

## מיכה פרק ז:ב

תתן אמת ליעקב חסד לאברהם אשר נשבעת לאבתינו מימי קדם:

### Miknah 7:2

You will give truth to Yaakov as an act of graciousness to Avraham, which You swore to our ancestors from the earliest days.

## בראשית פרק כב

(י) וישלח אברהם את ידו ויקח את המאכלת לשחט את בנו:

(יא) ויקרא אליו מלאך יקוק מן השמים ויאמר אברהם ויאמר הנני:

(יב) ויאמר אל תשלח ידך אל הנער ואל תעש לו מאומה כי עתה ידעתי כי ירא אלהים אתה ולא חשכת את בנך את יחידך ממני:

(יג) וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא והנה איל אחר נאחז בסבך בקרניו וילך אברהם ויקח את האיל ויעלהו לעלה תחת בנו:

(יד) ויקרא אברהם שם המקום ההוא יקוק יראה אשר יאמר היום בהר יקוק יראה:

(טו) ויקרא מלאך יקוק אל אברהם שנית מן השמים:

(טז) ויאמר בי נשבעתי נאם יקוק כי יען אשר עשית את הדבר הזה ולא חשכת את בנך את יחידך:

(יז) כי ברך אברכך והרבה ארבה את זרעך ככוכבי השמים וכחול אשר על שפת הים וירש זרעך את שער איביו:

(יח) והתברכו בזרעך כל גויי הארץ עקב אשר שמעת בקלי:

(יט) וישב אברהם אל נעריו ויקמו וילכו יחדו אל באר שבע וישב אברהם בבאר שבע: פ

### Genesis 22:10-19

Avraham sent forth his hand; he took the knife to slaughter his son.

An angel of Hashem called to him from the Heavens, saying: "Avraham, Avraham!" He said: "Here I am."

He said: "Do not send forth your hand against the lad, and do him no harm, now that I know that you are a fearer-of-G-d and you have not withheld you son, your unique on, from Me."

Avraham raised his eyes and saw – Behold a ram *achar* caught in the brush by its horns. Avraham went and took the ram and brought-it-up as a going-up sacrifice in place of his son.

Avraham called the place "Hashem will see", about which it is said today: "On Mount Hashem-will-see".

An angel of Hashem called to Avraham a second time from the Heavens.

He said: "I have sworn by Myself, says Hashem, that owing to the fact that you did this thing, and did not withhold your son your unique one,

that I will indeed bless you, and I will indeed multiply your descendants like the stars of the Heavens and like the sand that is on the shore of the sea, and your descendants will conquer the gate of its enemies,

and all the peoples of the land will be blessed through your descendants, in reward for your having listened to My voice.

Avraham returned to his lads, and they arose and went together to Be'er Sheva, and Avraham settled in Be'er Sheva.

## תוספות

ואל תעש לו מאומה – יש במדרש שהמלאכים בכו והדמעות ירדו על הסכין על שהיה נשחט ורצה אברהם לחנקו –

א"ל: ואל תעש לו מאומה.

אמר אברהם: אחנקנו ואטריחך לבקש לשרה בן אחר ששמו יצחק לקיים מה שאמרת לי "כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע", או השבע לי שלא תנסני עוד, וכשיהיה אפרו של יצחק צבור לפניך, להיות לזכרון לדורת כאילו הקרבתי.

א"ל הקב"ה: "בי נשבעתי יען אשר עשית את הדבר הזה".

א"ל אברהם: על (?עם?) כל זאת לא אניחנו עד שתתן לי חותם שלך.

א"ל: חייך דבדין אני פטור על השבועה שהשבעתני, שהרי פטרתני, אמנם אעשה לך חסד ואעשה בקשתך, אבל לא אמסרנו לך, לפי שיצא ממך ישמעאל, גם ליצחק נמי לא אתננו לפי שיצא ממנו עשו, אכן לבן בנך אמסור אותו והיינו יעקב שמתתו שלימה,

והיינו דכתיב "תתן אמת ליעקב חסד לאברהם" – כלומר ע"י חסד שעשה לאברהם נתן אמת ליעקב, ואמת הוא חותמו של הקב"ה.

עוד יש במדרש:

כשאמר אברהם שלא ינסנו עוד, א"ל הקב"ה: חייך צרות רבות עתידין לבא עליך, אכן נולד עוץ שיצא ממנו שיקבלם בעבורך והיינו איוב דכתיב איש היה בארץ עוץ והוא היה מבני נחור דכתיב ואת עוץ בכורו.

### The Tosafist Commentary to Genesis 22:12

“And do him no harm” – There is in the midrash that the angels cried and the tears descended onto the knife (*and dulled it* – RK) because he was being slaughtered, and Avraham then sought to strangle him – He said to him – “Do him no harm”.

Avraham said: I will strangle him and trouble you to seek out for Sarah another son whose name is Yitzchak so as to fulfill that which You said to me: “For through Yitzchak will our offspring be called”, or else swear to me that You will not test me further, and then when the dust of Yitzchak is gathered before You, let it be a reminder-to-favor for all generations as if I had sacrificed him.

The Holy One Who is Blessed said to him: “I have sworn by Myself, says Hashem, that owing to the fact that you did this thing.”

Avraham said to him: “Despite this I will not leave Him be until You give me Your seal.” He said to him: By your life, in law I am now exempt from the oath you imposed on Me, as you have exempted Me. However, I will do you this act of graciousness and act on your request. But I will not give the seal over to you, because Yishmael will come out from you. I will also not give it to Yitzchak, because Esav will come out from him. However I will give it over to your grandson, namely Yaakov, because “his bed is whole”.

This is the meaning of what Scripture writes “*Titen emet l’Yaakov chesed l’Avraham asher nishbata la’avoteinu miyemei kedem*” – this means that via the act of graciousness that He did for Avraham he gave truth to Yaakov, and truth is the seal of The Holy One Who is Blessed.

There is further in the Midrash

That when Avraham said that Hashem should not test him further, the Holy One Who is Blessed said to him: By your life many troubles are destined to come upon you, but Utz has been born who came out from him and will accept them on your behalf, referring to Iyov, as Scripture writes: “There was a man in the land of Utz”, and he was of the children of Nachor, as Scripture writes “And Utz his eldest”.

The redundancy in the angel's instructions to Avraham – “Do not send forth your hand against the lad, and do him no harm” – has spawned an array of fascinating interpretations in which Avraham seems disappointed when the Akeidah is not consummated. These interpretations, likely rooted in the experience of the Crusades, have Avraham actually killing Yitzchak, then seeking to kill him again after G-d resurrects him; seeking permission to at least wound Yitzchak (Rashi); or seeking to strangle Yitzchak when the knife was forbidden him or damaged, as in Tosafot translated above.

Each of these readings challenges the conventional image of Avraham as the paragon of Chesed who with great reluctance prepares to sacrifice the character trait that defines him so as to fulfill the Divine command. Rather, they depict Avraham as apparently eager to show his dedication to G-d by sacrificing his son. In this vein I love citing in the name of the Kotzker that the deepest temptation occurs when one believes that one is using one's yetzer hora for the sake of Heaven, and the greatest test is to be able to stop and reconsider one's actions undertaken in that belief, as Avraham did here, - and even Avraham needed to be told twice to stop.

But the version cited above does not fit with the Kotzker either. Instead, it offers a picture of Avraham that is rich with nuance and ambivalence, to a degree that I have not seen paralleled elsewhere. To appreciate the accomplishment of this midrash, however, it is necessary to pause and consider its exegetical underpinning.

From a formal perspective, what we have here is a drashah on the closing verse of Mikhah. The immediately presenting difficulties in that verse, if one adopts the conventional translation in which it reports that “You will give emet to Yaakov and chesed to Avraham, which you swore to our ancestors in the earliest days”, are

- a) Why is Yaakov mentioned before Avraham?
- b) Why is Yitzchak left out entirely?
- c) Where did G-d swear to do this?

To resolve this, the darshan retranslates “You will give emet to Yaakov as a chesed to Avraham”, and locates the Divine oath in Genesis 22:16.

This new translation, however, raises a new question in turn: If, as the end of the verse reports, Hashem swore to give the gift, in what sense is giving it a chesed (an act of kindness beyond that required by duty), rather than an obligation? To resolve this issue the darshan develops the startling idea that Avraham was not satisfied with the Divine oath, and insisted on His seal (Truth) as well; by not accepting the oath, Avraham released G-d from it, and thus His eventual fulfillment of it, and granting of the seal, was an act of chesed.

But the truly radical element of this interpretation is its depiction of Avraham not as struggling to overcome either his compassion or his religious fervor, but rather, unless I am mistaken, as fully choosing and in control of his decisions and capable of biting irony toward G-d for imposing them on him. “I will trouble you to create another Yitzchak from Sarah to fulfill your

promise"!)? What would the promise be worth, if Avraham can and will be forced to sacrifice everyone whom he loves? And if G-d's promises can be so twisted, no wonder Avraham wants His seal of truth in addition to the latest promise? Indeed, the allusion to Iyov in the last segment reminds us that Iyov was in fact expected to be made whole and satisfied by replacement children after his first group is killed as part of a Divine test!

In this version, Avraham offers – threatens? - to kill Yitzchak simply to get the tests to stop, on the assumption that there is nothing more that G-d can ask of him after that. G-d concedes that this is so, but rather than releasing him cleanly, transfers the next set of tests to a family member, Iyov – yet another akeidah, albeit this time Avraham had no way of knowing that he was sacrificing someone else. What is the moral of this story?

I have no satisfying answer, and encourage you to send me yours. (It is worth noting (as many have before me) that this is the last conversation between Avraham and G-d.) But perhaps one underlying theme here is that broadly, Hashem's first instruction to Avraham is to leave everything behind and start fresh, but Avraham interprets it narrowly and takes his family, his possessions, and even an entourage with him. In other words, the trait of Avraham that is regularly countered by Divine tests is his sociability, his genuine engagement with other human beings, from which his chesed flows. The same tests would be no challenge for a kannai, a zealot, whose relationship with G-d is so all-encompassing as to leave room for human relationships. But the purpose of the tests cannot be to transform Avraham into a kannai – that would be wasteful, and there are thousands prepared to speed at His bidding in that fashion. Rather –especially if we assume that this midrash takes the traditional (and textually compelling) position that Avraham “passed” the akeidah with honors – the purpose of the tests was to bring Avraham to the point that he was willing to challenge G-d directly, as opposed to the indirect way he challenged the “lekh lekha” command, but without threatening disobedience.

Shabbat Shalom!

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