

*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 for the olah, my son.”
[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

The bright spotlight of Torah is shining on the man we have come to refer to affectionately as ‘*our father Avraham*’. The central place of the *Avrahamic persona* and the *Avrahamic Covenant Lifestyle* in the Grand Redemptive Plan of the Holy One for Mankind and for Creation was established firmly in the Brilliant Mind of Elohim before the foundation of the world. Those who dwell on the earth were introduced to this essential element of the Divine Plan through the great ***Lech Lecha*** calling of Genesis 12. We are learning that it is *in Avraham* and *through Avraham* that the Holy One has ordained that His Grand Redemptive Plan for the earth is made available to everyone who seeks it. And 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.

Avraham is no longer sleepwalking obliviously through an easy, comfortable, convenient life like most people on the planet; he is suddenly caught up in the throes of the ultimate impossible dream.

Avraham is no longer carrying on meaningless chit-chat sessions with family members and friends on the back-side of nowhere as before; he is now well on his way to becoming an intimate friend of and co-laborer with the Creator of Heaven

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and Earth. All eyes – on earth and in Heaven – are on him. His every movement is carefully considered. He is obtaining riches without pursuing them and garnering attention and influence without for one second 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’s King.

Avraham is no longer content to live in the mind-numbing realm of mediocrity, wallowing in the norms of his socio-cultural and/or religious environment; he is now actively participating in a glorious Divine Romance. He is now walking out an epic odyssey, following close on the heels of an Unseen Shepherd-King. Step by step, day by day, challenge by challenge, he is being carried along the narrow pathway of the Unseen Shepherd-King by the Breath of the Holy One’s own mouth. He has no idea he is teaching every man in every generation how to walk with, serve, and bring glory to the Creator of the Universe.

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. He has been sent into the world as an agent of reconciliation, healing, and deliverance - not a mouthpiece of condemnation. What he is doing is modeling to the world what experiencing 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*.

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!

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 ‘brand’. We are also not here to live comfortable, cushy lives in ivory tower mansions and offices.

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 also 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 crusaders. We are not heroes. We are not warriors. We are just humble pilgrims, like our father Avraham, looking for a city not built by human hands, Whose Builder and Maker is God. What we are here to do is walk out the same Great Adventure and live by the same Eternal Covenant Avraham did.

This is the Avrahamic Covenant. This is the Avrahamic Challenge. Are you up for it? Be careful how you answer that question, Dear Reader. Later in this shiur there will be a test on this very subject matter.

Something Is Stirring at Be'er-Sheva

As we begin today's aliyah our patriarch is pasturing his flocks at *Be'er-Sheva* in the Negev. Yitzchak – now well into his thirties – is there with him. For whatever reason, Sarah apparently is not.

Avraham and Yitzchak have set up a *Bedouin*-style camp a stone's throw from the oasis of *Be'er Lahoi Roi* – the supernatural well in the middle of the desert recently opened for Hagar and Yish'mael by an angel of the Holy One.

As you may recall from yesterday's shiur the last thing we saw Avraham do was establish a covenant of peace with Avimelech, the warlord of the Ph'lishtim. The Ph'lishtim have decided to give Avraham and his progeny a wide berth for the time being. Ethnic tensions are still present, but there is a moratorium on actual conflict. As the world sees it, this is a season of 'peace'.

But *does Avraham have peace with himself?* Even more to the point, *does our patriarch have peace with the Holy One?* Has Avraham dealt successfully with the 'loss' of Yish'mael and Hagar to the shifting sands of the Negev? Has he *forgiven the Holy One?* Has he *forgiven Sarah* for her part in the great separation of Genesis 21? Has he *forgiven himself for his?* Is all well with Avraham's soul – or is there a festering wound and/or a root of bitterness growing there? We will see, Dear Reader. It is almost the appointed time for the most challenging test of Avraham's Covenant Walk.

A Matter of Time - and Much, Much More

Our aliyah – the *aliyah of the ultimate test* - starts with these words:

Vayehi achar ha-devarim ha-eleh

And it came to pass after these things

v'ha-Elohim nisa et-Avraham

that Elohim tested Avraham . . .

[Genesis 22:1(a)]

After ***these things*** – a ***TEST?*** 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.*** And 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 about the context of *the aliyah of the ultimate test* is that the events about which we read do not occur in a time of 'business as usual'. The events we are about to witness must be understood as having occurred in the context of a long season of Divinely choreographed encounters between Avraham and the Holy One.

Avraham is no wide-eyed novice. He is no confused truth-seeker. He is a seasoned veteran of Divine Guidance. He is now a full Covenant Partner. He even bears a irreversible mark of that Covenant in his flesh. He intimately knows – and is intimately known by - the Creator of the Universe. Avraham has, prior to today's aliyah, been lovingly watched over, prodded, and trained by the Holy One. He has been upgraded to a level of understanding and trust that very few human beings have ever been privileged to experience. 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 seen angels open wells up in the desert not for a righteous man but 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, Hanoch [Enoch] and Noah [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.

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 YHVH, 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 Gomorrah 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. And that is why our aliyah begins with the words: “*Vayehi achar ha-devarim ha-eleh v’ha-Elohim nisa et-Avraham* [And it came to pass after these things that Elohim tested Avraham . . .]”

The Question of Prophetic Substance

The second question the opening lines of our aliyah bring to mind is the question of prophetic substance – i.e. what exactly is the ‘test’ the Holy One has in mind for His Most Beloved Wandering Aramean. We all think we know what the Holy One told Avraham to do with Yitzchak. But do we really? Let’s look at the actual words of the Divine Instruction:

kach-na et-bincha et-yechidecha asher-ahavta et-Yitzchak

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

v’lech-lecha el-eretz ha-Moriah

and go for yourself [i.e. your identity, your mission and your destiny] to the soil of Moriah

v’ha-alehu sham l’olah

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

al achad he-harim asher omar eleycha

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

[Genesis 22:2]

Notice that in the actual words the Holy One spoke there is nothing whatever said about a *knife*, nor is that anything said about an *altar*, about a *fire*, or about *Yitzchak* – or *anyone or anything else - dying*. That is all a matter of interpretation. It is not what the Holy One *said* – it is just what Avraham *heard*.

Sometimes, Dear Reader, even seasoned Covenant Partners we think we know more than we do, and think we hear things we have not heard. And sometimes what we think we know and think we hear significantly colors the way we interpret and respond to Divine Communications.

The operative verb in the Divine Directive of Genesis 22:2 is not the Hebrew verb ***zabach*** – clearly meaning to take a knife in hand and slay as an act of making a sacrifice testifying of one’s abiding loyalty to a covenant. 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 tell Adam, or Hevel [Abel]², or Kayin [Cain]³, or Shet [Seth] to make **olah**. He did not tell Hanoah [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**” [i.e. 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** before⁴. He had no frame of reference for what the Holy One had told him to do with Yitzchak. Avraham heard **alah** and thought **zebach**. But rest assured, 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.

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 **YHVH 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]

² What Hevel brought – of his own free will, without instruction from the Holy One – was a **bekorah** [a firstfruits presentation].

³ What Kayin brought –of his own free will, without instruction from the Holy One – was a **minchah** [a voluntary presentation of a portion of grain].

⁴ 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 YHVH*’. 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**.

This time there is no “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 sulking, nursing no small amount of anger at the Holy One for 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?

When the Holy One speaks Avraham’s name after the long period of silence, take note what Avraham does NOT do. Our beloved ancestor does not fall down on his face and worship. He does NOT humble himself before His Creator and King. Why? Why does Avraham seem to lack the “fear of Heaven” at this point? I do not know the answer, of course. I suspect however that the reason may have had something to do with Avraham being engulfed in the hustle and bustle of his new Philistine life, and perhaps with him holding onto a fair amount of *residual anger* at the Holy One over the whole “Yish’mael incident”.

Hence when the Holy One calls his name after so long a period of silence, Avraham's response to the Holy One's greeting is a terse one-word reply. Torah describes it as follows:

Vayomer Hineni

And he replied, "I am here".⁵

A single word is all Avraham spoke in reply. After 37 years "**Hineni!**" – "*Behold me!*" – was all the response Avraham could muster to the Creator of the Universe. Perhaps it is just me, but in Avraham's reply to the Holy One I sense an uncomfortable edge. It as if what Avraham is thinking – though to his credit not what he says out loud – might be:

"I am not hiding from you.

You know where I am. So what about it?"

Ouch. If I am right, this is not going to be easy. But then again, becoming the person the Holy One created you to be *is not supposed to be easy*, is it?

Avraham's "Only" Son

The Holy One is not offended in the least by the terseness of Avraham's reply. He knows exactly what stands between Himself and Avraham, so He goes straight to the point. With the following words He strikes right at the sore spot in Avraham's heart, and hits it with surgical precision:

Vayomer Kach-na et bincha

And He [the Holy One] said 'Take your son

Et-yechidecha asher-ahavta et Yitzchak

The only one you love, Yitzchak

Uh-oh – the Holy One "*went there*". Did you catch that "**only son you love**" reference? "*What about Yish'mael*" would have been a fair question to ask, would it not? Inside Avraham may have screamed "*Yeah, right! Only son I love, my eye!*" In his wounded heart Avraham must have cried out: "*What about Yish'mael! Remember him?*" *If Yitzchak is my ONLY son, just whose fault is it that, anyway?*"

Avraham did not give voice to these cries of course. But then again, he knew he did not have to. He understood by now that the Holy One *knew him far better than he knew himself*.

⁵ "*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.

What *about* Yish'mael indeed. What about what the people and things that you and I hold closest in our hearts? What about *the friendships we have cultivated, the homes we have built, the wells we have dug, the lives we have forged* in our respective Philistias? Hmmm. What about them indeed.

If Avraham had any of the questions or negative feelings I have mentioned, the Holy One certainly did not pause long enough to let Avraham express them. The Divine Voice Avraham had grown to know so well continued:

Lech-lecha el-eretz ha-Moriyah

Go away for yourself - to the Moriyah area.

Oh my goodness - another '***lech lecha***' Word from the Holy One. By now Avraham was intimately familiar with that particular phrase. ***Lech lecha . . .*** was after all the very first phrase the Holy One had ever uttered to 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 the those very words: "***Lech lecha . . . go out for yourself***".

Watch out Avraham Avinu - *lightning is about to strike twice!*

Behold: The Soil of The Moriyah

This time however the Holy One does not just say '***Lech lecha***' and then leave the destination a mystery as He did before. This time the Holy One tells Avraham *exactly* where he is being called to ***lech lecha***. The destination is to be *the soil of the Moriyah*.

The *soil of the Moriyah*, huh? Avraham *knew the place well* of course. He had walked the "length and the breadth of the land" 9 chapters earlier, when Lot left him to build a life in Sodom. See **Genesis 13:14-17**. Years later Avraham had come to know '*the soil of the Moriyah*' more specifically as the domain of someone called "**Melki-tzedek**", *the king of Salem*, and the *priest of the Most High God*. And the soil of the Moriyah thus became the place where 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' in the battle to rescue Lot. 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*' very, very well. And you and I

know the ‘*soil of the Moriyah*’ as well, don’t we, Dear Reader? The soil of the Moriyah is the place that *calls to us* across the centuries. It is the place *where Heaven and earth touch*. It is the place *where angels fear to tread*. It is *the place of ultimate sacrifice*. It is *the place of complete surrender*.

Each of us knows – if we are honest with ourselves - that we absolutely must go to Moriyah, sooner or later. And we know the way. The only question is, when will we have *the will - and the courage* – to make the journey?

For An Olah?

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-alehu sham l’olah
And raise him up as/for an olah

Al ached he-harim asher omar eleycha
on one of the mountains I will designate to you.’

“*Raise him up there for olah*⁶ . . . ?” “*Hold on a minute*”, Avraham could have said. “*What exactly do You mean by ‘raise him up there for an olah’?*”

But Avraham did not ask. He may not have understood what the Holy One might think *making olah* meant, but he 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.

⁶ 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 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.

Avraham – the Father of the Sh'ma People

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 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 I.

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*. And 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 of the 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. And then it was time. I picture Yitzchak pursing his lips and drawing a deep breath. I imagine him smiling at his father one last time, then closing his eyes even as he lifted 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 mimeni
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'alehu 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] “*Now, Avraham, do you know why I*

brought you here.

Look, Avraham!

Through your tears, Avraham, 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* see⁷. 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 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

⁷ 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.

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 the soil of the Moriyah. And most of all, lift up your eyes, like Avraham did. Lift them up higher than you ever have before. Lift them up . . . 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 regards 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 regards to his and his descendants’ covenant with the Holy One?

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

6. In today’s concluding haftarah of parsha *Vayera* we read about the dramatic resurrection of the son of the Shunamite [a prophetic reference back to Yitzchak and ahead to Messiah Y’shua]. 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 Messiah Y’shua. Who took/takes Messiah Y’shua ‘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 before the foundation of the world.
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 evil 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.*