NOT LIKE ABRAHAM

TEMPLE SHOLOM

RABBI DAN MOSKOVITZ

OCTOBER 30, 2015

Tonight is the nexus of two terrible events in Jewish history, the story of the binding of Isaac which we will read tomorrow morning and the anniversary of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, which we will commemorate Monday evening at 730pm.

The story of the Akedah, the Binding of Isaac. It's a troubling story on so many levels.

In Jewish tradition the story of the the near sacrifice of Isaac at the hand of his father Abraham is held up as a banner of faith. We are taught that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son was a sign of his everlasting faith in God.

Every time I read it, I am appalled that we celebrate this moment, champion it as a symbol of Jewish faith. It is in large part the story of a man so caught up with religious fervour and fanaticism that he nearly takes a knife to his own son.

In the context of the stabbing attacks that are sweeping through Israel over the last few weeks the parallels are unavoidable and uncomfortable.

There are differences. Abraham's intent is to sacrifice his son, not murder him – but the distinction is really in the eye of the beholder, or knife holder. I would hope that as Isaac looked up at his father, the knife inches from his throat he was not thinking, 'this is God's will'. I imagine he was screaming for his very life, screaming for his father to stop. Or maybe he was paralyzed with fear, unable to comprehend what was happening.

I am horrified for Isaac.

Most importantly Abraham differs from the terrorists because he withholds the knife, he doesn't go through with it. But the fanaticism that leads him to think God is asking this of him is still there. Its in our Torah, its accessible as we have seen from Jewish terrorists to murder in the name of God and Torah. You don't have to dig too deep in our text to justify barbarism.

I've always read the story as it was Abraham's conscience that holds back the blade from his son's throat, a realization that this is wrong, that a God he believes in would not ask this or want this of him.

But a straightforward reading of the text is that it's an angel of God that puts an end to the test, only after it is clear that Abraham is prepared to go through with the unconscionable deed.
We have fanaticism in Judaism, we always have, from Abraham and his son, to the retribution brought by

their descendants for the rape of their sister Dinah, to the *milchemet mitzvah* the wars fought against the seven nations God said must be wiped out for the Israelites to settle the land to the zealots of Masada that chose suicide rather than assimilation. All the way to present day and the assassination of Rabin at the hand of a religious Jew who was doing what he felt God and Torah had commanded, demanded of him to do.

Yigal Amir, *y'mach shmo* (his name should be blotted out) justified his murder of Rabin on the basis that Rabin was a *rodef*, a pursuer that was threatening the Jewish people. And under rabbinic, Talmudic law, if someone presents mortal danger to you, you are permitted to use deadly force to stop them. In fact it says if someone is trying to kill you, you should get up early and kill them first.

It was on that basis, from that place of fear that the assassin justified his deed. His rabbis blessed it and in

Israel today, there are some who still celebrate it. Just this week fans of Israeli soccer club Beitar Jerusalem chanted the name of the assassin. Footage of the incident, which took place Monday night in Tel Aviv's Bloomfield Stadium during a game against Maccabi Tel Aviv, aired on Israel's Channel 2, you can watch it on YouTube. To them Amir the assassin is celebrate as a hero

I am not interested in spin tonight, I am not interested in commentary that can justify or explain away these moments of madness as being examples of Godliness. Nor am I inclined to the rhetoric that argues that these are rare exceptions, that Jews are not extremists or fanatics.

I put this in the same category of those who wrongly reason hat Jews are not afflicted by addiction, substance abuse or domestic violence. We are not different by design, we are human beings, we are only different by

behaviour and sometimes our behaviour is no different, no better than the rest of the world. Its supposed to be that's what choseness is all about but we don't always, or even often meet that standard.

And let me add sometimes the Torah just says what it says and I disagree with it. Sometimes Jewish history is what it is and I am ashamed of it. Sometimes Jews act in the name of all of us and I am embarrassed by them.

That doesn't make me hate the Jewish people, or remove myself from Judaism though I would understand if it did for some, I know it does for some. Some throw their hands up at religion, all religion, they point, incorrectly to the idea that more wars have been fought in the name of religion than any other cause, which is not actually the case, but it feels like that some times and so they say enough with religion and walk away.

I get it, I understand it, but for me, the rise of extremism and fanaticism in Judaism; compels me to draw closer to engage with our religion, to shape it, and reform it.

The most often heard phrases in the Torah are love your neighbour, love the stranger remember you were once strangers. That's the Judaism I believe in, that's the God I believe in, all the rest, as Hillel said is commentary.

I refuse to let Judaism be hijacked or denigrated by those who use Judaism or religion in general as a justification to destroy, divide and hate.

I had a shop teacher in High School who taught me an eternal truth, he taught that their are two types of people in the world, those that like to tear things apart and those that like to put things together.

I guess I like to put things together, or in this case back together after others have torn them a part. I am hoping, betting, praying that you like to do that too.

In two weeks Anat Hoffman one of the founders of Women of the Wall and the Executive Director of the Israel Religious Action Centre of Reform Judaism, our social justice arm in Israel will be here in our community. She will be speaking at Temple Sholom on Monday, Nov 16 at 7:30p.

Anat likes to put things together, even if she has to tear them down first in order to remodel and rebuild. Read the interview with her on the front page of the Jewish Independent this week. She's got chutzpah! She sees this period not only as a fight for the nation of Israel and its security but for the soul of the Jewish people, and I do as well.

I was a chaplain for a year and a half at City of Hope Cancer Hospital in Southern California. City of Hope had a motto over the entry to their campus, it read, "There is no profit in saving the body if in the process you destroy the soul." I thin the same must be said about the Jewish people and Israel today. There is no profit in saving the land of Israel if in the process we destroy the soul of the Jewish people. We must save both, we must care for both, we must fight for both.

In my reading Abraham realizes that, in my reading Abraham holds back the knife because he realizes you cannot love a God that demands you murder children, you cannot build a people, a religion a faith on such faulty reasoning. To our Muslim brothers (and they are brothers as we share the same father Abraham) I reiterate that and to our own radicals and extremists I say that as well. When religion implores you to murder others its no longer holiness, it's a defamation of God's name.