

Study of the Teachings of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks with the Kavannah to support the ascent of his soul.

- Introduction
- Short video Animation
- His commentaries on Parashat VaYera
- insights from the last chapter of his book “To Heal a Fractured World”

Introduction

This Sunday, the 8th of November, Rabbi Lord Ph.D. Jonathan Sacks was laid to his eternal rest, after he passed away on Shabbat Parashat VaYerah. I was, am and always will be a devoted student of his teachings. I will probably need more than one lifetime to read, understand and digest his teachings.

I am also privileged to have a personal connection with Rabbi Sacks. Several years ago, just before getting ordained, I wrote him an email with a few comments on his teaching about ואהבת לרעך כמוך – you shall love TO your fellow human as yourself. I was honored to receive back his personal response along with his blessing on my journey as a Rabbi. His Hebrew name, HaRav Ya’akov Zvi ben David Ariele, encapsulates my own family: My maternal grandfather, Ya-akov, was murdered in the Shoah. My paternal grandfather’s name is Zvi. My father’s name is HaRav Ariele, and our last name is Ben David. Realizing it made my emotional and spiritual connection with Rabbi Sacks much stronger than ever before.

It is my honor to present and lead this Shi-ur, at the conclusion of which I would like to offer the recitation of the Kaddish D’Rabannan.

Video Animation: Why I am a Jew

<https://youtu.be/CAbiFbpQP8o>

Rabbi Sacks thoughts about Parashat VaYera

Source: <https://rabbisacks.org/space-us-vayera-5778/>, with additions from my own D'var Torah on this Parasha from last year.

Shabbat VaYera is the very day of his passing away, and it is also the Shabbat when 11 of our People were murdered during service in the Etz H'ayyim (Tree of Life) synagogue in Pittsburgh PA.

Avraham was chosen to be a father. The first two letters of Avram, Av, mean just that. Avram means “a mighty father.” Avraham, says the Torah, means “a father of many nations.”

The stories told in this parasha – the expelling of Ishmael and the binding, the Akedah, of Isaac – are among the hardest to understand in the whole of Tanakh, both actions are so harsh, making them almost unbearable to read, less to understand. We ask ourselves: how can one who banished his son Ishmael, sending him to his almost certain death, and later is willing to sacrifice his other son (not knowing if Ishmael is alive or not) be the parental role model, be thought of as an exemplary father model for future generations?

Reading these stories carefully one can realize that they are not questions about Abraham but rather questions about the will of God. For it was not Abraham who wanted to send Ishmael away nor was it Abraham who wanted to sacrifice Isaac. It was God who told him to listen to Sarah and send the child away just as it was God who told him to sacrifice “your son, your only one, the one you love, Isaac”. Abraham was acting on both occasions against his emotions, his paternal instincts.

There is an even deeper problem, and it is hinted at in the words God spoke to Abraham in summoning him to the binding of his son: “Take your son, your only son, the one you love—Isaac—and go forth – lekh lekha – to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.” This command, Lekh Lekha, appear only twice in Torah. The other time is God's first summons: “Go forth [lekh lekha] from your land, your birthplace and your father's house” (Gen. 12:1). These only two places are connected with Abraham's first and last trials the latter is an echo of the first.

The first trial meant that Abraham had to abandon his father, thereby looking as if he were neglecting his duties as a son. So, whether as a father to his sons or as a son to his father, Abraham was commanded to act in ways that seem the exact opposite of what we would expect and how we should behave.

The Where To in the last trial is also very significant. The name Moriya folds in itself many meanings, all coming out from the same or very similar root in Hebrew. Moreh – a teacher; one who points towards a direction; one who commands instructions to be followed; Horeh – parent; Morah – fear, but more in the connotation of awe; Mar-eh – vision; Marut – authority. Let's put these additional meanings into the translation of the verse: “Leh Lekha to the Land of Moriya – the origin place of direction, teaching and awe-

fear, were you will see me, accept my authority and receive the instructions, directions and teachings that I, as your teacher, parent and guide, shall give to you”.

This is too strange to be accidental.

Abraham, as the pioneer of a new kind of faith and way of life, was instituting a new form of relationship between the generations. Essentially, what we are seeing in these events is the birth of the individual.

In ancient times, the basic social unit was not the individual but the family. Religious rituals were performed with the father serving as priest, offering sacrifices, libations and incantations to the spirits of dead ancestors. The power of the father was absolute. Wives and children had no rights and no independent legal personalities. They were mere property and could be killed by the head of the household at will. There were no individuals in the modern sense. There were only families, under the absolute rule of its male head.

The Torah was a radical break with this entire mindset in making no provision for sacrifices to dead ancestors, and forbidding the attempt to communicate with the spirits of the dead. Monotheism was more than simply the belief in one God. Because each human was in His image, and because each could be in direct relationship with Him, the individual was suddenly given significance – not just fathers but also mothers, and not just parents but also children. They were each to become persons in their own right, with their own identity and integrity.

Such changes do not happen overnight, and they do not happen without wrenching dislocations. That is what is happening at both ends of the Abraham story. At the beginning of his mission, Abraham was told to separate himself from his father, and towards the end he was told to separate himself, in different ways, from each of his two sons. These painful episodes represent the agonizing birth-pangs of a new way of thinking about humanity.

First separate, then connect. That seems to be the Jewish way. That is how God created the universe, by first separating domains – day and night, upper and lower waters, sea and dry land – then allowing them to be filled. And that is how we create real personal relationships. By separating and leaving space for the other. Parents should not seek to control children. Spouses should not seek to control one another. It is the carefully calibrated distance between us in which relationship allows each party to grow.

It is this drama of separation that Abraham symbolically enacts in his relationship both to his father and to his two sons. In this world-transforming moment of the birth of the individual, God is teaching him the delicate art of making space, without which no true individuality can grow.

“On Dreams and Responsibilities” – the last chapter of Rabbi Sacks book “To Heal a Fractured World.”

On the very same Sunday, I concluded, with my Havrutah, the study of the last chapter of the abovementioned book. Studying this book, we felt that we were reading the teaching of a great luminary, one of the greatest Jewish spiritual leaders of our generation (and probably of the whole current and past century). Let me present to you a quote of the very last pages of his book, which I feel represent his spiritual bequest and legacy.

“I have spent much of my life thinking about life, observing people, reading books, searching for teachers and exemplars, trying to distinguish between what ultimately matters and what merely seems to matter at the time. I make no claims to wisdom, but this I have learned:

- that each of us is here for a purpose;
- that discerning that purpose takes time and honesty, knowledge of ourselves and knowledge of the world, but it is there to be discovered. Each of us has a unique constellation of gifts, an unreplicated radius of influence, and within that radius, be it as small as a family or as large as a state, we can be a transformative presence;
- that where what we want to do meets what needs to be done, that is where God wants us to be;
- that even the smallest good deed can change someone’s life;
- that it is not the honors we receive that matter, but the honor we give;
- that what counts is not how much wealth we make but how much of what we have, we share;
- that those who spend at least part of their lives in service of others are the most fulfilled and happiest people I know;
- that there is no greater gift we can give our children than to let them see us sacrifice something for the sake of an ideal;
- that religions reach their highest levels when they stop worrying about other people’s souls and care, instead, for the needs of their bodies;
- that no religion that persecutes others is worthy of respect, nor one that condemns others, entitled to admiration;
- that we honor the world God created and called good by searching for and praising the good in others and the world;
- that nothing is gained by less-than-ethical conduct. We may gain in the short term but we will lose in the long, and it is the long term that counts;
- that moral health is no less important to the quality of a life than physical health;
- that a word of praise can give meaning to someone’s life;

- that, putting others down, we diminish ourselves; lifting others, we lift ourselves;
- that the world is a book in which our life is a chapter, and the question is whether others, reading it, will be inspired;
- that each day is a question asked by God to us;
- that each situation in which we find ourselves did not happen by accident: we are here, now, in this place, among these people, in these circumstances, so that we can do the act or say the word that will heal one of the fractures of the world;
- that few are the days when we cannot make some difference to the lives of others;
- that virtue does not have to be conspicuous to win respect;
- that the best do good without thought of reward, understanding that to help others is a privilege even more than it is an opportunity;
- that cynicism diminishes those who practice it;
- that self-interest is simply uninteresting;
- that it is not the most wealthy or powerful or successful or self-important who make the greatest difference or engender the greatest love;
- that pain and loneliness are forms of energy that can be transformed if we turn them outward, using them to recognize and redeem someone else's pain or loneliness;
- that the people who are most missed are those who brought hope into our lives;
- that the ability to give to others is itself a gift;
- that we can make a difference, and it is only by making a difference that we redeem a life, lifting it from mere existence and endowing it with glory;
- that those who give to others are the closest we come to meeting the divine presence in this short life on earth;
- that the best way of receiving a blessing is to be a blessing;
- and that if we listen carefully enough – and listening is an art that requires long training and much humility – we will hear the voice of God in the human heart telling us that there is work to do and that he needs us.”

Sacks, Jonathan. To Heal a Fractured World (Kindle Locations 5663-5699). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

The following form of Kaddish is also recited by mourners/those observing yahrzeit during the Shacharit/ Morning Services (during P'sukei D'zimra)

קדיש דרבנן Kaddish D'rabanen

Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'meih raba.

B'al'ma di v'ra chiruteih,

v'yamlich malchuteih

b'chayeichon uv'yomeichon uv'chayei d'chol beit yisra-eil,

ba-agala uvizman kariv, v'imru amen.

Y'hei sh'meih raba m'varach l'alam ul'al'mei al'maya.

Yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpa-ar v'yitromam v'yitnasei

v'yithadar v'yitaleh v'yithalal

sh'meih d'kudsha b'rich hu,

l'eila min kol birchata v'shirata

tushb'chata v'nechemata,

da-amiran b'al'ma, v'imru amen.

Al yisra-eil v'al rabanan,

v'al talmideihon

v'al kol talmidei talmideihon,

v'al kol man d'as'kin b'orayta,

di v'atra hadein v'di v'chol atar va-atar.

Y'hei l'hon ul'chon sh'lama raba,

china v'chisda v'rachamin,

v'chayin arichin, um'zonei r'vichei, ufurkana,

min kodam avuhon di vishmaya (vara),

v'imru amen.

Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya,

v'chayim tovim aleinu

v'al kol yisra-eil, v'imru amen.

Oseh shalom Oseh shalom bimromav,

hu b'rachamav ya-aseh shalom

aleinu v'al kol yisra-eil, v'imru amen.

יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא.

בְּעֻלְמָא דִּי בְּרָא כְרַעוּתֵיהּ,

וְיִמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתֵיהּ

בְּחַיִּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל,

בְּעֻגְלָא וּבְיוֹמָן קָרִיב, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ

לְעָלָם וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמַי.

יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא

וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל

שְׁמֵהּ דְקֻדְשָׁא בְרִיךְ הוּא,

לְעָלָא מִן כָּל בְּרַכָּתָא וְשִׁירָתָא

תְּשַׁבַּחְתָּא וְנַחֲמָתָא,

דְאָמִירָן בְּעֻלְמָא, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל רַבָּנָן,

וְעַל תַּלְמִידֵיהוֹן

וְעַל כָּל תַּלְמִידֵי תַלְמִידֵיהוֹן,

וְעַל כָּל מָאן דְּעִסְקִין בְּאוֹרֵיתָא,

דִּי בְּאַתְרָא הָדִין וְדִי בְּכָל אֶתֶר וְאַתֶּר.

יְהֵא לְהוֹן וּלְכוֹן שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא,

חֲנָא וְחִסְדָּא וְרַחֲמִין,

וְחַיִּין אֲרִיכִין, וּמְזוּנֵי רוּיָחִי, וּפְרָקְנָא,

מִן קֳדָם אַבוּהוֹן דִּי בְשַׁמַּיָּא,

וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא,

וְחַיִּים טוֹבִים עָלֵינוּ

וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

עֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרְמֵי,

הוּא בְּרַחֲמֵי יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם

עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

May God's great name be exalted and hallowed throughout the created world, as is God's wish. May God's sovereignty soon be established, in your lifetime and in your days, and in the days of all the house of Israel.

And we say: Amen

May God's great name be acknowledged forever and ever!

May the name of the Holy One be acknowledged and celebration, lauded and worshipped, exalted and honored, extolled and acclaimed – though God, who is bless, b'rick hu, is truly beyond all acknowledgement and praise, or any expressions of gratitude or consolation ever spoken in the world, And we say: Amen

Grant abundant peace to our people and their leaders, to our teachers and their disciples, and to all who engage in the study of Torah in this land and in all other lands. May you and they be blessed by our creator in heaven with great peace, grace and kindness, compassion and love, and long life, abundance, and deliverance. And we say: Amen.

May heaven bestow on us, and on all Israel, good life and abundant and lasting peace. And we say: Amen.

May the one who creates peace on high mercifully bring peace to us and to all Israel. And we say: Amen.