

By Hayyim Rothman (Kevin)

A word of introduction: the following piece is my own reworking of the Abraham story drawing liberally from the midrashic tradition in Judaism (homiletical interpretation of scripture). The nature of this tradition is that it is highly malleable; Judaism as a legal tradition is fundamentally concerned with behavior and, therefore, has a relatively free approach to interpretation so long that it does not bear on practice. As such, stories tend to get reworked over and over again through the generations so as to serve new needs facing the community. A key feature of this storytelling tradition (at least in my view) is that it presents God as being on trial just as man is on trial. As it were, God judges man and man judges God. (An anecdote to demonstrate this idea: there is a story that during the Holocaust a rabbinical court was assembled in Auschwitz to bring God to judgment. People testified for and against God and, in the end he was found guilty. Nonetheless, after the trial the court and the onlookers conducted the afternoon prayer service)

What I have done here is attempted to use the theme of “God on trial” and the moral problem posed by the binding of Isaac to point to one – among many – fundamental theological conflict facing post-Holocaust Jewry. Finally, a note on Jewish humor. The schlemiel is a classical character, he is the oblivious bumbler who somehow, in his foolishness, uncovers the truth about others, the world, God, what have you in a manner that us serious folk cannot hope to attain. Here I have cast Abraham in the form of this character type

Poor Abraham just didn’t understand that God was not the benevolent being He was taken for. It’s not as if God hadn’t tried to break the truth to Abraham gently, he did destroy Sodom and Gomorrah after all, and with such fanfare! (And, really, if the place was so wicked as to merit such treatment I know many places equally deserving. No, it’s not that they couldn’t have been saved, God just didn’t feel like it at the time – though its certainly possible He has changed his mind since. Abraham was simply too soft-headed to grasp this point. He actually believed God just!) It was a stroke of luck, really, for God. He never actually expected Abraham to agree to the “test”, it was more of a passing whim, a wry cruelty of the every day sort. But

defying all expectation, Abraham took the bait and it was altogether too tempting to see where things might lead.

Truthfully, God had hoped that Abraham would back out after a decent night's sleep, But Abraham rose at the crack of dawn to pack his things and get on his way. To his credit, God set the appointed place at a distance of three days in the hopes that Abraham would gain some insight on the way. Still, seeing as Abraham had not shown himself receptive to subtlety until this point, the angels decided to intervene so as to save God from his own vanity and Abraham from his own foolishness. The satan himself agreed to take up the mission.

He first disguised himself as an old man and appeared to Abraham. "Where are you going?" he said. "To pray at the mountaintop". "For what then do you need this knife and that pile of wood?". "We may stay there for several days and will need them". "Then why haven't you brought other supplies?! No, you are going to sacrifice your son; you will be called a murderer. Stop now before it is too late!" And Abraham replied "God has commanded it and I will obey". The satan then appeared as a young man to Isaac and said "your father is going to kill you, flee while you are still able!". But Isaac replied "God has commanded my father and I will not hold myself back". Lastly, the satan appeared as a deep river, but, oblivious, Abraham walked straight through until the water reached his nose and he could no longer breath and, yet, continued walking. Powerless before Abraham's idiocy, Satan shuffled his way back to the heavens in shame.

Finally the duo reached Mount Moriah and climbed to its summit where Abraham tied up his son, raised the blade and, at the last instant, a great burst of laughter exploded from on high. God could not restrain Himself any longer! "Ha!", "Ha, ha, ha! 'Take him to the mountain and raise him up' I said! 'Raise him up,' not 'sacrifice him' you fool, you utter simpleton! Ha, ha, ha! Don't touch the boy! But Abraham, still uncomprehending, asked humbly "can't I just draw a small drop of blood?" This was altogether too much. God bent over laughing hysterically. With slightly more scruples, the angels attempted to hold back as long as they were able, but soon they, too, joined in the hilarity; even the satan could not help but let our a

giggle. And, so, the entire divine entourage carried on laughing and stomping about until suddenly the very heavens shattered, sending them crashing to earth.

Naked and hungry, they came to Abraham who, tramping through the thorns to receive them, had discovered a ram caught by its horns. With its flesh, he fed them. With its wool, he clothed them. And with its horns he fashioned shofrot with which his children would summon them back to the heavens when such time comes as God will be worthy of man's praise.