

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Passing Life's Tests: Spiritual Reflections on the Trial of Abraham, the Binding of Isaac

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Introduction: Seeing Ourselves in the Biblical Mirror

What do you seek when you study Torah or Scripture?

Explore how you understand the authority of the Bible and its wisdom. Does it matter who wrote it? Does it matter if God gave it or how God gave it?

What is the value of using multiple approaches to derive meaning from an ancient text? What are the challenges?

Part One: Translation & Commentary

Once you have read through the translation, summarize the story and its plot line. Then describe places you would want to explore further, areas that shocked you, surprised you, made you angry or disappointed.

Where there areas that elevated you or inspired you?

Working through the commentary, do you find yourself drawn to one of the four approaches more than the others? Why?

Do you find yourself distanced from one of the approaches more than the others? Why?

What surprised you in the commentary?

What did you see in the story that you had missed before?

What would you add as your own commentary?

Part Two: Deepening Our Encounters

Share a challenge or tragedy you faced in your own life. How did it change you? What did it teach you?

Think about the *Akedah* in the light of your own life experience. What would you learn after being bound on the altar?

Share a time you gave yourself completely to someone, to a community, to a moment of possibility. How does a stance of *Hineni* change your life?

Sometimes we live in the moment and at other times we focus on preparing for times yet to come. How do you know when to prioritize one or the other? Can you recall a

time when that assessment was crucial? Can you share such a challenge you are currently facing?

How do you reconcile love and loyalty to a person with love and loyalty for an ideal or value? Can you think of a moment of such conflict in your own life? How did you finesse that tension? If you had it to do again, would your response be different? Did Abraham manage to balance his love for his son and his commitment to God's will? Did Isaac balance reverence for his father and love of life?

Sarah was conspicuously missing from the *Akedah* story. How do you think that shapes the telling? Talk about the ways that women might be marginalized in your own community. In what ways could you help them attain greater centrality? Are there others in your community who are invisible or shunted aside? How might focusing on Sarah in the *Akedah* help serve as a corrective?

If the people who know you best were to be asked, would they think that you live out your core values, or would they identify a gap between the talk you talk and the walk you walk? Would you? How does Abraham deal with that gap in his own life? How might you deal with it on your own?

What are you prepared to sacrifice for your highest ideals? What are you prepared to impose on those you love for your highest ideals? What do you learn from Abraham and Isaac's wrestling with that same challenge?

Relations between parents and children are often complex, integrating deep love and strong conflict at the same time. Talk about Abraham and Isaac and their father-son relationship. How can you learn from them and improve your own parent-child relationships?

Life brings great joys and also great suffering. Think about the ways that Abraham and Isaac suffered in the *Akedah*. Reflect on moments in your own life of great exultation and great sorrow. How does seeing yourself in the light of the biblical tale shape your experience of these perennial realities?

Conclusion: Belief—Know Before Whom You Stand

Is there a test you are currently facing? How does your faith help you (or hinder you) in coping with it?

How can you find ways to make meaning in your struggles?

What possibilities do the examples of Abraham and Isaac open for you that you had not previously considered?

What resources does the example of a God who stays Abraham's hand and sends the ram offer you that you had not previously considered?