



GEULAS YISRAEL

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Addressing the War Today

The Ideological War Between Yitzchak and Yishma'el

Though initially weary of dispatching his older son, Avraham accedes to his wife's wishes and immediately dismisses Yishma'el. Yitzchak, and not Yishma'el, will succeed Avraham in his divinely installed mission. Though the Torah doesn't offer explicit reasons for Yitzchak's selection, two factors are alluded to.

LIFE OR DEATH?

One difference between the culture of Yitzchak and that of Yishma'el is showcased by the akeidah, an event which only commences *after* Yishma'el has left the scene.

Initially, Avraham is instructed to deliver Yitzchak to Hashem as a sacrifice, only to be halted, at the very last minute, by a divine angel. Avraham's knife is drawn and Yitzchak's neck is taught, as new instructions descend from Heaven. The akeidah was *staged*, drawing Avraham to the brink of human sacrifice, precisely to debunk any notion that Hashem desires human sacrifice. The akeidah repudiates the concept of human sacrifice as part of religion. Had the akeidah not been staged, this message would not have been as evident. By terminating the akeidah

at the very last minute, Hashem loudly announced "I don't want human blood and I don't desire human sacrifice". Hashem wants life and cherishes life.

Having been instructed to stand down from the akeidah, Avraham still requested to symbolically draw some blood from his son. Having generated such heroic passion and staggering faith, shouldn't he be given the opportunity to express it, even without actually sacrificing Yitzchak. As Rashi explains, Hashem responds אל תעש לו מאומה which literally means don't do anything, even to draw blood.

Through the akeidah, Hashem instructs Avraham, and his successor Yitzchak, to construct a religion which cherishes life and preserves human dignity. The drama of the akeidah can only occur once Yishma'el has departed. The descendants of Yishma'el will, tragically, craft a macabre religion of death and blood. Our battle with Islamic fundamentalism is a continuation of this original ideological split and is the reason we were chosen over Yishma'el. We value human life as the greatest gift of a compassionate and caring G-d. They

celebrate death and suffering, wreaking havoc upon their enemies, while subjecting their own people to war and affliction. For them, life is cheap and the akeidah's message is irrelevant. By highlighting the value of human life through the akeidah, The Torah provides the first reason for Yitzchak's selection over Yishma'el.

TWO WORLDS

The second reason for Yitzchak's selection appears during the dismissal of Yishma'el. When instructing Avraham to dispatch Yishma'el, Hashem announces: **וְיִצְחָק יִקְרָא לְךָ זֶרַע** (literally “in Yitzchak you will have future progeny”). Grammatically, the word “Yitzchak” should not have included the letter “bet” as a preface. Hashem should have simply stated that “Yitzchak” will be designated as Avraham's successor. Instead, Hashem added an extra “bet” or “ב” to the name of Yitzchak.

The midrash claims that the *reason behind Yitzchak's selection* and the removal of Yishma'el is coded within this extra letter “bet”, which is the numeric equivalent of the number two. The term “*b'Yitzchak*” showcases that, unlike Yishma'el, Yitzchak acknowledges *two* worlds. Due to his capacity to acknowledge “two worlds” – this world and the afterlife- Yitzchak is chosen and Yishma'el is demoted. The extra letter “bet” contains the seed of Jewish selection.

This straightforward reading suggests that Yitzchak alone acknowledges the afterlife. This reading, though, is historically inaccurate. In addition to Judaism, most world cultures and religions acknowledge the afterlife. Without question, Islam acknowledges “Akhira” or



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the “other” world as a primary element of faith. It is intellectually dishonest to portray Judaism as the *only* religion to acknowledge the next world or to justify Yitzchak's selection based upon this uniquely Jewish tenet of faith.

More likely, the midrash celebrates our unique ability not just to acknowledge the two worlds, but to unify them. Much of the modern world has become so entranced with our culture, technology, and the seductions of modern life, that they have completely abdicated any vision of, or belief in, a future world. Our mesmerizing world has dimmed any reality which lies beyond the enchanting delights of modernity. Human imagination has become shackled to a cold and barren empirical prison.

Just the same, the other half of humanity is so captivated by the promises of the

next world, that they look to secede from the affairs and challenges of this world. Religious systems which are pivoted upon the experience of Nirvana – literally being “blown out” or “extinguished”- hope to escape the challenges and commotion of this world.

Jews unify the two spheres; the next world isn't a *reward* as much as a *result*. We develop our spiritual and religious personalities as best we can in this world, despite its impediments and despite its conditions of defeat. As a result, when we exit this world, we enter a second sphere without spiritual inhibitions and continue our spiritual experiences without the hindrances and barriers of this world. For a Jew, the next world doesn't promise endless pleasure or limitless financial abilities. The next world is merely a consequence of our current world. As Henry Drummond, A 19th century British religious thinker once commented, “to get to Heaven, we must take it there with us”. Yitzchak is chosen because he fuses the two worlds into one continuum.

Islamic descriptions of the afterlife as providing sensual pleasures sever the two worlds. The false premise that endless bodily gratifications are afforded a person who exhibits moral restraint and pious behavior in this world separates the two realms into unrelated realities. Yishma'el acknowledges the presence of the afterlife, but does not fuse it properly to this world. Yishma'el is demoted because he and his descendants rupture, rather than unite, the two worlds. B'yitzchak.

MURDER AND THE AFTERLIFE

Islamic fundamentalism has further

fractured the two realms. The warped and sick notion that you can enter the next world by committing a heinous crime in this world completely severs the two realities. For a *shahid*, murdering innocents or even infidels will secure entry into the next world. The notion that a crime in this world can serve as a ticket of entry into the next world completely detaches the two worlds. If our two worlds are united, it is preposterous that a terrible crime in this world earns a place in the next one.

Judaism rejects this fracture but instead merges the two into one band. As the Rambam asserts, the next world enables wise and just men to sit endlessly in the presence of Hashem and enjoy the spiritual glow of the shechinah (*nehenin miziv hashechinah*) We earn that condition by building a spiritual interface between ourselves and Hashem in this world. The unique capacity of a Jew to straddle the two realms and integrate them into one reality is the reason we are selected and Yishma'el is discarded. Not because we alone envision the next world, but because we are able to integrate the two experiences into one letter 'bet'. B'yitzchak. ■

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