

# PARSHAS VAYERA - AVRAHAM AND YITZCHOK WALK "TOGETHER"

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein*

## **Avraham and Yitzchok Walk "Together"**

*Avraham returned to his young men. They rose up and went together to Be'ersheva. (Bereishis 22:19)*

The story has been told many times before, in many places and in many cultures. The hero embarks on a journey. Along the way, he grows, responds to challenges. He does wondrous things.

Those wondrous things will depend on the culture and its values. In one, they may be acts of courage and fortitude. He may slay many dragons, rescue the oppressed, champion the downtrodden. In other societies, the hero will walk with the common man, inspiring them with wisdom or ministering to the needy.

At some point, the hero will meet his greatest test. He will prevail. In the process, he transcends ordinary existence. He may climb to Olympus, or ascend to heaven. He may die - a tragedy tempered by the realization of everyone else that his mundane routine in a pedestrian world is no longer appropriate to him.

This is not the way the Akeidah ends for Avraham and Yitzchok. The dénouement of the story is often overlooked, but it is quite unexpected.

Three times in the narrative, the Torah uses "yachdav" to describe father and son walking together. (The word does not mean the same thing as the related "yachad." That word speaks of a more casual association; "yachdav" is more intense - it signifies a stronger, more essential, togetherness.) The first two are well known for their poignancy. They walk hand in hand, full of love and trust, ready to serve Hashem with an offering. An innocent question by Yitzchok. A loving but terse response by Avraham, that points to the unexpected role Yitzchok is going to play at the top of the mountain. They do not break stride. The realization of what is to come does not touch the bond, the togetherness.

When it is all over, they both return, and set out for Be'ersheva. Here, too, they travel "yachdav," only this time with the two young attendants they had previously left waiting at the foot of the mountain. Everyone had realized that those men should not and could not be part of the Divine service at the top. They could not relate to the kind of faith and love that Avraham and Yitzchok had for HKBH.

The story line, as told in other cultures, would call for Avraham and Yitzchok to be transfigured.

Touched by their encounter with the Divine, having passed the supreme test and achieved full control of their inner selves, they would have adequate reason to shun the world of the ordinary and the ordinary folk. Any pride they would feel would be well deserved. No one would hold it against them.

That is not the way of G-d. After their greatest triumph, Avraham and Yitzchok return to the ordinary people they had previously left behind. They walk with them, not superciliously, but in genuine togetherness. Every human being is worthy of respect, without regard to station or rank. Lofty spiritual accomplishment, in the view of the Torah, presents no barrier to associating with those who do not share that accomplishment. It does not produce spiritual masters perched atop mountains - real ones, or virtual ones of their own making.

To the contrary, the greater the person, the less superior - and hence less aloof - he feels. Reaching for the sky and achieving celestial elevation does not have to be a recipe for haughtiness or for separation. It is remarkable that Avraham and Yitzchok were able to walk up the mountain. The Torah here shows us that it was also to their credit that they were able to walk down as well.

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