

This Week In Torah Va'year
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As I type this, the polls are open and the result of the elections are not yet known. All I know is that I voted as I hope ALL of you did. What the outcome will be is out of our hands. In Quantum physics, there is a theorem called "Schrodinger's cat", developed by the Austrian physicist Erwin Schrodinger. His theory is that if you place a cat in a box with radioactive material, it will have a 50-50 chance of dying. The moment before one opens the container, the belief in quantum physics is that the cat is both alive AND dead. Until one can ascertain with certainty the status of that cat, it must be assumed both states exist. It is applied in the realm of particle physics through the concept of superposition--- that particles can occupy multiple spaces until it is examined. That is the status right now of the ballots—as they remain sealed before counting, both candidates can be seen as victors and losers!

This concept comes into play in this week's *parasha* as well. Abraham journeys for three days with his son Isaac after being commanded by God to offer him up as a sacrifice on top of a mountain that God will show to Abraham. For three days, Abraham could easily be in a state similar to Schrodinger's cat—fearful for the fate of his son but trusting God will protect them, he sets out early to perform a *mitzvah*—that is perceived by the Rabbis as a sign of his enthusiasm and faith. A 19th century Polish Rabbi, Joseph Pachinsky, compares this to the journey of two men on a train heading toward the big city. One man is a tourist and he is excited to see the vast metropolis and absorb the sites and sounds. For him, this is an andragogical adventure. Yet, the other man is in shackles, heading to the city to face punishment for some transgression. For him, there is no legerity in the moment; there are fear and trepidation. The two men co-exist in the same place, at the same time, on the same train heading to the same destination. Torah readers can easily apply this in two fashions—first, an inner conflict reverberating within Abraham's soul; the second, the status of the relationship between Abraham and Isaac as a father prepares for an action that could lead to a terrible fate and a son who is journeying with his father whom he loves.

The Torah does not record what occurs on the journey. That is in the realm of the midrashists. Rabbi Pachinsky remarked that these days showed the righteousness and uniqueness of Abraham. He is at peace, in the moment before the metaphoric box is opened and the fate of Schrodinger's cat is known. His faith and trust in God are strong so that permits him to be mindful of with whom he is traveling. As he waits for the sign from God, he treasures the time they have together. He is present. He is aware. He is not in control—for him to disobey God would mean surrendering his place in the *Olam HaBah* [in the World-to come], according to Rabbi Pachinsky. To disobey the command might save his son at that moment but it would abdicate his place in fulfilling God's promise and potential. Plus God already said that through Abraham, a great and mighty nation would emerge. How would that be possible if his only son, who he loved, was taken from him? Faith and trust balanced with surrendering control over what he had no control over were essential for Abraham to face the task that was ahead of him.

A note must be inserted here about the world of Rabbi Pachinsky. 19th century Poland was a land of chaos, especially in the shtetls. He was preaching to a community of Jews that have had to surrender their control of the socio-economic and political fate. The only thing in their control was their spiritual fate as it pertained to their relationship with God. European powers trampled through their poverty-ridden lives as geographic borders were redrawn. Pogroms ravaged villages. Anti-Semitism was

rampant. His message about Abraham was essential for his disciples to hear. There were forces beyond their control, but what was in their hands was their faithfulness. He encouraged others to experience the reality of faith rather than living with doom and gloom about predictions for tomorrow that they could not control.

Abraham's faith was strong. He believed that the verb in the text was essential to understand and embrace—this was a test. He understood that God already swore that Abraham and his prodigy would be the successor of the covenantal relationship. He believed that if his descendants were going to be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands on the shore, then Isaac will survive the *akediah* [the story is the BINDING of Isaac, not his sacrifice!]. Abraham could argue with God as he did over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. He could doubt divine intervention with the story of Sarah in Pharaoh's palace, only to learn of God's omnipotence. Abraham learned to accept God's will—that was the essence of his faith.

For us, we live with uncertainty. We yearn for certain outcomes. We fought and campaigned and rallied to make them real. But now the votes are cast. Like the fate of Schrodinger's cat, we will wait and see. But from Abraham, we learn that the anxiety many of us are experiencing can be soothed by our faith and trust in God. What will be will be. We will deal with it then. But for now—we wait and see that we are all in this together. We are on a sacred journey, similar to that of Abraham and Isaac. How we deal with it can be shaped by how Abraham dealt with his journey.