

Vayera                      And He Appeared      In Search of the Righteous Core

Torah:                      Gen. 18:1-22:24

(1) 18: 18, 19: ***“Abraham shall certainly become a great and powerful nation and in him shall all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, for I have chosen him in order that he would charge his sons and his house after him to keep the way of the L-rd in practicing righteousness and justice so that in so doing, the L-RD would accomplish the promises which he made to him”.***

Faithful obedience was the call Abraham received and was the way he lived and it remains the way of the L-rd today. It is the double spiritual imperative, because you cannot have one without the other.

(2) 19:22: ***“Hasten to seek refuge there, for I cannot do anything until you have arrived there. That is why the city is called Tsoar (little).”***

G-d called the righteous core out of Sodom and did not destroy it until the righteous core was safe and it is because of this same righteous core that He does not destroy our world, which is rapidly becoming a worldwide Sodom. It is sad that the core will always be “little”, not because the call is little, but because the response is small. Are you taking refuge?

(3) 22:15-18:” ***The angel of the L-RD called a second time from Heaven unto Abraham and said: I swear by Myself, because you have done this and have not refused your only begotten son, that I will bless you and multiply your posterity like the stars of the heavens and like the sand of the seas and your posterity will possess the gates of its enemies..”***

Abraham is the father of the L-rd’s righteous core, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile because he obeyed by faith. It is not always easy to have faith and it is never easy to obey, even once you come to faith, but these two elements are the principles upon which the L-rd’s righteous core is founded. Which core do you belong to? What is your core like, deep down? Faithful obedience and obedient faith are the same thing, because the one cannot exist without the other and still be pleasing to G-d. Abraham understood – do you?

(4) 22:18: ***“And all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in your posterity because you have obeyed my Voice.***

The actual blessing or redemption came through the posterity of Abraham because He obeyed the voice of the One he believed in. Abraham did not win our redemption, instead he believed in the One who promised it would come and obeyed His voice. Faith is our link and obedience is the proof of the pudding. Have you acquired the faith of Abraham? Have you acquired the obedience of Abraham?

Haftarah:                      2 K. 4:1-37

(5) 4:27: ***“And as soon as she arrived to where the man of G-d was located on the mountain, she embraced his feet and when Gehasi came near to pull her away, the man of G-d said: leave her, for her soul is full of bitterness and the L-rd has hidden it from me.”***

There will always be moments of doubt and trial for those who are part of the righteous core and we have to remember the successful strategy of this woman – we have to hang on and not let go until we are heard.

(6) 4:35: ***“Elisha removed himself and went here and there in the house and came back up to the room and stretched out upon the child. The child sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.”***

This was not an established procedure Elisha was following, he just knew that somehow the child would be restored to life and when it did not work the first time, he tried again. We have to be careful not to assume that all of G-d’s solutions will be instant and that if we have not succeeded the first time that we have failed. The righteous core never abandons either faith or obedience.

**Brit Chadashah:** Luke 1:28-38; 24:36-53

(7) 24:44: ***“Then He said to them: This is what I said to you when I was still with you, that all that which is written about me in the Law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled.”*** G-d is not the G-d of partial measures. All of His word shall be fulfilled and the righteous core needs to be in firm possession of all that His word teaches – nothing less and nothing more. It is not a do-it-yourself proposition. We need to have faith in all of His word and obedience to all His voice. Abraham was obedient, Lot was obedient, the mother of the child was obedience because they believed. Do you believe (what do you believe)? Are you obedient (what do you obey?)

**Ps. 11 Jewish Hero: Angels**

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Gal. 3:7-14: ***“Recognize that it is those who have faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scriptures, foreseeing that that G-d would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared this good news beforehand to Abraham: all nations will be blessed in you. Thus those who believe are blessed with Abraham the believer. For all of those who rely upon the works of the Law are under a curse. For it is written: cursed is whoever does not observe all that is written in the book of the Law and who does not put it into practice. Now it is evident that no one is justified before G-d by the Law, because it is written: the just shall live by faith. But the Law does not rest on faith, but it says that the one who puts these things into practice shall live by them. Messiah has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us. For it is written: cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. This was in order that the blessing of Abraham should come to the Gentiles through Yeshua HaMashiach and that we should receive by faith the Spirit which was promised.”***

This passage outlines how the blessing of Abraham was able to come to the Gentiles and it also explains an aspect of the Law which is frequently misunderstood. ***The Law was always intended to be a reaction to faith and never a replacement for faith.*** In other words, the House of Israel was redeemed from Egypt and then was called to become to obedience as a reaction to this redemption. The Law was never given as a means to earn grace, nor as a means to acquire salvation through works, so that if you were good enough, you could become acceptable to G-d by your own efforts.

Paul was making a powerful statement about grace through faith and was not attacking the Law, only some people who misused the Law, ***as if obedience were able to earn us our salvation, instead of being a reaction to grace.***

In our Torah portion we see that Abraham ***acted in obedience because he had faith*** and that the two never competed or functioned in opposition to each other. He is called the father of all believers, both among the Jews and among the Gentiles and the good news (which is what the word Gospel means) is that the promised redemption has come, both to those who observe the Law and those who do not have the Law.

He is saying that people do not have to come through the Law to find redemption and that the Law was not given as a means to obtain redemption. Authentic faith does not seek to please G-d as a means to deserve salvation – as if people had to become good enough in order to earn salvation or to prove to G-d that they deserved salvation.

I know this is a tricky concept to get a grasp of, but our Torah portion helps. Abraham was told that he would become a great nation and that all nations would be blessed in him, but there was a problem. His wife was sterile and either this blessing had to come through Abraham in his lifetime, or something had to happen so that his wife could conceive after she had gone through menopause.

There was nothing Abraham could do to cause his sterile wife to conceive, except to believe that G-d would cause this to happen. In the meantime he continued to obey, not as a means to make the promise come, but as a reaction to his faith in the promise which he knew was coming.

But there was a catch which demonstrated Abraham's commitment to both faith and obedience, without setting the two against each other. Once his son was born, he was commanded to offer him up as a sacrifice to G-d. Now we could talk about how horrible a demand this was to make of a father, but Abraham did not see it this way.

***His faith and his obedience never clashed*** and he may have understood that just in case he felt that Isaac's birth was just a happenstance or a fluke, the L-rd was going to take Isaac and provide him with another child in his place or even better, he was going to raise Isaac from the dead, ***so that Abraham would know beyond a shadow of doubt that his son was a miracle from G-d and not something he accomplished on his own.***

When he had tied his son up and was about to kill him, he was stopped an angel who showed him the ram in the thicket and it was after this act of faithful obedience that G-d confirmed that Abraham would indeed be a blessing to all nations because he taught the double pronged imperative: ***faithful obedience.***

In Paul's day there were those who wanted to dissect this imperative and place obedience above faith or replace faith with obedience, saying that you had to obey your way into faith, or that you could not have faith until you learned obedience. There are those who call the Messianic Movement a kind of Judaizing, because we understand that the Law is not a curse and we want to continue to practice Judaism.

Here is the concept which divides us from our detractors. The Law is never called a curse. It only becomes a curse for those who feel that obedience is somehow superior to faith or that obedience somehow replaces faith.

The whole point of Judaism is ***redemption which produces obedience, not obedience which produces redemption.*** As well this redemption (and its subsequent obedience) has two contexts. There is redemption for the great nation by faith and also redemption for all nations by faith. The question of obedience needs to be seen as a reaction to faith, and not as means to access this redemption in place of faith.

In other words there is nothing we can do to deserve redemption or to earn redemption. All we can do to access redemption is to have faith in the Ram of G-d who died in our place to absorb the curse.

What was this curse? It was the curse of disobedience which our race has been battling since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and Cain slew his brother. The Law stands in opposition to this curse and condemns it, but it does not provide the solution to remove the curse because Israel did not obey her way out of Egypt and the captives did not obey their way home to the Holy Land. In both cases the L-rd redeemed His people and called them to respond to their redemption, and not to try and earn it.

Frequently while our people were in the wilderness, they lost both their faith and their obedience and it was only G-d's grace which allowed them to survive and to eventually take possession of the land which they were promised.

You cannot violate G-d's law and be pleasing unto Him, any more than you can keep this same law and feel that somehow your obedience means you deserve His grace.

Authentic faith realizes that we must believe in His promises and wait upon His deliverance and that a big part of this waiting involves obedience.

In Abraham, Gentiles are called to have faith as a means to access the redemption which our L-rd won for us on the cross. They do not have to become Jews and practice obedience as a means to access the redemption which our L-rd won on the cross. However, it is not a question of faith instead of obedience, any more than it is a question of obedience instead of faith, because they are two sides of the same coin.

Our passage in Galatians was restoring a balance and upholding the three aspects of the Abrahamic covenant of blessing. Abraham was to become a great nation (and to teach his descendents to practice righteousness and justice and he even was to become the father of many nations (Edomites, Moabites Ammonites and the descendents of Ishmael). That's two, but he was also to be a blessing to all nations, without either becoming the father of all nations or requiring that all nations become part of his great nation or a part of the many nations he was to become father of.

The question of obedience must always be seen as a reaction to this three pronged promise and not as a means to accessing it. Abraham is father of all believers who accept what our blessed Messiah won for us on the cross. However the Bible never portrays him as some kind of spiritual Borg, where his children are called to assimilate all nations into his Jewish collective (resistance is futile, oy gvalt).

Both faith and obedience have to be active together, each in its own place. It is by faith that we access redemption, the redemption which the Law speaks of and which was won, not by our efforts, but by the graceful intervention of G-d through His Son, our blessed Messiah. It is by obedience that we are weaned away from the disobedience which brought the curse. The Law cries out for us to believe, in order that we might be redeemed. We are redeemed to obey; we are not redeemed by our obedience.

It is both foolish and impossible to believe we can earn our redemption by our obedience, either as a Jew or as a Gentile. It is equally foolish to believe that once we have obtained redemption that we are somehow excluded from the need to obey. We are set free for the Law, not by the Law, in order that the power of the redemption we have received might equip us to obey. You have to be set free from Egypt in order to obey.

Authentic faith does not belittle or try to sidestep obedience and is never at war with the Law, just as authentic obedience does not try to belittle faith or try and sidestep it as the sole means to access redemption. Faith and obedience remain two sides of the same coin and function in harmony and never in competition.

How is your faith doing?

How is your obedience doing?

Are you trying to earn redemption through obedience?

Are you trying to sidestep obedience through faith?

The redemption which our Messiah won applies to both the great nation and to all nations through faith in our blessed Messiah.

Obedience also applies to both the great nation and to all nations, never as a means to redemption but always as a response to redemption – this is the message of the Bible and also of the Law and this is what Abraham understood and how he lived and how he responded.

May we grow in our understanding of our double spiritual imperative: faithful obedience, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.