



Parashat Vayera 5771

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On the Parashah... The Akedah: A Divine Command Versus Human Morality

[Tal Chermon]

The Divine command to sacrifice Yitzchak shattered the moral foundations of Avraham's life. He who had fought uncompromisingly against idolatry and human sacrifice, he who epitomized the loftiest morality and kindness was about to murder his own son! He was thus going to violate the most basic and logically obvious moral dictate that existed, "You shall not murder."

There are three crimes that are so heinous that according to the Halachah one must be willing to die rather than to transgress them. They are idolatry, immorality, and murder. Of the three idolatry and severe immorality are derived from Torah verses, while murder is derived through logic. Even when threatened that unless you murder you will be killed, murder is forbidden. Who says that your blood is redder (= more important) than his (Sanhedrin 74a)! And yet Avraham was on his way to murder his son! Avraham's "hypocritical" betrayal of the very ideals that he had preached to the world would destroy all his educational achievements. Past, present, and future are about to be obliterated with one blow! These are the morbid thoughts that the evil inclination flashed through Avraham's mind to dissuade him from performing G-d's will (Gra in Kol Eliyahu, Parashat Vayera sect. 12).

The Akedah constitutes the dissolution of man-made morality and its replacement with a Divine command. Avraham had to forgo even his highest and loftiest ideals, thoughts and aspirations and substitute them with one single ideal, G-d's will. This is most a dramatic demonstration of the fact that we do not observe G-d's mitzvot because they are intelligible and pleasant but because they are the word of Hashem. We do not differentiate between the pleasant mitzvah of putting on Tefillin and the less enjoyable mitzvah of wiping out the memory of the Amalek. Both are equally dear to us. We refrain from eating pork not because it is loathsome to us but because thus we have been commanded by Hashem (Sifra Kedoshim 20, also brought by Rashi on Vayikra 20:26). We must obviously try to elevate ourselves to the level that we feel delight in performing the mitzvot and repugnance at the very thought of a sin. Furthermore, it is self-evident that enjoying prayer, disgust at eating pig and repugnance at the very thought of murder and similar emotions are proper and worthy feelings. Man advances and senses what is right and wrong. We must understand, however,

that morality is not determined according to what man knows, feels or understands but it is based purely on the Divine word. The Akedah came to uproot an ethical system which emanated from man, and to build in its place a firmly based Divine system of morality. Naturally, Yitzchak was not sacrificed in the end. The Akedah concludes with the verse, "Do not harm the boy. Do not do anything to him" (Bereshit 22:12). It could not finish any other way since murder is prohibited. What has been achieved is that the precept "You shall not murder" has been converted from a **humanly** based imperative that can vary and change according to human emotions and understanding to an eternal, immutable and **Divine** command. Once this understanding is firmly rooted, man is called to raise himself and to feel the pleasure and delight in performing G-d's absolute will.

Rav Aviner on... How to Be Happy

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Lech Lecha 5771 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Everyone has a deep longing to be happy. Don't confuse the longing for pleasure, which the Ancient Greeks called "Hedonism", with the longing for happiness, which they called "Eudemonism". Pleasure is partial, momentary, sensory and fleeting. Happiness, by contrast, fills up the whole person with great, permanent content, and eternal worth. I won't get into a discussion here about whether happiness is a human need or is itself a virtue.

Does an upright person deserve to be happy, or is happiness itself a good, upright thing?

Whoever peruses the Book of Tehillim will see that happiness is mentioned numerous times within the supreme ideal: "Happy is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked" (1:1), "Happy are those that dwell in Your house" (84:5), "Happy is the people for whom such is the case" (144:15), "Happy are those that follow the path of righteousness" (119:1), etc.

If so, how does one achieve happiness? Obviously, someone who is lacking nothing in life – he has his parents, a spouse, children, status, work, health, and every other bounty – may not ask himself how to be happy. Yet there are unfortunate, suffering people, the impoverished and the ill, who find their lives unbearable and detestable, and one must certainly ask how they can find happiness.

We can ask a secondary question as well. Why is this matter never mentioned in our prayers? After all, Rambam informs us in his "Guide to the Perplexed" that all the principles of faith are hidden away in our prayers and blessings. Certainly one cannot learn all of Jewish law each day. Neither can one learn all the foundations of faith each day. If so, a person will be lacking spiritual contact with those foundations. Therefore, said Rambam, all of those laws and principles are stored away in our prayers and blessings by the Men of the Great Assembly, which included several prophets.

Regarding the question of happiness, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi enlightened us in his book, the Tanya (Chapter 33), pointing out that man's happiness derives from "closeness to G-d", i.e., faith in G-d; which does not mean just being intellectually convinced that G-d exists, but trusting in G-d, clinging to Him, and being connected to Him. Clinging to G-d is something that cannot be taken away from anyone. Whatever one's circumstances, whether one is rich or poor, healthy or sick, single or married, whether one has a family or is childless, closeness to G-d cannot be taken away from a person. The Master of the Universe fills up the entire world. Not only is closeness to G-d one pathway to happiness, but all of a person's happiness. That is because there is nothing in the world besides G-d. "In Heaven above and on earth below, there is nothing else" (Aleinu). All the rest is transient vanity. Obviously, clinging to G-d can be expressed as well through loving people and by loving all the mitzvot, through kind deeds and good character, through self-sacrifice on behalf of our people and land, our state and army.

That is what fills a person with happiness. G-d did a great kindness for His world that He didn't abandon it, dwelling only on High, but instead established a residence on this earth. Thus we, who live on this earth, can be close to G-d.

All this is written in the siddur, and we daily mention how we fill ourselves with happiness anew each day. "How happy we are! How good is our destiny! How pleasant is our lot! How beautiful our inheritance! Happy are we who frequent the synagogues and study halls, early and late, proclaiming G-d's oneness daily and forever, reciting twice each day, lovingly, 'Hear Israel! Hashem is our G-d! Hashem is One!'"

Kitzur Tefilat Amecha - #14

[adapted for middle-schoolers by Rabbi Shmuel Jablon from Rav Aviner's three-volume commentary on the siddur "Tefilat Amecha"]

In Birkot Ha-Shachar in the prayer "A person should always be in fear and awe of Hashem both in private and in public," we tell Hashem that we are the children of Hashem's Brit (covenant) and the children of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Hashem has a covenant with us, a permanent bond created by Hashem. It lasts forever because it was created by Hashem. This is different than a merit. When we say we have the merit of our fathers and mothers, this will only help us if we live up to their example. To get their merit we need to try to have the connection to Hashem and to follow Him just as they did. Hashem is waiting for us to do this. We say that Hashem loved Yaakov, and He loves us - his children - as well.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Questions regarding the Eiruv

Q: If the Eiruv is checked before Shabbat and is declared Kosher, should a person still be concerned that it was rendered invalid on Shabbat in the event of a storm? Can we rely on the "Chazakah" (presumption) that since the Eiruv was operational the beginning of Shabbat, it still remains that way?

A: It depends on whether the Eiruv is strong or not. This is a most serious question, and one should ask the Rabbi who is in charge of the Eiruv.

Q: If an individual actually knows with certainty that the Eiruv came down, should he tell other people, or keep quiet about it since they may not listen? Is this a case of "Mutav sheyehyeu shoggegin v'al yeeheyu mezidin" (It is better for people to transgression unwittingly than wittingly)?

A: In general, the whole issue of an Eiruv is Rabbinic since we are discussing a "Karmelit". Therefore, if people will listen, one should inform them. If they will not listen, we apply "mutav she-yeeheyu shoggegin..." (see Rama, Orach Chaim 608:2 with commentaries).

Ha-Gaon Rav Avraham Dov Auerbach, Av Beit Din (Head of the Rabbinic Court) of Tiveria, once told me about an incident that occurred there in the past.. One time the "eruv" was damaged, and the Rav of Tiveria ruled that the "eruv" was kosher. There was a great Torah scholar who lived there and he bumped into the Rav of the city after Shabbat. They talked, the Torah scholar walked him home, and they sat and chatted. The Torah scholar said, "Let's learn some Torah." The Rav of the city obviously agreed. The Torah scholar took Massechet Eruvim and they learned. Suddenly, the Rav of the city said, "Oy va-voy! If so, I ruled incorrectly today!" The Torah scholar said, "It appears so." The Rav of the city asked, "Did his honor announce in his shul not to carry on Shabbat?" "No," he responded, "since carrying

in this place is a rabbinic prohibition, but honoring a Torah scholar is a Torah mitzvah. I therefore did not say anything."

Q: If someone makes an announcement on Shabbat recommending that the Eiruv not be used because of the possibility the Eiruv came down (without having any knowledge that it actually is not valid), how should the community behave? Should this announcement be ignored, or once it is said, people should be careful not to carry?

A: One should ask the Rabbi in charge of the Eiruv.

Q: Does the Rav have any specific tradition from Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook regarding the use of an Eiruv on Shabbat?

A: In the book "Ki Shem Hashem Nikra Elecha" by Ha-Rav Shlomo Gilat (p. 66), he relates that Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah did not carry things out on Shabbat within the Eiruv, but he agreed that a student could carry the house key.

Text Message Responsa

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah" and "Olam Ha-Katan." Here's a sample:

Modesty

Q: I have occasionally looked at immodest images without my wife's knowledge. Do I have to ask her forgiveness?

A: No, since it will cause her distress, but you should repent (Rabbi Yisrael Salanter. See Chafetz Chaim, Hilchot Lashon Ha-Ra 4:12).

Harry Potter

Q: Is it permissible to read Harry Potter?

A: It is definitely not worthwhile since it contains a mixture of ridiculous ideas.

Metzitzah

Q: Is there an obligation for Metzitzah at a Brit Milah or are there lenient opinions?

A: It is an obligation according to all opinions. See Shut Da'at Cohain (#140-142).

Convert saying "Who has not made me a non-Jew"

Q: Can a convert recite the blessing "...Who has not made me a non-Jew"?

A: Some authorities say that he should say: "Who has made me a convert." Rama, Orach Chaim 46:4. Some say that he should not recite the blessing at all. Others rules that he can recite "Who has not made me a non-Jew," since there was a spark of the holiness of Israel in his soul which caused him to convert. Nezirut Shimshon on Taz (Piskei Teshuvot 46:12).

Miscarriage

Q: Does a miscarried fetus have a portion in the World to Come?

A: All Israel has a portion in the World to Come, unless someone who loses it, and a fetus has his portion since he did not lose it.

Reporting a Damage

Q: I saw a truck knock down a stop sign and just drive away. I wrote down the license plate number. Should I report it?

A: Yes, it is returning a lost object.

"Rachel"

Q: I have a lot of problems and people say it is because my name is Rachel. Some I change it?

A: This is a wonderful name. Do not change it (see Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh 335:10. And when Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievski was asked this same question, he answered that this idea is nonsense, and the source for those who think this way is that the Chizkuni explains that Rachel could not have children because she lacked a letter "Hey" in her name. She therefore gave her maidservant "Bilhah" to Yaakov, since she had two letters "Hey" in her name, one for herself and one Rachel, but this is nonsense. Firstly, it is common place for women to have the name Rachel and they have children. Secondly, we see in the Gemara [Shabbat 154b, Bechorot 3b and elsewhere] the name "Rav Meri bar **Rachel**" and Rabbi Akiva's wife was Rachel [Avot De-Rebbe Natan chap. 6] – Derech Sichah vol. 1 p. 34).

Honoring Parents

Q: If my father is yelling at my mother, it is permissible for me to yell at him to honor her?

A: No, but speak to him afterwards in private and with humility (Shulchan, Yoreh Deah 240:11).

Chabad

Q: Is it permissible to daven in a Chabad shul, where the people believe the Rebbe is the Messiah?

A: Certainly, they are G-d-fearing people. Please stop divisions and disputes.

Modesty in Swimming

Q: Is it permissible for young women who are fully-clothed to enter a spring where there are young men?

A: Certainly not. One must stay very, very far from such things. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 152:8.

Human Skin

Q: I accidentally swallowed a piece of skin from my lip. Do I have to wait six hours before eating dairy?

A: No, human skin is pareve. By the way, so is mother's milk.

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