

# THE SOURCE OF OUR BLESSINGS

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

One of my earliest childhood memories of being in Synagogue was the all too frequent announcement; alternately, "All rise! Please be seated!" I remember thinking, "Why don't they make up their mind?" When considering the rapid transition from the "Days of Awe" to the "Time of our Happiness", on Sukkos, one might be left with the same feeling. What's the deal here?! Is the relationship one of overwhelming fear or abundant love, or both somehow?

Avraham manifested the epitome of human dedication when he stood willing to sacrifice his principles, his reputation, his future, his beloved son, with one swipe of the knife. We know how the story ends. The Almighty was testing to see if he was willing to give it all up and he lived up to the test. Today we continue to draw from the fount of the account gained by his noble intentions. In the last instant he was interrupted and an announcement was made "Now I know you fear G-d, because you did not withhold your son, your only son, from Me!"

That must have been the height of heights, but then something even greater happened which seems to have eclipsed the prior achievement. How could that be? We are told that Avraham noticed a ram in caught in the thicket, which he subsequently sacrificed in place of his son, and a second Divine announcement was made, "I swear, so says Hashem, because you did this (the sacrifice of the ram) and you did not withhold your son your only son, I will bless those who bless you. I will increase your seed like the stars of the heavens and like the sand of the sea shore and your seed will inherit the gates of its enemies. All the nations of the world will be blessed through your descendants because you have hearkened to My voice!"

What's the big deal with the ram? Why after having demonstrated his willingness to give up his son he is titled as one who fears Hashem, which is no small matter, but when he brings some stray creature in his stead, the act of bringing his son is again evoked and mountains of blessing begin to flow in his general direction?

Imagine it's mid-winter and on Shabbos eight feet of snow falls. After Shabbos your boss or significant authoritative other calls and all but commands that you come immediately and dig him out so he can catch a plane. Immediately you get into serious gear, winter gear, and spend the next two hours just getting your self out from under the snow. Now you hurry to the boss's house to perform the same task on his extra long driveway.

When you arrive you notice the driveway is clear already. The plow must have just come. Your boss

is already strolling to the waiting Town-Car with is luggage. He thanks you for your effort for coming and titles you a dutiful worker on his way by. Suddenly he notices you running to your car. At first he assumes you are looking to escape before he innovates some other mission impossible. Rather, he witnesses something that amazes him. You take out your broom and dust off his mailbox and sweep a few crumb of snow from here and there. Then as you go back to your car, he runs after you, in tears, offering you a raise for your devotion for having swept around a little. What went right here?

Maybe when you came, initially, your motive was fear, thinking, "What would be the result of not coming? How can I not go when the boss calls!?" By merely arriving you had demonstrated your loyalty. You would have been forgiven for escaping at that moment before he changed his mind and threw another monumental task your way. However, when you took out the broom and swept up, even though the act is significantly smaller, you showed that your original motive was not fear alone but an abiding love, a sincere desire to come close. Therefore the treasure house of blessing is opened. Raises and bonuses are in order.

The same applies to Avraham and the wayward ram and to us in this season of seeming mixed emotions. Simply sitting in a Sukkah reveals retroactively that the devotions demonstrated during the "Days of Awe" were not done due to dread alone but were driven by a deeper dynamic. That tiny extra touch excites a cover of love above and is the source of our blessings!

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