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'Iron sharpens iron, so a person sharpens the wit of their friend.'

Proverbs 27:17



Introduction

Welcome to the fourth and final week of this series of the Alyth Chavruta Project. In this four-week course we will be undertaking an in-depth study of the story of the Binding of Isaac (the *Akeidah*) in advance of our reading of the story at Rosh Hashanah. This week we reach the ending of the story, in which Abraham receives a blessing from God's messenger, then returns home.

The text itself can be found here in both Hebrew only and Hebrew with translation. For those with some knowledge of Hebrew, we encourage you to attempt your own translation, but there is absolutely no expectation that you engage with the Hebrew. As usual, there is also no requirement to get to the end of the pack – we have provided more than you can get through in an hour of study, and we encourage you to focus on understanding a small amount rather than becoming confused by a greater amount.

Further resources and advice on how to get the most out of chavruta can be found in our [FAQs](#). We look forward to seeing you on Monday to share our learning with each other.

Blessing for Study

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִנְּנוּ
לְעֶסֶק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Blessed are You, our Living God, Sovereign of the universe, whose commandments make us holy, and who commands us to devote ourselves to the study of Torah.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu la-asok b'divrey Torah.

טו וַיִּקְרָא מִלֵּאךְ יי אֶל-אַבְרָהָם שְׁנֵית מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם: טז וַיֹּאמֶר בְּי
נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם-יְיָ כִּי יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת-הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא חִשַּׁבְתָּ אֶת-
בְּנֵךְ אֶת-יְחִידֶךָ: טז כִּי-בָרַךְ אֲבָרְכֶךָ וְהִרְבָּה אֲרַבָּה אֶת-זֶרְעֶךָ כְּכֹכְבֵי
הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל-שַׁפְּתַי הַיָּם וַיִּרְשׁ זֶרְעֶךָ אֶת שְׂעֵר אֵיבֹי:
יז וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְזֶרְעֶךָ כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ עֲלֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקִלְי: טז וַיֵּשֶׁב
אַבְרָהָם אֶל-נְעֻרָיו וַיִּקְמוּ וַיֵּלְכוּ יַחְדָּו אֶל-בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע וַיֵּשֶׁב אַבְרָהָם
בְּבְאֵר שֶׁבַע:



The Hebrew Text with English Translation

טו וַיִּקְרָא מֵאֲדָם יְיָ אֶל־אַבְרָהָם שֵׁנִית מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם: טז וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם־יְיָ כִּי יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא חָשַׁכְתָּ אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ: טז כִּי־בָרַךְ אֲבָרְכֶךָ וְהִרְבָּה אַרְבֵּה אֶת־זַרְעֶךָ כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַח־לֵךְ אֲשֶׁר עַל־שַׁפְתַּי הֵימָּה וַיִּרְשׁ זַרְעֶךָ אֶת שַׁעַר אֹיְבָיו: טז וְהִתְפָּרְכוּ בְזַרְעֶךָ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ עֲלֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלִי: טז וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם אֶל־נְעָרָיו וַיִּקְמוּ וַיֵּלְכוּ יַחְדָּו אֶל־בְּאֵר שָׁבַע וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם בְּבְאֵר שָׁבַע:

¹⁵ And the messenger of the Eternal called out to Abraham a second time from the heavens ¹⁶ and said to him, 'By myself I swear, declares the Eternal, that because you have done this thing, and you did not withhold your son, your only one, ¹⁷ I will bless you greatly and you will greatly multiply your seed, like the stars of the heavens and like the sand that is on the shore of the sea, and your seed will take hold of the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸ And all the nations of the earth will be blessed through your seed, because you listened to my voice.' ¹⁹ And Abraham returned to his lads, and they arose and they went together to B'er Shava, and Abraham settled in B'er Shava.

Questions

1. What is the nature of the blessing Abraham receives here?
2. How do you think this part of the story fits with the rest of the story?

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis 22:20

והוה בתר פתגמיא האיילין מן בתר דיכפת אברהם ית יצחק ואזל
סטנא ותני לות שרה דאברהם נכס ית יצחק וקמת שרה ופגנת
ואשתנקת ומיתת מן אניקא

And it was, after these words, after Abraham had bound Isaac, Satan came and told Sarah that Abraham had slain Isaac. And Sarah arose and cried out, and was choked and died from agony.

Ibn Ezra commentary on Genesis 22:19

וישב אברהם. ולא הזכיר יצחק כי הוא ברשותו והאומר ששחטו
ועזבו ואח"כ חיה אמר הפך הכתוב:

'And Abraham returned' – and Isaac is not mentioned because he was under his [Abraham's] authority, and those who say that he slaughtered him and left him, and that afterwards he came back to life, say the opposite of what is written.

Questions

1. How do these commentaries change our understanding of the ending of the story?
2. Why do you think Isaac is not mentioned (at least by name) at the end of the story as it appears in the Hebrew original?



'The Actions of the Fathers'

By T. Carmi, translated by Ilana Kurshan

And after the Akedah?
Then the most difficult test began.

Abraham took his son to the camel races
Hiked with him from the Euphrates to the Nile,
Swam by his side, watching him like a hawk
In the waters of Eilat. And when they returned home,
He slaughtered flocks and herds aplenty,
All tender and good,
Sweet scent of songs and of muscle and meat
And guests in good graces come in from afar.
Isaac ate and ate, ate –
And was silent.

Abraham bought his wife a fur coat
And golden jewelry
He installed emergency lighting in their tent
He brought her boots in style from a shop on the Nile
Hashish from Tarshish,
Cinnamon from Lebanon.
Sarah, who grew old overnight,
Never took off her mourning clothes.

Abraham prayed to his God morning and evening,
He hung tzedakah boxes on all the tamarisk trees,
Studied his Torah night and day,
Fasted,
And gave room and board to angels for almost no fee.
The voice from on high disappeared.

And the voice within him
(The only one left)
Said: Yes, you went
From your land, from your homeland, the land of your father,
And now, in the end, from yourself.

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Questions

1. How does this poem creatively reframe the ending of the story of the Binding of Isaac?
2. In what way do you think Carmi understands Abraham to have 'gone from himself'?



'River So Wide'

By Alicia Jo Rabins (Girls in Trouble)

I went down to the river so wide
Satan was standing on the other side
He said to me, look and see
I saw you with our only child
With a knife in your hand and your eyes so wild
On the mountaintop, and then the vision stopped
Ooh ...

My love, my love, what have you done
And where have you taken my only son
Some terrible place where I can't see his face
All these years I been a faithful wife
And I gave you a child so late in my life
My time was done, when I bore you a son
Ooh ...

So take me home
And put me to bed
Cause the sun is in the sky
But it's dark inside my head

And I don't care
If I never do wake up
If I can't be
With the one I love

Well I went down to the river so wide
Satan was standing on the other side
He said to me, Look and see
But hush little baby, don't you cry
Cause I'll be waiting on the other side
You won't be alone, I'll make it feel like home
Ooh ...

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Questions

1. From whose perspective is this song written?
2. How does this song change our understanding of the story?



Woody Allen, 'The Sacrifice of Isaac'

... And Abraham awoke in the middle of the night and said to his only son, Isaac, 'I have had a dream where the voice of the Lord sayeth that I must sacrifice my only son, so put your pants on.' And Isaac trembled and said, 'So what did you say? I mean when He brought this whole thing up?'

'What am I going to say?' Abraham said. 'I'm standing there at two A.M. in my underwear with the Creator of the Universe. Should I argue?'

'Well, did he say why he wants me sacrificed?' Isaac asked his father.

But Abraham said, 'The faithful do not question. Now let's go because I have a heavy day tomorrow.'

And Sarah who heard Abraham's plan grew vexed and said, 'How doth thou know it was the Lord and not, say, thy friend who loveth practical jokes, for the Lord hateth practical jokes and whosoever shall pull one shall be delivered into the hands of his enemies whether they can pay the delivery charge or not.' And Abraham answered, 'Because I know it was the Lord. It was a deep, resonant voice, well-modulated, and nobody in the desert can get a rumble in it like that.'

And Sarah said, 'And thou art willing to carry out this senseless act?' But Abraham told her, 'Frankly, yes, for to question the Lord's word is one of the worst things a person can do, particularly with the economy in the state it's in.' And so he took Isaac to a certain place and prepared to sacrifice him but at the last minute the Lord stayed Abraham's hand and said, 'How could thou doest such a thing?' And Abraham said, 'But thou said-'

'Never mind what I said,' the Lord spake. 'Doth thou listen to every crazy idea that comes thy way?' And Abraham grew ashamed. 'Er—not really ... no.'

'I jokingly suggest thou sacrifice Isaac and thou immediately runs out to do it.'

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And Abraham fell to his knees. 'See, I never know when you're kidding.'

And the Lord thundered, 'No sense of humour. I can't believe it.'

'But doth this not prove I love thee, that I was willing to donate mine only son on thy whim?'

And the Lord said, 'It proves that some men will follow any order no matter how asinine as long as it comes from a resonant, well-modulated voice.'

And with that, the Lord bid Abraham get some rest and check with him tomorrow.

Question

What message might Woody Allen be trying to deliver through humour in this story?



A Guide to the Texts

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (also known as the Jerusalem Targum) was a targum (an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible) written in the Land of Israel. Its dating is a source of debate, with dates ranging from the 4th to the 12th centuries CE. As well as translating the original text of the Hebrew Bible, the Targum also contains a number of additions, such as that we find here.

Abraham Ibn Ezra (c.1089-1167) was a biblical commentator and philosopher. He was born in Spain and died in the Land of Israel.

T. Carmi (1925-1994) was the pseudonym for Carmi Charney, an American-born Hebrew poet.

Woody Allen (born 1935) is an American filmmaker, actor and comedian.

Alicia Jo Rabins is a singer, songwriter and poet, whose band Girls in Trouble often gives voice to the female characters of Jewish tradition.