



Parshas Vayera 2020, the significance of man

The Parsha Perspective is in loving memory of my grandfather Yaakov Yosef ben Aryeh Leib Edward Ben Efraim, Shlomo Ben Edward, and Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Gedalia. May their souls be uplifted and their memories a blessing.

Our Parsha has the story of Akeida's Yitzchak, the binding of Yitzchak. This is one of the most fundamental and meaningful stories of all of Judaism. A story we read on Rosh Hashanah to evoke G-d's immense love for the Jewish people.

The Torah portion begins with G-d telling Avraham that he will fulfill his promise of a successor with the birth of a baby boy. One year later, Sarah gave birth to Yitzchak, who looked exactly like his father, Avraham.

When Yitzchak was 37 years old, G-d appeared to Avraham and told him. (22:2) *"Take your son, your only one, the one whom you love, Yitzchak, and go to the land of Moriah where you will bring him up as an offering on one of the mountains there."*

Avraham did as he was told; the following day, he took Yitzchak and the necessary supplies and headed out to the mountains. When they arrived, Avraham built an altar and tied Yitzchak to it. But, as he was about to slaughter his son, an angel ordered him to stop immediately and sacrifice a ram that was nearby in place of Yitzchak. G-d then blessed Avraham with great blessings as a reward for passing his final and most challenging test yet.

However, a question comes to mind: When the angel stopped Avraham from slaughtering Yitzchak, he said (22:12), *"Do not raise your hand against the boy or do anything to him. For now, I know that you fear G-d since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me."*

But didn't G-d already know that Avraham feared and loved G-d from all the previous tests that Avraham passed with flying colors? What did Avraham do that finally showed G-d that he indeed feared Him?!

Rashi on that Pasuk quotes the Midrash Rabbah, which explains why the angel said, "*now I know that you fear G-d,*" because Avraham complained to G-d that He was going back on His words. First, G-d said (21:12), "*through Yitzchak, your offspring will continue.*" Then G-d said (22:2), "***Take your son, your favored one, the one you love, Yitzchak, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering.***" But now G-d says "*Do not raise your hand against the boy or do anything to him.*" Why do G-d keep going back on His words?!

G-d replied to Avraham that He did not actually say to slaughter Yitzchak, but rather to bring him up. As the Pasuk says, "*Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and bring him up as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you.*"

It is clear why the Pasuk said, "*now I know that you fear G-d.*" For now, G-d knew Avraham truly feared Him because Avraham followed G-d even when it seemed contradictory and inconsistent. He was about to slaughter Yitzchak, whom G-d said would continue Avraham's legacy. Avraham's immense and extraordinary belief in G-d is why he is a forefather of the Jewish nation.

However, the Sforno gives a deeper and more profound explanation. He writes that when the Pasuk said, "*For now, I know that you fear G-d,*" it was the angel himself talking!

The Bartenura details that it was not just any angel, but in fact, it was Malach Mechel, one of the highest ministering angels. The Sforno explains the angel was telling Avraham, now I understand why G-d has elevated you above us. Against all common sense and logic, you still follow G-d's commands with vigor, energy, and enthusiasm.

For the angels did not understand why G-d wanted to create mankind. As the Talmud writes in Sanhedrin (38b), when G-d wanted to create man, He first

created one group of angels. He said to them: If you agree, let us make a person in our image. The angels said before Him: Master of the Universe, what are these people's actions that you suggest creating?

G-d said to them: their actions are such and such, according to human nature. The angels replied, what is so significant about man that You are mindful of him? G-d then burned the angels with fire.

The same conversation occurred with the second group of angels with identical results. When G-d asked the third group of angels, they replied, the entire world is Yours; whatever You wish to do in Your world, do. G-d then created Adam, the first person.

The Sforno explains that until Avraham Avinu, the angels could not comprehend why G-d desired to create people who could rebel against Him. But now, it became clear to the angels why G-d created human beings. Only we can go against our nature in service of the King of the universe.

If we can anger and go against G-d c"v, we equally and more can give G-d great pleasure and happiness when we follow in His path. To live up to Malach Mechel's holy words, ***“For now, I know that you fear G-d.”***

In our daily life, it is imperative that we do not put ourselves in a box. That we do not limit ourselves to what we think is our potential. Rather, constantly strive for growth, development, and improvement.

This outlook opens the mind enabling us to adapt and take advantage of unique opportunities that G-d places in front of us. A perspective that empowers us to achieve beyond what we thought possible. Overcoming problems and obstacles in our path to accomplishing our true potential.

“The only person you can become is the person you decide to be.”

Have a great Shabbos!

Rabbi Sholom Yemini