

THE PASSION

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

*"And Avraham raised his eyes and saw - behold, a ram - afterwards, caught in the thicket by its horns; so Avraham went and took the ram and offered it up as an offering instead of his son."
(Beraishis/Genesis 22:13)*

Rashi relates the mishna that teaches that this ram was prepared during the Six Days of Creation for this point in history. What was the great significance of this offering that creation awaited it? And why does the Torah need to inform us of the obvious reality that the ram was "instead of his son"?

Sforno (1) explains "instead of his son: in exchange for that which was in his heart to offer his son, in the realm of maintaining faithfulness to that which he had previously committed in his heart." Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (2) finds this amazing: G-d gave Avraham the command to bring Yitzchak (Isaac) up on the altar as a test, for just as G-d had commanded Avraham to bring him he was commanded to remove him. The "commitment" that Avraham made to bring his son as an offering was in error, a colossal misunderstanding. Nevertheless, notes Rabbi Dessler in Sforno's words, without an alternative vehicle with which to serve G-d, Avraham would have been disingenuous to his commitment to serve. Indeed, Rashi explains that the ram was "instead of his son" because Avraham literally requested that G-d view each act - from the slaughter through each subsequent step - as if it was performed in his son's stead. Rabbi Dessler notes that Avraham was correlating every action to his original intent and commitment. That even though he was absolved by nothing less than a Divine decree, Avraham was concerned with fulfilling his "obligation".

Why such a burning passion? Because Avraham realized that this was not simply some contractual obligation that was now moot because the contract was revoked. This was the ultimate of Avraham's Divine trials. But these trials did not test Avraham's G-d consciousness, they FORGED it. This opportunity was presented to Avraham to allow him to transcend his human condition and offer his entire future to G-d in His service. Avraham very keenly appreciated this unparalleled opportunity and knew he was bound to follow through. And G-d agreed, such that He built this parallel chance into Creation. (And Satan was also rather aware of this unique circumstance, for it was he who caught the ram's horns in the thicket; see Rashi.)

True, we do not have the spiritual fortitude of our patriarch Avraham and our challenges may seem insignificant compared to the Binding of Yitzchak. But G-d imbues all mitzvos (Divine commands) - especially the challenging ones - with the potential to mold our G-d consciousness. And He imbues every Jew with the potential to emulate his grandfather's passion.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) 1470-1550; classic Biblical commentary of Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno of Rome and Bologna, Italy

(2) 1891-1954; in Michtav Me'Eliyahu, his collected writings and discourses; from England and, later, B'nai Brak, he was one of the outstanding personalities and thinkers of the Mussar movement

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