

Parashat Vayera 5785, 2024:

“G-d is the L-rd of the World”

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ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו כל בני ישראל, בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ

Avraham Avinu's countless acts of kindness represented *chesed* in action. Consequently, *Elokim's* command to Avraham to bring *Yitzchak Avinu* as a *korban olah* (completely burnt sacrifice) was antithetical to his very being:

And it came to pass after these things, that *Elokim* tested Avraham, and He said to him, “Avraham,” and he said, “Here I am.” And He said, “Please take your son, your only one, whom you love, Yitzchak, and go away to the land of Moriah and bring him up there for a burnt offering on one of the mountains, of which I will tell you.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 22: 1-2, this and all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

The Torah tells us that Avraham proceeded to fulfill this directive with alacrity. Given that Avraham exemplified *chesed* how was this possible? My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as “the Rav” by his students and followers, suggests that: “... the idea of sacrifice is a cornerstone of Judaism, and the *Akedah* has inevitably introduced sacrificial action as part of our historical drama.” (This and the following citations, *Abraham's Journey: Reflections on the Life of the Founding Patriarch*, pages 110-11) As such, analysis of this aspect of *avodat Hashem* is essential for understanding our relationship with the Almighty. For the Rav, *avodat Hashem*, which he terms “service awareness,” means that our entire being is under Hashem's hegemony:

Man is a servant of God. He belongs completely to God—body and soul. God owns human existence at every level, physical, spiritual, and social. Every movement of our muscles is related to God. Every thought that flashes through our minds belongs to Him. Every feeling, stirring of the soul, every joyful anticipation or sad expectation is not the property of man.

God is the Lord of the world and the master of man. Hence, God from time to time calls upon man to return to Him whatever is His. He demands that man give not a part but the whole of himself. He requires of man to return divine property to its rightful owner.

This provides an important insight into Hashem's command that Avraham bring Yitzchak as a *korban olah*. Avraham was returning to G-d that which was always His. As the Rav explains: "The supreme sacrifice is never too much, since G-d owns everything, and man possesses nothing. 'The soul is Yours, and the body is Your handiwork' (High Holy Day prayers). Total sacrifice was decreed by God when He summoned Abraham to offer Isaac on Mount Moriah."

These ideas enable us to better understand how Avraham could have acceded to *Elokim's* command to sacrifice Yitzchak: "God is the Lord of the world and the master of man." This means that no matter how challenging a situation may be, we must give Hashem pride of place in our decision making and follow His holy Torah. As *Dovid HaMelech* said so long ago: "*Shiviti Hashem l'negdi tamid*—I have placed the L-rd before me constantly." (*Sefer Tehillim* 16:8). *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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