

THE JEWISH PEOPLE VERSUS ABRAHAM AVEINU
A CLASS ACTION SUIT IN TWO ACTS

by
CATHY SCHECHTER

Based on Genesis Chapter 12
Philo
Guide for the Perplexed, Chapters 24-25, by Moses Maimonides
Midrash Rabbah
And
The Story of Hannah and Her Seven Sons, Apocrypha, II Macabbees,
et al

ACT 1: THE CASE

INT. HEAVENLY COURT, 8TH OF AV

A low hum in the courtroom, the whirl of the overhead fan. Door to offstage is opened; **BAILIFF** enters.

BAILIFF

All rise for the True Judge in the class action suit brought on behalf of Jewish Parents Against Child Sacrifice, or JPACS, on behalf of all Jewish People throughout history, in the *People versus Abraham Aveinu*.

The observers all rise, along with the advocates at the table. **TRUE JUDGE** enters, a short stocky aging person of at least 80 years, perhaps older. The wiry white hair give the air of resembling my father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, or yours.

JUDGE

(enters, motions for everyone to be seated, grumbling)

Sit down, sit down. Time is of the essence here, it is the 8th of Av. I am warning all of you that this is highly irregular and unprecedented, and I am in no mood to play. So let's get this thing moving. (Bangs the gavel) Ms. Shel Sheva, state your case.

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA, a tall late-middle-aged woman, rises slowly. She is tall, her long curly hair is the color of salt-and-pepper. Her lips are thin, her eyes fiery. Her voice, however, belies the fire in her eyes; she speaks with a calm, resonant, self-assured voice.

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA

(rises, faces the judge)

Your Honor, I will be brief. I represent JPACS and the Jewish people in a class action suit against Abraham Aveinu for inflicting pain and degradation on our People through time via his binding of Isaac.

(MORE)

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA (CONT'D)

I will show that though he did not murder his son on that fateful day at Mt. Moriah, he did indeed bind him. These actions caused Isaac a permanent disability, Your Honor, a life of blindness. Further, Abraham's abandonment of his son and ensuing unnatural silence after this incident set a harmful precedent for his progenitors. How? He has led us to beliefs that have caused many in history to sacrifice our children for the sanctification of Your Name. To put it succinctly...for a Patriarch, he was a poor role model.

JUDGE looks over reading glasses quizzically at HANNAH.

JUDGE

(questioning)

Ms. Shel Sheva, what civil redress can you possibly seek from a defendant who disappeared years ago?

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA

The redress we seek, Your Honor, is not money nor gold. In fact, it does not at all require the presence of Mr. Aveinu. What JPACS seeks is an immediate removal of the reading of the Akedah from the Rosh Hashannah liturgy. We further request that this reading be reassigned to Tisha b'Av, which you noted, is tomorrow.

JUDGE

(impatient)

Ms. Shel Sheva, it is the 8th of Av. Your timing could not be worse. State your purpose for this timing or I shall hold you in contempt of the Heavenly Court.

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA

On the contrary your honor, no argument for the sake of heaven is in contempt of Court. In our minds, Your Honor, this disastrous precedent for Jewish parents through the ages, is no less than the *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred, which brought down the Temple. Or the weeping and whining that prevented slaves from entering the land. Indeed, it is even more egregious because of it's surrounding and unnatural ... silence. Through the generations, Your Honor, silence about Isaac's **trauma**. And yet, not without subsequent similar acts of many parents through history, based on the perceived **merits** of Mr. Aveinu.

JUDGE

(nodding, writing, looks up sharply)

Fair enough. Mr. Philo? Your response?

MR. PHILO, well-dressed in a polished suit, rises. He looks as though he has stepped off the pages of GQ Magazine, his shoes polished to a high sheen. He clears his voice, smiles dazzlingly at HANNAH SHEL SHEVA, and speaks with the polish of experience of such attacks.

PHILO

Your Honor, my esteemed opponent Ms. Shel Sheva raises an interesting point. However, I will show that her case lacks merit. For centuries, I have maintained that the silence of which my worthy opponent so eloquently spoke is the silence of the truly great, of the truly pious. And for centuries, quarrelsome critics who misconstrue everything, who value censure above the praiseworthiness of Abraham's act, have not thought him so great and wonderful. But never, Your Honor, has anyone or any people tried to equate this holy binding as an equivalent to the destruction of the Temple! Or the lies of the spies, the murders at Betar!

(MORE)

PHILO (CONT'D)

These mournful acts form the basis of Tisha B'av. On the contrary! Abraham's action, though admittedly confounding, is the seminal act of greatness our Patriarch bequeathed to us, his ancestors. It is this singular act of faith that has made our heritage, our history, indeed, our entire tradition, great and enduring. Abraham was Isaac's father, yes, but Isaac was only one link in the chain of the faithful. Isaac's importance is that of **proof, proof positive! Sustained faith in the face of his trial has shown our people how to sustain faith in the face of confounding circumstances that appear contrary to our G-d-given promised destiny!** That is Abraham's "role model," in the parlance of Ms. Shel Sheva and her clients. His enduring legacy for all time...faith! As such, I submit that the Akedah should remain, indeed MUST remain part of the Rosh Hashannah liturgy, now and forever. A reminder of the trials people of true faith must endure to prove their fealty to Hashem.

JUDGE

(looking off in the distance, interested, ponderous)

The Court commends the two advocates Mr. Philo and Ms. Shel Sheva on the distance you have traveled beyond the initial accusations by JPACS on behalf of Sarah Imanu, who wanted to charge Mr. Aveinu with murder in the first degree. I am relieved to move this case from criminal court to the realm of civil remedy. Though I am somewhat annoyed with the last minute nature of this hearing, I am curious as to how the two of you evolved out of allegations of criminality to seeking civil damages?

The advocates look at one another and nod in the affirmative. A low hum is heard among the observers.

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA

(steps forward)

Your Honor, if I may speak to this issue. My client, Mrs. Sarah Imanu, disappeared to Machpelah shortly after criminal charges were filed. The facts of the case do not point to first degree murder. In fact, Isaac fathered twins, so he could not have been sacrificed as a boy, and if as a man, then he had to be culpable himself. That his progeny have lived to tell this tale and fight this battle recommends a logic that suggests that he had to have been more than a boy at the time of the Binding. Practically speaking, we lack eye witnesses. (Looking directly at TRUE JUDGE) At least ones who are willing to testify. Though Mr. Philo pressed upon me to drop all charges, I had to reflect upon the many children, including my own, who died at the hands of parents like me who blindly followed Abraham's example in hope of a heavenly reprieve.

For me, your honor, this case is very personal. I stand here before you on behalf of the late Mrs. Imanu, z"l, myself, and every mother or father who has sent a child to death rather than surrender them to the apostasy of Crusaders, Inquisitors, Nazis or terrorists. As a young widow, your Honor, I sacrificed my seven sons, one by one, to make mockery of idolatry and apostasy with their deaths. How could I? Because Abraham set this example. Abraham bound his child to sacrifice. And Abraham received a reprieve, while these parents did not! Abraham was rewarded with long life and more children. What, I ask You, is my reward? What future for those whose sacrifice was in vain?
(pause) So ...

(MORE)

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA (CONT'D)

while the facts as we know them do not support criminal charges against Abraham, enormous and enduring damage has been done, throughout history. What other legacy can I, an advocate, a mother of seven sacrificed sons, leave other than to try to remove this example from liturgy heard once a year by many, for once and for all, and place it where it belongs. Which is among the mournful or scornful lamentable acts that characterize Tisha b'Av.

PHILO

(rising)

Your honor, I respect the distance Ms. Shel Sheva has come in the matter, however I am in total agreement with the Court that we really need to bring it to a close, as tomorrow is Tisha b'Av. For this reason, we agreed to the appointment of two friends of the court, Dr. Moses Maimonides and Rabbi Hanina, respectively. They have agreed to testify as expert witnesses to help me and Ms. Shel Sheva, respectively, build our cases.

JUDGE

(reading a piece of paper,
grumbling)

B'seder, fair enough. I can see here that through a toss of the coin, Dr. Maimonides speaks first on behalf of Mr. Philo. Do you swear to tell the truth, and so forth?

DR. MAIMONIDES might look distinguished if not for his rumpled traveling clothes and knit kippah, which falls slightly off his balding head and hangs only by a threadbare bobby pin. His beard is short and well-trimmed, his eyes are sharp behind horn-rimmed glasses. He might be my tenured professor, or yours.

DR. MAIMONIDES

(looking non-plussed)

Know this, Your Honor.

(MORE)

DR. MAIMONIDES (CONT'D)
I always tell my truth, and nothing
but my truth.

JUDGE
(ignoring his manner)
Make your statement and make it
snappy.

DR. MAIMONIDES
(humorously)
There is little that is "snappy" to
guiding those who are perplexed,
Your Honor.

JUDGE
(impatiently)
Doctor, I am not perplexed and I am
not an ignorant fool. It is the
8th of Av and my clock is ticking.
Get on with it...and make it
snappy.

DR. MAIMONIDES
(impervious to the
critique, continues
smoothly as if nothing
has happened)
First of all, let us say that I am
pleased with the elevation of this
matter from an allegation of
earthly criminality to a discussion
of loftier liturgical ideas. An
excellent question is posed by our
advocates: what is the nature of
the injury inflicted on the Jewish
people as a whole, for the whole of
history? How do we acknowledge this
admittedly singularly unique act?

The binding of Isaac was not a
murderous act that set the tone of
infanticide and child sacrifice for
generations. No. Rather, it was a
trial, for Abraham then, and for
the Jewish people forever. And
what is the nature of a trial? It
is NOT to show G-d one's love or
one's fear. Indeed, G-d knows what
is in the hearts of men and women.
Rather, a Trial is set to elevate a
person's **own** awareness of his or
her love of and faith in G-d. For
example, the Torah teaches us of
many trials.

(MORE)

DR. MAIMONIDES (CONT'D)

After their exodus from Egypt, the Israelites endured trials in the desert as they ate only manna. The prophecy of Moses Rabbeinu, in Devarim admonishes us to know we will be subject to trials through false prophecy or the temptations of idolatry. The aim and meaning of all trials is to let **people** know what they ought to believe or do, not G-d. If G-d did not already know, He would not be G-d. And if we did, we would not be human.

JUDGE

(bangs gavel)

As expert witness on behalf of Mr. Philo for the defense, Ms. Shel Sheva is entitled to questions. Madame?

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA

(rising, her face pinched in self-control, but her her voice is relaxed, almost coy)

We Jews like to celebrate our trials, don't we Dr. Maimonides? You speak of the trial of the Israelites in the desert, and we commemorate our triumph over trials in the desert after the exodus with our Passover seder, correct? Seder, meaning order, correct?

DR. MAIMONIDES

(raises his head)

That is correct.

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA

(voice becoming more pointed)

And we eat well and celebrate at Passover, and also at Sukkot, as we commemorate our march through the desert living in booths. We eat and sleep in the sukkah to remind us of the trial of enduring the uncertainty of the temporary, correct.

DR. MAIMONIDES
 (doubtfully, not sure
 where she is going)
 Ye-es.

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA
 And we commemorate the joy of
 enduring the trial of the terror of
 the moments when we received the
 law under the mountainous thunder,
 with dance and celebration on
 Simchat Torah, correct?

DR. MAIMONIDES
 That is more or less correct.

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA
 And all of this celebration and
 commemoration makes logical sense,
 does it not? The dancing, the
 singing, and the food! Oh the
 aromas of the wine and food, though
 perhaps a trial for Mrs.
 Maimonides, these are delightful,
 are they not, Doctor?

DR. MAIMONIDES
 (senses hostility,
 tightens)
 I cannot speak to the trials of the
 chef, but I can say that yes, those
 celebrations and commemorations of
 trials we have endured make logical
 sense.

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA
 (pausing)
 Ah, the unnamed chef, we cannot
 speak for her, of course.

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA (CONT'D)
 (voice rising)
 How then do you explain the logic
 of placing this ultimate trial, of
 sacrifice...not of an animal or of
 grain, sir. But of a child, of
 children, of SEVEN children. Sir,
 how do you guide us through the
 perplexity of connecting this
 sacrifice with a celebration
 calling for ingestion of (*false*
confusion) apples and honey?
 (MORE)

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA (CONT'D)

How do we justify reading this story and thus perpetuate its notions? Now, in the 21st century, at the same time we celebrate the **birthday of the world?** (shouting) How, Doctor, do you expect a parent who has endured the sacrifice of children, whether by the hand of a medieval father defying Crusaders, or a mother's own hand as she covered her baby's mouth to keep from being discovered as she hid from Nazis? What comfort for this mother, who defied authorities who wanted to convert her children to apostasy? (*quietly, though forcefully*) Or to the mothers who sacrifice their children to protect the State of Israel?

The courtroom falls completely silent, except for the sound of Hannah's breath.

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA (CONT'D)

(quietly, dignified)

I submit to you Sir, and to this court, that this is a cause for mourning and fasting, not apples and honey.

Hannah now walks behind the table and takes her seat. She holds her head high in defiance of Dr. Maimonides and his logic, must as we might imagine she stood before the Romans.

DR. MAIMONIDES

(lets the silence set in, then speaks in a soft tone)

Madame Shel Sheva, there are four types of actions. Purposeless actions lack reason or motivation. Trivial actions amount to nothing, and are most often attributed to the confused, insane or thoughtless. Futile actions are characterized when the point or purpose lacks attainment. (*pause*) However, an excellent act, whether it be of charity, good health, or to prove a valuable point ... these are never in vain. It is an immutable truth that acts of G-d are never in vain, so it follows that acts motivated G-d ...

(MORE)

DR. MAIMONIDES (CONT'D)
for the love of G-d ... can never
be in vain.

Know this. Your seven sons
followed their mother's direction
to give their lives rather than
accept apostasy, just as Abraham
followed G-d's directions without
question. Therefore, your
motivation for sending them to this
fate can also be compared to G-d's
motivation for testing Abraham!

It is my studied opinion that since
all of G-d's actions are excellent
and never in vain, a parent who has
sacrificed her children for the
love of G-d has likewise proved her
excellence. Therefore, if you do
not wish to eat apples and honey on
Rosh Hashannah, you may refrain.
Know this: The opposite of apples
and honey is Yiskor. What you must
do is say Kaddish for your sons, in
order to continue your excellence
by glorifying G-d's name. That is
the only logical thing to do...On
Rosh Hashannah.

The courtroom falls completely silent, as all eyes turn to
Hannah Shel Sheva. She does not waiver or react to his
suggestion, but remains erect with her head held high.

HANNAH SHEL SHEVA
(sitting down, without
expression or taking her
eyes off of Dr.
Maimonides)
No more questions for this witness.

JUDGE
(to Mr. Philo)
Very well. Now Mr. Philo, are you
prepared to cross-examine Ms. Shel
Sheva's friend of the court, Rabbi
Hanina?

PHILO
(rises quickly, with
assurance)
Of course. Rabbi?

RABBI HANINA, though elderly, is spry and emits high energy. He walks briskly and uprightly to the front of the Court. On his way, he stops at the Judge's bench.

RABBI HANINA
 (friendly, directly,
 schmoozingly)
 Judge, it's great to see you again!
 How the heck have you been? You
 seem well.

JUDGE
 (smiles)
 It's good to see you too after such
 a long time, Hanina. How are
 things in the Sage's neighborhood
 of Gan Eden?

RABBI HANINA
 Couldn't be better, Judge. No
 complaints from me.

JUDGE
 Take the stand and make your
 statement. Do you swear to tell
 the truth and so forth and so on?

RABBI HANINA
 (twinkling)
 No Your Honor, I do not swear to
 tell the truth because unlike my
 colleague Dr. Maimonides, I am not
 so sure about the truth. I have my
 middot as my compass, and that is
 the best I can do.

JUDGE
 Very well then, take the stand.
 Enough said.

RABBI HANINA
 (now on the stand, direct)
 Your Heavenly Honor, and boys and
 girls in the Court. Let me begin
 by saying that in one thing, Dr.
 Maimonides and I are in total
 agreement. All is determined by
 Heaven except for the fear of
 Heaven. In his act of binding
 Isaac, Abraham acted totally in
 accordance with this belief, and is
 beyond reproach. And let us say
 ...

PHILO & DR. M (SHOUTING IN UNISON)

Amen!

RABBI HANINA

Having said that, I shall take another fork in the road and ask us to consider a different question. To what did Abraham bind Isaac?

PHILO

(rising quickly)

I object, Your Honor, on the grounds of irrelevancy.

JUDGE

(motioning him to sit down)

Overruled. Continue, Rabbi.

RABBI HANINA

(smiling)

On the contrary, Mr. Philo, despite your impeccable defense of Abraham Aveinu and Dr. Maimonides impeccable logic on the matter, I maintain that G-d is in the details. And in their quest for ration and logic, these modern guys sometimes lose the detail found inside the metaphor. Lose that, and risk losing the crux of the matter.

My beloved teacher Rabbi taught: "As G-d did prove (nes) Abraham," this may be compared to the verse from Psalm 60:6, "Thou hast given a banner (nes) to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. Selah." So another question: What was the banner here?

Philo rises again.

PHILO

(exasperated)

Your Honor, really. What can be gained by a sermon? Or imaginary connections between bindings and banners? As a friend of the court, Rabbi Hanina has an obligation to stick with the facts.

(MORE)

PHILO (CONT'D)

This business about metaphor is all conjecture.

JUDGE

(sternly)

Mr. Philo, let the Rabbi finish his statement. If you interrupt him one more time, I will find you in contempt of the court and you will spend your day tomorrow, the 9th of Av, reading the Akedah. Now sit down! (pause) Rabbi Hanina, please continue.

RABBI HANINA

(unaffected)

During my life, I took an intense interest in this story, for reasons I need not discuss in public. Suffice it to say some children are worthy of punishment. But not Isaac, and that has always troubled me. What is the difference between punishment of a wayward child, and sacrifice of a beloved, obedient child such as Isaac? An important question.

I questioned the reason for calling the knife a "ma-akelet." The reason for the use of this term, I determined, was to make food fit for eating. But in retrospect, surely, Abraham Aveinu had no intention of eating a sacrifice, let alone his own son? And surely he did not think G-d would eat Isaac! Now, if the knife in question was called a "ma-akelet" to make something fit, or appropriate, must it necessarily be something to eat? Another important question.

As my dear friend R. Aha said, Abraham pointed out, G-d said in Genesis 17:21, "I will establish my covenant with Isaac."

PHILO rises, he has had enough.

PHILO

(beseeching)

Your Honor, with all due respect to the Rabbi, what does this have to do with Tisha b'Av? He's all over the map! Banner, the fitness of knives and then covenant? The witness needs to stick to the subject!

JUDGE

(motioning Philo to sit,
says gently to Hanina)

Hanina, you are a wise and wonderful story-teller and well-respected Midrashist. Please remember that it is the 8th of Av, and we have little time left to decide!

RABBI HANINA

(sighs)

Very well then. Mind you, the impatience of the stama is what left this story out to begin with, so listen well. But first, one last point.

We do not have stretch our imagination to know that there must have been many tears at this alter. We are told the angels wept over Isaac as he laid bound on the alter, and that these tears may have dissolved the knife. We are also told that Abraham wept and that his tears fell into the eyes of Isaac. Tears have great power, as we know, for they have the ability to open the gates of heaven. If tears can open Heaven's Gates, is it a stretch to believe that these same tears have the power to blind?

RABBI HANINA (CONT'D)

(stopping a moment)

Is it improbable that the intense power of these tears changed the physical elements? No!

(MORE)

RABBI HANINA (CONT'D)

Let us suppose that these tears of Abraham changed a metal knife to a leather strop, and caused the wood to dissolve into paper. The tears scorched the skin of the lamb to dry parchment. Let us imagine the powerful fear breathed through the nostrils alternately of both father and son to shape a leather box. Envision a fire so intense that it seared words onto parchment. G-d gave a banner to those who feared Him. *Nes!* A banner! Then ... *Nis*, a miracle.

Out of the ashes of a fire doused by powerful tears, a Binding. Abraham bound Isaac ... with tefillin. (Long pause)

Now, Mr. Philo, I will be happy to answer any questions.

Philo, stunned, rises unsteadily, and stands for a long moment pondering. Then he smiles, begins to laugh, and he laughs until tears fall. Maimonides joins him, as do many of the observers.

PHILO

(wiping his tears)

That is indeed a lovely story Rabbi Hanina, though it proves nothing other than your active imagination. But let us assume for a moment that this was true, are you saying that the binding of Isaac is nothing more than a ... **bar mitzvah!** What is the tragedy then? What makes this occasion cause for mourning on Tisha B'Av?

RABBI HANINA

(looking with compassion at Hannah Shel Sheva)

What makes it a tragedy, dear Philo, is that after binding Isaac, Abraham Aveinu failed to bind himself.

A heavy silence rests on the court. PHILO stands straight up, shocked.

RABBI HANINA (CONT'D)
(continues)

Nor apparently did he bind Ishmael. If he had, much of our troubles at least for today, would not exist. Wouldn't you say so? The father of nations did not bind himself or his other children. And he lived happily ever after, while Isaac went away blind.

That is most lamentable. (*slowly, emphasizing each word*) Abraham ... lived ... happily ... ever ... after. Remarried. Had more children. Ripe old age. Etc. Etc. Etc. Has never paid his dues to the Jewish Parents Against Child Sacrifice. Has never lent his esteemed voice to the cause of parents like Ms. Shel Sheva, who laments her loss **every day of her life**. Tsk. Most tragic part of all. The truth about our Patriarch is that he was unbound and had nothing before his eyes but his own happily-ever-after. What could be more worthy of Tisha B'Av?

-INTERMISSION-

ACT II: THE VERDICT

BAILIFF

(still bored)

All rise for the True Judge in the class action suit brought by Jewish Parents Against Child Sacrifice, or JPACS, on behalf of all Jewish People throughout history, in the People versus Abraham Aveinu.

HANNAH and RABBI HANINA rise at their table, at the same time that DR. MAIMONIDES rises next to MR. PHILO. The JUDGE walks in, talking on his cell phone.

JUDGE

(nodding and gesturing)

Nachon, nachon! B'seder gamur, yalla bye. (snaps phone shut) Oy. Sit down, everybody sit down.

Everyone takes a seat. TRUE JUDGE shuffles through paper, sits back, closes eyes and stays still a moment. Leans forward to speak.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Except for Abraham Aveinu and Isaac Aveinu, only One knows the true story, and that is Me. Laws, rules, client confidentiality and such, my dictum has always been, "What happened at Moriah stays at Moriah." An unfortunate incident, I remember it well, very well. It's definitely in my list of top ten unforgettable moments in Tanach.

But it has never been up to Me to decide how to conduct a service or put together liturgy. That would be like fitting and stitching One's own gilded ceremonial robe, not at all humble. No, these are the decisions made among people. I may be present, but I do not let on. It's really not my business.

(MORE)

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Why then have I taken such an interest in this matter, on this of all days, when I am told by my Shechinah that I should be resting to prepare for all the whining and crying and lamentation commencing at sunset? (*gently, to HANNAH*) I have always been a sucker for the cries of women named Hannah, for their tears and their pleas tug at My heart, oy, Hannah, your cries wound my very G-dliness and haunt my eternal dreams. That you carry this terrible wound and can still pick a good fight for the sake of heaven endears you to me as much as I was endeared to Abraham Aveinu when he argued with me at Sodom and Gemorrah.

But it is the 8th of Av, and the clock is ticking. To get then to the point: **You are all right.**

Mr. Philo, you are right about the quarrelsome critics. They are as eternal as My chosen people. They quarrel and criticize and drive their leaders to distraction, beaten rocks and eternal exile, and this will never change. Sinat chinam! Baseless hatred! For this, we must still lament on Tisha B'Av, even though we have a Jewish state. Jerusalem is still overrun with the baseless hatred of Jew towards Jew.

Dr. Maimonides, while it would give me no greater pleasure than to tell you that you are wrong, you are also right. I love a person who wrestles with a well-placed trial. A good wrestler acts with excellence. Well-said, sir. Now, would you please straighten your kipa?

(MORE)

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Ms. Shel Sheva, the crux of your case is also right when you suggest that the trial endured by Abraham Aveinu became a difficult role model for future Jews, who wrestled with their trials as they thought Abraham wrestled. I never asked for it again after the Akedah. In fact, I sent prophet after prophet to admonish these people not to sacrifice their children to fire, whether of Molech or Malach! The prophets of truth are still true.

And my friend, dear friend Rabbi Chanina, thank you for coming and for your beautiful story. I never quite understood why they threw that one out of Midrash Rabbah, I would have left it in, but then, I am not the stama.

Mr. Philo, your off-the-cuff remark about the Akedah as "Isaac's bar mitzvah," prompted me to consider whether it is in fact more a tragedy that Abraham did not bind himself or a joy that Isaac, at any age, accepted the binding and went forward, even though blind! Without his father. Inasmuch as he caused his mother and father to laugh, Yitzkak's resilience, the resilience of anyone who survives such a trial, creates joy for Me. And I always prefer joy to sorrow.

In that spirit, I must conclude that the essence of Isaac's binding is more an apples and honey occasion than mourning and fasting. Abraham's failure to bind himself, if true, is more a personal failure than collective. Tisha B'Av laments the collective; on the other hand, if Abraham were to do teshuvah, it would commence on Rosh Hashannah. Undoubtedly, a recount of the Akedah would be a reminder of that to which he needed to return.

(MORE)

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Let the verdict be that the Akedah remain in the Rosh Hashannah liturgy. However, with this caveat: it may only be read on the second day, for only the faithful show up on the second day anyway.

I bid you all an easy fast. The sun will soon set on the 9th of Av, and we must lament. Then may our psalms console us, and may Elul open our hearts to that consolation. Know that there is such a thing as serendipity or synchronicity, call it as you like. It is no coincidence that the world and Isaac share the same birthday. Read his story and weep your tears. May your tears transform your *nes*, your banner, to your *nissim*, your miracles. And we all say ...

TRUE JUDGE pounds his gavel, and the stage goes black.

-END-