

QUESTIONS? OR ANSWERS!

by Rabbi Dovid Green

There is a very basic aspect of Judaism which we learn from this week's parsha. In one of the most dramatic episodes in the life of Avraham - the binding of his son to be brought as a sacrificial offering, we find Avraham faced with a dilemma. G-d directs Avraham to do what in Avraham's eyes is the most despicable of things. That is - to bring a human sacrifice.

Now, if Avraham would think that something is despicable, and G-d wouldn't think so, Avraham could adjust his views. However, in this case Avraham was under the distinct impression that G-d was of the same view. Avraham made this clear in his many sermons to the people of the land, and to his many followers. Imagine what people would say when they heard that Avraham himself committed the same "abomination" that he so passionately opposed.

Additionally, there was another small detail. There is a passage in this week's parsha (Genesis 21:11) stating that Avraham's lineage would continue through Yitzchok, who would be one of the biological patriarchs of the Jewish Nation. Yitzchok was not yet a father, so it was out of the question that this promise would come true if Avraham would go through with bringing Yitzchok as a sacrifice.

There are any number of reasons why Avraham could have excused himself from this commandment, and we would not have faulted him in the least. Still, he went to the furthest point that G-d wanted him to, and he would have finished if that would have been G-d's will. It wasn't though, and G-d sent his heavenly messenger to make that clear before it became an irreversible act. We learn from Avraham the important lesson which is embodied in the expression "you don't die from a question."

There was once a man who left his cloistered religious life in the "shtetle" and set off for America in the early part of this century. Just as he parted with his old country, so did he gradually part with his old lifestyle. He eventually gave in to the influences of his surroundings, and became a totally irreligious man. He maintained just a precious few of the practices of his "former life". On one occasion he came in contact with one of his mentors of his earlier years. "What happened to you? Why did you give everything up?" questioned the mentor who could not contain himself. "Well, I have a lot of questions," was the confident reply. "So if I can answer your questions, you'll reconsider?" asked the mentor. "Absolutely." "But first," queried the mentor, "I have a question for you." "Did you have these questions before or after you gave up observance?" Unsure of why he was asking, he answered "I guess it was after I became irreligious." "Then I can not answer your questions, because they are not questions at all, but rather they are answers." In other words they were the

excuses he made up in order to absolve himself of his guilt for not really having compelling arguments for having given everything up.

We all have questions. Those who are uninitiated to traditional Judaism have many valid questions. However, those who are knowledgeable are equally if not more puzzled by contradictions. The more one studies the sources, the more answers one finds. Inevitably, with the new answers and growth in understanding, come new questions. There is another expression as well. "You live from a question." The questions are our source of growth and elevation.

Avraham had questions; compelling questions. At the same time he saw things in perspective. His job was to do what he knew G-d had told him to do. The answers to his questions would eventually be resolved. Where would we be today if Avraham had not taken that approach?

Good Shabbos!

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