or a localized pillar of cloud, as we mentioned earlier. According to this aggadic interpretation the words , "which he told him," לוֹ אֵשׁ אָמַר לוֹ refer to the moment when he became aware of this phenomenon and his awareness was the equivalent of what is described in our verses as an אֲמִירָה, a verbal communication.

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

**CHIZKUNI...Abraham built an altar...** Yitzchok did not participate in that activity; the reason that he did not do so was not that he would not have been willing to do so, but his father had hidden him so that Satan would not be able to tempt him, as he had tried to tempt Avraham not to carry out God's request by hurting him so that he would be unfit to serve as an offering.

**RABBEINU BAHYA... the altar...** The letter ה at the beginning of the word המזבה *hamizbeach*, shows that a specific altar was meant, i.e. the altar. According to the plain meaning of the text it means that the altar corresponded halachically to the rules governing such altars in Jewish law, i.e. that they must not be constructed from stones which had been treated with iron tools (compare Exodus 20:22).

A Midrashic approach: (Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer 31) sees in the letter ה which is a definite article an allusion to the altar which Adam had built and on which also Cain and Hevel had offered their respective sacrifices. The site of this altar had been known to be at Mount Moriah. This was also reputed to be the altar on which Noach had offered his thanksgiving to God after the deluge.[The latter detail is difficult to reconcile with the distance Noach would have had to travel from Mount Ararat in North Eastern Turkey to offer his thanks to God. Ed.]

A kabbalistic approach: The meaning of the Midrash we quoted is that the original "recipient" is the final product of the "structure." In other words, there is a causal relationship between the words ויבן, "he built," and the word מזבה, "altar." [I believe a good way of phrasing this may be this. As soon as God had completed "building" the universe with the creation of man, the time had come for man to reciprocate in some form by offering gifts to the Creator by means of the altar. Ed.] Kabbalists view this altar as one on which both terrestrial beings and celestial beings offered sacrifices.... [The altar is viewed as a place where benevolent celestial input to the terrestrial world evokes input by terrestrial man addressed to the celestial spheres. Ed.]

- **Exodus 20:22:** וְאִם-מִזְבֵּחַ אֲבָנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה-לִּי לֹא-תִבְנֶה אֹתוֹן גִּיּוֹת כִּי סִרְבֵּן הַנֶּפֶת עָלֶיהָ וְתִסְלַלָּהּ: And if you make for Me an altar of stones, do not build it of hewn stones; for by wielding your tool upon them you have profaned them.

**RABBEINU BAHYA...he arranged the firewood...** The letter ה at the beginning of the word העצים is a reference to the wood which Avraham had taken with him from home with which we are already familiar. On the other hand, the letter ה may simply teach that not all kinds of wood are acceptable as the kindling for an offering on the altar.

### *bound...*

- **JPS...**The Hebrew stem '-k-d is found nowhere else in the ritual vocabulary of the Bible. In postbiblical texts it is a technical term for the tying together of the forefoot and the hindfoot of an animal or of the two forefeet or two hindfeet.
- **ABARBANEL**<sup>33</sup>... Yitzchok assumed that this was to be a symbolic offering. It was only when Avraham took the knife and marked the place for the cut did he realize that he was actually to be slaughtered. At that moment he called out to Hashem.

<sup>33</sup> Don Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel (1437-1508) was a Portuguese Jewish statesman, philosopher, Bible commentator and financier.

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

- **RABBEINU BAHYA...** We are told in Tanchuma Vayera 23 that when Avraham was about to slaughter his son, that Yitzchak asked to be bound hand and foot in order that he should not invalidate the offering if he were to move at the moment his father would cut his throat.
- **RADAK...** he bound both his hands and his feet so he should not involuntarily kick when the knife would strike him. This was in spite of the fact that Yitzchok was perfectly willing to be the offering. He was afraid that at the last moment he would rebel; this was why he asked his father to tie him securely. (Bereshit Rabbah 56:8)
- **RASHI...** his hands and feet behind him. Hands and feet tied together is what is meant by עקידה “binding”. It is associated in meaning with עקודים in (Genesis 30:35) “[she-goats] that were streaked” — whose ankles were streaked white so that the place where they are bound could be plainly seen.
  - **Genesis 30:35:** וַיִּסַּר בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת-הַתְּיָשִׁים הָעֵקְוִים וְהַטְּלָאִים וְאֶת כָּל-הָעֵזִים הַמְּקֻדָּוֹת וְהַטְּלָאֹת כֹּל: וַיִּתֵּן בְּיַד-בְּנָוָיו: אֲשֶׁר-לָבָן בּוֹ וְכָל-הַיּוֹם בְּפִשְׁבֵּיָם וַיִּתֵּן בְּיַד-בְּנָוָיו: But that same day he removed the streaked and spotted he-goats and all the speckled and spotted she-goats—every one that had white on it—and all the dark-colored sheep, and left them in the charge of his sons.

### V. 10

#### *he took hold of the knife...*

- **DAAT ZKENIM**<sup>34</sup>... This was the knife that would be used in cutting up the flesh of an offering after the animal’s throat had been cut. A different view. The word is used metaphorically, (based on the meaning if אכל “eating,” as the root of the word) it is the instrument that since that time has been feeding Israel throughout history since that time as we all still benefit from Avraham’s having passed this “test.”
- **RABBEINU BAHYA...** According to the Tanchuma..., Yitzchak told his father: “when you tell my mother about what happened, do not tell her while she is standing on the roof or near a well so that she will not fall into the well or to the ground from shock.”

#### *slay...*

- **FOX...**A verb used to describe animal sacrifice; the throat is slit.
- **RADAK...** to first slaughter him before the fire would burn up the body. This is the usual procedure when meat offerings are brought on the altar.

### V. 11-12...JPS...GOD ACKNOWLEDGES ABRAHAM’S FIDELITY

#### V. 11

#### *called to him from heaven...*

- **JPS...** Angels need to travel between heaven and earth, as is clear from 28:12, as well as from place to place on earth, as proved by 18:22. But the critical urgency of the moment

<sup>34</sup> Daat Zkenim is a Torah commentary compiled by later generations of scholars from the Franco-German (Ba’alei HaTosafot) school in the 13th century.

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

precludes their usual personal appearance, such as made to Hagar (r6:7ff.), and dictates this exceptional mode of angelic intervention, just as it did in 21:17.

- **ALTER...** This is nearly identical with the calling-out to Hagar in 21:17. In fact, a whole configuration of parallels between the two stories is invoked. Each of Abraham's sons is threatened with death in the wilderness, one in the presence of his mother, the other in the presence (and by the hand) of his father. In each case the angel intervenes at the critical moment, referring to the son fondly as *na'ar*, "lad." At the center of the story, Abraham's hand holds the knife, Hagar is enjoined to "hold her hand" (the literal meaning of the Hebrew) on the lad. In the end, each of the sons is promised to become progenitor of a great people, the threat to Abraham's continuity having been averted.
- **RABBEINU BAHYA...** ...When Avraham was about to slaughter Yitzchak, an angel called to him from the heaven calling out his name twice. The reason the angel had to repeat Avraham's name was to stop him in time as Avraham was in such a hurry to complete his task and to slaughter Yitzchak. (compare Tanchuma Vayera 23). He said: "do not stretch out your hand, etc." Avraham replied: "who are you?" The angel responded: "I am an angel of God." Avraham retorted: "when I was instructed to offer Yitzchak as a sacrifice God told me personally. Now that He apparently wants me to desist, He would have to tell me personally." Thereupon the Torah (verse 16) writes: "An angel called out to Avraham a second time from the heaven saying to Avraham: "I have sworn an oath by Myself says the Lord, etc." When Avraham heard this he said "You have sworn;" "I have also sworn an oath that I will not descend from this altar until I have said to You what is on my mind. Did You not first say to me כִּהְיֵה זֶרַעךָ, 'this is how numerous your descendants will be?' Who did You have in mind would be the one from whom these descendants would come forth?" God answered "from Yitzchak." Thereupon Avraham said This is the sort of thing I meant to answer you: 'Yesterday You told me that my descendants will be known though Yitzchak and now You told me to offer him as a burnt-offering! I suppressed my impulse to ask You all these questions. Now, if and when my descendants will sin and they will experience difficulties, I want You to suppress Your feelings when You punish them remembering that I suppressed my inclination to ask You some embarrassing questions. I want You to consider as if Yitzchak's ashes had already been piled up on this altar, as if his blood had been sprinkled on it and as a result You will forgive the transgressions of my offspring.'
- **RADAK...** he heard a voice without seeing a visual image.
- **TUR HAARUCH...** Why did the angel call from the celestial regions instead of first descending to earth and addressing Avraham, as had occurred on other occasions? The interference had become such an urgent matter that he was afraid that he would be too late, Avraham having already concluded the act of slaughtering Yitzchok.
- **RABBEINU BAHYA...** You also need to know that the apparently strange phenomenon in this paragraph, i.e. that God is the one who subjects Avraham to the trial whereas the angel prevented him from going through with it, needs to be understood as follows: The "angel" mentioned in our paragraph is not of the category of the נִפְרָדִים, "disembodied spiritual creatures," but it belonged to what are known as the נְטִיעוֹת, "the emanations of God." [a

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

divine voice much closer to God's Essence than "mere" angels. Ed.] Had the angel who called out to Avraham and instructed him to desist belonged to the category known as נפרדים, Avraham would have ignored him, would not have allowed himself to be countermanded by a subordinate of the One who had instructed him in the first place. Moreover, it is quite unthinkable that an angel of the "lower" category נפרדים would have been allowed to say to Avraham מני ממני, "and you did not withhold your son from Me." He would have had to say: "you have not withheld your son from Him." All of this proves that the voice which the Torah describes as emanating from an "angel of God," was of a superior divine level. This "angel" is also known as the "great angel," who manifested himself in Exodus 14:19 when the Torah describes him as traveling in front of the encampment of the Jewish people (performing all kinds of miracles). The words מלאך האלוהים employed there by the Torah do not mean "angel of the Lord," i.e. the word מלאך is not a possessive clause, the angel being merely an attribute of God. The word האלוהים in that verse must be understood as an explanation of the word מלאך. When the Torah describes this divine emanation as מלאך, the meaning is that God is "contained, present," within this divine emanation. We encounter something similar in Exodus 23:21 where God explains to Moses that the מלאך who will be accompanying the Jewish people needs to be related to with the utmost reverence as "My Name is within him." Apparently, the word substituted for this attribute of God we called יצהק, an attribute which brooks no defiance of any sort. When we read in Genesis 48:16 when Yaakov blesses before his death בקרב הארץ... אותי, "the angel who has rescued me, etc. etc. is in the midst of the terrestrial world," this is an allusion to the אדנות, the attribute of "mastery" which this "angel" represents. He has authority בקרב הארץ within the whole terrestrial universe.

Seeing that this attribute contains also the element of mercy, "He" suddenly describes Himself as י-ה-ו-ה when He says בי נשבעתי נאום ה' "I have sworn by Myself says Hashem, i.e. the attribute of Mercy, etc." Up until this moment the attribute mentioned in this chapter had only been the attribute אלוהים, i.e. God manifesting Himself as the attribute of Justice.

Whereas before the binding Avraham had spoken of השה לו השה, that the God known as elokim would select the lamb for Himself, after the episode Avraham begins to view this elokim as Hashem when he said ה' יראה, "at the mountain of the (merciful) God He may be seen (experienced)." At that time this attribute promises Avraham that He would bless his descendants making them numerous and bestowing powerful blessings on them. The repetition of the words ברכך אברכה and הרבה ארבה are proof that these blessings will be more numerous and more powerful than ordinary blessings.

Such expressions always mean that the power from which such blessings emanate contain another power within the overall attribute from which such blessings emanate. The Torah drew attention to this subordinate "power" by comparing it to the "stars of the heaven" and "the sand on the beaches of the sea." God also describes the result of such powerful blessings as being that not only would Avraham's seed be numerous, but that it would take permanent possession of the gates of its enemies. When the blessing concludes with the

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

words עקב אשר שמעת בקולי “as a result of your having hearkened to My voice,” it becomes plain that God Himself is the One bestowing this blessing.

### *Abraham! Abraham!...*

- **JPS...**The repetition connotes both urgency and a special relationship between the one addressed and the One who calls.
- **CHIZKUNI...** The repetition of Avraham’s name is to indicate that the call was of an urgent nature. This is a formulation also known in other languages.
- **RADAK...** God repeated his name to ensure that Avraham would listen immediately.
- **RASHI...** The repetition of his name is an expression of affection (Genesis Rabbah 56:7).

**ALTER...Here I am...** The third time Abraham pronounce this word—*hineni*—of readiness: first to God, then to Isaac, now to the divine messenger.

## V. 12

**JPS... And he said...** In biblical angelology, God and His angels often interchange imperceptibly, as is noted in Excursus 10.

- Excursus 10: *Angelology 16:7*

The bearer of the divine word is described as “an angel of the Lord.” Hebrew *mal’akh* derives from a stem *l’-K*, “to send,” which is used as a verb in Ugaritic, Arabic, and Ethiopic. *Mal’akh*, like the Greek *angelos*, from which the English “angel” is derived, means nothing more than “messenger.” It is used of ordinary humans, as in Genesis 32:4., Judges 9:31, and 1 Kings 19:2, as well as of spiritual beings. A prophet or priest may also be called “an angel of the Lord” as in Haggai 1:13 and Malachi 2:7. No special importance attaches to angels in preexilic biblical literature. Information about the nature of belief in them is very sparse. They are nameless; they are without any mythological qualities; they enjoy neither individuality nor free will, and there is no hierarchy among them. Their sole function is as the emissary of God to carry out His specific charge.

From several texts it is clear that the demarcation between God and His angel is often blurred. Hagar is addressed by the angel (16:7-8,9,11) but she responds directly to God (v. 13). The same interchange of speakers occurs in Genesis 22:11-12, 15-18 and at the incident at the burning bush in Exodus 3:2, 4. At the Exodus from Egypt it is now God (Exod. 13:21), now His angel (14.:9) who goes ahead of the Israelite camp. In the story of Gideon (Judg. 6:11-23) God and His angel speak interchangeably.

On the other hand, angels most frequently assume human form so that the individuals to whom they appear are at first unaware of their angelic nature. Such is the case, for instance, in Genesis 18-19. The three who visit Abraham are variously described as “men” (18:1, 16, 22; 19:5, 10, 12, 16) and as “angels” (19:1, 15), and the Sodomites certainly perceive them to be humans (19:5, 9). In the case of the mother of Samson (Judg. 13), the one who appears to her is “an angel of the Lord” (v. 3) whom she describes as “a man of God” who “looked like an angel of God, very frightening” (v. 6). When the angel reappears to her husband,

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

Manoah does not recognize him as such (v. 16) until he disappears in the flames on the altar (vv. 20f.).

Several suggestions have been made to account for the presence of angelology in Israel. Some see a borrowing from Near Eastern mythology in which deities are surrounded by ministers semidivine, semihuman. In Ugaritic the messenger who goes back and forth between the gods is termed *ml'k*. It is hypothesized that Israel borrowed, refined, and monotheized the notion. Another view regards the angel as the personified extension of God's will, or the personification of His self-manifestation. A third theory sees the angel as a conceptual device to avoid anthropomorphism. He serves as a mediator between the transcendent God and His mundane world.

Angelology largely disappears with the advent of classical prophecy in the middle of the eighth century B.C.E., only to reappear in postexilic times in highly developed and complex forms.

### *do not raise your hand...*

- **TUR HAARUCH...** According to the *Midrash*, the angel saw that Avraham had suddenly realized that he no longer had a knife in his hand. (this is why the angel told him not to harm Yitzchok with his hand, instead of with his knife). Avraham therefore decided to strangle Yitzchok with his bare hands in order to carry out God's command. This is when the angel had to tell him not to harm Yitzchok in any manner.
- **RASHI...** to slay him. Then he (Abraham) said to God, "If this be so, I have come here for nothing; let me at least inflict a wound on him and draw some blood from him". God replied, "Neither do thou anything (מאומה) to him" — inflict no blemish (מום) on him (Genesis Rabbah 56:7).
  - **SIFTEI HACHAMIM...** *I will make a cut in him and draw a little blood...* Question: Why does drawing blood make a מום (blemish)? The answer is: Avraham said, "I will draw blood and offer it up. Hashem said: "Do not draw blood." Avraham thought that just drawing blood was insufficient and said, "If so, I will offer up one of his limbs." Hashem said: "Do not cause him any מום." (*Maharshal*)

**RADAK...***don't do anything to him...* again God repeated what He had said in different words, in order to lend additional emphasis to His warning not to touch Yitzchok.

### *for now I know...*

- **JPS...**As Ramban points out, it is not that God's foreknowledge is wanting but that, for Abraham's sake, the quality of character that now exists only potentially must be actualized. In the biblical view, the genuinely righteous man must deserve that status through demonstrated action. Henceforth, Abraham is the incontestable paradigm of the truly "God-fearing" man, one who is wholehearted in his self-determined, disinterested, self-surrender to God's will. It is not important that the act was unfulfilled, for the value of the act may lie as much in the inward intention of the doer as in the final execution.

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

- **CHIZKUNI...** did God not already know? Actually the meaning is: “now I am able to make My knowledge public to all.” We have a similar formulation in Exodus 32:12, where God said to Moses: **ידעתך בשם**, “I have made your name well known.” The appropriate translation would be: “I have made you so famous that no one can dispute it.”
- **MALBIM**<sup>35</sup>... Hashem knew that even when Avraham spared his son’s life he did so only because he was commanded to do so. This was the proof that he was truly God-fearing.
- **RASHBAM...** I now can demonstrate My knowledge about you to the whole world, that you are God fearing. [in the most selfless manner. Ed.]
- **SFORNO...** These were the words of the angel — “Now I know why God elevated you above us.”
- **RASHI...** R. Aba said: Abraham said to God, “I will lay my complaint before you. Yesterday (on an earlier occasion) you told me, (Genesis 21:12) “In Isaac shall seed be called to thee”, and then again you said, (Genesis 21:2) “Take now thy son”. Now you tell me, “Lay not thy hand upon the lad”! The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, in the words of Psalms 89:35, “My covenant will I not profane, nor alter that which is gone out of My lips”. When I told you, “Take thy son”, I was not altering that which went out from My lips, namely, My promise that you would have descendants through Isaac. I did not tell you “Slay him” but bring him up to the mountain. You have brought him up — take him down again” (Genesis Rabbah 56:8).
- **RASHI...** From now I have a reply to give to Satan and to the nations who wonder at the love I bear you: I have an opening of the mouth (i.e. I have an excuse, a reason to give them) now that they see that you are a God-fearing man (Genesis Rabbah 56:7).
- **RAMBAN...** At the beginning Abraham’s fear of God was latent; it had not become actualized through such a great deed. But now it was known in actuality, and his merit was perfect, and his reward would be complete from the Eternal, the God of Israel. (*See Ruth 2:12.*) The doctrine of this chapter which teaches that God is the One who tries Abraham and commands him about the binding of Isaac, and it is the angel of God who restrains and promises him, will be explained in the verse, *The angel who hath redeemed me.* (48:16)
  - **Ruth 2:12:** **ישלם יהוה פעלך ותהי משפּרתך שלמה מעם יהוה אלהי ישראל אשר-באת לחסות תחת-כנפיו:**  
May the LORD reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge!”

**RADAK...you fear God...** The word **יראה**, “fear,” mentioned here is none other than a form of **אהבה**, love, seeing that the fear was not something physical, concern for his body, but concern that he soul should not suffer irretrievable damage. Avraham was prepared to sacrifice his son to demonstrate that his love for abstract, invisible God was greater than his love for his physical, mortal son. He wanted to ensure that neither of them would forfeit their lives in the world to come.

---

<sup>35</sup> Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser (1809-1879) was a Hebrew grammarian and Biblical commentator from the Russian Empire.

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

**SFORNO...From Me...** (or, “than I am”). These are also the words of the angel. The verse should be inverted and read: “You are more God-fearing than I am because you did not withhold your son”.

### V. 13

**JPS... THE SUBSTITUTION OF A RAM...** Abraham interprets the fortuitous presence of a ram to mean that a substitute animal offering is desired in place of Isaac.

**RADAK...when Abraham looked up...** he raised his eyes in order to see if there was some pure animal suitable for a sacrifice which he could offer in lieu of his son.

### *a ram after/behind...*

- **FOX...** Some read “one ram caught” [instead of “a ram caught behind”].
- **JPS...** Hebrew *'ayil 'ehad*, literally “one ram.” This is the reading underlying many ancient versions, as well as of several medieval manuscripts. Our printed editions read *'ayil 'ahar*, as did a few other ancient renderings." This text is taken to mean “a ram behind [him]” or “a ram, later [caught]”? On the graphic confusion of *resh* and *dalet*, see Comment to 10:4.
- **ALTER...** The Masoretic Text reads “a ram behind [*achar*],” but scholarship is virtually unanimous in following numerous ancient versions in reading *echad*, “one,” a very similar grapheme (the smallest meaningful contrastive unit in a writing system) in the Hebrew.
- **RABBEINU BAHYA...** This ram was one of the ten things which were created on the original sixth day of creation at dusk (according to Avot 5:6). This is why this animal was called איל instead of כבש. Normally, when the Torah refers to these types of animals in connection with their being used as sacrificial animals they are always referred to as כבש or כבשים בני שנה “one year old sheep.” The word כבש suggests that this animal (when offered as a sacrifice) is כובש, “suppresses” the sins of the Jewish people. When this animal grows to maturity it is known as איל, when it is only a day old it is referred to as כבש, as we know from Leviticus 22:27 שור או כשב או עז כי יולד, “when an ox, a sheep or a goat is born, etc.” Another reason why this ram which was sacrificed as a burnt-offering was called איל is the similarity of this word with the word אילת השחר, a complimentary name applied to the כנסת ישראל, “the spiritual concept represented by the Jewish people” (compare Psalms 22:1). Allegorically speaking, this ram represents Israel which receives its spiritual input via שחר which protects it generation after generation due to the merit accumulated by Avraham as a result of his having bound his son. [The word describes something which precedes the light of the morning. God preceded everything in this world. Israel receives its spiritual and material input from such pre-historic sources. Ed.]
- **RASHI...** AFTER the angel had said to him “Lay not thy hand upon the lad” he saw it being caught in the thicket. And that is what we mean when we translate it in the Targum by “And Abraham lifted up his eyes after these (i.e. after these words)”. Other versions of Rashi have: according to the Midrashic explanation, after means after all the words of the angel and the Shechinah, and after all the arguments of Abraham.

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

- **SIFTEI HACHAMIM...** *After the angel had said to him...* I.e., אחר is connected to an earlier phrase. It is out of place. The verse means to say: “Avraham looked up *afterward*, and beheld a ram that had been caught...” Rashi proves it from Onkelos, who translates: “And Avraham looked up *after these* [words].”

### *behind him a ram caught in the thicket by its horns...*

- **CHIZKUNI...** According to Rashi, Avraham saw the ram as it became entangled. This is why he understood that it was not there accidentally, but that God had given him a hint to use it as a substitute for the offering he had been prevented by the angel to complete. If that ram had been standing there as did others, he would have thought it was privately owned by someone else and would not have touched it. A different interpretation: “he noticed it after it had become entangled by its horns.” (Ibn Ezra).
- **DAAT ZKENIM...** according to B’reshit Rabbah 56:9, the strange word “behind” in this verse is interpreted as God having said to Avraham, that He could foresee that his descendants would likewise be caught up in various kinds of sins at different times, and that by using the ram’s horn on designated days of the year and blowing its horn, they would be able to secure for themselves atonement as their founding father Avraham had willingly offered his beloved son as an offering to Him. Ram’s horns which are open ended at both ends are to remind the Jewish people that though they will seemingly enter a dark tunnel when sinning, there is light at the end of the tunnel if they do penitence; blowing the ram’s horns when asking God for forgiveness is one of the means of obtaining forgiveness. The ram’s horn may therefore be viewed as an advocate on our behalf.
- **RABBEINU BAHYA...** The plain meaning of the text is that after the angel had told Avraham not to touch Yitzchak he saw this ram. The word בסבך, thicket, suggests that the part of the mountain on which the binding took place was full of trees and low brush, a place also known in Kings I 7:2 as יער לבנון, a type of Cedar forest....
- **RADAK...** this served Avraham as an invitation from God that seeing that this ram was caught in a thicket away from the flock it belonged to, something which its shepherd had not even become aware of. This is why we have learned in the Mishnah Avot 5:6 (according to some scholars) that among the things which had been created at dusk on the 6th day of creation was also this ram which would eventually serve as the sacrifice brought by Avraham instead of his son. If Avraham had been able to locate the shepherd of this ram, he would have compensated him for the value of the animal. He would not have wanted to offer an animal as a sacrifice without paying for it.
- **SFORNO...** this incident indicated to him that God must have arranged for this ram to be at his disposal, and that there could be no question of his committing robbery if he took this ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering. The fact that there had been no such ram when he prepared the altar and bound Yitzchok and suddenly this ram materialized, was ample evidence of its purpose.
- **RASHI...** a thicket – a tree. BY ITS HORNS — because it was running towards Abraham, but Satan caused it to be caught and entangled among the trees (Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 31).

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

- **SIFTEI HACHAMIM...** *For it was running towards Avraham...* [Rashi knows this] because it says נֶאֱחָז in singular, which must refer to the ram itself. If so, why does it say בְּקֶרְנוֹ? Rashi answers that it tells us that the ram's face, meaning its horns, was towards Avraham, as it was running to Avraham to be sacrificed, but the Satan entangled it to impede it. Perhaps the *Re'm*, too, meant this. (*R. Meir Stern*)

*he offered it as a burnt-offering in lieu of his son...*

- **RABBEINU BAHYA...** Rashi explains the words תָּחַת בְּנוֹ, as meaning that from that time on every time Avraham would perform a sacrificial service he would commence the ceremony by saying: “may this act of service be considered as equivalent to my offering up my own son.” In other words: “may the act of slaughtering the animal be considered as if I were to slaughter my son. May the act of sprinkling its blood on the altar be considered as if I were to sprinkle the blood of my son on this altar, etc.”
- **SFORNO...** in exchange for what he had had in mind to do with his son. The phrase reminds us of Psalms 15:2 וְדֹבַר אֱמֶת בִּלְבָבוֹ, “he spoke truthfully in his heart.” [the author justifies the use of the word תָּחַת, “in lieu of,” for something which had not actually happened, i.e. Yitzchok had not been slaughtered. The verse from Psalms proves that the intention is as good as the deed when such an intention was sincere, wholehearted. Ed.]