

The Chessed of Abraham

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The episode of the Akeda culminates in G-d's revelation to Abraham saying unto him: "for now I know that you are a G-d-fearing man". And we can't but be surprised: was it really necessary to discover that Abraham is G-d-fearing? Indeed, Abraham was the first believer to announce G-d's Name in the world; so what happened in the Akeda that revealed that Abraham was fearing G-d?

Understanding this means understanding the meaning of fearing G-d, this issue being the leitmotiv throughout the whole parasha and it is even the line connecting the parasha to the haftara.

After Abimelekh discovers that Sarah is Abraham's wife and not his sister, he asks him: "What have you done to us [...] that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin?", but Abraham doesn't answer. Then Abimelekh goes on and asks: "What did you see, that you did this thing?", meaning what stands at the root of your deed? To that question Abraham answers: "Because I thought: Surely there is no fear of G-d in this place." Abraham says: as I saw that the morality of Abimelekh and the of Gerar is based on the versatile human point of view, and not on the fear of G-d, therefore morality can change from today to tomorrow, and that being the case, maybe murder is acceptable but taking one's wife is not. That is the reason of the complexity of the verse describing the place of residence of Abraham "and [he] dwelt between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar", because in the political Gerar Abraham allows himself just to sojourn but not to dwell. (like Chazal say on the first verse of Psalms: "Happy is the man that has not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of the scornful" – this is said about Abraham at the time of the Tower of Babel, in relation to Sodom and Gerar). Therefore Abimelekh tells Abraham: "Here is my land before you: wherever it pleases you, you may dwell.", meaning be a dweller and not just a temporary resident (in Hebrew the word גֵר means a stranger, or temporary resident).

And that was exactly what G-d wanted to "test" Abraham for. Abraham's virtue is *chessed*. Is his chessed just a matter of a sporadic ideology or is the essence of all his actions is the fear of G-d? That's why in our Parasha Abraham has to go through three tests in which he is compelled to renounce his commitment to chessed, in order to comply with G-d's will. (the Hebrew word for this is נִסּוּיָן, test, means also to elevate, because the point is not so much to check whether one will pass the test or not, than to elevate he who succeeded to a higher level). In Sodom, in casting out Hagar & Ishmael, and in Akedat Yitzhak, Abraham has to set the path to Yitzhak, his son and continuator, Yitzhak whose virtue is *gevura* (rigor) that manifests itself especially in the fear of G-d and through it to reveal Jacob's virtue, "give truth to Jacob", because truth appears only when the apparently opposite virtues of Abraham and Yitzhak are unified, testifying the unity of G-d.

And that's also what the haftara comes to underline. In the beginning of the haftara we have a description of a situation where fear of G-d is absent, therefore the two sons of a widow can be taken into slavery without any regard to the commandment "you shall not behave toward him as a lender", the lack of any sign of chessed reveals a situation where the exaggeration of law casts out any sense of justice. Indeed, despite all that the whole sense of belief of the widow in G-d and his prophets allows

the revelation of the infinite will of the Creator of the world to pay back chessed to his creatures, with no extreme, and that only the capacity of the receptive vessel limits G-d's abundance.

The "walk before Me and be whole" of Abraham is what allows the miracle of the birth of Yitzhak, like the promise of a son in the haftara is parallel to the promise "and Sarah will have a son." And in the death of the child and his resurrection, there is a parallel to the Akedat Yitzhak, which Chazal call "a whole Holocaust," and his resurrection with the commandment "Do not stretch forth your hand to the lad, nor do the slightest thing to him," reveals us the essence of the Fear of G-d, which the recognition of the man himself as a creature of G-d, who as such testifies about his Creator.

"For now I know that you are a G-d fearing man," reveals the grandeur of Abraham to himself and to the whole world, "you did not withhold" any efforts so that everyone will know that your only child is from me, G-d.

Fear of G-d leads us human beings to the understanding and the internalization of our relation and bound to our Creator and to the recognition of the need to bind the effect to its Cause – and through that to elevate oneself and reach the pure Fear of the *Hashem* that endures forever.

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