

Session 23

Vayera – The Sacrifice to Succeed

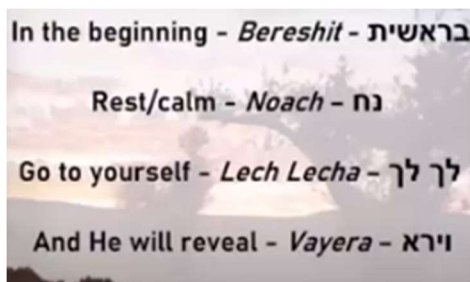
8 November 2020

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B49zWaS5Nww>

Shalom fellowship. It is great to be together again, just in time to come together and make sense out of the craziness and order, out of the chaos of this world. Huge shifts are happening around the world now. America's direction looks like it's shifting. It's not final yet, but when the United States turns left, it's like a huge boat in the water. The whole world feels the effect of the waves in its wake. And thank God there is a message for us in the Torah portion. It's a light for all believers around the world who read it. For those who know how to study the Torah as a living guide, not as a book. It's for us to give us guidance, reassurance, courage, direction in these crazy times.

Last week was so unstable, it was so unsettling, I mean, who's going to win the election? Who's winning the election? What state is counting? This state has been announced early. What's going to happen? It felt like the biggest band-aid being ripped off as slowly as possible so we could really feel the anxiety of it all. And here's what I've been praying for. Revelation. That's what we all need now. How do we make sense of it all? What is our direction in all of this? It feels like we've all been learning together, practicing together, praying together, training together, knowing that a great day is ahead of us. Knowing that there might be a rocky road along the way. But if we know Him in all of our ways, He will straighten our paths. And if we have clarity and strength in our minds, then the winds of change and chaos outside will have much, much less effect on us inside.

So now, no one knows what the future holds, but we can seek His revelation as to our place in these times. How should we see these events that are unfolding? And there's a beautiful ancient teaching that I learned from my first Rabbi, Rabbi David Zeller, of blessed memory, about the path towards revelation that's actually encoded in the first Torah portions. And it's the key to the heart of the entire Torah. The Torah as our guide, as a revelation. And you can see it right here on the screen:



The first four Torah portions are Bereshit, Noach, Lech Lecha, and Vayera. We've studied all four of them together now. So Bereshit literally means in the beginning. Noach means rest,

calm. Lech Lecha, go to yourself and Vayera means, He will reveal. And so, you put those together, in the beginning, you need calm, you need to rest, you need to stop moving, sit down, breathe. In the beginning, you just need to be.

Heschel writes this beautiful saying. Just as clairvoyance may see the future, the religious man comes to sense the present moment. And this is an extreme achievement. For the present is the Presence of God. Things have a past and a future, but only God is pure Presence. If your mind is racing to all the to do's and the worries and the concerns about the future, what's going to be? It's like, no, I'm sorry, we just can't be open like that. It can't be present to the moment that is becoming. Noach, rest. Lech Lecha, go to yourself. Send to yourself. Realign yourself, return to yourself. And then Vayera, He will reveal. And so, with all of the chaos around us, we're taking this time to stop and rest from all the rustle and bustle of the world and to do tshuva. We have carved out this time to go to ourselves, to realign ourselves, to receive guidance, to invite His revelation in to lead our lives, to loosen the grip a little bit and realize that our ark does not need a steering wheel. He's taken our ship to its destination, to exactly where it needs to go.

And so now, I want to invite Ari to kick off the fellowship with some Torah from Judea. We spent a lot of time talking, learning together over Shabbat. And he had absolutely beautiful insights that I would just love for him to share. And I think it's exactly the message that believers around the world need now. So, let's kick it off with Ari:

Ari

Shalom my friends. While many of our fellowship members are from the United States, and therefore are experiencing these dramatic and divisive elections from within, the truth is that these elections are playing out on the world stage. And they have global consequences, even out here in Judea. There's a strong feeling that the outcome of these elections will have a profound effect on our lives and on the future of Israel. So it's rare to meet someone that doesn't have an opinion and most people feel very strongly. As discussed last week, these differences are not only dividing the country, but communities, friends, and even families.

So yesterday, I was speaking to a very dear friend of mine who was quite sad, even a little bit depressed about what appears to be the outcome of these elections. He felt like things for Israel were just going so well. We've never had such close, close friends and allies in the White House who supported the right of the Jewish people to Judea and who have ushered in such a wonderful and promising peace treaty between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and between so many of our Arab neighbors. He was afraid that terrible things would happen. Iran would be strengthened, and the Terrorist Palestinian Authority would be heavily funded and empowered. And the Jews of Israel and Judea would be back to being isolated and alone.

And so, I told my friends that we must do what Jews have done for thousands of years and turn to the Torah. And more specifically to the weekly Torah portion for wisdom, for guidance, and for strength. So last week, we discussed one of the reasons why the divine test of circumcision was so difficult for Abraham. He was convinced that his mission in the world was exclusively universal, to bring the entire world to a love and knowledge of the one true God. It was a universal mission, but with the circumcision, it seemed to change. It seemed to become a family thing, a national thing, a particular thing. This fundamentally clashed with what he was convinced was one of his life's great missions.

And now, we see this week's parsha, parashat Vayera, and here we see even more challenging tests. The ultimate test, the test which Abraham was commanded to offer up his beloved son, the son for which he had hoped and prayed for, the son he was told would continue his mission. He was commanded by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac, to slay him with his own hands. Now this is considered by most to have been the ultimate test, his most difficult test, not only because he was being told to sacrifice his son who was the heir to his mission, but because it appeared, he was sacrificing his mission itself.

God was commanding him to sacrifice his message to the world. Consider this. Abraham came to the world to shatter idols and destroy false gods. And indeed, one of the most prevalent and repulsive idols of his times was the child sacrifice of Molech in which people would literally pass their children through fire in order to sacrifice them to this disgusting idol. And Abraham's message was that the one true God is not a bloodthirsty God seeking child sacrifice, but a loving God that seeks a humble, obedient heart of charity and kindness and compassion and truth. And now, now Abraham has to offer his own son up as a sacrifice. He wasn't only sacrificing his son, he was sacrificing his message and his mission that was what made this test so unfathomably difficult.

And without hesitating for a moment, he was willing to do it. And I think that's the calling for all of us, and believe me, believe me, myself included, is to follow the steps of Abraham and recognize that we just don't know. We don't know the way things are supposed to go. We don't know how things are supposed to look. We may think we know our mission. And we may think we know what is best for us and the world. But we don't. He does. The God of Israel is controlling all of this and so we have nothing to fear.

And every bit of fear that we feel in the Biden/Harris administration replacing the Trump administration is a gauge that exposes to ourselves the amount of faith and trust that we've put into Trump, as a person. It's one thing to have our faith in God and to recognize that Hashem used Donald Trump as an unexpected vehicle to strengthen and support Israel. But if we're crippled with fear and anxiety that he's no longer in power, we're exposing a flaw in our faith that on some level, we felt not that Trump was a vehicle through which God blessed us, but he was the source of the blessing, himself. Listen, we're only human. All of life is a process of

shattering idols that we have inadvertently let into our hearts. And if we allowed Donald Trump to become an idol in our hearts and minds, well then Biden's election is an opportunity to set ourselves straight and to remember and internalize the words of King David – don't place your faith and trust in princes and diplomats, in whose hands there is no salvation. For let us remember the words of King Solomon, King David's son and Mishle/Proverbs 21: the heart of a king is like a stream of water in the hands of Hashem. Wherever He wishes He will direct it.

There's nothing here being left up to chance. Everything is in His hands and what we may consider a curse will turn into a blessing. And what we would consider a blessing, could come out as a curse. For example, most people consider the Trump administration the architects responsible for the Peace Treaty with the UAE, the United Arab Emirates. And while there's truth in that, in my opinion, even more credit goes to the Obama administration who unintentionally laid the groundwork to make these peace agreements possible by signing the evil and shameful nuclear treaty with Iran which created the power balance in the Middle East. By creating a reality in which these Arab countries needed Israel as a strategic partner to combat the Iranian threat which the Obama administration created in the first place.

My point is that Hashem is in charge and therefore, however evil the intentions of a future administration may or may not be. They will turn out for a blessing if Hashem wills it, which He does. Who knows if a hostile administration to Israel and Jews in general could bring about the ingathering of the exiles, a stronger and more independent Israel or anything else which we simply don't have the ability to foresee. Like Abraham, we must be willing to sacrifice what we know and put our faith where it belongs, in God's hands.

Hashem, please allow us to strengthen our emunah, our faith in You. Remove from our hearts all fear that is not fear of You. Remove from our hearts hatred and resentment, particularly of those people that are celebrating that which we're mourning, those whose views we believe are immoral, terrible and destructive. And just as Abraham prayed for the lives of the evil city of Sodom and Gomorrah, give us the love and the faith and the strength to pray for our fellow man, no matter how evil their actions may be. Hashem, please use these events that are unfolding before our eyes to bring about the redemption and the salvation which we've been waiting for. May it be soon. Thank you, my friends. Love to all of you and of course feel free to reach out to me with questions or thought or comments. ari@thelandofisreal.com Shalom. Back to you, Jeremy.

Jeremy

Thank you so much, Ari. Listening to it, I can't think of more relevant words to our hearts. You know, all of us live with this message. Every person has a way they see the world. You know, some of us are more vocal than others. But every person has the message they tell themselves, this is the way things should be. This is the ways things are supposed to be. And you know, the way things should be.

Abraham has it tough. He was a walking message. He was preaching wherever he went. But I think Ari's right and it seems like a huge part of his final test was, are you able to let go of the way you think things should be? It's like sometimes, I read the stories about Abraham and the sacrifices that he made and just the struggles that he lived through. But there are some things I just, I can't wrap my mind around. And it's just so relevant for today. You know, he saw his life's purpose over the span of so many generations. He wasn't concerned with his life as much as he was concerned about the future nation and nations that would emerge from him. It's like a totally different way of seeing the world. It's the fundamental difference between him and Noah.

You know, Noah was able to learn from the past, when men sin, chaos will erupt and destroy everything around you. I understand Americans right now that are just distraught because you know when there's no fear of the Lord, there's no wisdom. When there's no wisdom, chaos will erupt, and who knows what might be. And Noah's teaching us we've got to learn from our past. Noah didn't have a clear vision for the future and you don't have a clear vision for the future, Noah ends up drinking himself into a coma. In Noah, we learn about the past, but Abraham gives us for the first time, a vision for the future. It's like in modern times, we look at quarterly reports to see how a company is doing. Most psychologists, when planning, you know, for life, they'll tell people, listen. Think five years ahead what you want to do with your life. Let's really like plan it out.

You know, some great men and women very few, make the effort to really think about the end of their life. And how they want to leave the world. And what legacy or impact they want to leave behind. And those few people that are thinking about the end of their life, that's about as long-term thinking as you get in 2020. Abraham was talking about impacting the world thousands of years beyond his time. It's just astounding. It's like from Isaac, from one child, he was thinking about populating the world as the dust of the earth and stars in the sky. I mean, if you think about it, it's just remarkable. Miraculous really. Abraham is made two promises almost 4,000 years ago and we look at the world today and the first promise is that he would be the father of many nations and impact billions of people through Isaac, Ishmael, Esav and Jacob. Abraham is the father of every single Jew, every Christian, and every Muslim in the world.

The substructure of our moral world was built on the shoulders of Abraham. He's the spiritual father of billions of people. This isn't something that we have to believe in, something that's beyond our understanding, so we have a leap of faith. It's just prophecy manifest. It is the reality of existence as encoded in the Torah. Like the Torah is the blueprint and the world is manifesting itself by its plan.

The second promise that was made to Abraham is that the Land of Israel would somehow, in some way, eventually be given over to Isaac and Jacob and their descendants as an everlasting possession. Here we are, Ari and myself, our families live in the deepest settlement in Judea today. It's not something that we need to believe in, an ingathering of the exiles is underway and beyond our understanding, a call has gone out that has called the Jewish people home to Israel once again. And it's a testimony for the whole world to see. The foundational covenants and promises made to Abraham are at the very heart of our reality today for the whole world to see.

It's like, you know, what can we believe today? Did Trump win? Did Biden win? Who can we trust? What news? What's real? What's fake? What's being censored? What's not being censored? You can't censor reality. Abraham is the father of billions of people and the children of Israel are back in our homeland. Twitter and Facebook can't censor that. And so, it's just marvelous to see that with all of the chaos around us, it's strength to see the foundations of the Torah, the foundations of the Biblical vision, they're manifesting before our eyes.

And you know, Tehila had an amazing revelation connected to this. We were talking about these ideas all of Shabbat. And you know, it's like this fellowship is getting all the jewels of our Judean Shabbat. You know, we can't celebrate Shabbat together just yet, but for now, we can broadcast the light from Zion, bring some Judean Shabbat light into lives around the world and homes around the world into this coming week. And so, I want to hand it over to Tehila and let her teach as only she knows how because it was just so beautiful. So Tehila, take it away.

Tehila

Hi guys, I hope you're all doing well and recovering from the roller coaster of the past few days. This week's parsha has one of the most incredible and shocking dialogues I think there might be in the entire Torah. Hashem says that Sodom and Amora, they're just terrible, awful. Before Hashem even has a chance to give the details, it seems like Avraham just jumps in and he says, could it be that the judge of the whole earth will not do justice? And then he says what I think might be the most shocking verse in the Torah. He says, I didn't bother looking up the translation on that because no translation can quite capture the Israeli style chutzpah in that sentence. Kahila would loosely translate as, oh, don't you dare, right? Like I'll be honest, Jeremy and I study the Torah portion with our 11-year-old and our 14-year-old every night and these were not easy verses to read. I'm like, hey kids, look. There's a bird. Quickly turn the pages, Jeremy, turn the pages.

Because how many of you guys would like it if your kids said, oh you wouldn't dare, you know, take away whatever privilege. I bet a lot of you guys would be correcting that pretty quickly. But the kids might have a good leg to stand on reading Avraham speaking to Hashem. So Abraham and Hashem have this strange kind of back and forth negotiation over how many righteous people would there need to be in Sedom to justify saving Sedom. Why is this kind of

a strange dialogue? Because in Hebrew, we have this term – full gas on neutral. Like if your car is in neutral and you're pressing the gas as hard as you can, it's sort of a waste because you're not going anywhere. That's what this argument kind of reminds me of. Because Avraham's having this massive argument with Hashem, but there's something he doesn't know and we know, right? We the readers know because right before, in chapter 18:22 it says right before Hashem starts talking to Avraham about Sedom, it says that the angels turn to go to Sedom. And right after the dialogue, we know that why were the angels in Sedom? They were there to save Lot and his family. Or in the words of Avraham, they had already been sent with a clear task to remove the righteous people out of the wicked people of Sedom. Because Hashem doesn't want to kill the righteous among the wicked.

So in essence, what Avraham doesn't know is that Hashem has already taken care of all the moral concerns that Avraham is bringing up, right? So now, let's say this was happening between you and your kid, right? Your kids arguing and like, oh mom, how could you do that? It's so unfair. And you've already thought of these problems and taking care of them ahead of the time. You know ahead of time. I would say to my kids, who do you think you are? You think you know better than me? I'm the mom of this family. Of course, I've taken care of this before you even thought of it.

But Hashem doesn't even mention to Avraham. Like, hey Avraham, you know I've already thought of that. Why don't you just leave the divine justice to Me. I'll take it from here. I already sent the angels. Instead, it seems like He's kind of playing ball with Avraham. He's participating in this dialogue about how many righteous people should there be in Sedom to save Sedom. And at the beginning of the story, even before this dialogue, Hashem actually says, I want to reveal My plan to Avraham and He says because I'm going to turn him into a great nation. And why have I chosen to make him a great nation? It doesn't say that Hashem chose Avraham because of his theology, that he knows the one true God. It doesn't say Hashem chose Avraham because he's very obedient. He listened to the Lech Lecha. It says, I'm choosing Avraham because he will teach his children to do the right and the just. That's why Hashem loves Avraham.

And so, Avraham is just demonstrating that characteristic that Hashem loves. It's his sensitivity to righteousness, his sensitivity to justice. And if there's anything that we see in the whole Torah, it's that Hashem wants to be in a dialogue about those things with us. You know, he wants to have a conversation. It's not a coincidence that Hashem calls the Jewish people Israel, right? Israel, you have fought with Hashem and man and you've prevailed. So, it's really cool. Hashem kind of encourages and likes this type of relationship, but then, what's the weirdest part of this Torah portion? A little bit later, Hashem commands Avraham to do something that is clearly against all the morality he has learned.

Go sacrifice your child. Wouldn't you expect Avraham to put up an argument here? Be like, hey, what about the fact that he's an innocent boy? What about the fact that he's righteous, right? It seems so out of character that he doesn't even raise an argument. For years, this kind of felt strange to me. But in this time, this year, reading the parsha, I noticed something that really resonated for me in my life. I realized that in order to understand why Avraham doesn't say anything, when he's ordered to sacrifice Isaac. We need to look at all the stories that proceed it.

So, first, we have this Sedom conversation. Avraham is arguing that it's so unfair, so unjust, just to later find out that Hashem had already had a plan before He thought of any of this. He had already sent angels. Then, Yitzchak is born and Ishmael is having a bad influence on him. And Sarah says, you know, we got to get rid of him. And Avraham doesn't feel good, he gets upset, right? He's like not feeling comfortable with this. Hashem says, listen to Sarah. But he doesn't just say, listen to Sarah, I'm the boss, period, end of story. Hashem says, listen, I know this looks bad to you, but I actually have a plan for Ishmael. He's going to be a father of many nations. I'm going to take care of him, right? So once Avraham understands that Ishmael is going to be watched over by Hashem, he feels ok with it.

And then, we get the sacrifice story, then he's commanded to sacrifice. Now the first verse of chapter 22 is so amazing because it says, and after these things, Hashem tested Avraham, meaning Hashem shows that He is like trying to show us that this sacrifice story is like a direct consequence of those stories before. You know, when you're in school and you're learning, you're learning, you're learning, and finally there's the big test, right? So it's like all of these stories building up our training, it's like basic training for Avraham. He's been through this training camp. Do you know the drill? Are you ready for the battlefield?

So this last test, interestingly, it seems kind of like a combination of the previous tests. There's the element of sacrificing a son, like he had been there, done that. I had to get rid of Ishmael, but then it also has the Sedom element of killing an innocent person because Ishmael didn't seem like the nicest guy. Yitzchak is just like an innocent righteous boy.

So it takes the hardest part of both of these stories and puts it into one. And the test is like, Avraham, have you built up your trust in Me to know that I have a plan? And you know, there's this part where they're walking and Yitzchak says, father, where is the lamb? And he says, Hashem will see to the lamb, right? And I always read that as just trying to, you know, sort of calm him down. But when reading it in this light, I realized that Avraham is saying, no, really. Hashem has a plan. How do I know? Because Hashem has taught me all of these lessons up until now. That really resonated for me and maybe for you as well.

I know that sometimes in life, I have these moments where everything seems like a disaster and then, it just works out. And in those moments, I'm like, oh, Hashem had a plan. But then the

next time comes around and I'm like, oh no, everything's going to be terrible. It's like I forgot that I already know that Hashem is going to take care of me. And you know, definitely now, I mean I imagine you guys feel the same and we're in pretty turbulent times in the world.

And I think this parsha is teaching us that we can draw on our past experiences, draw on all those times that we've all had where you felt like there was just a part of the picture that you hadn't seen. But Hashem had seen, and Hashem made everything work out all right. Avraham is showing us that in the hardest test, because Hashem always tests us in our hardest thing. In our hardest tests, we can draw on those past experiences, get strength from them and be ready to face whatever our latest test is, knowing that Hashem has a plan. He's thought of the things that we're worried about, and He knows parts of the puzzle that we don't know. And He's going to make it work out in exactly the way that He knows it needs to work out.

So that's my thought for this week. Bye guys, wishing you a wonderful rest of the week, and I hope you guys enjoy it.

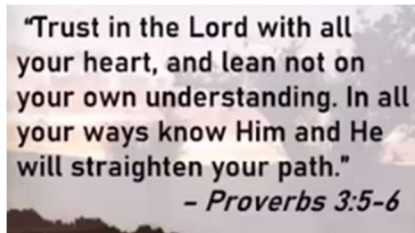
Jeremy

There we go, thank you, Tehila, that just hit the spot. You know, I am an anxious guy. I literally, I just suffer from anxiety. I'm a nervous guy, and that's why I take great pride in that we've made very courageous leaps in our lives. Even though I'm a very nervous, anxious person. And I just give it all to God. That it's only because I trust in Him, because I have faith in Him, that I just feel like ok, we can do the impossible. We can go up against all odds. And I think right now, more than ever, we just need to know that Hashem has a plan. He is going to guide and protect the righteous. He has arks built for all of us as we're building it together with Him.

And that took Avraham a while, you know. And just, it's like kings and leaders rise up to fulfill a purpose and then they vanish into the pages of history. President Donald Trump changed the course of history. He moved the American Embassy to Jerusalem. He recognized the Golan Heights. He brokered the first real peace deal with Israel. He will be remembered in Jewish history as one of the greatest world leaders for the Jewish people in the State of Israel, ever. Perhaps he completed his task, perhaps it's time for the Jews outside the Land to really consider buying a home in Israel now. Perhaps it's time for Israel to lead the way forward.

I think we're going to find out. It's like, maybe Hashem has brought us this far now. Now, it's that time for Israel to be like, all right, we're here in the Middle East. Let us lead the way. Let me show you America who to align with and who not to align with. To sacrifice also means to let go and to sacrifice our preconceived notions of what should be. How things should be. It's just to let go and let God because really what do we know? There is so much that's beyond our grasp. And what is out of our control is out of our control. And trying to hold on to what we want things to be like and the way we think things should be, it's just not a good strategy for living.

And the book of Proverbs 3:5-6 says it all for us:

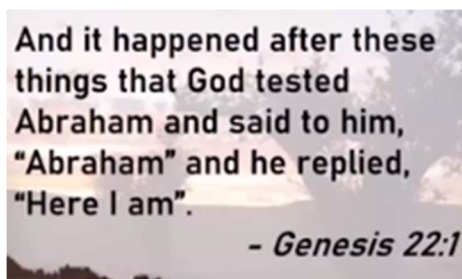


"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways know Him and He will straighten your path."
- Proverbs 3:5-6

That's the heart of it all. I think that's like the key. The prophets, King Solomon here, he's just articulating for us the principles that are already laid out in the Torah. It's like trust in the Lord with all your heart. Don't try to figure it out in your own understanding. The most brilliant person in the world is an idiot compared to Google. You know, it's like ok, how much understanding can a human mind have? And as long as we know Him in all our ways, don't worry. The rocky road, He'll straighten our path. And today, what is the way to straighten our path?

I want to talk about sacrifice, but first, in this parsha, this portion of sacrifice, we need to know that the observation, or the revelation of the Bible is that the world was created for the good. God created the world. He's looking at it. He's like, oh, this is good, meaning, it is ultimately designed to bring good. It's ultimately designed to bring the best out of us, to call our best selves forward. And I think that's the right way to think about it. We have a latent potential inside us. It needs to be called forward. It needs to be revealed. And it's revealed through challenges and tests. Only when we're called to the limits of sacrifice do we know what our limits are.

And I think the Bible teaches...I think it's true to what I've read. It's true to what I see in my life. When people have faith, men and women can overcome their limitations. They can achieve far more than they know. They can become far more than they ever imagined. And that's what's happening right now, here in the Torah. It's like laying the blueprint for all believers. Genesis 22:1 is the beginning of the story:

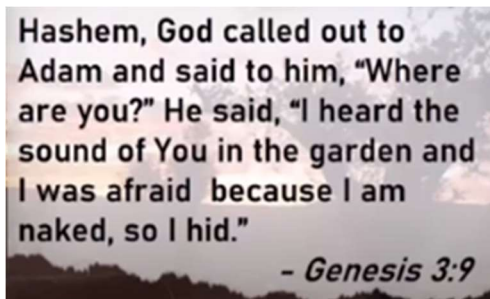


And it happened after these things that God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham" and he replied, "Here I am".
- Genesis 22:1

After all that Abraham had learned, after those things, God tested Abraham in the final test and said to him, Abraham, and he replied, hineni, here I am. In the story, in his tenth and final test,

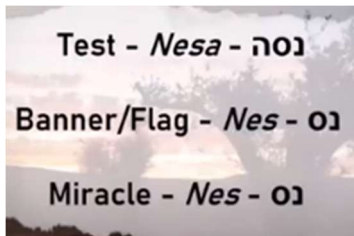
Abraham is being tested with everything on the line. He's being pushed beyond his limits. Everything that he's worked for, everything he loves, everything he believes in, everything. He's being called forward and he answers, hineni, here I am.

That's the question for every believer right now. When you are called upon, will you rise up and say, hineni, here I am? You know, Abraham walked into the unknown. He lived through poverty. He lived through the evils of man, tyranny, war. He's being called again, and it's as if this time, his call brings us all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Adam's first test wasn't eating from the Tree. The first test was how he responds to that failure and to the challenge. In Genesis 3:9, look what happens:



That was the first question asked to man. God calls out to Adam. Where are you? Adam hides because he feels naked, inadequate, afraid. Abraham is called by his name and he answers, hineni, here I am, I'm right here. He's coming to fix the whole world right at the root. It's like the world is designed to bring the best out of us. The design is real and it can really hurt. It's like, without faith, truth, a moral compass, meaning, this life can facilitate tragedy, failure, and despair. But the canvas of existence is here to bring out the best. To make our life a masterpiece, if we choose. With all the struggles and challenges. It's almost like...through those struggles and challenges, we're called to rise up beyond ourselves. To be better than we are. To be stronger than we thought we could be. To make Aliyah to Israel is a physical representation, a physical manifestation of choosing to rise up, to rise up above the world around you, to choose the path toward higher living.

That's really what the word test means in Hebrew. It's like the word "test" sometimes, it's translated as, and God tempted Abraham. That's way off, but even the word test is lacking. The word test, it means to lift up a banner, a flag, it's like marking something.



The Hebrew word means so much that the simple English translation can't possibly give over the meaning. The Hebrew word test, nesa, is the word nes, which means banner or flag. It also means the word nes, miracle. It's like when life tests you, it is opening up the possibility of raising your best self up, like a flag lifting up a testimony of who you are to God, to the people around you, to yourself. You only know who you are when you're put to the test. But the word miracle is embedded in the same word. It's so beautiful. It's like at the same time, every test we pass is a miracle. Because who gave us the strength and the courage to prevail? Who gave us the wisdom to choose the right path? Thank God, we're tuning in. Who are we tuning in to? Who's giving us the direction? We have the ability to call on miracles in our lives.

Abraham's best self was called forward. And from that test, emerged the world as we know it. The world is designed to bring the best out of us. The challenges of life, they call our best self forward. The sacrifice, the hardships, the storm, those refine us. Their fires that purify us. They make us sharper. They make us stronger. We struggle, we fail, we get up and we fall again. We rise up and we struggle. And we prevail. That's the secret of Israel. We never, ever give up.

A dear member of our fellowship was sharing some of their hardships and challenges that they're going through, you know, asking me to pray with them, to pray for them, and while comforting himself in our conversation, he said, calm seas never made a skilled sailor. And I really like that line he taught me. And so now, I'm sharing it with you guys. Calm seas never made a skilled sailor. It's specifically in dealing with the hard times that make you a master of your life. Going out to sea and dealing with the winds and the waves and the rain and the turbulence, you can only develop the skills of sailing when the environment challenges you.

It's like raising your children. We all know this. You want your children to grow, you want them to be strong, you want them to develop, you want to put them in situations that challenge them, that build their confidence, that build their character. They only grow in their push to do something that's beyond them. Friends, we are no different. We were brought into this world like every living thing. To grow, to express ourselves, to become all that we can be. And I think that's why when God tells Abraham that his children are going to be forged through several generations of slavery, he doesn't pray for them. He prayed for Sodom and Gomorrah, like why doesn't he pray for his own children that are going to be enslaved in Egypt? It's like he realized that as their father, looking in such a trajectory, those hardships under God's providence of Egypt, they're going to forge his children into a force of compassion. That experience will create a nation that will always fight for freedom, for centuries later. A people that felt the pain of oppression and tyranny will know the pain and suffering of others and seek to bless them. Only that nation will be able to bless the world.

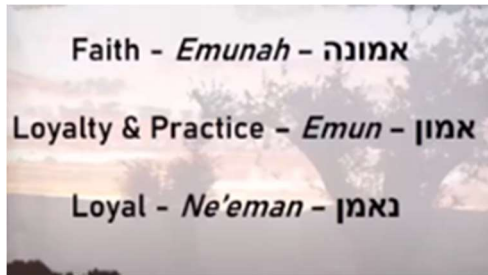
A people that knows from experience the evil that man can inflict on each other will emerge a people that's dedicated to fixing, to bringing more love and healing into the world. It's like we

are called into greater being. We struggle, we sacrifice, we fail. We fail, we fall, we rise up again, stronger. It's like that's where greatness is made. That is the secret of Israel's eternity. That's the covenant of Abraham. It's an eternal covenant, la'olam, it's like the secret of Israel's eternity. See, when someone is shaky in their faith, in other words, they're saying they're shaky in their faith in life, in being itself. It's like, what is this life? It's like, you fortify your faith, not by trying to convince yourself of the existence of a transcendent power that you can believe in. In the same way that you believe in a set of empirical facts. That's not the right way to look at things. That's not the right approach. That's not Biblical faith. That's just not the mind.

The question of God's existence, it didn't apply to the people of the Bible. The prophets didn't look at the world that way. They looked at the mystery of existence itself in radical amazement and saw life itself as an expression of God. Reality itself was a communication. Existence itself was calling them forward. They were in a dialogue with the world around them and forged a relationship with the source of all being. And as we continue to grow in our lives, we continue to grow through the centuries, our understanding of God grows and evolves, but our covenant remains the same. How we walk in the world in our actions, our faith brought into the world in action, our orientation toward the world, toward other people, they remain in line, they remain aligned, they're in tshuva.

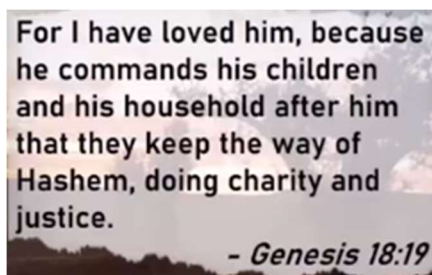
We enter into a covenant with what you hold, at the highest regard. Our understanding of God is like the ultimate good. When we are in covenant with that, the world will open up to you and when you act, your faith is emboldened. Only emunah, which is faith in action, faith is emboldened. It's like the story of Abraham is a lesson for all believers. It's like you have an inner calling, an inner voice inside of you. That is His blessing to the world. An inner voice that can guide you. It can easily be silenced or dulled or ignored. You can drink it away, you can eat it away, you can sin it away. But it is something that can be empowered. It's like, we don't know where thoughts come from. We don't know where they emerge from. But the more you listen, the better you get at hearing. It's like everything in life. You exercise it, it gets stronger. You practice it, it gets better, eat healthy food for a healthy body. Practice healthy habits for a healthy soul. You want to have stronger reception? You want to build your faith? Let's call those healthy soul habits, acts of loving kindness, or mitzvot. You follow your inner intuition that's guiding you to a higher living, you commit to live out that relationship in action, in life decisions. You know how to aim towards the best you can be – the best father you can be, the best husband you can be, the best wife you can be, the best mother, the best friend.

Aim for the ultimate. Aim for the kingdom. It's like in that pursuit, don't waver. Be strong, courageous. Your integrity and loyalty is the greatest expression of your faith. And as you are growing that loyalty, you grow in faith. That's why emunah, the Hebrew word for faith and emun, is loyalty and in the same word as practice. Ne'eman is loyal.



It really has nothing to do almost with statements of faith, trying to articulate our understanding of the transcendent reality beyond time and space. I guess that's an interesting philosophical exercise, but the faith of Abraham can be summed up in one question. It's a question of emunah. Are you being led in your life? Are you being led beyond your immediate, selfish, self-centered life to live a life of love, a life of giving? It's like one of the greatest lessons of Abraham. When a thought arises in his mind, and the emotion was strong, he acts. He doesn't hesitate. He doesn't say, well, let me analyze the situation. The pros and cons. He's moved, he's inspired. Seize the opportunity. He's called to go forth from his Land. He doesn't say, well let me sleep on that for a few days and let me weigh my options here. The next day, he's packing up and he's on his way out.

He's called to sacrifice Isaac. The next morning, he wakes up with the dawn and he's out on his mission. Inspiration comes and inspiration goes. Intentions diminish, ideas they fade away, the emotions disappear. When you're filled with inspiration, it's a gift. When you feel filled with the spirit of inspiration, that's the time to act. When you know that like, ok, God runs the world, hold on to that. Whenever fear arises, just translate that...we're going to live with a certain amount of fear in our life. Take that fear, it's fear of the Lord. That's it. So many people, they wait to make their move. Once they're concerned, once they're in a bind. Fear is leading them and their decisions out of fear will take you to a totally different place than decisions made when you're inspired, when you're being led. We have to, when the moment arises, seize it. It's like Genesis 18:19:



Doing what's right. Charity to love beyond ourselves. Justice to rise beyond ourselves, to fight corruption and seek justice. Because He commands His children in his household. That's it. It's like, how do you walk in the world? Just the immediate surroundings, that's all that matters right now. Don't worry about politics, don't worry about world events. You command your

children and the people around you. Keep the way of Hashem. Charity and justice, to love beyond yourselves, to rise up, to fight corruption and seek justice. That's it. It's how we walk in the world. You know enough to walk with integrity now. You know enough to walk in the light. We may not have the whole path illuminated. We don't know where the world is going right now. But we have enough now to light on the horizon, to like walk forward.

And here's what Abraham teaches us. Every time he overcame a hardship in the form of sacrifice, he had to give something of himself to overcome that challenge. Every time Abraham encountered a struggle and faced it, he emerged stronger. Each trial preparing him for the next. I think that's the right way to look at it. His tests weren't for God, but were for Abraham, himself. He only knew his faith. And his commitment that he was able to live out, his covenant when he was tested. Each time you choose to walk in the light, you transform yourself into being light.

Abraham is given a new name. He transforms his identity, he changes his destiny. In our personal lives, it's like your initial impulse, it's like the heart of man is not very good. It's like selfish, lazy, short-sighted and small-minded. But as you choose the higher road, you actually rewire your brain. You create a new habit. There's an ancient Jewish writing that says man acts based on his actions. It's like your actions actually form you. It's better to give ten dollars a month than a hundred dollars all at once because every time you reach your hand into your pocket and take out money and give it to someone in need or towards a cause, you believe in, as you give, every time you give, you're becoming more giving. After you do something holy, something good, for a certain amount of time, your physical body will compel you to do it again. Somehow our brains and bodies, they like routines. And the more you follow those patterns of goodness, the more you become good. If you commit to good, you will do good. You do good, you become good. It's like there's some people that say, no, I don't want to pray or meditate every day. I just want to pray when I want to pray. When I feel the spirit move me. I want it to flow. I want the prayer to come from an authentic place.

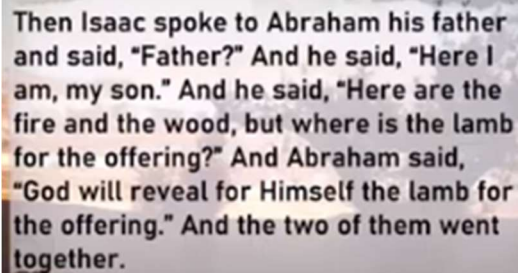
And I don't think that's the right mindset. It's like sacrifices were given every day in the temple. It's like every day, to meditate and pray every day, you become a more prayerful person. Your heart will become more open. It's like if you pray, your mind will be waiting every morning to become...to be present. It's like through a commitment to yourself, you build yourself. It's like the most fundamental ritual in the Torah. The first humans outside of the garden, what do they do? Cain and Abel, they're sacrificing. The first thing Noah does after the flood, sacrifice. Abraham walks across Israel going from place to place making sacrifices in different locations. It's like one message so fundamental, so important. Sacrifice, it is the one lesson for every single person, for every believer. It doesn't matter if you're rich, you're poor, you're Jewish, American, Mexican, Canadian. At the core of life, if you want to move forward, is sacrifice. You cannot succeed without sacrifice. You have to be ready to give of yourself, of your time, of your money, of your life to achieve what you want in this world.

And if you're able to burn away what's dragging you down, what's holding you back. If sin is missing the mark, what in your life is creating that crookedness that's making you miss. How can I burn that away? How can I burn the sin away? If you're able to give up what your lower self wants, now you will be drawn to who you are destined to become. It's like life is not a sealed fate. You can bargain with your future. You can change your destiny, you can give up something in the present and transform your future.

Abraham, the father of many nations wanted to transform the world. You want to transform the world? That's a lot. Boy, you're going to have to sacrifice everything. The articulated principle. If you give up something of value today, you can attain a greater cause in the future. So then the question, what's the greatest sacrifice? What is the greatest cause to strive for? What if everyone in the world sacrificed up the things that were their greatest impediment in their lives? And directed their lives toward the greatest cause they could imagine? Who knows where that would take us? The Bible tells us something like heaven on earth. It's like beyond our imagination.

Salvation, redemption, the kingdom, it's like emerging from flesh rising above our instincts. A sacrificial attitude is the only way forward. It's like so unpopular today. That is the way of the Torah. It's like Isaac wasn't a child. He wasn't a little boy, he was a young man. Isaac was willing to sacrifice his life. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son. Nothing more precious could be offered by either of them. Abraham and Isaac had to teach us that they were ready to go all the way. It's like in that act, Abraham and Isaac gave us the power of sacrifice. Our fathers in their example gave us the strength to overcome every evil of this world. Let it be the riots in Oregon. The Jewish people were ready to love God with all their hearts, with all their souls and all their might. Only that spiritual power could defeat the Greeks, the Romans, the crusaders, the Inquisition, the Pogroms, the Nazis, the communists. Two thousand years of exile.

When I think about Jewish history, I mean, come on. We've been through Pharaoh. We'll live through Biden. The conversation between Abraham and Isaac on their journey. It's like an archetype. It is the ultimate. It's like after a hundred years of waiting, Abraham, with all his hopes, Abraham is ready to sacrifice it all. Is Isaac ready for the ultimate sacrifice? We cannot hesitate to offer the ultimate sacrifice, if we want to achieve the ultimate good. Both of our fathers had to grapple with this ultimate question. And their answer for us is, man, I want to make my life better. It's ok. There's a path. It's like, I have to burn off what's holding me back. I have to let that go to achieve a greater good. It's like their answer is our strength today. It's like these verses for me are so important. Genesis 22. It's like right in the heart of the story:



Then Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "Father?" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the offering?" And Abraham said, "God will reveal for Himself the lamb for the offering." And the two of them went together.

- Genesis 22: 7-8

If we can look at the ultimate sacrifice. If we can stare our greatest fear down and still stay committed, Scripture tells us we might not have to make it. God will reveal for Himself a lamb for the offering. In some way, maybe they knew that God would somehow provide a way that they couldn't see. But only when they were ready to stare their greatest fear down, were they able to move forward.

The world is designed for the good. To bring out the good in us. It is calling our name, our personal name, like Abraham. It's calling us. We're being called to answer, hineni, here I am. I'm right here. Abraham was called into action. The reality of existence, it demands a response. It is calling us and like Adam, we can choose to hide, say we're inadequate, we're naked. I just, I just...leave me. I just want to hide. But even if we hide, reality is still calling us. Reality still calls on to us. What are we going to do? That call might go out to a single mom in this fellowship, who I'm speaking to right now. Who's raising her children and taking care of her mother. And those two children are the entire world. Those two children are no different than Isaac. She's being called to her best self, to be the best mother she can be, the best daughter she can be, the best person she can possibly be. In these times, we're being called into the unknown. Reality has placed us into the unknown. Nothing has changed since the days of Abraham. Reality itself is communicating to us now. Existence is calling us forward.

But you can say, I'm too young, I'm too old, I'm too scared, I don't know if I have what it takes. Right there, that's it. It's right there. Hineni. Here I am. I'm old, I'm young, I'm ill-equipped, I'm scared, here I am. I'm in this place, from this place I'm with you, God. I'm ready to go. I might need to walk slowly. I might not be the strongest person, but I'm ready to walk forward. Because I know that with You, I'm walking in the light. And I know that with you, you'll take me into the light every step in the light, every step in faith. Every step into the unknown. Following your call is your sacrifice. You are sacrificing potentials of who you could be and allowing your greater self to be revealed. Hineni. Here I am. I'm not trying to be someone I can't be or someone that I'm not. Hineni, I'm saying, here I am with all of my flaws and all of my baggage and all of my fears, trying to be my best, trying to be good. I'm trying to be loyal to Your calling, to be faithful to You and to be loyal to myself.

It's like most people in the world, they just want to show up for life. They're just living. Where the winds take me, that's where I'm going to go. The Torah tells us that's not going to work. There is no staying power in that way of living. Just like, drink, drink and be merry for tomorrow we might die. No, there is no direction, that's not the right approach. You cannot be of the chosen people, if you are not choosing life. To be a believer is to be chosen. It is to choose life. You can't carry God's Name as a believer in this world if You're not ready to sacrifice. That's the foundational story. You have to rise above yourself to give of yourself. You can't just show up. You have to hear the calling. And your response can't be to just hide like Adam. Your response needs to be, here I am. Sometimes we have courage, sometimes we don't. Wherever we are, that's where's He's calling us.

It's like, I'm too old. Abraham was 75 when he started his journey. Now, I don't have a lot of money. Abraham didn't have a lot of money. I don't have a big ministry or work that I'm being called to do. Abraham just had one son that was it. That was his whole world. You have a son, you have a daughter. You have a parent, you have a husband, a wife, you have a friend. That's all you need to start. The mystery of being unfolds right before you. You can begin spreading the light immediately. The calling is right there before you.

What are you being called to do now? You're called from your place by your name, not just to show up. To put your best foot forward in your walk. To be your best self. Because right now, we're going into times that will demand strength, courage, faith. Now is the time to prepare. Bring your best self forward now. So when the tenth test arrives in our lives, we're ready for whatever lies ahead. That is the blessing of Abraham. That's why the believers will find refuge in Zion. That's not just a phrase from the Bible. That's a way of being in the world.

And so, it's like, may we all be blessed with the blessings of Zion. May we see a new light shine on Zion in these days. May that light spread across the world. May Israel rise up as a leader among nations and lead this world toward the light. We know that God is guiding this ship. He's holding our hands and reality is unfolding with a destination in mind. A new Jerusalem is on the horizon and the believers aligned with Israel will all rejoice together in our House of Prayer for all Nations. So until then, until that day comes, it's hineni, here I am. And know that you are blessed from the mountains of king David.

Aaronic blessing

Shalom, my friends. See you next week.