

What Kind of G-d Would Ask You to Sacrifice Your Son?

By: Yanki Tauber

Skeptic: I assume even you guys have a problem with this one. G-d testing Abraham by ordering him to sacrifice his son! And--even worse--Abraham rushing to fulfill the macabre command. Now if that's not the epitome of everything wrong with religion...

Believer: Personally, I have no problem with it. Though I admit it's not as easy for me to explain to a skeptic as, for example, the story of the Exodus.

Skeptic: You have no problem with it? G-d not only condoning, but actually *asking* for the sacrifice of a human life as a demonstration of faith? If that's how you feel about it, you're no different from the suicide bombers who believe they're killing themselves and scores of innocent men, women and children because G-d wants them to...!

Believer: Aren't you leaving something out? If you're going to read the *Akeidah* story, read it to the end.

Skeptic: I know. In the end Isaac isn't killed. But that's almost besides the point.

Believer: No, that *is* the point. Or at least a very important point of the story. After Abraham demonstrates the depth of his faith and commitment to G-d with his *willingness* to sacrifice Isaac, G-d commands Abraham, "*Do not reach out you hand to the lad! Do not do anything to him!*" G-d makes it clear that He does NOT want us to offer human sacrifices to Him.

This gets repeated many times throughout the Torah. The Torah expressly forbids human sacrifice, and calls it an "abomination." We serve G-d by living a G-dly life and giving life to others, not by dying and killing. Judaism celebrates life and mourns death, not vice versa.

Skeptic: Ok, so let's say that G-d wants to make the point that He's a G-d who desires life, not death. Why does He have to go through the whole sadistic spiel of getting Abraham to truss up his beloved child like a lamb and lift the slaughtering knife over the kid's outstretched neck, before announcing, "No, never mind, I don't want you to do this"? He could simply have revealed Himself to Abraham and said: "Abraham, I know that all your neighbors are heavily into this, sacrificing their kids to their gods, but listen, that's not what I want. I want you to be the father of a people who shun this kind of thing, and teach everyone else how bad it is."

Believer: But if G-d did only that, what would everyone have said? "Oh, that's Abraham, with his no-sacrifices-needed religion. He calls it a "life-affirming" faith, but he's just a wimp. The simple truth is that he's not as committed as we are. He's like those limousine liberals with "principles"--until it affects their own pocket or comfort."

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Vayera

Shabbat Begins: 5:38 pm

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Skeptic: Hey, I resent that.

Believer: Sorry. Seriously, do you know what Hassan Nasrallah said?

Skeptic: You mean that Hezbollah guy?

Believer: Yes. He said, "We're going to win this fight. You know why? Because the Jews want to live, and we want to die."

Skeptic: I hate to say this, but the guy has a point. They'll always have that advantage over us--that they're happy to die for what they believe in, and we're not.

Believer: No, he's wrong. If the reason we desired life and did everything in our power to avoid death was that we're a bunch self-absorbed spoiled rich kids who cannot imagine anything more important than our own puny existence, then he'd be right. But the *Akeidah* proves him wrong. The *Akeidah* shows that our commitment to life comes from a place no less powerful and absolute--indeed, far more powerful and absolute--than the suicide bomber's pursuit of death and destruction.

Abraham demonstrated that we are prepared to give our life for G-d--that we recognize that there is a truth and reality that is greater than our own existence and we are absolutely committed to serving this higher truth. So when G-d tells us that that's *not* what He wants from us--that He wants us not to die and kill for Him but to live and nurture life as His "partner in creation"--our pursuit of life is motivated and empowered by our commitment to G-d, and is as absolute and as powerful as its source.

Skeptic: But wouldn't all this be true also if G-d and Abraham hadn't staged their scary little show on Mount Moriah?

Believer: No, it wouldn't. It may be true in theory, but theories don't necessarily mean anything in real life. Unless Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son for G-d was actually experienced by him in the most tangible way, the first Jew could not have forged a commitment to life that's as powerful as the evildoer's worship of death.

The whole point of Judaism is not to die for G-d, but to live for G-d. But unless you're prepared to quite literally die for G-d, you cannot truly live for G-d.

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