

PRAYER

**Be wise not only in words, but in deeds;
mere knowledge is not the goal, action is.**

*Know the God of your ancestors,
and serve Him by your deeds.*

**Let not your wisdom exceed your deeds,
lest you be like a tree with many branches but few roots.**

*If the thoughts of your heart be pure,
it is likely that the works of your hand will be also.*

**Accustom yourself to do good;
Before long it will become your greatest pleasure.**

*One good deed leads to another,
as every evil deed leads to more wrong-doing.*

**If others do good through you,
their deeds will be accounted to you as your own.**

*Though it is not incumbent upon you to complete the work,
you are also not free to desist from doing all you can.*

**Judge people by their deeds,
and you will not be led to false judgment.**

*Say little and do much,
for you are judged by your deeds.*

**If you are wise and rich,
Let your good deeds reveal your wisdom and your wealth.**

*Honor people for what they are;
but honor them more for what they do.*

Honor people not for their possessions,

But honor them for what use they make of them.

*When mortals depart this world neither silver, nor gold,
nor precious stones accompany them;*

**They are remembered only for their love of learning
and their good deeds.**

Happy are they who are rich in good deeds,

For they shall be honored in life

And be remembered long afterwards for their goodness.

(Selected From The Talmud)

THOUGHT FOR THE MOMENT OF SILENCE

Some people miss the message because
they are too busy checking the spelling.

Maynard C. Carney



TRADITIONAL CONGREGATION

12437 Ladue Rd, St Louis MO 63141

314-576-5230 www.tradcong.org

Affiliated with the

Union for Traditional Judaism

Rabbi Seth D Gordon

Rabbi Ephraim I Zimand, Emeritus

Shabbat Bulletin

November 12, 2011

טו חשוון תשע"ב

Parashat Vayera – Genesis 18:1-22:24 (וִירָא)

Hertz – p 63

Stone – p 78

Haftarah – Second Kings 4:1-37 (מַלְכִים ב')

Hertz – p 76

Stone – p 1134

Kiddush Luncheon co-sponsored by

Gloria Friedlander in honor of

her 85th birthday

and by Marcia and Mauricio Lisker

in honor of Marcia's birthday

Rabbi Gordon's Talmud Class – 3:15 PM

Minchah – 4:15 PM

Shabbat Ends – 5:33 PM

On This Week's Torah Portion - וַיִּבְרָא

We have spoken of the *Akeidah* (the "binding" of Isaac and his near sacrifice at the hands of his father, Abraham) before; I would like to consider it this year again from another angle. There is a concept in Jewish thought called *mesirut nefesh*, giving up one's soul. It has been said that the currency of the World to Come is *mesirut nefesh* – how much one is willing to put aside one's agenda, one's personal desires, in order to do Gd's Will. The degree of *mesirut nefesh* that one displays is a measure of how close one has come to Gd, and since the entire purpose of our creation, and the creation of the universe in which we live is to come close to Gd, the more we are *moser nefesh*, the more we are fulfilling the entire *raison d'être* of our existence.

It is clear that Yitzchak displayed *mesirut nefesh* – he allowed himself to be bound on the altar. Yitzchak was, according to the traditional chronology, 37 years old, and Avraham 137 years old, at the time of the *Akeidah*, so clearly had Yitzchak objected, the project would have fallen through! The commentators point out however, that dying for Gd is a lot easier than *living* for Gd, and in this sense, the *mesirut nefesh* demanded of Avraham is much greater than that of Isaac. When we give up our life in an act of *Kiddush Hashem* it is over and done with and we move on to our reward.

What Avraham was asked to do was something much more difficult. Had he gone through with the slaughter of his son, he would have had to spend the rest of his life not only mourning his son, but being unable to carry out the very mission that Gd had given him from even before he left Mesopotamia for Charan, and later for the Land of Israel. Avraham's entire life was spent bringing people to the knowledge of one Gd, the Creator of the universe, full of mercy and compassion for all his creatures, and who demands that we treat each other both justly and mercifully. Now, this Gd allegedly demands that Avraham slaughter his son on His altar! Were Avraham to have gone through with this act, *as he wished to do*, his entire life's work would have crumbled into the proverbial dust. Why, then, did he do it with nary a peep?

I would like to give an example from my own life that afforded me some insight into this question. As some of you may know, I am the primary caregiver for a lady who is bedridden with MS. Since she has no movement in any part of her body below the neck, she relies on me, or people I supervise, to handle all aspects of her personal care. This requires me to remain in the house virtually 24/7; fortunately my profession allows me to work from home, but going out of town further than an hour or two is impossible, as is moving somewhere I might prefer to live (Israel). She expressed at one point her gratitude that I had "given up my life" for her. That kind of caught me by surprise, because I actually have no feeling of having given up anything; as I told her at the time, I'm living my life exactly how I would want to live it – with her. So what she saw as *mesirut nefesh* (albeit on a much, much lower level than was demanded of, and produced by, Avraham!), I evaluated as not much of a sacrifice at all, because of the love I have for her. As far as I am concerned, I am not *moser nefesh*!

Now perhaps we can begin to understand a little bit of Avraham's greatness. Avraham's life was completely subsumed in his love of Gd. In Arabic to this day, Avraham is called *al-khalil*, the friend of Gd *par excellence*. If Gd told him turn left he turned left. If Gd told him now turn right, he turned right. In modern terms we might say that in his relationship to Gd he was "process-oriented" rather than "goal-oriented." He had completely transcended his individual ego and made himself a pure conduit to implement Gd's Will in the material world. In one sense we might describe this as the ultimate form of *mesirut nefesh* – completely giving one's body, mind and personality over to Gd to do with as He pleases. I think maybe Avraham would take the opposite tack. To Avraham, his love of Gd was so intense that *nothing* he did in response to Gd's command was a sacrifice. He had, in the words of *Pirke Avot*, made Gd's Will his will. If Gd told him to slaughter his son and give up everything he had worked and hoped for in his life, that was what he *wanted* to do. What Avraham actualized at the *Akeidah* was a state of being where a finite, individual human was identified with Gd's infinity to the maximum extent possible. It was as if Avraham's personal considerations had become completely transparent, ethereal; the underlying Reality, which is Gd alone, shone through him in all its glory.

Sometimes we feel that our Patriarchs were larger-than-life figures, and of course they were spiritual giants the likes of which few of us will be privileged to meet on this earth. Yet they are human beings, and as such, they are examples of the heights to which human beings can rise. We are enjoined to ask "When will my deeds match the deeds of my forebears?" Well, it's a long way to go between where we are and what they achieved. Let's at least make sure that we're moving in the right direction.

Shabbat shalom, Rafi Rabinoff

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, November 13 **Travel Me Jewish Program cancelled.**

Sunday, November 13 Spaghetti Dinner/Family Game Night for Solomon Schechter 8th Graders' trip to Israel. Bring games, cards, etc. \$12/adults, \$6/age 10 & under. B'nai Amoona, 5:30 PM

Tuesday, November 15 PJ Storytime/Jewish Book Month. For kids ages 3-9 and parents/grandparents, 6:45 PM, Brodsky Library. RSVP by 11/14, 314-442-3720.

Wednesday, November 16 **Deadline for receipt of articles, notices, etc. for December Newsletter.** Please email to tradcong@sbcglobal.net.

Motzei Shabbat, November 19 **Israel Bonds Dinner, 7:00 PM. Join us to honor our Eishet Chayil, Cyndee Levy.** Guest Speaker Dr. Jonathan Adelman: "Israel and the Mideast: Hope or Despair?"

Monday, November 28 **Last chance to be photographed for our 2012 Membership Directory.** Photographers will be here from 2:30-9:00 PM; go on-line to www.tradcong.org to book your appointment, or call the office if you need assistance. No obligation, you'll receive a free 8"x10" portrait just for coming in.

December 2-4 **Scholar-in-Residence Program with Rabba Sara Hurwitz.** Full program information is available in our November Newsletter and in your mail, please RSVP and send a donation to support the program.

Condolences to...Barbara Mirowitz on the passing of her sister, Lorraine Braffman.

The Barbara Mendelson Tomchei Shabbos Fund Thanksgiving Food Drive, through Nov 20th. Shabbat items, non-perishable foods and paper & toiletry items, dry or canned soups, rice, pasta, beans, cholent mix, pasta sauce, cereal, baking supplies, canned fruits and vegetables, Shabbat treats, instant potatoes, couscous, pancake mix, etc. **Place items in blue barrel outside TC office.** Also needed are donations for purchase of meat and chicken through *Irv and Kay Diamant Meat Fund*. Checks payable to the "Barbara Mendelson Tomchei Shabbos Fund," mail to Diamant Meat Fund, #4 Millstone Campus Drive, St. Louis, MO 63146, please note "DMF" in the memo.

DAILY SERVICE TIMES

Sunday morning – 9:00 AM

Monday–Friday morning – 7:00 AM

Monday-Thursday evening – 6:30 PM (*Arvit*)

Friday evening – 5:45 PM