D'VAR TORAH AKEDAH: WHAT DO YOU LIVE FOR?
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This Shabbat we read of the sacrifice, or rather, attempted sacrifice of Isaac, by his father Abraham.

SUMMARIZE THE STORY

The story raises many questions, one question the story forces us to confront is the question, what are we willing to die for? With our nation at war, with people choosing to stay or evacuate from their homes in the face of mother nature's violent wrath of flood and fire. With our country bitterly divided over deeply root political and moral issues. We have all thought about this question, but have we answered it?

Martin Luther King Jr. once taught, that if an individual has not discovered something that he will die for, he hasn't discovered what is worth living for. As we look once again at this familiar story Abraham's answer is quite clear, he was willing to sacrifice his son for what he believed to be a cause greater than his son. You and I adamantly disagree with this, but it is a story designed to evoke our own questions of sacrifice, for the idea of self sacrifice has become foreign to many of us, and yet it is a central

part of Judaism. So as we re-visit this parsha I encourage you to ponder your own answer to three questions:

1. What are you willing to die for?
2. What are you willing to sacrifice, for the greater good?
3. Is there is actually reward in sacrifice?

So to question one: For what are we willing to sacrifice ourselves – for what are we willing to die? Abraham said he would do it because God commended it of him, but what calls upon us? Joe Walker, an author who writes a lot about values poses it this way:

"Do we value liberty? Then every once in a while we're going to have to fight -- and possibly die -- to protect it. Do we value free speech? Then occasionally we're going to have to give up the floor and allow someone else to espouse beliefs and ideas that are diametrically opposed to our own. Do we value human dignity? Then we need to be prepared to share with others who are less fortunate." He continues, "Values aren't free. They cost -- sometimes a lot. That's why they are called values. We need to be careful about what we choose to value. Eventually, there's a price to be paid, and we need to be sure it's worth it."

So is there anything, besides your family, that you value so much that you would give your life for it?

It is not often that we are called upon for such commitments as in thinking about life and death, maybe it is too hard a question, too hypothetical, take it down a notch, What are you willing to sacrifice for the greater good?

A brief story:

Rabbi Mordechai saved his pennies all year round in order to have enough money to buy an etrog (citron) for the mitzvah on Sukkot. The etrog is the lemon shaped looking fruit that is used as a symbol on the holiday of the festival of booths. It is also a very expensive item. On the way to buy the etrog, he encountered a man who was weeping bitterly, and his inquiry revealed that this man had made his meager living as a porter, hauling things by horse and wagon. That day his horse had perished, and he was now without a means of livelihood. Rabbi Mordechai promptly gave the man the entire sum of money he had saved throughout the year, in order that he might buy another horse. The man rushed off over-joyed, and Rabbi Mordechai turned his eyes to heaven saying, "Dear God, all other Jews will fulfill the mitzvah of Sukkot with an etrog, but I will do so with a horse."

How many of us are willing to give even if it alters our own experience? How many of us are willing to sacrifice in order to repair relationships? From the simplest tasks, to the most

profound, do we fail to act quickly enough? When your spouse asks you to do the dishes – how fast do we act, for we will be sacrificing some good TV time. How many of us are willing to improve our relationships, by waking up early to finish some project, mow the lawn, baby-sit, listen to someone without offering advice, sacrificing our pride so that another might feel proud? How many of us are willing to sacrifice our ego to learn something new, to share in something different? How many of us are willing to sacrifice our power in order to empower others?

Finally, is there reward in sacrifice? Ralph Waldo Emerson taught, "Self sacrifice is the real miracle out of which all the reported miracles grew." Think of the sacrifices of our biblical ancestors – without Moses giving up the comfort of living in the Pharaoh's palace, there would have been no redemption from slavery. What a miracle! Without the heroism of the many righteous gentiles, millions more would have been killed during the Holocaust. What a miracle! Without the bravery of the firefighters during 9/11, 10s of thousands more would have been incinerated. What a miracle! Without your parents driving you to all your activities, you would not have become the person you are. Without your children sharing themselves to help care for you when you were sick, or your mobility decreased you would have been alone. Without our people volunteering their time on our

Carring Community or our Ethical Action committee, many would not be fed or cared for! These are daily miracles because of the sacrifices we have all made – yes there is reward in sacrifice.

This Shabbat of the Akeddah, the near sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham, ask yourselves these questions? What are you willing to die for, what are you willing to sacrifice for, in the answer to that I think we will all find many reasons to live.