

Akeidah poem

"You can find other midrashic poems and prose by Rabbi Steve Nathan, as well as divrei torah, at www.mindfultorah.org or on Facebook at mindfultorah."

And here are discussion questions.

1. What do you see as the thresholds that exist between the following three words: *compromise*, *sacrifice*, *martyrdom*. Where on this tri-partite spectrum do you see the Akedah narrative falling?

2. What does the word "sacrifice" mean to you? Do you agree that we can't know, ultimately, how far we will go to sacrifice for the ones or things we truly love?

In what ways do we or don't we inadvertently sacrifice those we love in small or large ways? (Eg. Consider the effects of the following on our loved ones, and particularly the next generation: our work habits, consumption habits, climate change, allowing the political situation to have evolved to this point vis a vis racial injustices, polarization, etc.)

3. What do you see as the difference between thinking "about" a story and thinking "with" a story? Does the poem prompt you to do more "thinking *about*" or "thinking *with*" this narrative?

4. Some stories easily accommodate to us and reading them is like being the driver of our own car. Some stories *refuse* to accommodate to us and reading them is like being on a roller-coaster, which we have no control over. When you listened to the poem about the Akedah, did you feel like you were driving the car of the Akedah chronicle, or that you were a passenger on an amusement park ride called The Akedah, with little possibility for getting off?

5. Is there a story from *your* life that deserves to be told from as many perspectives as possible? What are you *afraid* would happen if you did so? What do you *hope* would happen if you did so?

The binding
a poem in 5 parts

I. bound faith

Yitzhak
 my name
Yitzhak
 a verb
 he shall laugh
I cannot laugh
the name itself
a cruel joke
they made
a mistake
it should be
 Yitz'ak
 he shall cry out
no
even that
not right
I am not
verb
I do not
act
I simply
am
I know
not
who
what

let father decide
let mother decide
let God decide
let me decide
absurd
that makes me
laugh
but there is
no one
to hear
I am alone
I have left my parent's house

still
I carry it
with me
I have left
 my birthplace
Perhaps now
I can finally
be born
I have left
 my land
 my piece of earth
never really mine

Only
one
spot
belongs
to me
the place
 where I was bound
the place
 where I was willing
to give up
 my life
 my self
for my father
for his God
 my God
the place
 where I was prepared
 to act
to finally
become
a verb
a man
by doing
 nothing

inactive action
courageous folly
that place
that time

that moment
I became
 human
I became
 one
with
God
father
mother
brother
all
I realized
 in that moment
I am alone
 not alone
not bound
 to the altar
 of fire
bound
 to the altar
 of faith
bound faith
 not
blind faith

faith
in the One
 who gave me life
upon that altar
at the moment
when I
surrendered
I chose
to act
 to do
 to make a difference
to live
by allowing my
 self
to die

I pray
I can
continue
to act
to make

 a difference
to become
 a blessing

now
 I begin
 my journey
to the place
 not shown
to the place
 I will find
 on my own
 step by step
perhaps
that is
the point
each step
of the journey
the destination
the place
the Divine
 where we
 are meant
to be
to live
each place
 the end
 the beginning
each place
 able
 to bind
 ourselves
to
the One
the All
the moment

that is
 the essence of
 the sacrifice
 the journey
of being
alive

ii. sarah's test

why
did I
let him
leave
how
could I
not

my son
my only one
whom I love
more
than life
is
no
more

I could not
 look
I could only
 hear
sitting
in my tent
surrounded
God's light
afraid
I would fail
 the test
rise up
 from my place
run
 to him
embrace
 him
prevent
 him
from going
growing
living
leaving

I
did not

I passed

the test
I held
my screams
tears
 fear
 self
 inside
I allowed
 him
to leave
with
his father
knowing
only
one
would
return

the only way
to fulfill
God's promise
was
to let
him go
into the wilderness
from where we came
trusting
 in God
trusting
 in Abraham
trusting
 the voice
 in
my soul
torn
 from
 my
 body
the moment
I could
no longer
hear
 his voice
see
 his face
feel

his touch
the moment
I realized
he was
no longer
mine
as
he
should
not
be

perhaps now
he
will become
who
he was
meant
to be
Yitzhak
a child
of laughter

I remember
my laughter
disbelief
when told
I would
give birth
Abraham's laughter
incredulity
joy

Yitzhak's laughter
did it
ever
exist
yes
a memory
a shadow
a childhood I
long ago
cut
short
the moment
he realized
he was not

to be
like others
the days before
my fear
jealousy
hatred
masquerading
as love
tore his brother
the one
the only one
that he
loved
who reminded
him
he was
not alone
away
from
him

perhaps
now he will
laugh
live
fulfill
the promise
create
a people
stars in the sky
sands on the shore
shining brightly
with
the faith
of
his father
able to shift
to change
like
his mother
with ebb and flow
constantly changing
impermanence
a life
built on
hopes and dreams
that never

turn out
as we
imagine

I do not
know
I can only
pray
this shall
be

Now
I am alone
sitting
in my tent
God's light shining
above
more than enough

these days
have been
longer than others
one night
lasting an eternity
the sun
remained in hiding
never rising
never setting
only darkness
the
last
night

in the distance
I see
three figures
two servant boys
I do not
know
a man
with whom
I have shared
lifetimes
bent over
with sorrow
age
he too

has passed
his
test

I see
no one else
that is
enough
it is done
nothing more
to do
but breathe
and wait
for God
to descend
to return
my soul breath
to its source
one day
to be
reunited
with the soul
that came
into the world
through me
filling me
with laughter
joy
blessing
and who
will now
do so
for those
yet to come

I am
to die
to be reborn
to wait
to see
what comes next
for him
for me
for him
for us all

III. after the ram

the slaughter was easier
than I had imagined
the sacrifice
was not what I had thought
or was it

I did not need
to kill
him
I needed
to kill
the part
of him
within
me

the ram
 trapped
 in the thicket
 by its horns
a father
 trapped
 in the moment
 by his fear and joy
a son
 set free
 at last
 by the one
 who kept him
 bound
 all those years

I saw
 the ram
I knew
 what to do
in a dream
I untied
the boy
looked
at him
he turned
away
I turned
my back

knowing
I would
never
see
him
again

I took
my time
did not want
to turn
to see
the inevitable
nothing
no one
he
was gone

the ram struggled
 to be free
I struggled
 to give freedom
I bound the ram
 I saw hiss face
I slaughtered the ram
 I saw my tears
I burned the body on the altar
 I saw God's smile
I returned home
 I saw her scream

At that moment
I knew
the journey
was over
the journey
had begun

Yitzhak
may he laugh
I had only
 to slaughter
 a ram
to sacrifice
our relationship

I had
no choice
but to choose
this path
now
we are
each
on our journeys
destinations
the same
unknown

as I walked
down
the mountain
to return
to some
where
I feel some
thing
in my
hand

I look down
I see
a horn
reminder
of what
happened
of what
did not
of
my test
and his
and hers

I still have
still sound
it
today

to remember
that moment
all that I lost
then
all that I have
now
then to be lost
as
everything
is

after the ram
nothing was the same
before the ram
nothing was different

so it is
before
each moment
after
each moment
a life
continuing
trial to trial
sacrifice to sacrifice
joy to joy
sorrow to sorrow
breath to breath
until
it ends
which
it
never
does

iv. the trial of God

it is
done
finished
just begun
neither
both
it continues

why
did I test
them
test
me

why
could I
not
have faith
in
my creations

why
did
I
need
to know
the answer
remaining
unknown
even
after
the test
is complete

my children
showed me
the meaning
of faith
what
have I
shown
them

the meaning
of
testing

trying
manipulating

no

I have
shown them
the meaning
of
mercy
forgiveness
faith
trust
in
the
moment
in which
they each
chose

each one
unique
the test
the subject
the response
each one
bears witness
to
faith
in
me

in
the part of me
within them
that is them
faith
in
relationship
interdependence
unity

we
are
one
I thought

I knew that
then
I realize
I know that
now

they
did not
forsake me
I
did not
abandon them
I tested them
they turned to me
for strength
knowing
I
was
the source
of
their
pain

what
amazing
creatures
I have made
to be
separate
yet
a part
of me
of all

I know
I have caused pain
son
torn from father
father
sacrificing son
mother
sacrificing all
soon to die
to rejoin
her source
family
torn asunder

always bound
together
with me
within me
through
their
faith

perhaps
this is not
a consolation
now
perhaps
one day
it will be

does
that
matter

Now
I know
I do not
want
to test
anymore

still
I know
I must
continue
testing them
testing me
one
and
the
same
to remain
certain
of
the only thing
that is
certain
permanent
reliable
relationship
me

you
us
bound
together
eternity
no them
no other
only
one
that
is the answer
to the test
the
divine human
equation
one

I passed
so did they

they always will
if they
we
I
look within
to the soul
our soul
and not without
to others
to find
the answer
the truth
of
one

v. as for me

why
who
what
I do not
understand
why
I should
care

they are
foreign
strange
unknown

I pity them
father
 sacrificing son and self
mother
 sitting in silence
 enabling all
son
 risking all
 for what
god
 self-centered
 manipulative

needing to know
what
the truth
even if
it kills
them

leave me alone
I do not want
to know you

yet
I must
I do
for you
are all
within me
within us
spiritual
DNA

no
I refuse to believe
this
is
truth

I
would not
sacrifice
for any god

I
would not
abandon
the child
I never thought
would be

I
would not
risk
my life
to prove
my love

I would not

ask
the unaskable
of those
I claim
to
love
merely
to serve
my needs

or

would I
have I
will I
again

don't we all

no
I do not
believe
with complete faith
that
this
is
truth
I know
with complete faith
that
it must be

love
sacrifice
pain
surrender
fury
resignation
all
part of life
for all
for god
our image
our source

we
do not

want
to cause
pain

still
we do

we
do not want
to test
the limits
of faith
of love

still
we do

we
do not
want
to sit
inactive
allowing
the plot
life
to unfold
before our eyes
unable to
stop it

still
we do

we
do not
want
to sacrifice
 the self
to find
the truth
the one

still
we must

why

why
can it not
be simple
no pain
no test
no sacrifice
no surrender

because

without
pain
 testing
 sacrifice
 surrender

life
would not
be

without these
we would be
Isaac
 without laughter
never able to leave
home

Abraham
 in his tent
welcoming guests
never going
beyond
comfortable borders

Sarah
 protecting
 precious possessions
never allowing
freedom
growth
life

God
 uncertain
 how far
each
will go

what
each
will do
to surrender
to
divine will
to walk
the path
step by step
to continue
the work
of creation

I know all this
still
I do not
like them
still
I love them
know them
know
their actions
feelings
a part of
me
I
a part of
them
all
part of
the plan

Remembering this
there is pain
not
suffering
which
comes
when we
deny
the plan
the one
our part
in
something greater

perhaps

this is
what
they
are all
are trying to teach
us
their
descendants

Still

I
don't like
the players

I
don't like
the author

I
don't like
the plot

yet
I watch it
them

unfold
within
around
me

I feel
the pain
but know
there is something
greater

I must
learn

I wish
there were
an
easier
way

maybe
next
year

