

This Week In Torah *Va'yera*

There is a poem that is read at funerals and during *Yizkor* services by Rabbi Alvin Fine. People seem to find real comfort in his words. It starts off: “Birth is a beginning, death is a destination; and life is a journey...” It might be familiar to you. There is one line that always leaves some questioning: From offense to forgiveness, From loneliness to love, From joy to gratitude, From pain to compassion, From grief to understanding, From fear to faith.” It is that “fear to faith” segment--- why are those 2 things seen as opposites in Rabbi Fine’s mind-set?

Keep that question in mind as we explore this week’s *parasha*. This week is the story of the *Akedah*, the binding of Isaac. One can say that Abraham moves from “fear to faith” as he receives the command from God, travels 3 days to Mount Moriah, ascends the mountain, binds Isaac, and holds the knife over him. “Fear to faith” is the outcome. But there is another perspective—that is Abraham already had faith. He trusted God to fulfill the Divine promise of the Covenant. Last week, we read in Genesis 15:6—“He [Abraham] trusted in God and God reconciled it with Abraham’s merit.” Abraham’s faith and trust was ever present—God acknowledged that and his righteousness that he demonstrated. There were battles Abraham fought out of personal promises made, but he refused to exploit the spoils of those wars. Next week, Abraham turns down the generosity of a land donation and insists on purchasing the land for full value. Abraham believed in God’s promise and acted with true *anavah*/humility as it unfolded. It is as if the words of Psalm 27:1 were in his soul: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?”

Abraham’s faith instilled a sense of confidence. It made firm his steps as he did what God expected him to do. The Psalmist says in 16:8: “I am ever mindful of the Lord’s presence; God is at my right-hand. I shall not be moved.” Abraham had faith, he trusted, and he fulfilled the command that God uttered to him as we start Genesis 22.

The “fear to faith” motif is, therefore, not one being scared and moving into confidence. It is rather blind obedience out of fear to act firmly because of one’s faith! Abraham trusted in God and he lived by it by performing the *Akedah*, binding of Isaac. And this is a valuable lesson for us—no, don’t tie your children up. Rather do what we read in our

prayer book every morning: “Blessed are You, O God, who makes firm each person’s steps.”

May your faith and trust in God transform you so that you too can act with confidence.