

## Akedah drash 2024

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Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, of blessed memory, has written about the Akedah, the binding of Isaac. He says - "As Jews – indeed as humans – we must reject Kierkegaard's principle of the "teleological suspension of the ethical." This is an idea that gives *carte blanche* to religious fanatics to commit crimes in the name of God. It is the logic of the Inquisition and the suicide bomber. It is not the logic of Judaism rightly understood.[5] God does not ask us to be unethical. We may not always understand ethics from God's perspective but we believe that "He is the Rock, His works are perfect; all His ways are just" (Deut. 32:4)."

He further makes the argument that the Akedah is really about the birth of the individual. That children are not the property of their parents, their family, but rather individuals in their own right. Everything in this world is derived from God, so we are all God's children. And that God is the source of all life and that life, not death, is paramount.

So Sacks believes that the message of the Akeda is that Abraham was ready to give his son, his only son, over to God. That Abraham did not own Isaac and he had no claim over Isaac.

But, I must admit, that this interpretation is not totally satisfying to me. If that is so, why didn't God just request Abraham to give Isaac over to Him, to be a faithful servant, but not to kill him. And Abraham seemed all too ready to fulfill this command. He was ready to slaughter Isaac, his arm was raised with the knife in his hand. We have so many examples of Abraham arguing with God in the Torah to save lives, but not in this case.

On the contrary, Abraham was eager to fulfill this horrendous mitzvah. Why didn't Abraham argue with God? Why didn't he say to God, take me instead. Why didn't Abraham raise the knife to himself instead.

It is a very troubling story and one that is not very satisfying to me. I am left agreeing with Immanuel Kant that Abraham failed the test. That an innocent life, in this case, Isaac, takes precedence over God's commandment. I also feel that God failed in some way. How could God put Abraham in this monstrous

dilemma? What type of God would do that? So I am left feeling quite unsatisfied in reading the story and many of its commentaries. Maybe the story points to the idea that we are all flawed in some way, even God.

So I was going to end my drash here. But I felt so depressed about it, that I feel that I have to end on some hope. I am going to lean into Heschel's idea that Abraham heeded the call to stop. Abraham heard the call from the angel and acted. That we need to act and we need to listen to the call for justice and moral clarity. I am going to convince myself that Abraham maybe somehow misinterpreted God's request, and he finally heard it correctly at the 11th hour. And, thank God, he reacted swiftly before it was too late.

I wish everyone a Shana Tovah Umetukah, a sweet and healthy year for us all.