

A New Yavneh Publication

16 Chesvan 5769 // 14 November 2008

Minyan Times

Friday Mincha	4:25 PM
Kabbalat Shabbat	After Mincha
Saturday Shacharit	8:45 AM
Saturday Mincha	4:10 PM
Saturday Maariv	5:31 PM

Announcements

- There will be a TISH! this Friday night upstairs in the CJL starting around 8:30PM. There's gonna be a freakin' cholent! Woah!
- Beginner Talmud Shiur 8PM-9PM Monday night—not too late to join! Advanced Talmud Shiur 7:30PM-8:30PM Tuesday night—not too late to join!
- Lunch-n-learn Wednesday at 12PM (free for upperclassmen and grad students)—guest speaker Rabbi Elie Kaufner from Yeshivat Hadar, the first egal yeshiva in the US. Rav Kook Tefilah Shiur Wednesday at 6PM (f.u.g.s.)
- Mishmar Thursday 6PM CJL Library
- The Yavneh Board is seeking interested and capable applicants for various positions. Check this weeks' Hatzala Purta for details!

Want to Write?

Have a good idea for a column? Contact Greg Burnham (gburnham@) if you are interested in writing for this newsletter. We'll publish most anything relating to Judaism or Judaism at Princeton.

1 Akedah, 2 Akedah

By Rabbi David Wolkenfeld

In his wonderful (Hebrew) book “Seek Peace and Pursue It: Topical Issues in Light of the Bible, The Bible in Light of Topical Issues.” Professor Uriel Simon of Bar Ilan University compares the accounts in *Sefer Bereishit* of Yitzhak and Yishmael and their similar *akedah* experience. In Genesis 21:12 God tells Avraham that he must listen to Sarah and send away Yishmael and Hagar. The Torah then describes what followed:

Early next morning Avraham took (*va-yashkem Avraham ba-boker va-yikah*) some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them (*va-yasem al*) over her shoulder, together with the child and sent her away. And she set out (*va-telekh*)

Compare that language to that used in Genesis 22 when God tells Avraham to offer Yitzhak as a burnt offering:

Early next morning, Avraham (*va-yashkem Avraham ba-boker*) saddled his ass and took (*va-yikah*) with him two of his servants and his son Yitzhak. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out (*va-yelekh*) for the place of which God had told him [...] Abraham took (*va-yikah*) the wood for the burnt offering and put it on (*va-yasem al*) his son Yitzhak.

Both of Avraham's sons seem to face certain death—Yishmael from hunger, thirst, and exposure in the dessert, and Yitzhak at his father's hand in fulfillment of God's command. Yet, both sons are saved at the last moment through a miraculous intervention. Again, the language is striking in its similarity:

God heard the cry of the boy, and **an angel of God called** to Hagar **from heaven** and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear **not, for** God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” Then God opened **her eyes and she saw** a well of water. She **went** and filled the skin with water [...]

Then an angel of the Lord called to him **from heaven**: “Avraham! Avraham!”

And he answered, “Here I am.” And he said, “Do **not** raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. **For** now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your so, your favored one, from Me.” When Avraham **looked up, his eye** fell upon a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. So Avraham **went** and took the lamb.

Beyond the linguistic similarities, there is a thematic similarity. Avraham was twice commanded to overcome his love for a child in obedience to God’s command. With all the obvious and less obvious differences, the psychological experience for Avraham must have been similar. However, when Avraham was told to expel Yishmael and Hagar, he was told by God that, in the end, Yishmael would survive and prosper (see Genesis 21:12-13). He received no such guarantee when he was told to sacrifice Yitzhak. The most significant similarity is that both sons were placed in mortal danger by their own father’s obedience to Divine command. And, both sons, went on to enjoy lives filled with the blessing of God as the spiritual heirs of Avraham. Uriel Simon concludes his short chapter on the double *akedah* of both Yishmael and Yitzhak with these beautiful words (at least they’re beautiful in Simon’s original Hebrew):

The distancing of Yishmael the first born and the preference of his younger brother was liable to cause incurable anger against the father and eternal hatred against the brother. [...] However, to our great surprise, when Avraham died, “his sons Yitzhak and Yishmael buried him.” [...] The unexpected cooperation of the two brothers in burying their father demonstrates that the brother who was kept at a distance was free of bitterness or jealousy and that the brother who was kept close was clean from self-righteousness or haughtiness. This is because the two of them realized that the thing that separated them was also the thing that brought them together. Their *akedah* experience that was forced upon their father from on high was a source of divine blessing for each of them. This is the power and this is the reward of true spiritual humility. It makes it possible to walk towards separate destinies without forgetting that they are children of the same father and that they both serve the same God.

Obscure Halacha

How Frum are You?

By Devorah Haberman

The blessing of *shehecheyanu* is one in which Jews thank G-d for giving them life and allowing them to experience new things. It should only be said on truly momentous occasions; when one purchases mundane items such as shirts, shoes, and socks, no blessing is necessary. This applies even for the poor, for whom such items may in fact be valuable. On the other hand, a rich man should not say a blessing when he buys items that would be valuable for an average person but are not particularly important to him. (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 59:12) This *halachah* seems to show that from the point of view of a poor man, things should have an absolute value, whereas from the point of view of a rich man there is only relative value.

There is also a debate in *Brachot* 49b as to whether one should recite a *shehecheyanu* on a new house or garment. Rav Huna takes the position that it should only be said if one has no similar object, and is not simply adding the new item to a stockpile. Rav Yochanan disagrees, arguing that one should always say a *shehecheyanu*; the purchase itself has a certain value, no matter how many times it has been accomplished. Here, again, there is an idea of assessing values. According to Rav Huna, value is relative and dependent on one’s other possessions. According to Rav Yochanan, value is absolute and dependent only on the nature of the object. The *halachah* follows Rav Yochanan, which seems to imply a verdict in favor of absolute value.

Shehecheyanu is, then, a blessing said by everyone alike, no matter how much he/she personally values an object - until some tipping point, at which a person becomes too wealthy to care enough about an object to say a *shehecheyanu*. This, perhaps, is the point when one stops appreciating the smaller things in life and begins to assign things relative values. Ideally, this point would never be reached, and one would be equally grateful to G-d for every purchase, as Rav Yochanan argues. Yet this *halachah* realistically sees the world as one of haves and have-nots, in which the haves do not necessarily appreciate what they have, and assesses the situation accordingly.