מדרש

Midrash

ON GENESIS 22:2

Why did God ask Abraham to offer Isaac if He never meant for him to die?

Bereshit Rabbah 56:8

Yitzchak himself asks to be bound tightly, fearing that any involuntary movement might invalidate the offering, showing that the Akeidah was an act of his own full consent and devotion, not merely his father's will. Avraham's tears mingle with his joy, reflecting both natural human mercy and complete submission to the Divine will, while the angels protest that Jerusalem's destiny seems endangered. God then clarifies that the command "take him up" never meant "slaughter him," teaching that the real test lay in the act of ascent and willingness itself, not in Yitzchak's actual death. AI SUMMARY

Another matter, Rabbi Yitzḥak said: When Abraham sought to bind Isaac his son, he said to him: ‘Father, I am a young man, and I am concerned that my body will tremble due to fear of the knife, and I will [thereby] upset you, or perhaps the slaughter will [thereby] be rendered unfit and it will not be counted for you as a valid offering. Therefore, bind me very well.’ Thereupon, “he bound Isaac his son.” Is a person capable of binding a thirty-seven- year-old [variant reading: a twenty-six-year-old] without his consent?

Immediately, “Abraham extended his hand.” As he extended his hand to take the knife, his eyes were emitting tears and the tears were falling into Isaac’s eyes, because of the father’s mercy [for his son]. Nevertheless, his heart was joyful in fulfilling the will of his Creator. The angels gathered themselves into groups up above. What did they cry out? “The highways are desolate, those passing on the way have ceased, he breached the covenant, he has spurned the cities” (Isaiah 33:8) – does He not in fact desire Jerusalem, and the Temple that He had planned to bequeath to Isaac’s descendants? “He had no regard for man” (Isaiah 33:8) – if the merit of Abraham is not sufficient, there is no significance for any person before Him.

Rabbi Aḥa said: Abraham began to express his astonishment, [saying to God]: ‘These events are nothing short of bewildering. Yesterday You said: “For it is through Isaac that will be called your descendants” (Genesis 21:12), then You said: “Take you your son [...and offer him up]” (Genesis 22:2), and now You say to me: “Do not extend your hand against the lad”? This is bewildering.’ The Holy One blessed be He said to Abraham: ‘“I will not violate My covenant, nor alter the utterance of My lips” (Psalms 89:35) – when I said to you: “Take you your son,” I did not say: “Slaughter him,” but rather, “take him up.” I said this to you in affection. You have taken him up and fulfilled My words, now take him down.’

<Variant reading: They said a parable; this is analogous to a king who said to his friend: ‘Bring your son up to [eat at] my table.’ He brought him to him, knife in hand. The king said: ‘Did I say to bring him up in order to eat him? I said: Bring him up out of affection for him.’ That is what is written: “[They built altars on which to burn their sons and

daughters in fire, something that I never commanded] and which never entered my mind" (Jeremiah 19:5) – this refers to Isaac.>