

**And God Wept: A Modern Midrash on the Binding of Isaac**  
**By Rabbi Esther Adler**

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*And the angel of the Lord called out of heaven to him and said, "Abraham, Abraham," and Abraham said, "Here I am," and the angel said, "Lay not your hand on the lad, neither do him any harm, for now I know you are a God-fearing man, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." (Gen. 22:12)*

Before giving Abraham his blessing, God wept. Tears of disappointment rained on Mount Moriah, Abraham had broken the commandment, *"You shall love the Lord your God,"*<sup>1</sup> dashing the hope for a people driven by love.

"If only Abraham had listened to his heart," God thought.  
"I certainly gave him enough opportunity. When I first called him to this task, I gave him three chances to refuse, and all I got was silence."

God recalled the conversation: *"Take your son..."*<sup>2</sup>

Abraham was silent...

"Your favorite son, Abraham, the one you waited so many years to conceive..."

More silence...

"Your son Isaac! Abraham, do you hear what I'm saying? The son who will fulfill all of my promises! I'm asking you to kill him."

Just silence.

"The one whom you love, Abraham, the one whom you love! Listen to your heart Abraham! I haven't given you free will – would you do anything I asked? Even this horrible act? Without any protest?"

"Oh Abraham, where is your love? I know you have a keen sense of justice – I remember your arguments on behalf of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah<sup>3</sup> – But Abraham, where is your love?"

And God shuddered with the memory of Isaac's plaintive question to his father, *"Here is the firestone and the knife, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"*<sup>4</sup>  
How Abraham lied, "God will see to the lamb, my son." Lying in God's own name,

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 6:5

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 22:2

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 18:23-32

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 22:7

no less. And how he lied to Sarah too, saying he was taking Isaac away to study.<sup>5</sup> Sarah never would have let him go if she had known.

And God felt the chill of the knife as the angel had to call twice to finally stop Abraham. There Abraham was, arm extended, knife in hand, ready to slay his own son.

*“Abraham - - ABRAHAM!”<sup>6</sup>*

So intent in his ambition, so lost in his zealousness, eyes glazed, he didn't even hear the call he should have been hoping and listening for. The angel had to call twice. It was almost too late.

“Why, Abraham, why?” God thought.

“Why didn't you refuse? Why didn't you argue like I thought you would? I thought you would tell me that real faith means respecting human life and love? That's what I wanted to hear. Don't you know that saving a life is like saving the world, and that destroying a life is like destroying the world?<sup>7</sup> You could have saved the world, Abraham, instead you were ready to destroy it and I had to stop you.”

God sighed.

“That's the way it has to be, I suppose. At least he hears my voice. A patriarch who fears me will have to be good enough. I will bless Abraham and multiply his seed, and let them possess the gate of their enemies,<sup>8</sup> but oh, how I wish I could give him the full blessing I had reserved had he shown me loved me.

“What a world it would have been – no enemies to worry about, a world based on love rather than fear – oh well, we'll all have to make the best of it.”

*And the angel of the Lord called out of heaven a second time and said...(Gen. 22:15-18)*

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<sup>5</sup> Midrash Tanhuma Vayera 22-23, and others

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 22:11

<sup>7</sup> Mishnah Sanhedrin [4:9](#); Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 37a

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 22:17