YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat VAYERA**

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Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Jack Sable *z”l* and

Ambassador Yehuda Avner *z”l*

By Debbie and David Sable

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**Sicha of HarAV Yaakov Medan**

**Avraham vs. Iyov**

Translated by David Strauss

### I. The Words of Satan

The story of the *Akeida* opens with the words, "And it came to pass after these things" (*Bereishit* 22:1). Rashi (based on the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* 89b) proposes two explanations:

"After these things [or: words]" – Some of our Rabbis say that it means after the words of Satan, who denounced Avraham, saying: “Of all the banquets that Avraham prepared, not a single bullock nor a single ram did he bring as a sacrifice to You.” God replied to him: “Does he do anything at all except for his son's sake? Yet if I were to bid him: ‘Sacrifice him to Me,’ he would not refuse.”

Others say it means after the words of Yishmael, who boasted to Yitzchak that he had been circumcised when he was thirteen years old without resisting. Yitzchak replied to him: “You think to intimidate me by mentioning the loss of one part of the body! If the Holy One, blessed is He, were to tell me: ‘Sacrifice yourself to Me,’ I would not refuse.” (Rashi, *Bereishit* 22:1)

The two conversations that Rashi reports as having preceded the *Akeida* are not recorded in Scripture. The disagreement between the two views of *Chazal* cited by Rashi relates to the question of whether the hero of the *Akeida* was Avraham or Yitzchak. An argument can be made for both options, and this disagreement is found also in various *piyyutim* and *midrashim.* Since in my opinion the biblical passage points to Avraham as the hero, I will focus on the first opinion cited by Rashi, which deals with the conversation between God and Satan.

From where did the Sages derive this conversation between God and Satan? Why was Avraham denounced for not having sacrificed a bullock or a ram at any of the banquets that he had prepared? The answer to these questions is found at the beginning of the book of *Iyov*:

And the Lord said unto Satan: “Have you considered My servant Iyov, that there is none like him in the earth, a whole-hearted and an upright man, one that fears God, and shuns evil?”

Then Satan answered the Lord, and said: “Does Iyov fear God for nought? Have not You made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions are increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now, and touch all that he has, surely he will blaspheme You to Your face.” (*Iyov* 1:8-11)

The Satan who denounced Iyov is the same Satan who denounced Avraham according to *Chazal.*

*Chazal* also took the accusation regarding Avraham's failure to offer sacrifices at his banquets from what is reported earlier about Iyov:

And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Iyov sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all; for Iyov said: It may be that my sons have sinned, and blasphemed God in their hearts. Thus did Iyov continually. (*Iyov* 1:5)

Iyov offered sacrifices as an inseparable part of his feast days, and this is what Satan expected Avraham to do at his banquets.

*Chazal* dealt at length with the comparison between Avraham and Iyov, especially in light of the first words of Elifaz the Temanite:

Then answered Elifaz the Temanite, and said: If one venture (*ha-nisa*) a word unto you, will you be weary? But who can withhold himself from speaking? (*Iyov* 4:1-2)

*Chazal* compared this verse to the beginning of the account of the *Akeida*: "And God tried (*nisa*)Avraham" (*Bereishit* 22:1). The Midrash says as follows:

Another explanation: "If one venture a word." Rav Chama bar Chanina said: Thus said Satan to Avraham: Shall a great man like you do this? Surely you, who bring people under the wings of the *Shekhina*, if you kill your son, everyone will distance themselves from you, and call you a murderer. Avraham said to him: I will not listen to your counsel.

Another explanation: "If one venture a word." Rabbi Yose ben Zimra said: Thus said Satan to Avraham: Is it not you, at whose door all the great men in the world arrive early in the morning, and from whom they take advice? If you do this, everyone will abandon you. Come back! But Avraham did not listen to his counsel.

Another explanation: "If one venture a word." Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat said: Thus Satan said to him: Is it not you, whom all the princes see and before whom they rise, and even those riding on horses dismount and kneel before you. If you do this, all knees will kneel and kick you, as it is written: "Your words have upheld him that was falling" (*Iyov* 4:4). (*Midrash ha-Gadol*, *Vayera*, pp. 346-347)

All three opinions in the Midrash relate to one central idea: loneliness. If Avraham would offer Yitzchak as a sacrifice, his relationship with his wife Sara, with his friends and with all the people who recognize the novelty of his teachings would collapse. Iyov complains about such loneliness the entire length of his book:

He has put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are wholly estranged from me. My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. They that dwell in my house, and my maids, count me for a stranger; I am become an alien in their sight. I call unto my servant, and he gives me no answer, though I entreat him with my mouth. My breath is abhorred of my wife, and I am loathsome to the children of my tribe. (*Iyov* 19:13-17)

The *midrashim* of *Chazal* teach that Avraham and Iyov were close in time and place:

When did Iyov live? Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said in the name of Bar Kapara: In the days of the patriarch Avraham. This is what is written: "There was a man in the land of Utz, whose name was Iyov" (*Iyov* 1:1), and it is written: "Utz his firstborn" (*Bereishit* 22:21). (*Yerushalmi*, *Sota* 5:6)[[1]](#footnote-1)

"The land of Utz" has not been unequivocally identified, but there are those who locate it very close to Charan. If this identification is correct, it turns out that Iyov and Avraham lived in the same generation and in close proximity. It is possible that the two of them were candidates for establishing God's people from their descendants. In the end, Avraham was chosen, and Iyov was rejected.

Why did God choose Avraham? As stated, Avraham and Iyov were threatened by loneliness, but Avraham was ready to accept that loneliness, and not heed Satan. Avraham uttered only a single word at the *Akeida*: "*Hineni*, Here am I." He accepted everything that happened in submission and in silence. As opposed to Avraham, Iyov had much to say, and even cast accusations against God. He broke. It is true that in the concluding verses in *Iyov* it is stated:

The Lord said to Elifaz the Temanite: My wrath is kindled against you, and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job has. (*Iyov* 42:7)

But was Iyov actually a righteous man? In the Gemara one opinion states:

There was a certain pious man among the nations of the world named Iyov, but he [thought that he had] come into this world only to receive [here] his reward, and when the Holy One, blessed is He, brought chastisements upon him, he began to curse and blaspheme, so the Holy One, blessed be He, doubled his reward in this world so as to expel him from the World-to-Come. (*Bava Batra* 15b)

In the verse cited above, there is no hint to the notion that Iyov was headed for Gehinom. Why then were *Chazal* so severe in their judgment, banishing him from the World-to-Come? It would appear that Iyov made peace with God, but did not merit to reach the level of Avraham. Avraham was chosen to establish the nation of God, and thus merited the World-to-Come, eternal life. Iyov remained righteous and pious, but closed up within himself, without laying the foundations for a people of God.

### II. Accepting the Decree

The comparison between Avraham and Iyov raises another question. Earlier in our *parasha* we encountered Avraham's seemingly brazen words to God regarding the fate of the cities of Sedom and Amora. How is it possible that Avraham formulated his words in such a decisive manner? Avraham was required to teach his children "the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice" (*Bereishit* 18:19), and therefore he had to understand God's way, identify with it, and even judge it. Nevertheless, as much as we appreciate the need to examine the manner in which God governs His world so that we can educate our children in its light, it is hard to ignore the danger in such an examination. For it is but a step away from the path taken by Iyov, who momentarily lost his innocent faith in the justice of God's judgment and asserted: “It is all one; therefore I say: He destroys the innocent and the wicked” (*Iyov* 9:22). Elifaz too accuses him of this:

Is not God in the height of heaven? And behold the topmost of the stars, how high they are! And you say: What does God know? Can He judge through the dark cloud? (*Iyov* 9:22)

Who can guarantee a person that he will know how to distinguish between examining the truth of God's judgments for the purpose of teaching his children, as Avraham did in connection with Sedom, and examining the truth of His judgments because of doubts and uncertainties whether God is indeed a righteous judge, as did Iyov? Who can guarantee Avraham that the personal example that he provided his descendants when he cast accusations at Heaven will be a favorable example, and not, God forbid, open the door to the path taken by Iyov in the time of his afflictions, a path that was defined by *Chazal* (*Bava Batra* 16a) as blasphemy?

It seems to me that the *Akeida* comes to answer this question. In addition to the test of his readiness for self-sacrifice, Avraham faced another test, which may not have been any easier than the first: a test of his faith in a God of righteousness and justice. For Avraham could have asked: What will that God who sentenced Sedom to destruction for the cry of one girl answer regarding the cry of an old woman whose only child was taken from her to be slaughtered on Mount Moriya? Does the God of justice have an answer to this question? Is a God who made multiple covenants with Avraham, and promised the land to his seed, and now comes and rips it all to shreds with that awful command: "And offer him there for a burnt-offering" – is He the God of justice?

For three full days, God gives Avraham the opportunity to contemplate these difficult questions as he makes his way to the *Akeida.* But over the course of all three days Avraham says only one word to his Creator: *Hineni*, here I am. In the four hundred and eighty verses in the book of *Iyov* this word does not appear even once. Those three days of silence and acceptance of God's judgment during which Avraham headed to Mount Moriya, dispel any fear that the way that he was teaching the world's inhabitants was one of "blasphemy," as Iyov did. That single world of Avraham when he received the command – *Hineni* – establishes a tall barrier between Iyov, who examined God's ways of justice and judgment based on doubt about their existence, and Avraham, who lovingly accepted God's command with innocent faith and without any possibility of finding an answer to his questions about God's way.

Avraham behaves, then, in what appear to be two contradictory manners. In the story of Sedom, he strongly expresses his opinion about God's justice, he argues with Him, and does not move from there until his demand for justice is accepted. On the other hand, in the story of the *Akeida*,he accepts his incomprehensible sentence, which seems to be unjust. He accepts it in silence, without question, with innocent faith.

It is possible that this difference in Avraham's approach to God's judgment stems from his educational role. In the story of Sedom, Avraham expresses his opinion, for his involvement in what is happening is only so that he may command his children and his household after him. But when God commands him to offer Yitzchak as a sacrifice and to send Yishmael away, he understands that in fact he will not have any sons to instruct and educate. If so, it appears that God has some profound plan that he cannot understand, and here is the place for naive faith, faith that is not accompanied by any explanation or even a trace of logic.

In both missions, learning God's way and maintaining his innocent faith in Him, Avraham passes with honor.

### III. The Sound of the Shofar

As was explained earlier, the comparison between Avraham and Iyov is what led *Chazal* to their midrash about Satan denouncing Avraham. In other midrashim we find that Satan accompanied Avraham during the *Akeida*, or to be more precise, during the three days that he advanced toward the *Akeida*:

Why did [Avraham] tarry for three days? Surely the place was close by? Rather, this teaches that Satan came and made himself like a river before him. Avraham said: I will enter the river and see whether the water is deep, and Avraham almost drowned. He lifted up his eyes to the Holy One, blessed is He, that He should save him from the water and not drown in it. The Holy One, blessed is He, immediately rebuked Satan, and Avraham found himself standing on dry land. (*Midrash Aggada* [Buber], *Bereishit* 22:4)

Samael came to Avraham, and said to him: Old man, old man, have you lost your heart? The son who was given to you when you were a hundred years old, you will go and slaughter? [Avraham] said to him: For that purpose… When he saw that he gained nothing from him, [Samael] went to Yitzchak [and said]: The son of that wretched woman [Sara], you will go and be slaughtered? He said to him: For that purpose. (*Midrash Yelamdenu*, *Yalkut Talmud Torah* 107)

The struggle with Satan may be connected to the “young men” who set out with Avraham on the journey. We mentioned earlier the midrash that describes how Satan warned Avraham of the loneliness he would suffer were he to slaughter Yitzchak. Perhaps these warnings were sounded by his young men,[[2]](#footnote-2) which in the end brought Avraham to cast them off with the blunt words: "Sit you here with the ass." Only Yitzchak and Avraham, who continued on their way despite their questions, merited seeing the cloud rest on the mountain and ascending Mount Moriya.

The Gemara in *Rosh Hashana* deals with the order of blowing the *shofar*:

Rabbi Abbahu said: Why do we blow on a ram's horn? The Holy One, blessed is He, said: Sound before Me a ram's horn so that I may remember on your behalf the binding of Yitzchak…

Rabbi Yitzchak said: … Why do we sound a *teki'a* and a *teru'a* while we are seated, and then sound a *teki'a* and a *teru'a* standing up? In order to confuse Satan. (*Rosh Hashana* 16a)

Rabbi Yitzchak explains that even though the main *shofar* blasts are "the blasts sounded while standing up," the blasts adjacent to the blessings of the *Amida* prayer (according to some, during the silent *Amida* prayer, and according to others, during the prayer leader's repetition of the *Amida*), they are preceded by "the blasts sounded while seated," before the *Mussaf* prayer, in order to confuse Satan. It may be suggested that the period before the *Mussaf* prayer, the time of the blasts sounded while seated, corresponds to the three days of struggle with Satan. The shofar blasts come to confuse him, to persuade Avraham and those who hear the blasts of the righteousness of God's path.

Only after we overcome Satan can we ascend Mount Moriya and recite the *Mussaf* service. Then, Rabbi Abbahu says, the shofar corresponds to the ram of Yitzchak, the ram that informed Avraham that Yitzchak merited the attribute of mercy, and that he would descend from the altar alive and well.

1. There in the *Yerushalmi*, and in the *Bavli* in *Bava Batra*, there are many different opinions on the matter. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Chazal* expounded that Satan appeared to Avraham as an old man. It is possible that Avraham's *ne'arim* were actually mature adults, for the word *na'ar* denotes a servant, and not necessarily a young man. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)