

*Shiur L'Yom Shishi*¹

[Friday's Study]

READINGS: *Torah Vayera:* Genesis 22:1-24
Haftarah: II Kings 4:27-37
B'rit Chadasha: Hebrews 11:17-19

The Holy One Himself will provide the lamb.

[Genesis 22:8]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 141:1-7;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #1, *Da'at*, the Prayer for Intimate Knowledge

Vayehi achar ha-devarim ha-eleh v'ha-Elohim nisa et-Avraham – Then it came to pass after these events that Avraham was tested/tried/put to proof by Elohim. Genesis 22:1.

Gather around children – it is *Story Time* again! The Immaculate Storyteller is about to regale us with yet another tale of ordinary folk like us transcending impossible challenges by walking with the Creator, *sh'ma*-ing His Voice, and doing His Will rather than doing whatever seems/feels right in our own eyes. What epic tale of earth-aligning-with-Heaven drama does the Great Narrator have cued up to recount for us now? Ah, Beloved - it is the legend of *Akeidat Yitzchak* – *i.e.* the binding of 'Isaac'. Being an attorney by secular profession, I tend to think of this whole episode more like *Avraham's Bar Exam* and Yitzchak's law school admission test. If a man of Covenant is to guide and serve others as a true model of on-earth-as-in-Heaven alignment, these are tests he must pass.

Warning: the story the Great Narrator is about to tell us is not everyone's cup of tea. Avraham had walked with the Holy One – through thick and thin - for over 50 years before the Holy One deemed him ready to take this particular matriculation 'test'. The story of this test is thus for 'mature audiences' (in the Kingdom sense, that is) only. It is likely to confound and confuse any Johnny-come-lately novices to covenantal life. It will almost certainly offend and repulse any all-about-the-'feels' masses Kingdom wanna-be's fresh out of the philosophies and shallow religions of men. Hmmm - perhaps that is actually the idea! This is a story designed to separate the wholehearted and committed from the curious and conflicted. It is designed to cull out the devoted and surrendered from the cynical, critical, ethno-culturally indoctrinated, and/or self-important. After all, this story is about times and circumstances in life that no one shallow or self-important person wants to talk about - times when nothing within one's education, his philosophy,

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his framework of science, or his forms of religion can help him navigate the high-stakes challenge looming before him. This story is about things/situations that require us to go beyond ‘knowledge’, logic, reason, ‘principle’, and ‘common sense’, as well as all cultural ‘norms’, ideas/convictions about morality, and credal/sacramental forms of religion. This is a story about times that come along in life when our Wise and Benevolent Covenant Partner puts us in an incredibly high-stakes crucible and poses three critical questions: 1. ‘*How well do you know Me?*’, 2. ‘*How much do you love Me?*’, and 3. ‘*How thoroughly do You Trust Me?*’ Then He will make us prove it – to ourselves and the world. Think of it like a matriculation examination. Passing this test – a test 99% of the people of the world would not even be willing to take, much less be able to pass - is how we prove our higher calling. But it is not the Holy One who needs the proof – it is us, ourselves, and the people we presume to serve.

***It’s Not Just Avraham – But All Passionate Lovers of God –
Who Will Face This Kind of ‘Do-You-Trust-Me’ Test***

Every true son and daughter of the covenant will eventually be required to pass a matriculation exam something similar to the Akeida. If we are going to serve the raging nations wholeheartedly, we need to know what we will – and won’t - do for the Holy One. The people we are sent to serve need to know this as well – or they will never – SHOULD never – trust us enough to follow our counsel and emulate our example. Each of us who presume to model the ‘More Excellent Way’ of the Kingdom of Heaven to the raging nations therefore is called upon to carefully consider and formulate a believable response to the three critical questions posed in the preceding paragraph – and to do so while under the extreme pressure of a crucible akin to the one Avraham is about to navigate. When will we be called upon to face this crucible? When will we be asked these three critical questions? It will not happen until the Holy One knows we are *ready*. He wants us to pass the test, you see. For the sake of the world He created, and the generation into which He called us, He wants a people who are, like Avraham in the days of the Akeida, so mature in relationship with Him, so surrendered to His Will and Ways, and so disciplined in *emunah*, that they will go anywhere He sends them and will do anything He tells them to – at whatever the cost.

How about you, Dear Reader? How mature are you in your Covenant Walk? Whose counsel do your actions reveal that you really trust? Whose wisdom do your behavior patterns and responses to irritation, aggravation, temptation, intimidation, and stress show you really rely upon? When chaos is breaking loose around you, whose guidance are you really following? Into whose hands, guidance, strength, skill, goodness, and faithfulness are you demonstrating to the world that

you are willing to place your life and welfare; the life and welfare of your spouse; the life and welfare of your child; and the continued operation of the ecosystem of earth? To what - or whom – are your attitudes and actions telling the world you really pledge your allegiance?

For Avraham – and for all Avraham’s ‘seed’ – those who have had face full-on GENOCIDAL FURY at least once in every generation, and who thus have become experts as assessing LIFE RISK and at understanding the STAKES OF WRONG-DECISIONS ABOUT WHO AND WHAT TO TRUST - these questions demand an full-on, all-out committal level of response. If we have truly been walking with the Holy One, and seeing things through His Eyes, we now know beyond a shadow of a doubt that no one is promised tomorrow. We know that only fools put their trust in governments, political parties, economic systems, institutions, or movements. We understand that we cannot even put our trust in our own nation’s constitution, laws, or leaders, much less the ecclesiastical hierarchy, clergy, and/or halakah of any organized religion. We have learned how fickle and unreliable all those things - and the people who profit from and promote them - are. We know that we cannot entrust our lives, our spouses, or our children to the care or counsel of human beings. We can only entrust the people and things that really matter to us to the Holy One. We can only put our reliance His Counsel. We can only trust His Way, His Will, and His Words. We who are called to ‘the more excellent way’ of the Torah must walk in *emunah*, not emotion; and in *sh’ma*-responsiveness to the directions of our Covenant Partner in Heaven, not caving to knee-jerk, hormonal, or pseudo-intellectual reactions like fear, anger, offense, lust, envy, greed, pride, revulsion, self-righteous vengefulness, or fight-or-flight response.

Avraham was not just a man who believed good doctrine. Much less was he a man who practiced any form of religion bearing any resemblance to modern ‘Judaism’ or ‘Christianity’. Avraham knew the Holy One intimately. He had walked with Him for decades – through good times and bad. He had learned to listen for and *sh’ma* His Voice – and to *lo sh’ma* the voice of another. Over and over again he had accepted – indeed rejoiced in –the Holy One’s guidance – and it had always worked out for the best. He now loved the Holy One. **Isaiah 41:8**. But wait – what does that last thing – loving the Holy One – even mean?

Welcome to the Crucible of Ultimate Trust

A key element – perhaps THE key element – of both Moshe and Yeshua’s well-lived life / abiding protocols is that we are to love the Holy One our God with all our heart, with all our soul (i.e. our mind, our will, our emotions), and with all our substance/strength. See **Deuteronomy 6:5; Deuteronomy 10:12; Deuteronomy 11:1, 13, &**

22; Deuteronomy 30:6, 16 & 20; see also Joshua 22:5, Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27 and John 21:15-17. Both Torah and Yeshua define love not in terms of adrenaline rush, feeling, or emotion, but in terms of service, especially following Torah's directions and protocols instead of what seems right in one's own eyes. See **Deuteronomy 12:8, 28, & 32; Deuteronomy 13:3-4 and John 14:15.** Loving the Holy One means coming *in the volume of 'the Book'* (i.e. the Torah) to do, and then delighting to do, His Will. **Psalm 40:8; Hebrews 10:7.**

Love is learned through discipline – a/k/a *discipleship*. Discipline/Discipleship, in turn, comes through strategic self-denial, sacrifice, dedication, and constant rearrangement of priorities as one's Trainer/Master/Mentor directs.

So ... what evidence can you offer that your over-riding allegiance is to your Creator instead of to anyone or anything in the *seen* world? What demonstration can you present that you value His Words, His Will, and His Ways above all else – including your personal comfort, your dreams, and your aspirations; above your reputation, your community standing, your lifestyle, your livelihood, and your legacy; above your political, ideological, institutional, and theological concepts of 'truth', 'justice', and 'morality'; above your homeland, your home, your parents, your spouse, and even your children; in short, above your own life? How could the Holy One verify – and reveal to the world - the depth of your love for Him? In what kind of crucible could He make both the level of your commitment to Him and the measure of your trust in Him manifest for all to see?

Is It Just Another Fleshly Romance – or Is It True, Abiding Love? How Can A Person Know For Sure?

The prototypical season of calling to Divine Romance – to that wonderful, all-encompassing kind of relationship between the Creator and a human being that the Torah calls walking in '*Covenant*' with the Creator – is in full swing. On one side of the narrow path leading from the Chuppah to the nations is the Creator of the Universe. Holy, Majestic, Awe-Inspiring, Ever-Faithful, and Perfect in All His Ways, He is definitely the Stronger Partner in the Covenant - i.e. the *Blessed Sovereign*. But He is not alone on this journey. In His shadow walks a simple mortal man – an elderly shepherd the Holy One calls Avraham. He is the very much weaker, but nevertheless essential, partner in the Covenant. Consider him the *Beloved 'Vassal'*. By this stage in the Romance, Avraham a/k/a the *Beloved Vassal* has seen the Holy One's patience, benevolence, compassion, and faithfulness so many times, in so many contexts, working so much *tov* for him and his family, that he no longer hesitates. He has ceased to question His Blessed Sovereign's motives. He no longer doubts His King's wisdom. He has quit second-guessing His

Sovereign's instructions. He knows the Holy One to be 'good' – in all things, at all times – and knows that the Holy One's mercy endures forever. As a result, Avraham's *trust meter* in relation to the One he knows simply as 'El Shaddai' and/or 'Adonai' is soaring up in the red zone – spiking somewhere around 'yes' and 'amen'. Wherever the Holy One leads, Avraham joyfully follows. Whatever words the Holy One utters, Avraham excitedly embraces, then meditates on, then talks about as he sits in his home and as he walks by the way, then commits to memory, and then publishes. Whatever the Holy One instructs him to do, Avraham rushes enthusiastically to do. Avraham does not live this way out of either expectation of reward or fear of punishment. For Avraham this '*sh'ma, sh'mar, asah*' lifestyle is, much bigger than either of those things. For him, the lifestyle I like to call 'the Dance' is a matter of *discovered identity*, of *embraced mission*, and of *understood purpose*. It is a matter of *extreme honor*. It is a matter of *humble service*. It is a matter of *tangible thanksgiving*. It is a matter of *sheer delight*. It is a matter of *deepening communion and fellowship*. And, most of all, above all these things, it is a matter of *ever-increasing, ever-maturing love*.

***The Divine Romance Flourishes Even in the Driest of Places –
i.e. the Negev - and in the Most Difficult of Circumstances –
i.e. When the Beloved Are Surrounded by Angry, Self-Obsessed Philistines!***

Most recently, the Holy One's Divine Guidance has led Avraham, Sarah, and Yitzchak to an oasis in the southern Negev called *Be'er Sheva*. Torah says the Covenant family stayed there *yomim rabim* – *i.e.* many/much days. **Genesis 21:34**. What was the Creator of the Universe doing embedding His fledgling Covenant family there, surrounded by fierce and testy Philistines, of all places? Why wasn't he out every day, actively pursuing his quest for a city with eternal foundations? All in good time, Beloved! Never forget, *wherever you go ...well ...there you are*. If you are going to *be* somewhere – and if your calling in life is to *be a blessing* - make sure that while you are at any given location, among any group of people, you are *fully there*. Make sure your mind, your heart, and your passion is not somewhere else. To the extent humanly possible, without giving up on your greater dreams and destiny, make sure you are 'all in' for whatever people and geographical area the Holy One brings within your sphere of influence. Never be a net taker; be a net giver. Never channel fear, spread hate, show disgust, or radiate negativity; you are an ambassador of the Kingdom of Heaven. You are sent as a messenger of love. You are there to be a model of *tzedekah* and *mishpat*, a minstrel of joy, a vessel of vision, and a lighthouse of hope. You are to be about your Father's business.

Taking Care of our Father's Business

Avraham was not just biding time in the Negev until something better came along. He was there for the long haul. It was his intention to make that area his family's permanent home. First of all, at no small expense – seven of his best ewes - he entered into a mutual non-aggression treaty with the local warlord [Genesis 21:32]. More importantly, he engaged in a slow, tedious process of turning what everyone else has always seen as a barren desert and war zone into a fruitful, delightful, peaceful plain. He set about to drastically change the atmosphere. He set about to bless and refresh Creation for miles around. He set about to make it beautiful again – envisioning the as the Holy One designed it to be, instead of the way centuries of men's neglect and/or abuse had caused it to become. How did he do this? The first step was simply to provide a calming, steadying influence there, to offset and counterbalance all the hypersensitive, knee-jerk reactors that had been there before. Simply by being a selfless man of *shalom*, he provided a strategic counterbalance to all the toxically narcissistic, pseudo-intellectual ideologues and lusty, selfish takers that lived around him. By serving as a flesh-and-blood fountain of love, kindness, mercy, forgiveness and blessing, he introduced a refreshing alternative to the cesspools of anger, offense, blame, self-righteous judgment, and constant cursing that the other residents of the area had become. Unlike his neighbors, he did not just take from the land; he saw beauty in it. He saw faint brushstrokes of the Creator's touch in it – and he decided to draw them out. He loved the land instead of using it. He blessed its potential for fruitfulness instead of cursing its present barrenness. And it was not, by any means, all talk or emotion. He *invested* heavily in it. At great expense and effort, he planted, nurtured, and tended a 'grove' [Hebrew *eshel*²] that would anchor an ecosystem that he envisioned both beautifying the region aesthetically *and* making it much more fruitful, pleasant, and inviting for generations to come. **Genesis 21:33.** Avraham also changed the atmosphere in and around *Be'er Sheva* in one other unique way - by releasing a new 'name' for the Holy One there. At *Be'er Sheva*, in the midst of P'lishtim, Avraham began to refer to, and call upon, the Holy One as the Holy One *El Olam*. He spoke lovingly of *the Holy One El Olam*. He sang to - and about – *the Holy One El Olam*. He exalted *the Holy One El Olam*. This 'name' – actually a description - literally means '*the Holy One, the Hidden God*'. Poetically it also can be interpreted as '*the Holy One, the Everlasting/Eternal/Enduring God*'. What purpose could it serve to speak of the Holy One's *hiddenness*? Everyone loves to

² Some English translators, possibly without an understanding of Avraham's covenantal mission, choose to translate *eshel* – *alef, shin, lamed* - more narrowly as '*a –i.e. one - tamarisk tree*'. That is simply because the tamarisk species is the type of fauna most frequently found in the Negev in the modern era. This interpretation is merely deductive, and has no linguistic basis. In other words, there is nothing in the Hebrew word *eshel* that points to the tamarisk species.

hunt for hidden treasure, right? All humans want to know what is just beyond the veil, don't they? Never underestimate the impact you can have on the world around you through the choice you make as to which Divine Attributes you choose to highlight when you speak to others of the Holy One! Pronunciation is not the key – telling His Story, and making His Glorious Characteristics and Attributes known, in ways that create a hunger in the people around you, is what matters.

Avraham is not just physically present in *Be'er Sheva*; he is actively engaged in *making a difference* there. Indeed, he is introducing blessing after blessing to the entire Negev region – and its pagan inhabitants. The impact of his presence will be felt in that area – and will be talked about by those people and their families - for millennia. He is a faithful servant, and a trustworthy witness. Under his stewardship the desert is becoming a fruitful plain. What more does our patriarch possibly have to prove? What more can he be expected – constrained by love for the Holy One – to do? Ah, Beloved - step with me gently into the final aliyah of *Vayera* – *i.e.* and he appeared/made himself manifest – and we will see.

Finally ... Behold, the City With Foundations!

The essential role of the *Avrahamic persona* and the *Avrahamic Covenant Lifestyle* in the Redemptive Plan of the Holy One was established before the foundation of the world. Those who dwell on the earth were, however, first introduced to this critical, healing element of the Divine Plan in Genesis 12. There the Holy One revealed that His Plan is for Avraham and his seed to **'be a blessing'** – in order that through him and his seed **'all the families of the earth are to be blessed.'** *Hallelu-Yah!* This is the hope of the world. This is the Plan. It is about *Mashiach*, yes. But it is also about every single one of us. It is about the Holy One raising up a *sh'ma/Lech Lecha* people on earth – a people who are willing to transcend the norms of the cultures, societies, and nations in which they live and become a fountain of blessing to others.

Avraham's calling, his life, his *shalom*, and his legacy – and ours as descendants of Avraham - constitute the embodiment of the Messianic mission. It is *in Avraham* and *through Avraham* that the Holy One has ordained that His Grand Redemptive Strategy is made available to everyone who seeks it. Through the narrative of *Lech Lecha* and *Vayera* we are seeing the Grand Redemptive Blueprint unfold one God-encounter at a time and one paradigm-challenging life experience after another. Everywhere the humble shepherd of Charan has gone in response to the *Lech Lecha* mandate the Holy One has caused the atmosphere around him to shift Heavenward. In every situation, in every circumstance, in every conversation, in every interaction, those who *bless him* wind up blessed, and those who *curse him*

wind up cursed. We – you and I – are called to have the exactly the same *level* and exactly the same *quality* of impact on the people of our world.

But What of Avraham Himself?

As a result of the *Lech Lecha* call he received, *Avram the humble shepherd of Charan* has become *Avraham, the friend of God*. Caught up in the throes of the ultimate impossible dream, his life now consists of a Mission of Kingdom Diplomacy on behalf of the Creator of the Universe. He has grown in grace, and in favor with God and with man. He knows that, as a result, he is always ‘under orders’ – and always being watched. The world wants to know: is this man’s relationship with the Holy One *real*? Is his faith-walk *legitimate*? Is his joy deep and abiding – or is it shallow and transitory, such that it can be adversely affected by circumstances? Can he really keep his *shalom*, continue to *see the potential for good in, and therefore love and bless others*, even they are angry, ugly and unlovable? Will he continue to demonstrate true and unshakable trust in his God even when he – or his wife or precious child – are harassed, distrusted, lied on, falsely accused, blamed, threatened, maligned, mistreated, isolated, persecuted, attacked viciously, taken captive, and even bereaved? What is this man’s substance – and what are his limits? He has been tested many times. His comfort zones have all been shattered. Powerful men keep giving him riches – and he keeps giving them away. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year our patriarch’s every movement is being scrutinized by the world’s most influential – as well as its most critical and mean-spirited - people. His every facial expression, hint of body language, movement, thought, vocalization, deed, and reaction is constantly being noted, parsed, dissected, and judged –and not infrequently misquoted, mocked, and twisted. He knows, therefore, that wallowing in the norms of his socio-cultural and/or religious environment is no longer an option for him. He knows that he cannot afford the self-indulgent luxury of rants, debates, protests, or wars of rhetoric about current events and trends.

As a result of what has happened in him, Avraham is no longer content to live in the mind-numbing realm of mediocrity. He now sees that getting offended by trivialities and outraged over someone else’s attitude, speech, beliefs, or behavior as self-indulgent, childish, silly, and foolish. He is too busy walking out an epic odyssey, following an Unseen Shepherd-King to a city not built by human hands – whose builder and maker is God. Step by step, day-by-day, challenge by challenge, he is being carried along the narrow pathway of His friend the Shepherd-King by the power of the Creator’s Breath and the beauty of the Creator’s Words. He has no idea that what the Holy One is doing with him is establishing him as a model or prototype to show every human being, in every generation, what it looks like to

walk with, serve, and bring glory to the Creator in *real time*. Avraham is just an adventurer with an awestruck heart. He has just happened onto a vein of man-God relationship gold – and become bound and determined to follow that vein wherever it leads, and whatever it costs. He is completely enthralled by Divine Romance. All he really knows is that after decades of struggling to merely exist, he has finally *come alive*. He is just happy that he has, at long last, begun to discover why – and for what purpose - he was born.

You see, Dear Reader, Avraham has not been given the breath of life and the faculties of thought and articulation to judge anyone’s sin or tell anyone else how immoral and off-track they are. Avraham has been sent into the world as an agent of reconciliation, healing, and deliverance – not as a mouthpiece of condemnation. What Avraham is called to do is modeling to the world what experiencing – and then sharing with others - the kind, gentle, merciful, slow to anger, longsuffering, peaceful, joyful, and wise Ways of the Holy One look like in real life, in real time. Avraham is no longer just trying to survive the slings and arrows of this cruel world; he is now yielding more and more of his life daily to the Hand of the Ultimate Master Craftsman Who is slowly but faithfully reconstructing him into the prototypical *Hebrew* – i.e. one who *crosses over*, *overcomes*, and *transcends*. He is garnering the respect of armies and influence with nations without seeking either. He is becoming a regular in the courts of the kingdoms of this world – and even more so in the Courts of Heaven. He is now a seasoned and fully functioning co-laborer with the Creator of the World. This is the High Calling. This is the Great Adventure. This is the Eternal Covenant.

***The Avrahamic Challenge: Sons and Daughters of the Covenant –
Arise! This is Your Appointed Time to Be a Blessing!***

Like Avraham, modern day sons and daughters of the Covenant are not put on earth at such a time as this to hold great meetings, to build great buildings, to establish institutions, or to fund, promote or perform great works. We are not here to promote political agendas, belief systems, or even our ideas and concepts of what ‘service’ or ‘ministry’ should look like. We are not here to make a name for ourselves. We are not here to promote a denominational, congregational, or doctrinal ‘brand’. We are also not here to live comfortable, cushy lives in ivory tower mansions and offices. We are not here to entertain the world – or to be entertained by it. We are not here to complain about the world - or condemn it. We are not here to engage in political arguments, doctrinal disputations, ideological polemics or academic debates. We are here to bless – and bless *radically and unselfishly*. We are here to inspire. We are here to serve. We are here to carry light into the darkness, water to dry places, healing to broken hearts, fragmented lives,

and diseased bodies, and food to starving souls. We are here to offer help to the helpless and hope to the hopeless. We are here to value the unworthy, forgive the unforgivable, and love the unlovable. We are here to model righteousness, faithfulness, kindness, patience, and gentleness daily – and to do so with genuine, contagious, and irrepressible joy even in the midst of rejection, persecution, and, if necessary, martyrdom. We are here to offer hope. We are here to represent the Heart - and cooperate with the Grand Redemptive Plan - of our Glorious King.

We are *not here* to invade and conquer evil with force [physical or political] or humiliate it with logic; we are to follow the lead of the Unseen Shepherd-King as He humbly, without fanfare, and without condemnation, *overcomes evil with good*. We are not here to play legalist to the fallen world's lawlessness, or to practice lawlessness in rebellion against the religious establishment's legalism. We are not here to waste our precious gifts of time, articulation, and influence to debate theology, argue doctrine, or demand justice while sipping gourmet coffee-flavored beverages and/or fine wine. We are not here to regurgitate the residue of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that remains in our system all over the lives of the people the Holy One brings within our sphere of influence. We are here to *call forth life*, not to pronounce death. We are *not here* to declare *Unclean! Unclean!* over other people's souls or to diagnose and/or determine the root causes of the world's diseases; we are here to announce joyous news about a *Great Healer* and a *Glorious Cure*. We are *not here* to legislate morality to a confused world; we are here to live humble, gentle, responsive, kind, and wise lives in real time as we live out the Life Instructions, model the True Characteristics, reveal the Beautiful Heart and Brilliant Mind, and follow the gentle leadership of the Creator of the Universe.

We are *not saviors*. We are not *arbiters of morality*. We are not *cult-busters*. We are not *heresy chasers*. We are not *crusaders*. We are not *heroes*. We are not *warriors*. We are not *protesters*. We are not *social activists*. We are not *vigilantes*. We are not *thought police*. We are not *judges*. We are not here to stand on podiums or behind pulpits to lecture people on social justice, economic policy, or political theory. We are just humble pilgrims, like our father Avraham. We, too, are just following an Unseen Shepherd, in search of *a city Whose Builder and Maker is God*. What we are here to do is to become as awestruck of heart – and as responsive to the Divine Voice - as Avraham was. We are here to walk out the same Great Adventure - and embrace the same Covenant calling, and have the same humble, gentle, honorable societal impact – that Avraham did. This the heritage of Avraham's seed. This is the *Lech Lecha* Challenge. This is the “*I am Your Shield and Your Exceedingly Great Reward*” Covenant. Are you up for it?

Be careful how you answer that question, Dear Reader. Later in this shiur there may be a pretty challenging test on this subject matter.

A Matter of Time - and Much, Much More

As stated at the outset of our study, the *aliyah of the ultimate test* begins with these words: *Vayehi achar ha-devarim ha-eleh* – i.e. *and it came to pass after these things ...v'ha-Elohim nisa et-Avraham* – i.e. *that Elohim tested Avraham Genesis 22:1(a).*

The two key phrases of this statement are: 1. *After these things*, and 2. *Elohim tested Avraham*. Two questions immediately arise upon reading these lines of Torah. First of all, after what things are the events of today's aliyah going to unfold? This is *the question of pertinent context*. Secondly, what kind of *TEST* exactly does the Holy One have in mind for His Covenant Partner? This is the *question of prophetic substance*. Oh, Avraham. Oh, friend of God. After 37 years of grief over Yish'mael, relative peace with your neighbors, and silence from Heaven ...*are you ready for what comes next?* Can your covenant with the Holy One survive even *this*?

The Question of Pertinent Context

The first thing we must understand is that the events about which we read in Genesis 22 do not occur in a vacuum; much less at a time of 'business as usual'. The events surrounding *Akeidat-Yitzchak* – i.e. *a binding of Yitzchak* - occurred in the context of a long season of Divinely choreographed encounters between Avraham and the Holy One. As discussed above, Avraham is no wide-eyed novice at God-man relations. Nor is he a confused truth-seeker. He has bought into the Plan – and is now a full-bore Covenant Partner. He bears an irreversible mark of that Covenant in his flesh – as does his son Yitzchak. He is a seasoned veteran of Divine Guidance. He has been lovingly watched over, prodded, and trained by the Holy One for decades. He has followed the Unseen Shepherd through bereavement and blessing, through pleasure and pain, through famine and abundance, through exile and homecoming, and through war and peace. He has been upgraded to a level of understanding and trust that very few human beings have ever been privileged to experience. He has seen angels open wells up in the desert not for a righteous man but also for a moody and rebellious bondwoman and her brooding, haughty, violent son. He has seen first hand miraculous conceptions and joyous celebrations of birth – and he has witnessed with his own eyes death and destruction on a level no other human being has seen on earth since Noah.

Indeed, as the infamous aliyah begins, Avraham is already in some very exclusive company. Men like Adam, Hanoach [Enoch] and Noach [Noah] – they might have a faint idea what his life and walk with the Creator has been like thus far. Men like

Yosef [Joseph], Moshe [Moses], Y'hoshua, and Sh'muel [Samuel], David, Sh'lomo [Solomon], Yeshayahu [Isaiah], Yirmayahu [Jeremiah], Kefa [Peter], Yochanan [John], and Shaul of Tarsus [Saul/Paul] - they will one day be in a position to get at least a little of it. Perhaps, however, only Sarah can truly understand the context of the aliyah of the ultimate test.

What Sarah Could Tell Us

Sarah knows that the most recent episode – the events of immediate context - started with her husband sitting in the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day while recovering from his circumcision. It was then that he experienced perhaps his most glorious Divine visitation yet. Sarah had actually gotten to participate in this God encounter. She heard for herself – from the lips of angels - the *promise of a miraculous conception and of the imminent coming of a child of redemption*. Sarah could tell us how the grand redemptive mission of Avraham and his descendants – i.e. the part Avraham and his progeny are to play in the redemptive plan of the Holy One - was then revealed. The Holy One Himself had declared that mission to be: “ ***...that he may enjoin/teach/instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Holy One, to do righteousness and justice.***” Genesis 18:19. Sarah could tell us how after Avraham’s upgraded purpose was revealed he was so empowered that he began to engage in a level of God-man interaction that boggles the mind – he actually *bartered* with the Creator of the Universe *over the security of the perverted cities within his sphere of influence and over the lives of fallen men he did not even know*. Sarah could give us an up close and personal view into the *perversion* and *unspeakable evil* that made the destruction of Sodom and Amorah absolutely essential. Sarah could tell us how, after being driven westward by the fallout from the tremendous implosion in the Jordan River Valley Avraham encountered the *Ph’lishtim* [i.e. “*Philistines*”] for the first time. Sarah could describe in hair-raising detail how she got taken into, then delivered from, the harem of the pagan king Avi-melech – and of how the Holy One intervened to keep her virtue intact and her relationship with Avraham undiluted. Sarah could tell us through laughter of how after she was returned to Avraham safe and sound, the beautiful child of promise – the son and heir that the Holy One promised - finally arrived! Sarah could help us understand how shortly after this child was weaned, Avraham suffered a stunning personal tragedy – as Avraham’s beloved eldest son Yishma’el, along with his mother Hagar, had to be expelled from the patriarchal camp to establish a bloodline of their own. Sarah could explain that it was in the midst of his season of deep bereavement and personal pain that Avraham cut the first-ever Middle-East Peace Agreement – a ‘land for peace’ covenant with the Ph’lishtim that was/is destined to affect the history of the world forever.

And then there is *the matter of the years*. Sarah could tell us that 37 long years passed between sealing of the covenant with the *Ph'lishtim* and the events about which we will read in Genesis 22. She could tell us that for Avraham, for her and for young Yitzchak, that meant 37 years *without a single recorded God encounter*. She could explain how the silence from Heaven during that 37 years *was deafening*. But even so, Avraham has not yet experienced the darkest night of his soul. He has not yet faced the ultimate test. But when considered in proper context perhaps neither the substance nor the famous outcome of the ultimate test of Covenant Faithfulness should be surprising to us.

Breaking the Silence: Disturbing the Peace

As we study and meditate upon the familiar story of the miraculous events that transpired on Mount Moriyah that fateful day when the world was introduced to *the Holy One Yireh*, we will find our attention fixed upon a ram – a ram whose horn we shape into a musical instrument and blow on *Yom T'ruah* [frequently called *Rosh HaShanah*]. And if we will but pay attention I believe we will discover the substance of what *Yom T'ruah* is all about. The great drama of the Moriyah Experience begins with the following words: *Vayomer elav Avraham* - *And He* [i.e. the Holy One] *said to him: 'Avraham!'* **Genesis 22:1**. This time there is no “*Al Tirah / Fear Not*” empowerment. This time there is no Divine formula of self-introduction. This time there is no glorious promise of land or heritage. This time the Holy One simply calls His Friend by name.

Ayeika? [Where Are You?]

When the Holy One spoke Avraham's name aloud to initiate the first God-encounter in 37 years it was reminiscent of the first *Yom T'ruah*, when the Holy One came looking for Adam. Genesis 3:8-9 says that back in the Garden when the Holy One came to breathe renewing life into Adam, Adam ran and hid. Will that be Avraham's response as well? When the Holy One called Avraham's name you see, it was as if He was posing to Avraham the same poignant question he had asked Adam - *Where are you?* So it was with Avraham. And so it is with us. The first issue the Holy One wants us to deal with - before any substantive dialogue is exchanged - is always going to be “*Where are you, My Beloved?*”

Let's think about the question. *Where was Avraham* at this stage of his life? Physically, he was living in the land of the Philistines in the midst of a pagan society under a treaty with Avimelech that he had negotiated quite without the Holy One's instruction or input. See **Genesis 21:22-34**. *Where was Avraham?* Spiritually I suspect that he was still smarting about having to send his firstborn

son Yish'mael and his mistress Hagar out into the desert never to see them again. See **Genesis 21:9-14**. And thus the Holy One had every right to ask, as He came into Avraham's garden for *t'ruah* – i.e. for an intimate interchange of the breath of life - *Where are you, Avraham?* Where indeed was Avraham our patriarch at this stage of his life? Where indeed are you and I right now?

A single word is all Avraham spoke in reply: **Hineni** – i.e. “*I am here*”.³ That one word said it all. Avraham was not just physically present; He was there, listening - waiting for his next set of instructions. And he was ready for, and committed to do, with all his heart, whatever those instructions called for – so help him God.

Another Lech Lecha – Same Covenant Song, Next Verse!

The next line of our aliyah let's us know exactly what the ‘test’ the Holy One has in mind next for Avraham. We all think we know what the Holy One told Avraham to do with Yitzchak, of course. But do we really? Let's look at the actual words of the Divine Instruction:

Kach-na et-bincha et-yehideicha asher-ahavta et-Yitzchak

Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, even Yitzchak

v'lech-lecha

and go for yourself [i.e. your true identity, your real mission and your greater destiny]

el-eretz ha-Moriyah

to the soil of Moriah

v'ha-aleihu sham l'olah

and cause him to ascend/rise up for a rising ascent

al achad he-harim asher omar eleicha

on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

[Genesis 22:2]

Oh, my goodness - another ‘***lech lecha***’ Word from the Holy One! By now Avraham was intimately familiar with that Hebrew phrase. ***Lech lecha ...*** was, after all, the very first instruction the Holy One had ever given him. Back in his father's village of Charan, what must have seemed like a lifetime ago now, the Holy One had once changed everything about Avraham's life with those very words: “***Lech lecha ... go out for yourself***”. Watch out Avraham Avinu - *lightning is about to strike twice!*

³ “*I am here!*” [Hebrew, **Hineni**] is a Hebrew idiomatic way of responding to a summons. As at a roll call we declare, upon the calling of our name, “*Present!*”, so a Hebrew responds to the calling of his name with “**Hineni!**”. For other incidents of this usage, see Genesis 27:1, 31:1, 37:13, Exodus 3:4, 1 Samuel 3:4, and 2 Samuel 1:7.

Behold: Moriyah

This time however the Holy One did not leave the destination of the Lech Lecha journey a mystery as He had done before. This time the Holy One tells Avraham *exactly* where he is being called to go. The destination is stated clearly to be *eretz ha-Moriyah* – i.e. *the soil of the Moriyah*. The *soil of the Moriyah*, huh? Avraham *knew the place called ‘the Moriyah’ well*. He knew that soil to be the domain of “Melki-tzedek”, *the king of Salem*, and the *priest of the Most High God*. The soil of the Moriyah was the place Avraham offered a tenth of the wealth the Holy One had delivered into his hand as spoils of his supernatural victory over the ‘kings of the East’. See **Genesis 14:18**. Why did the Holy One want Avraham to go back *there*? Hadn’t Avraham invested enough in *that place* – and in *that Priest*?

Ah yes, Avraham knew the ‘*soil of the Moriyah*’ well. You and I know the ‘*soil of the Moriyah*’ as well, don’t we, Beloved? *Moriyah* is where Heaven and earth meet – and where invisible, unseen, eternal, incorruptible Heavenly realities pass through the finity barrier and are made manifest to human eyes, ears, and intellect. The soil of the Moriyah is the place *where angels ascend and descend on a great staircase*. It is also the place of complete *surrender - and ultimate sacrifice*. And that is why the soil of the Moriyah sends out homing signal to the heart of every son and daughter of Avraham. Each of us knows – if we are honest with ourselves - that sooner or later we, like Avraham, *must go to Moriyah*. Whither we go, we know; and the way, we know. The only question is, when the time comes, and the eternal call of *eretz ha-Moriyah* finally reaches our ears, will we, like Avraham, have *the will, the strength, and the courage* – to make the journey?

Take My Son to Moriyah ...and do WHAT?

Go to ‘*the soil of the Moriyah*’ FOR WHAT? The Holy One told Avraham only the following cryptic explanation of what his Moriyah experience was supposed to consist of. The Holy One said:

V’ha-aleihu sham l’olah

And raise him up as/for an olah

Al ached he-harim asher omar eleicha

on one of the mountains I will designate to you.’

“***Raise him up there for olah***⁴ ...?” “*Hold on a minute*”, Avraham could have said.

⁴ The Hebrew word *olah* is a noun derived from a Hebrew verb meaning ‘*to ascend*’. The use of *olah* as a noun is difficult to translate into English in a way that captures its essence. Literally, the noun *olah* would merely mean *something ascending or arising*. Since the term was, in Avraham’s day, frequently used in the context of a specific kind of altar activity, however, Avraham naturally associated the word *olah* with an altar presentation in which whatever was on the altar was burned, causing smoke and scent from it to

*“Excuse me – point of clarification! What exactly does ‘raise him up there for an olah’ mean in this context? But Avraham did not even think to ask. He may not have understood exactly what the Holy One might think *making olah* meant, but he did understand perfectly what it meant to *Lech Lecha*. It meant *get up and go* - and trust the Holy One to show you what He has in mind when you get to wherever He tells you to go.*

It is worth noting, however, that in the actual words the Holy One spoke nothing whatever was said about Avraham taking a *knife* to the throat of Yitzchak. Nor was anything said about Avraham building an *altar*, lighting a *fire*, or *making a sacrifice*. Nor, for that matter, was anything said in the Hebrew about *Yitzchak* – or *anyone or anything else - dying*. That was all a matter of Avraham’s fleshly interpretation of the Holy One’s instructions. It is not what the Holy One *said* – but, due to Avraham’s limited, cultural frame of reference, it was what Avraham thought he *heard*. He will be pleasantly surprised, when this is over, that the Holy One had a much better idea in mind all along. But this is a faithful saying: *Even seasoned Covenant Partners of the Holy One tend to think they know more than they do. And sometimes we human beings are so conditioned by our fears, by our cultures, by our predispositions, by our past experiences, and by our pseudo-intellect, that we think we hear things – from the mouth or Word of the Holy One – that we have not in fact heard. And sometimes that which we think we know, and/or that which we think we have heard, significantly colors the way we interpret and respond to Divine Communications.*

You see, Beloved, the operative verb in the Divine Directive of Genesis 22:2 is not the Hebrew verb *zabach* – meaning to take a knife in hand and slay. The verb the Holy One employed instead when He gave His instructions to Avraham was the Hebrew verb *alah* – meaning to *arise, ascend, or go up*. Interestingly, in all the God-man interactions recorded thus far in Torah, the Holy One has never even once before told anyone to make *olah* [the noun form of the verb *alah*]. He did not

ascend. The Hebraic phrase *korban olah*, not used here, but found elsewhere in Torah, has therefore often been translated into English as “*burnt offering*”. This sounds sterile and legal. The true meaning is anything but sterile or legal. *Olah* simply means “*ascending*”. *Korban* is from a root word meaning “*to approach*”. So, a *korban olah* means *to approach in order to ascend*. It is a means – a picture – of someone totally submitting to the Holy One. The animal which was substituted for a man desiring to express his total submission to and longing to commune with the Holy One was burned completely on the altar. By this substitutionary presentation, the man (or the community) expressed its willingness to walk into the flames – be it burning bush, fiery furnace, Nazi incinerator, or whatever; and to do so not out of legalistic sense of duty, but out of *pure love for the Holy One*. It is a threshold of commitment, of dedication. Before one can be *kadosh* [set apart, consecrated for service to the Holy One], one must go through this step of commitment. One must see the flames, and surrender to them.

tell Adam, or Hevel [Abel]⁵, or Kayin [Cain]⁶, or Shet [Seth] to make *olah*. He did not tell Hanoach [Enoch] to do so. Neither did He even suggest to Noach to do so. The Holy One has therefore never defined what an *olah* is, or what making *olah* consists of. Men, therefore, have chosen to interpret the term for themselves. The process started with Noach. After exiting the ark, in a flood of emotion Noach came up with an idea of doing something he called ‘making *olah*’ by the operation of his human mind and emotions. Without any instruction from the Holy One to do anything of the sort he built an altar on Ararat, took a specimen from of every clean animal and bird that emerged from the ark, and, as Torah puts it, *vaya'al olot bamizbe'ach* [he caused olot (the masculine plural form of the Hebrew noun olah) to alah on/in/from the altar. See **Genesis 8:20**.

Avraham had never made *olah* before⁷. He had no frame of reference for what the Holy One had told him to do with Yitzchak. Avraham heard *alah*; but he apparently thought – and acted on - *zebach*. Rest assured, however, the Holy One can fix all that. Even when we think we hear something we do not hear, or misinterpret what we do hear, if we are faithful to do what we know the Holy One is faithful to bring about the result He intends. That too is a part of the Covenant Faithfulness attribute of the Shepherd-King.

Avraham – the Father of All Who Sh'ma

Avraham did not hesitate, equivocate, argue, complain, or offer excuses. He *sh'ma*-ed the second Divine “*Lech Lecha*” directive of his life just as he had the first. He responded quickly and affirmatively – with *alacrity*, *enthusiasm* and *excitement*. He *rose early*, saddled his donkey, and the split some wood – just in case that was what the Holy One meant by ‘making *olah*’. As Torah puts it:

*Avraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey,
and took two of his young men with him, and Yitzchak his son;
and he split etzei olah* [wood for olah], and arose,
and went to the place of which the Holy One had told him.

[**Genesis 22:3**]

Why did Avraham comply so enthusiastically with such a strange-sounding, ill-defined instruction? It is a fair question. I personally do not believe, as some have taught, that the reason Avraham complied with such alacrity is because he was full

⁵ What Hevel brought – of his own free will – was a *bekorah* [a firstfruits presentation].

⁶ What Kayin brought –of his own free will – was a *minchah* [a voluntary presentation of a portion of grain].

⁷ In Genesis 12:8 we are told that Avram *built an altar* to the Holy One [without instruction to do so] and that he then ‘called upon the Name of the Holy One’. There is no reference to an *olah*. Then in Genesis 15:9-17 Avram followed the instructions of the Holy One to ‘take’ [Hebrew *laqach*] five specific animals; Avram then followed his own ideas and cut the carcasses of the animals in two pieces. Again, there was no reference in the text to an *olah*.

of “faith”. I believe, you see, that Avraham was just a man much like us. I doubt that he had any more “faith” at that moment than you or me. I believe that the reason Avraham complied with the Holy One’s stunning “*Lech lecha el-aretz ha-Moriyah*” directive was simply that his soul and spirit had surrendered long ago to the beauty and goodness of the Voice which had first spoken the words “*Lech Lecha*” to him at Charan. I believe Avraham complied with the “*Kach-na et bincha*” directive because the Words of the Holy One themselves contained a power that propelled Avraham forward – as had the initial “*Lech lecha*” Word with which the Holy One had long ago called him out of his country and his father’s household and had bound his heart, mind, soul, and will to His Creator forever.

Avraham complied, I believe, because after all the Holy One had done for him he simply could not – *would not* - refuse His covenant partner *anything*. He did not, I do not believe, understand very much at all about what was going happen on the mountain to which he was called to *lech lecha*. But he knew that he *had to go*. He had to go *not for the Holy One*, but *lecha – for himself*. He did not, I do not believe, know what would become of his dreams, his plans, his wealth, his wife, his son, or all the Holy One’s promises - he simply knew he had to go – *lecha – for himself*. Avraham had simply *come too far to turn back now*. If he were to stay in Beersheva, holding onto Yitzchak and Sarah and his life among the Philistines, saying to the Holy One “*this is mine, you can’t have it*” he knew he would never fulfill the destiny for which he was created. The Holy One had drawn him away from Ur of the Chaldees while he was still living in his father’s house. The Holy One had pulled him away from his only living brother and the remnants of his family and clan at Charan. Despite all that had happened since then he still did not yet fully know why he had been “called out” from the rest of the world. He had to find out *lecha – for himself*. The only way to find out was to *go to Moriyah*. It is the same for us, Dear Reader. You see, for the people of the Most High, all our roads lead to Moriyah eventually.

Look Up! Your Redemption Draws Nigh!

Once Avraham and Yitzchak drew near to the soil of the Moriyah, Torah tells us:

*...on the third day Avraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off.
And Avraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey;
the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.”
So Avraham took the wood for the olah and laid it on Yitzchak his son;
and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together.*

[Genesis 22:4-6]

Yitzchak was no child. He voluntarily co-labored with his father to build a crude

altar of stone. The two of them carefully placed wood upon the altar. And then Yitzchak willingly climbed up onto the bed of wood they had made, and lay down in complete surrender. This was going to be as much *his test* as it was Avraham's.

Avraham bound his son to the altar with cords of linen. Slowly, tentatively, he reached into his pack and pulled out his flint knife. I am sure he stared at the cruel instrument in his hand for a long while - then spent even longer gazing lovingly – perhaps for the last time in this world - at his beloved, faithful, and *obedient-even-to-the-death* son. I am sure tears poured from his eyes. I am sure pain racked his heart. I picture both men bowing their heads in desperate prayer, whispering – or perhaps shouting - something like ***'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not my will, but Yours be done.'*** Matthew 26:39. Then it was time. I picture Yitzchak pursing his lips and drawing a deep breath, smiling at his father, then closing his eyes, and lifting his chin to expose his tender throat to the cold edge of the flint. I picture Avraham strengthening his grip on the flint, tensing his muscles, and raising the knife. And then ...well, and then *it happened*.

Vayikra elav Malach Adonai min-ha-shamayim vayomer

And the Holy One's angel called to him from the heavens and said,

Avraham Avraham

'Avraham! Avraham!'

vayomer hineni

And he said 'I am here.'

Vayomer Al-tish'lach yadcha el-ha-na'ar

And he said: 'Do not raise your hand against the boy.'

v'al-ta'as lo me'umah

Do not do anything to him.

ki atah yadati ki-yere Elohim atah

For now I know that you fear God.

V'lo chasachta et-bincha et-yechidecha mimeini

You have not withheld your only son from Him.'

Vayisa Avraham et-eynav vayar

And then Avraham looked up [lit. raised his eyes]

v'hineh-ayil achar ne'echaz basvach b'karnav

and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket

vayelech Avraham vayikach et-ha-ayil

And he went and took the ram,

vaya'aleihu l'olah tachat beno

And he caused it to ascend as an olah in his son's place.

[Genesis 22:10-13]

As Avraham and Yitzchak both passed simultaneously through the portal of *total surrender ... it happened*. As Avraham emptied himself of both his grief over the loss of Yish'mael and his dependence upon the company of his beloved Yitzchak for consolation and happiness ... *it happened*. *What happened*, you ask. Oh Beloved, something *absolutely glorious* happened. The Holy One stepped out of *eternity into time, out of the realm of spiritual mystery into the realm of tangible reality*, and off of the *Throne of the Highest Heaven onto the lowly orb of the earth* – and He *changed everything*. He spoke to his beloved charge Avraham tenderly – like only a father could. And he essentially [please forgive the author this literary paraphrase] said: “*Now, Avraham – now do you know why I brought you here?*”

Look, Avraham!

Through your tears, can you see it?

Though you are standing on top of a mountain, look up! Raise your eyes!

Raise them above the altar. Raise them above the mountain.

Raise them above the realm of time.

***Look beyond the physical realm of tachat shemesh* [under the sun].**

Now, do you see the ram, Avraham?

Do you see the ram ...that I have provided?”

And Avraham *looked up* as the Holy One instructed him. Though he was standing *on top of a mountain*, he looked *up*. And “*up*”. And “*up*”. And “*up*” some more. And at last his eyes were opened, and he really *did* see⁸. Behold, there *is* a ram. I personally suspect it looked to Avraham as if it was *slain before the foundation of the world*.

In *seedtime* what Avraham saw that day would have been described as a *lamb*. But Avraham did not see the ram in *seedtime* – he saw it in all its resplendent *harvest time glory*. Ah Beloved. At the place of total surrender – the place of tears and submission – in the domain of Melki-Tzedek, King of Righteousness – this ram can still be seen. And that is why Avraham called the place “*Adonai yireh*” – the Holy One will be *seen/shown/revealed/made manifest!* And to this day it is said, “*On the mountain of the Holy One, He will be seen!*” Genesis 22:14.

And so, my Dear Reader, as you prepare your homes and your hearts for the

⁸ The verb root of the Hebrew word used is *ra'ah*, meaning to see the essence of something, to see and understand the essence of something.

Shabbat this sixth day; and as you prepare, if you are privileged to do so, to *gather your children around you* just after sunset, and *bless them* with the ancient blessings [or perhaps as you prepare to stand before your parents and receive the ancient blessings]; as you focus your attention on the covenant you have with the Holy One, through the covenant sign of the Shabbat; as you do these things, please, please, *remember the ram of the Moriyah*. Remember that the very breath with which the blessings are spoken, and with which ‘*Lecha Dodi*’, ‘*Shabbat Shalom*’, and ‘*Shalom Aleichem*’ are joyfully sung, is not *your breath*, but is His Breath. Remember that there are moments programmed into Creation by the Master when *eternity will touch time*, when *mystery will touch tangible reality*, and when *Heaven will touch earth*. Remember that you have *an eternal covenant with the Creator of the Universe*. Remember that you were *created for a magnificent purpose*. Remember that you have *a destiny to fulfill*. Remember, Dear Reader. Remember *Moriyah*. And most of all, lift up your eyes, like Avraham did. Lift them higher than you ever have before in your entire life ... and see *the ram*.

Questions Regarding Today’s Study

1. As today’s aliyah begins we are told that the Holy One “*tested*” Avraham. The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as “test” is *nasa* [*nun, samech, hey*, Strong’s Hebrew word # 5254, pronounced *naw-saw*]. Look this word up in Strong’s and Gesenius, then read how the word is used in Exodus 15:25 and in Deuteronomy 8:2; then, describe the Hebraic word picture which the word *nasa*, as used in Torah, presents to us.
2. The Holy One instructs Avraham to go to the soil of the Moriyah [at the city of Salem, where Melki-Tzedek is king]. He instructs Avraham to present Yitzchak as what our English Bibles call a *burnt offering*. In Hebrew, what Yitzchak was to ascend the Moriyah to become is *for*, or *unto*, an *olah* – a means of approaching the Holy One through ascending, as – but not necessarily through, a fire. The details of *korban olah* will later be spelled out for Avraham’s descendants in Leviticus 1. Read that chapter, and describe what you think the Holy One wanted Avraham to learn from this experience.
3. What kind of animal bore the processional to Moriyah? Do you see any prophetic significance in this?
4. The hill where the events of this aliyah took place is the location where the *Beit Ha-Mikdash* [The Holy Temple] was constructed, and thus where every “sacrifice” was supposed to be offered. By providing a supernatural substitute at this location long before the Temple was built, what point was the Holy One making in regard to his covenant with Avraham and his descendants?

5. Many English translations say that Avraham responded to this supernatural provision of a substitute offering by saying “*Jehovah Jireh*”, and this is often translated “*the Holy One will Provide*”. The “j” sound, however, is English, not Hebrew. The verb is thus not “*jireh*”, but ‘*yireh*’, meaning “*will be seen/made visible/made manifest for the human eye to behold.*” Note how the word *yireh* is based upon the same root word as the title of our *parsha ha-shavua (Vayera)*. The root word is *ra’ah*, meaning to appear, or be made manifest to the human eye. What Avraham declares will be seen/made manifest for the human eye to behold at this site is *the Holy One Himself*.

[A] By declaring this truth at this location long before the Temple was built [or before Messiah Y’shua taught there, healed there, and underwent trial there] what point was Avraham making in regard to his and his descendants’ covenant with the Holy One?

[B] On what covenant reality was Avraham saying his descendants could rely?

6. In today’s concluding haftarah of *Vayera* we read about the dramatic resurrection of the son of the Shunamite [a prophetic reference back to Yitzchak and ahead to Yeshua]. Here is the reading in the Hebrew Names Version.

*Gechazi passed on before them, and laid the staff on the face of the child;
but there was neither voice, nor hearing.
Therefore he returned to meet him, and told him, saying “**The child has not awakened.**”
When Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid on his bed.
He went in therefore, and shut the door on them both, and prayed to the Holy One.
He went up, and lay on the child,
and put his mouth on his mouth, and his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands:
and he stretched himself on him; and the flesh of the child grew warm.
Then he returned, and walked in the house once back and forth;
and went up, and stretched himself on him:
and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.
He called Gechazi, and said, “**Call this Shunamite.**” So he called her.
When she was come in to him, he said, “**Take up your son.**”
Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground;
and she took up her son, and went out.*

[A] What do you think caused the flesh of the child to “grow warm” – i.e. what was ‘in’ Elisha that brought life?

[B] What do you think is the significance of the fact that Elisha stretched himself out on the child *twice*?

[C] After the child of promise was resurrected, at whose feet do you think the text is telling us the Shunamite fell?

[D] The conclusion of this haftarah story is much the same as the conclusion of the story in the Torah. Both parents [Avraham in Torah, the Shunamite in the haftarah] took their respective children of promise home. Here is where the symbolism of the story gets interesting in regard to Yeshua. Who took/takes Yeshua 'home'?

[E] Remember that the Shunamite woman is herself a prophetic symbol. What people does she symbolize? Where else in the TaNaKh is a Shunamite woman used to symbolize this people?

8. In today's reading from the apostolic Scriptures the writer of the letter to the Messianic Hebrews describes the events of today's Torah aliyah:

*By **emunah** Avraham, being tested, surrendered Yitzchak.
Yes, he who had gladly received the promises was surrendering his one and only son;
even he to whom it was said, "**In Yitzchak will your seed be called;**"
accounting that God is able to raise up even from the dead.
Figuratively speaking he also did receive him back from the dead.*

[A] According to this inspired writer, what understanding had Avraham reached, by reason of his many years of interacting with the Holy One, that gave him confidence that the instruction to make Yitzchak *l'olah* did not mean he would never see Yitzchak again?

[B] In what way did Avraham "receive (Yitzchak) back from the dead"? What does this writer mean when he says he did so "figuratively speaking"?

*May you look up, this day, and see the ram - a lamb slain for you.
And may you walk in all the blessings of Avraham's covenant with the Holy One.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 141:1-8

*O Holy One, I have called on you. Come to me quickly! Listen to [sh'ma] my voice
when I call to you. Let my prayer be set before you like incense;
The lifting up of my hands like the evening sacrifice.
Set a watch, O Holy One, before my mouth. Keep the door of my lips.
Don't incline my heart to any ra thing, to practice deeds of wickedness
with men who work iniquity. Don't let me eat of their delicacies.
Let the righteous strike me, it is kindness; Let him reprove me,
it is like oil on the head; Don't let my head refuse it;
Yet my prayer is always against evil deeds. Their judges are thrown down by
the sides of the rock. They will hear my words, for they are well spoken.
"As when one plows and breaks up the eretz, our bones are scattered at the mouth of She'ol."
For my eyes are on you, O Holy One Adonai.
In you, I take refuge. Don't leave my soul destitute.*