PROPHECY AND שמחה של מצוה JEWISH BROTHERHOOD

Ch. 18. אליו G'd becomes visible to him who has just performed the Milah upon himself; we learn later what G'd revealed to him. Although he had become a Jew, he continued his stay in "the woods of Mamre" with the men who had offered him their friendship (see 14, 13). "The day was hot"—yet A. does not seek the cooling shade but sits in the sun hoping for wanderers to appear whom he might welcome in the cool twilight of his tent. For, as the Sages suggest, he was troubled by the thought that people might shun him, now that the Milah had taken place. At this moment G'd becomes visible to him—while he also notices the wanderers (2)—he is in high spirits for his is the joyfulness that flows from the fulfillment of a Mizva (שמחה של מצוה)—and at this moment G'd becomes visible to him. This fact is of tremendous importance for the understanding of the true character of the Jewish Prophecy: Prophecy has nothing to do with "rapture" or "ecstacy"; neither does one partake of Divine revelations by an "escape from life": Men who are in the prime of their G'd—serving lives are selected by G'd as tools of His Prophecy.

A. sees the wanderers, rushes towards them, letting G'd quasi wait for him, asking Him (3) not to withdraw from him—for, say the Sages, to receive wanderers hospitably is a far greater duty than to "receive Gd's Shechina". Thus A. practices Jewish brotherhood on "uncircumcised" idolators. And how he practices it! No one would so hotly pursue profit as A. seeks an occasion to demonstrate brotherly love to his fellow-men! His entire household is set into motion, wife and child, everything is made ready as A. seizes the first chance to practice brotherly love as a *Jew*. For as a Jew he was called upon to bring to men—in the name of G'd—the message of brotherly love. This spirit

of love and of charity can be found in his late descendants—and it is due to this "Abramitic" heritage that this "humane" spirit has taken root in the non-Jewish world and has become a "blessing" to all mankind.—כי על כן, "therefore" (to be completed by:) I beg of you to rest in my house—You have passed by and I wish to receive you hospitably (5).

קמח סלת (6): Through repeated filtering, the flour was cleaned from all inferior substances (קמח). The purified flour is called סלת. Menachoth 76b explains that 1 סאה (1/3 Eyfa) yielded, after considerable sieving, 1/10 Eyfa of the finest flour for the "show-bread" (לחם הפנים). 1/10 Eyfa = 1 Omer was the daily portion of the Manna allotted to every individual in the desert. Thus it means here: take quickly from 3 סאה "unsorted" flour (קמח) the finest (סלת)—which would be 1/10 Eyfa for each guest, an amount that was befitting of the hospitality of an Avrohom.

The Angels had received the Divine mandate to announce to Sarah the birth of a son (10, on). It seems that A. did not consider himself authorized to inform Sarah of the revelation he had received (17, 19-21). (At the covenant it says לאמר (17,3); at the announcement of Yizchak's birth (17,19) this word is missing). Sarah is to hear it now, suddenly and unexpectedly, with the result that she also found it "ridiculous" (as could be expected): She is worn out (בלה), old and faded—and now she is to receive עדנה (עדן) delight, the satisfaction of her deepest desire! (12) — There is no need denying (15) — she and her descendants are never to forget it—that to the first Jewish mother the very thought of ever becoming a mother appeared "ridiculous"!

But G'd had appeared to A. to tell him of the coming downfall of the richest cities in the country — at a moment when he had performed the Milah upon him-

self and his household and demonstrated a brotherly love that was to be an example for all time to come. This insight in the Divine workings was necessary. For A. was to transmit to his people this great truth: "Sedom and Amorah" will always face destruction. G'd has chosen A.'s descendants that through them "all nations of the earth shall be blessed" (18). This will only come true if they continue to live in the spirit of A. G'd has "recognized" him (ידעתיו) (19): ידע describes the intimate union between man and wife (4,1). If men "recognize" G'd (דעת ה'), i.e. if they dedicate themselves faithfully to the Divine Will, G'd will be close to them and grant them His love and His care. "Strive for such "dedication" "is the great message of A. to his descendants, the Jewish people.

AVROHOM'S LEGACY: דרך ה' — צדקה ומשפט

His descendants are to "preserve the way of G'd", i.e. the demand "Walk before Me and strive for moral integrity" (17,1) will be realized if men choose the road on which G'd leads them. Towards such a goal G'd has given the Milah to His people which symbolizes the demand for moral and ethical conduct before G'd. To this belongs the fulfillment of the חוקים, the Divine statutes which aim to purify and sanctify our sensual lives (מצות שבין אדם למקום: Laws governing the relationship between men and G'd). They are the pre-requisites for the realization of the second demand: "Practice love and justice" (מצות שבין אדם לחברו:—Laws governing the relationship between men).

Man is entitled to demand משפט, just treatment from his fellow-men. צדקה signifies love and charity which one cannot demand but is entitled to expect in the name of *G'd* because it is *G'd* who demands them;—thus צדקה is a brotherly love which G'd demands from us! In this the Jewish concept of צדקה differs from the practice of charit-

able distribution of "alms", that curious sort of "generous donations" given haughtily by the wealthy, humiliating the receiver. צדקה is an *obligation* to which the poor are entitled in the name of G'd and whose acceptance does not humiliate them. For the rich are to consider themselves but administrators of their wealth, given to them by G'd, of which they are to contribute to the poor as much as they are entitled to receive in the name of G'd.— Usually משפט precedes צדקה: first practice justice, then צדקה: to be dishonest with one hand and give "alms" with the other is considered an abomination by Jewish truth! Here צדקה precedes משפט, obviously contrasting the Jewish concept of righteousness with the degeneration prevailing in Sedom. For without a certain measure of "legal order" society cannot exist. In Sedom there was such an "order" but it defied all common conceptions of humane conduct! In Sedom the practice of brotherly love and charity had become a criminal act! Jewish truth, however, maintains that men are never in a position to judge for themselves what is "just," and that it is G'd alone who can delegate to man the "right of the truth". Thus the great Abramitic legacy prescribes ושמרו דרך ה' לעשות צדקה ומשפט. It does not say ויעשו but לעשות: These demands are not independent of each other but rather condition each other: the demands of justice and love cannot be realized unless men are ready to preserve "the way of G'd"; men must be willing to recognize G'd as Master of their lives whose Divine Will directs their individual lives (חוקים) before they are called upon to meet the Divine demands of justice and love in their (sociological) lives!

SEDOM AND AMORA

At the moment when the cornerstone of the Jewish Nation has been laid through Milah and the doctrine of brotherly love, G'd directs A.'s attention to the Divine

Judgement which is to take place against Sedom and Amora: The nation of G'd shall always bear in mind the fate of Sedom and Amora on the soil of Erez Israel as a warning as to what will be its own fate if it ceases to be faithful to the "Abramitic Legacy" (see Deut. 29,22).

V. 21 and 22 belong together: "and be the noise over Sedom and Amora very loud and their depravity severe—I will still consider—". The excitement over their abominable crimes against mankind, ridiculing love and justice, was considerable; their moral degradation—which was in sharp contrast to "the way of G'd"—had become unbearable;—one crime follows the other as it happened at the time of the Flood. Here again the crimes against society which follow in the wake of moral degredation decided their fate.—צעקה is intensified זעקה: the cries of the people (זעקה) against their inhuman treatment reached G'd as צעקה. — צעקתה (21) refers to זעקת (20): G'd judges whether in view of the cries (הכצעקתה) which reached him, they have forfeited their lives, i.e. whether they themselves caused the destruction that was bound to befall them. And G'd "waits to see whether they have accomplished this self-destruction." He lets them pass a final test to determine whether the entire population has fallen victim to the degredation;—should this not be the case, then "I will judge," punish the culprits and spare the innocent inhabitants!

AVROHOM PRAYING FOR SEDOM AND AMORA

During all this time A. had remained standing before G'd (22), even while practicing his unique hospitality. Now he hears that the degenerated population is threatened with annihilation by G'd. He sees in G'd a righteous Judge. To harbor even the slightest doubt about this seems

to him a "desecration of G'd" (25). Yet there might live a number of righteous men בתוך העיר (not בעיר) "within the city," i.e. men who are not satisfied with being just and righteous for themselves and witnessing passively the general degredation but who do everything in their power to influence their fellow-citizens and to admonish them to change for the better, thus attempting to save them from destruction. Do not such righteous men deserve that for their sake (למען) G'd spare the cities from final doom?—Thus A., the man "formed from the dust, disintegrating into ashes" (27), stands before G'd, the "World-Judge" and his "sense of Justice," demanding a "just" treatment, meets with Gd's approval. G'd is ready to spare the city if there are but ten such "righteous men in the city."—Thus in our own Jewish present the "estrangement" of so many of our brothers, painful as it may be, must not frighten us. And even if the adherence to G'd and His Torah should be reduced to the small circle of the faithful—if *they* do their duty and do not tire in their efforts to call their fellow-Jews to their duty, they will pave the way for the final salvation of the K'lall Jisroel.—

DESTRUCTION OF SEDOM AND AMORA. LOT

Ch. 19. "Lot sat at the gate of Sedom" (1); he had been elevated to "Citizen" of Sedom where he occupied an influential position (for that means "he sat at the gate"). In Sedom hospitality was strictly prohibited. The travellers knew that and expected to have to spend the night by the roadside. Lot, however, dares to oppose the prohibition. He does the unexpected—this is contained in the words "הנה נא — —" (2): for even though he had become estranged from A. in many ways, the example of A. had had some effect on him. The travellers followed his invitation. He prepared the meal for them,

baked the cake—What a contrast to the spirit of hospitality that prevailed in A.'s house! Here neither wife nor children partake of the Mizvah—Lot found himself quite alone with all that he had learned in A.'s house.

G'd delays the final destruction of the city (see 18, 21)—but the events of this night furnished the decisive proof of the true extent of their inhumanity and immorality (רעים וחטאים). The "men of the city, men of Sedom" (not a mob) surrounded the house (4) in order to set an example which was to be a lesson to anyone who would ever again attempt to commit the crime of hospitality. They were resolved to treat the strangers with inhuman, bestial cruelty.—It is true that young people are often susceptible where immorality is concerned; but they usually possess a sense of dignity that rebells against brutality. Even the so-called "lower classes" which might be attracted by course immorality are opposed to the mistreatment of the helpless, being themselves oppressed. The older generation, on the other hand, although hardened by "experience," usually does not tolerate excesses where young people are involved although they themselves used to practice them. And also the so-called "upper classes," outwardly unmoved by the suffering of the underprivileged, usually do not tolerate scandals, a tendency which is supposed to spring from their celebrated "sense of decency" as the "educated class." Here in Sedom, however, "young and old," "the entire population from every end" (4) i.e. the lower and the privileged classes were unanimous in their intent to commit the worst crime of immorality. This unanimity sealed the fate of the "men of Sedom."—During the entire account of the downfall of Sedom G'd is called ה': in view of such degeneration, destruction was the work of "merciful love."

Lot turns to his sons-in-law and begs them to save themselves—yet when he speaks of G'd and the approach-

ing catastrophe they laugh at him and ridicule his fears. They had "taken his daughters" (as emphasized in V. 14), they had married them but they were far from being sons-in-law in the usual sense of the word. After thus being rejected, Lot does not even attempt to talk to his own sons (12). How alone he was in his own house! And the cause of all this was his separation from A. Even he himself hardly deserved to be saved and he owed his life fully to the "Divine mercy" (16). He should have never lived in Sedom. Now he got his punishment. He is forced to leave behind his wealth and all that had attracted him to Sedom. Death pursues him, he must flee, never to turn back (17)—he should have never possessed what he now had to leave behind. As for his sons—he had lost them even before they perished. — He is to seek refuge in the mountains but he fears that he will never reach them; he asks to be allowed to remain in a town which, as he puts it, "is insignificant" (20), offering none of the attractions which lured him to Sedom. Permission to stay in the town means that he will have saved his naked life, nothing else. His request is granted.

Looking over the Dead Sea and its vicinity the observer will notice the vulcanic nature of the soil. He will be inclined to classify the destruction of Sedom and Amora as an ordinary natural phenomenon. He will ascribe the origin of the Dead Sea to vulcanic eruptions which account for the vulcanic nature of the soil. In contrast to this theory stands the Divine word: "G'd lets rain fall—from *G'd*, from the *sky*" (24). The observer mistakes cause for consequence: the present condition of the soil was not the cause of the catastrophe but its result, emanating not from the ground but "from G'd, from the sky".

Lot's fear drives him from Zoar into the mountains. There, far away from the world, the daughters of Lot fell easy prey to the belief that they were the sole surviving

human beings on earth; if the father were to die, they would be all alone in the world (31). It was this terrifying prospect that drove them to their crime (32). Perhaps they thought that under the circumstances their act was no crime.

ABIMELECH

Ch. 20. After witnessing this catastrophe (19, 27-28), A. resumes his journey and travels—as he had done once before—to the barren, lonely South near the desert of Shur. There he settles down (וישב) but lives temporarily (ויגר) in Gerar, the residence of the King of the Philistines (1). The following consideration might serve to explain the motive for this "move": Yizchak's birth was approaching. A. wants his son to grow up protected from bad influences. Yet he realizes that it would be a mistake to keep Yizchak out of contact with the differently orientated world. From time to time he should enter the "non-Abramitic world," acquaint himself with its thinking and customs and gain the strength to realize and adhere to the Abramitic concept of life in the midst of strange and even hostile surroundings. The young man who has never left the parental home with its warm comfort often falls easy prey to the diverse influences of a "non-Jewish"world. A constant shutting-off from fresh air is the surest means of catching cold at the first exposure.

As to A.'s attitude in Gerar we refer to Ch. 12, 10, on. Here G'd also intervenes. (3) Abimelech is threatened by death. But he considers himself innocent. Sedom and Amora might have deserved their fate—but did not A. and Sarah settle peacefully in his land? As for his attitude towards A.'s unmarried sister there was, in his eyes, no offense: He feels completely innocent regarding both his intentions and actions (5). G'd, however, makes it quite clear that although he may have acted in the "innocence of

his heart" (6), his way of acting was far from innocent. And what if Sarah were really A.'s unmarried sister—what gives Abimelech the right to accost her? And even if this were the "custom" in Gerar—it is a sin before G'd, it is G'd who has kept him from committing this sin (—מחמן לי).

And G'd demands (7): "Return the wife of this man—for he is a Prophet,—that he may pray for you." A difficult sentence. Already the Sages ask the question (B.K. 92a): And if he had not been a prophet, had he been the lowliest beggar—were he not equally obliged to return the woman? — He had to return her under any circumstances. But more is demanded from him: The word השב (return, give back) implies the obligation (as in each instance of an insult) to pacify A. and to so satisfy him that he will even pray for him. For Abimelech alone is the guilty one. A., for his part, is entirely innocent; he is a tool in the service of G'd (as expressed in the words "for he is a Prophet") from whom Abimelech might have learned how to receive strangers and practice hospitality. He might have learned that the first question directed to a stranger must not be "is she your wife or your sister"—and act accordingly! — For the first time G'd demonstrates the significance of A.'s mission to an as yet uncomprehending world: A. is in the service of G'd, he is Gd's נביא and so are his descendants. They are referred to in Gd's warning to the nations in whose midst they live: "Do not touch my anointed ones, do not wrong my Prophets"—(Ps. 105, 15).

For a moment Abimelech forgets himself and reproaches A. instead of apologizing to him (9). But he gives in quickly and asks for an explanation of A.'s attitude (10, on). A. could not act differently in surroundings "where there is no fear of G'd". Although physically Sarah was not his sister, she was close to him in a sisterly way and thus became his wife. — The King endeavored to the best of

his ability to compensate Sarah for the wrong done to her. Henceforth (16) she will be protected from obtrusive eyes (כסות עינים "eye protection") and she will not have to conceal her "identiy" as A.'s wife (נוכחת means to have a frank discussion with someone). —

PRAYERS AND תפלה

A. "prayed" for Abimelech (17). התפלל is derived from פלל, to judge, meaning: to judge oneself, to examine whether our thinking and aspirations stand up before the eternal truths which are to shape our lives. It means to let these truths "penetrate" our minds (פלל related to בלל, mix, penetrate). This is the task of our תפלה. If תפלה were nothing but an expression of our thoughts and emotions, it would obviously be impossible to pre-formulate its texts and to demand its recitation at fixed times. The תפלה offers us eternally valid truths which have to dominate every phase of our existence. The less we are "inclined" towards the "prayer", the more important the תפלה becomes. We have a right to "prayer" only if we realize the truths of the תפלה. For תפלה formulates the conditions our life must conform with if ours is to be the happy knowledge that G'd is close to us, that G'd hears us. For we have the right to pray to G'd only if He is close to us.

THE BIRTH OF YIZCHAK

Ch. 21. As for Sarah, the Divine Promise comes true. The world laughed (6). But hers is a knowledge and an insight that is unknown to the world at large and she lends expression to her sentiments at the climax of her happiness (7): With this one child she will bring up "sons," for she has born to A. "the child of his old age, i.e. the son whom A. longed for in his old age, in whom he is to live on for all time to come. This child will be the cor-

ner-stone of the future nation of A. Thus, at this moment, Sarah feels that she is the mother of "sons," mother of an entire nation.

THE EXPULSION OF HAGAR AND ISHMAEL

Sarah had once cherished the hope that A. might have a son by Hagar, a son she (Sarah) would be able to bring up in A.'s spirit. She had made a mistake. She realizes this ever more: "Yishmael was the son of Hagar, the Egyptian" (9) — his "hamitic" traits could not be denied. She saw him "making fun" (מצחק). She could not tolerate that A.'s way of life was the target for ridicule in his own house, a way of life that might be ridiculous in the eyes of an uncomprehending world. — Sarah realized that Yishmael was not capable of administering A.'s heritage together with Yizchak. She demands that they be separated (10). It was hard, but it had to be. Twice the expression האמה הזאת returns in V. 10: Sarah had hoped Hagar's son might become *her* son; this might have been possible with another maid, certainly not with *this* one. She calls upon A. to use his master-rights, in the interest of the family. To A. this appeared cruel and bad. He thought of his son and his future (11). Certainly he had also noticed that Yishmael was a מצחק; but he told himself, if this happened in my house how much worse will it be if the boy is on his own, away from my influence and under the complete domination of his mother. G'd saw how worried A. was (that is why the Divine word mentions the maid-mother besides the boy) — yet A. is to "listen to the *voice* of Sarah" (12) although he does not at all agree with her demand (i.e. to listen to voice of someone else, to obey regardless of the nature of the demand). For Sarah was right—"Yishmael is your physical son (זרעך הוא) (13) but he will never be the descendant in whom

your spiritual heritage will live on. Do not let it be too hard on you to separate from this son" — "your name will be called in Yizchak" (ביצחק) (12): and even Yizchak's descendants will not all be true bearers of your spiritual heritage — quite a few (Esau etc.) will prove worthless.

AVROHOM—QUALIFIED FOR A POLITICAL TREATY! THE OATH.

"At this time" (22) when A. had sent away his oldest son and the entire future of his house rested upon his younger son who was just weaned—at this time Abimelech, the King of the country, and his general approached A. with the following request: A. should swear to offer him (Abimelech), the second and third generation after him and the entire country, the same kind of friendship that he himself had found in the land! Thus Abimelech considers A. not a private individual but the ancestor of a nation whose friendship and goodwill he is eager to secure. This indicates that he had heard of the great manifestations that A. had received from G'd. "G'd is with you in all that you do" (22).—Abimelech must have put great trust in A.'s influence with his descendants as he obviously cherished the belief that A.'s descendants would still consider themselves bound to the oath of their forefather! (Politics often means a frivolous play with treaties and promises but the Jewish state was always known to live up to a given promise).—A. swears. השבע, to swear from שבע seven. After six days G'd concluded His visible creation. The seventh day, the Shabbos, is a monument to the invisible Master of this creation. With the number seven Jewish thinking associates the idea of G'd, the invisible Master of the Universe. השבע (Nif'al, reflective) means literally "to devote oneself to the "seven" ", i.e. to the invisible Master, G'd and His judging Providence.

(G'd may punish me אם לא if this or that is not true, i.e. what I say is really true; on the other hand אם: if this or that is true, i.e. it is not true; — that is the actual meaning of this striking grammatical construction).

AVROHOM PLANTS A TREE

A. immortalizes this event by calling the place באר שבע in order to remind his descendants of the oath that he swore as their representative (31). Here he also plants a tree and proclaims in the name of G'd, the G'd of the future (33). According to the Sages, A. continued to demonstrate brotherly love in the shade of this tree, a practice which had ceased in the rest of the world. And when travelers would thank him, he "referred" them to G'd, Master of the Universe, whose children men are. Brotherly love as practiced by A. is a G'd-willed duty.

עולם — מלך העולם

There may also be a deeper reason for A.'s planting of a tree at this particular moment. In the past he had proclaimed G'd as "the owner of heaven and earth". Here (as nowhere else in the Torah) it says: He proclaimed G'd as Master of a veiled future (עלם "to be veiled"). It is true that G'd had announced to him that he was to become the ancestor of a people destined to be called into Gd's service. At this particular moment he *experienced* the unfolding of the realization of his destiny: A stranger without privileges, he had to fight for the possession of a well that he himself had dug (24-30) — yet the ruler of the country approaches the centenary and his two-year old son to conclude a "political" treaty far-reaching in scope! As the tree develops from insignificant roots to giant proportions, so did A. see a great future emerging from small beginnings. At this moment he *experienced* G'd as the Master who shapes the veiled future.

The great teachers of our people have seen to it that this particular name of G'd—as no other—should become familiar to us. Therefore it returns in all prayers and ברכות. We are to be continuously aware of the fact that not only the future is veiled (עלם) but that nature, the world and its unchanging motions are no less "hidden" from us. Thus the world is called עולם, the "hidden", puzzling world. The Sages teach us to perceive G'd at every moment and in every "function" of this world as the מלך העולם who is Master and Ruler of time, Master and Ruler of all the mysteriously functioning forces (laws of Nature) — G'd who desires to be *our* G'd in this "world of mystery" and whose will we must realize faithfully if our lives are to have meaning and purpose.

AKEDA

Ch. 22 "And it was after these happenings—" (1). A. had proclaimed G'd as א' עולם who paves the way for a still undisclosed future; he was justified in considering Yizchak the guarantor of this G'd-willed future; and he saw his future already taking shape, for the ruler of the land had just concluded a solemn treaty with the descendants of this child (Ch. 21);—at this moment האלקים, the *same* G'd who had assured A. of his future, confronts him with a strange demand: Tear down, with your own hands, the tree which you have planted! A trial without comparison! G'd calls—and A. exclaims הנני "I am ready," even before he learns of the nature of the Divine demand!

"*Please* take—" (2), meaning: I know that what I demand is hard and that your entire being will revolt; it is your son whom I demand, your only son whom you love with all your soul, it isYizchak on whose life the purpose of your life depends;—לך לך, with this call A.'s life begins, finding its highest achievement in the faithful fulfillment of this Divine demand! —

According to the Sages מוריה refers to the place where Kain and Hebel brought their offerings and where Noach sacrificed on "new-born" ground — this place was to "teach" (הוראה), for all time to come, what Gd's sanctuary, the Divine Law and sacrifices demand from us: To serve G'd, i.e. to devote one-self without reservation to the Divine will.

"TRADITION"

Yizchak was not a child any more, he was a man of 37 years and independent; his greatness of mind and spirit equalled that A.: he had not received the divine command directly from G'd but from the mouth of his father as a תורה שבעל פה "oral tradition." Here the first Jewish son sacrificed himself for a "tradition" which he had received from his father. This was so because his father's character and greatness of mind guaranteed the truth of all that was handed down to him in the name of G'd. Thus each generation sees in the previous one the guarantor for the truthfullness of its traditions. —

"On the third day" (4) — there is no hint of the feelings in the hearts of father and son during these three days. "Stay here by yourselves (5)" — A. and Yiz. leave their companions at the foot of the Moriah: Only Jews who are inspired by the spirit of A. and Yiz. possess the strength to climb the heights of the "mountain of G'd", even if the divine will demands the incredible. This strength—according to the Sages raises them high above the angels, who serve G'd without a mind of their own, while the Jew, truly serving G-d eliminates his own insight and will-power, ever ready to obey the divine law.—

A. merely informs his companions that "we want to go there, bow down and then return" — he makes little ado of his plans! His servants know that he wants to offer a "sacrifice". A. describes this act as "bowing down," de-

voting oneself (השתחוה), which is indeed the meaning of every Korban: one does not sacrifice the animal; the sacrifice symbolizes the devotion of one's life and entire being to G'd.

A. and Yiz. "both go together," as it says repeatedly (6, 8). Both father and son calmly face a task equally hard for either of them and they set about it in unshakable grandeur of mind—the prototype of father and son, pointing the way the older and the younger generations are to go in harmony and mutual confidence.

The father's silent and grave demeanor may have indicated to Yizchak that the task they were about to perform was a hard one. Twice ויאמר is repeated (7), twice he tries to inquire—and says merely "my father"—only then follows the question — "where is the lamb for the sacrifice"? Whereupon A. replies that one has to be ready for every sacrifice and has to leave it to G'd *which* sacrifice He demands—"my son"—"and they both walked together" (8).

"FEAR OF G'D"

At the last moment (11), an angel of G'd orders him to stop, informing him that this was a test. G'd Himself had to tell him about his son's sacrifice as he would not have believed this incredible news coming from an Angel; but Angel sufficed to inform him of the retraction of the order. In this sacred hour A. met the greatest possible test, achieving for himself the title ירא אלקים (12), as he got ready to sacrifice his only child upon the Divine command. This "Akeda of Jizchak", this readiness to have himself "bound" (עקד) by the Divine Will, regardless of his own feelings, has become a shining example, to the world demonstrating what true "Fear of G'd" demands of every Jew.

THE "AKEDA"—SACRIFICE

In this solemn hour A. feels the need of expressing the emotions which move him and his son Yizchak: He beheld a ram and "offers it as a sacrifice in the place of his son" (11). Here we have the irrefutable proof that sacrifices have only symbolic significance. If this were not so, A.'s sacrifice would be nothing but a ridiculous ceremony: He slaughters an animal that he finds accidentally in the wilderness and that was not even his own "in the place of his son"—at a moment when the dearest possession of his life had been returned to him! It is as if someone recevied a most generous gift—and picks up a pin from the street and presents it as a token of his gratitude!—

With this sacrifice, however, A. vows that his life shall be devoted to the Divine Will, for all time to come. Later on the Jewish nation renewed this vow daily in the Tamid-offering on Mount Moriah. This daily "national" offering had to take place on the "North-side, before G'd", at the "Midnight-side" of the Altar.—In the midst of night and darkness we have always to be cognizant of the fact that although *we* do not comprehend, "G'd sees", G'd perceives—and ours is nothing but obedience! And G'd remembers "Akeda of Jizchak" — for to be a Jew means to offer G'd continued Akeda-obedience. That is why A. calls the location of the Akeda יראה ה' "G'd sees" (14), G'd understands even if we never comprehend His Will. When G'd revealed His Torah to His people at the Sinai, Moshe added the significant words: "Today it must be said: One is "seen" on the Mountain of G'd" (14): G'd sees but everyone of us is also "seen", evaluated by Gd's judging eye whether his life constitutes obedience to the Divine Will of the Torah. Three times a year every Jew had to appear on Moriah, the place of the Sanctuary, in order to "be seen by G'd" (Ex. 23, 17) and to renew with the "sacrifice" the vow of his life's Akeda. —

THE JEWISH PEOPLE: PEOPLE OF THE AKEDA

In the Akeda A.'s life finds its climatic perfection. His devotion was such that his farthest descendants still were to benefit from its merits. Thus, in this hour, G'd was able to confirm by oath the great promises to A.'s descendants, the Jewish people (16-17): The Akeda-spirit will be alive in his descendants, for all time to come. It will never be completely lost even in the time of the most degrading assimilation. The future belongs to this Akeda-spirit, for it will conquer a hostile world, estranged from G'd. To instill this Akeda-spirit in the world—letting it partake of the greatest possible blessing — is A.'s testament and the task of his descendants, the Jewish people (18).

A. returns to his servants whom he had left behind (19). In the hour of the Akeda A. and Yizchak "went together." Now that they have achieved the highest ethical goal that men can attain, they rise and "go together" with their servants — they do not consider themselves more elevated than they—they return as if nothing had happened.—They set the example of true modesty which is so characteristic of the truly great.

"After these happenings" A. was told: "behold, Milka has also born children to your brother Nachor" (20-24). This seems to have been the answer to an inquiry that A. made; — he was thinking of Yizchak's future.

SARAH'S DEATH. THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH

Ch. 23. The Torah reports the death of Sarah. It does not say (1): she lived to be 127 years, but 100 years and 20 years and 7 years—these figures represent her childhood, her adult phase and her old age: the "life of Sarah" preserved all the aspects—the good ones—that are charac-