

PARSHAS VAYARA – 5768

THE AKEIDA: ANOTHER LOOK

"There are some mistakes you need a Ph.D to make."...

Dr. Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?"

This Erev Shabbos, my Father related to me the following episode: Many years ago, in the halls of Yeshiva University, a young boy approached Rabbi Solevaitchik with a question; "Why is it that Har Sinai-the location of our rendezvous with G-d, where we *became* a nation- is hidden from us, whereas Har Harmorai is open to our discovery and use?" His answer: "Sinai is where G-d revealed Himself to us-Har Hamoria, however, is where we revealed ourselves to G-d."

There is no question that this week's reading is the moment in our history when we realized heights unimagined. Here, on the mountain with Isaac bound and Abraham prepared, G-d saw, and we see, what true devotion can be.

Yet we can not help but feel as if we are missing something. Can it really be that this is Divine? Killing a son? We decry this act when other "religions", Lhavdil, devote themselves to G-d in such ways, when we see parents sending their children to death, yet, at the same time we embrace such an action as our watershed moment, our raison d'etre?

We have all seen explanations, but we are still left with a feeling of unease at this test, and we are not alone.

The Rashbam (12th century), however, suggests something that I believe will change our view of this act as well as revolutionize the way we read these Pesukim, forever. His interpretation is nothing short of breathtaking in light of all that we know and have been taught until now, and, had this not come from an eminent a sage as he, we would not even consider such a radical change in how we view this act.

The test begins (22:1) “ACHAR HADVARIM HA’ AILEH- And It Was After These Things”. After which *things*? Rashi explains this to be referring to Yishmoel and his challenges to Isaac. Other commentators have similar analyses. But not the Rashbam. The Rashbam begins his explanation by teaching a rule: “Any time the Torah says ACHAR HADAVARIM HA’ AILAH it is referring to the events described immediately preceding the ones presently taught (he goes on to prove this theory from many places)... and here the Torah had just taught the story of Avimelech and his peace treaty with Avraham.” Continues the Rashbam, “that “peace deal” so incensed G-d, for how could Abraham give away land that was not his to give away, that, ‘HASHEM NISSA ESS AVRAHAM’ – NISSA”, explains the Rashbam, does not, here, mean test, for otherwise why would it only employ that word by this challenge only, rather, “it means aggrieved¹/punished Avraham to show him what it feels like to have something taken away that should have remained.” The Akeida was only Divine, according to the Rashbam, in the way any punishment of G-d is divine- but accordingly this was not an act to learn from-on the contrary-what we need to learn is from the mistake of Avraham. The Akeida is not the paradigm of an act for G-d, rather, according to Rashbam, it is a model of severe emotional punishment.

More extraordinary than the new approach this Rashbam teaches is the underling secret it shares. There is a mystery within this Rashbam: here is Avraham trying to do good for his children, the father of our nation, and he is punished so magnificently for an act that was so well intentioned. Why would G-d punish Avraham so fiercely for an act so sincere in its execution?

This week, while driving home from Toronto, while the kids watched a video in the back of the van, we were listening to NPR up front, Chris Mathews, from MSNBC fame, was the guest. While talking about the election he mentions a candidate, and I won’t say who-but she is a senator from NY, and makes the following comment, “the only reason Republicans do not like her, or at least do not feel comfortable with her, is because of her gender, and they will use that against her”. This did not sit well with me. So I called in and said the following: “Forget politics, forget Hillary, forget Margaret Thatcher and Golda Meir and their electibility to even in those ardent conservative, what is so anathema about politics these days is not the lack of sincerity, but the lack of believing there is sincerity. Can it not be that a candidate-on either side-is not liked because people

¹ This too he proves, see there for his grammatical analysis.

actually have a different world view? Does there always have to be some nefarious motive?

Last night I asked a question that at the time I had no answer to: Rashi (18:5) brings a Midrash (B"R 48:11) in the beginning of this week's Parsha which teaches that Angels have no Yetzer Hara-Evil Inclination. Yet, seemingly contradicting himself, in this same Parsha, Rashi (19:22) tells us how the angels who saved Lot were **punished** ("...זה עונשן") for saying something out of line to their mission (B"R (50:9).

But the truth is that neither Rashi nor the Midrash ever said that angels do not have Bechira-Free Will, indeed it can be inferred that they *do* have wants - but only good desires i.e. a Yetzer Tov- Good Inclination and all that was said is what they do not have - a Yetzer Hara - and we do not need a Yetzer Hara to sin.

Indeed, most sins, by most descent people are well intentioned. Nobody means to hurt anybody, rarely are people *evil* rather they are sometimes just *wrong*. What the Nissayon/aggrievment of the Akaida teaches, what G-d was teaching us at that profound moment, was that our –Knesses Yisroel's - most powerful and transcending follies may come from virtuous objectives. As Dr. Francis Fukuyama said above, it can be precisely those same good characteristics of a people, be it brain power, expertise or trust that can be its downfall.

We can take this lesson and apply it to the current situation in and about Yerushalim, seeing many believing, shamefully, that there is another side with good intentions.

And, we can also take this principle and apply to our selves and those who we disagree with within Knesses Yisroel, on this matter and a myriad of others, how we, at times, do not allow ourselves to hear the other side because they are not just wrong, no, they are wicked. We do not disagree, no, we fight. "They are doing this with their Yetzer **Hara**", we say.

Why are we so tempted, when vociferous voices and opinions are made, to say – "I'll tell you what is *really* going on here, the Chareidim are surreptitiously trying to take over everything"; "I'll tell you what is really beneath the surface here, the Daatiem are vying for power"; And, so, we do not get done what needs to get done. We must consider that sometimes, perhaps, just maybe it is not about money, that it is not about Kavod or fame and maybe our "enemies" are "sinning with their Yetzer Tov.

Today when we celebrate the engagement of Mark and Shira, we hope that they understand that for a marriage to last there needs to be a trust that when mistakes are made- and they will be made- if we choose that our spouse harmed us with their Yetzer Hara then we are doomed, however, if we can believe in "honest mistakes" then there is only hope for true love, growth and understanding.

Let us hope the A-mighty gives us the wisdom to see our enemies for what they stand for and our brothers and sisters for what they are trying to say.