

## **Arguing With God and *Tiqqun Olam*: A Response to André LaCocque on the *Aqedah***

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### *Setting*

In a recent set of articles, I offered a critique of the behavior of Abraham and God as described in Genesis 22.<sup>1</sup> Let me summarize them briefly here.<sup>2</sup> How could God ask a person, a father, to sacrifice his beloved son? Why would a deity who had just promised to make Abraham the father of a nation suddenly retract that commitment? In requiring a father to kill his son, does God not undermine the greatest ethical norm of society? What kind of deity would torment a person with this kind of misery?

The Bible's account of God's "testing" of Abraham recalls the experiment of Stanley Milgram. While demonstrating the willingness of participants to follow orders no matter how ethically dubious (in this case, torturing fellow human beings in order to fulfill the dictates of an authority figure), Milgram never received informed consent from participants and consequently put some of them through an ordeal that recalls Abraham's agony. Even if Milgram had a laudable goal, as God may have had – to test the limits of free will or to abolish human sacrifice – modern protocols preclude the use of any means necessary to obtain a particular objective.

In addition, Abraham, Isaac, and Ishmael fare little better. In Genesis 21, God allows Sarah to expel Hagar and Ishmael and leave them alone in the wilderness. By calling Isaac the beloved and sole son of Abraham in Genesis 22, God effectively disowns Ishmael. And how does God reward Isaac? Being carried off to a mountain for sacrifice is not the gift that many human beings desire.

Further, what effect does God's experiment have on Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Sarah and their descendants? Contact between father and son ceases. Husband and wife converse no more. Sarah dies immediately afterward. A series of events illustrate the occluded vision of Isaac and Jacob: a blind Isaac is unable to see Rebekah's and Jacob's machinations (just as his father betrays him, so he is betrayed by his

family); Jacob sleeps with Leah thinking that she is Rachel; and the story of Joseph is filled with the characters misidentifying one another and not accurately seeing who is who and what is what.

While God's behavior demands questioning and criticism, Abraham acts as an obedient servant ready to follow the repugnant dictates of his commander. How would we react to the news of a father who drove out to the Appalachian hills to slaughter his son because he heard God ask him to do so? Why does Abraham not bother to engage Sarah, Isaac, or anyone else and discuss his vision with them? Why does he not argue with God, as Moses did in Exodus, or as he himself did at Sodom (Genesis 18:22-32)? How can we idealize a man who obeys unquestioningly, when we categorically reject that same behavior from Nazis like Adolf Eichmann who said that they were simply following orders? Further, do we promote submissive victimhood at the expense of self-protection and self-preservation when we idealize the image of a son who willingly allows his father to slaughter him? In light of violence in the world (with nations and children sending their children as sacrifices out to battle) and in light of the genocidal massacres of the twentieth century, does the story of Abraham and Isaac promote violence?

The story of the *Aqedah* figures prominently in Jewish liturgy, especially on the second day of the celebration of the New Year festival, *Rosh ha-Shanah*. In some rabbinic traditions and traditional Jewish liturgical texts, recitation of the *Aqedah* is seen as having an atoning effect that allows God to forgive Israel for its sins.<sup>3</sup> Many Jewish interpreters regard the behavior of both Abraham and Isaac as worthy of admiration in one way or another: Abraham's willingness to "sin" for the sake of God demonstrates Jewish devotion to God;<sup>4</sup> the absolute obedience of Abraham shows the commitment that Jews must make to the commandments (*mitzvot*) of Torah;<sup>5</sup> Isaac's willingness to die serves as a model for Jewish strength amidst the suffering caused by persecutions from the Middle Ages through the Holocaust;<sup>6</sup> and the intervention of the angels, who prevent Abraham from murdering Isaac, demonstrates the fundamental value of human life.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, a counter-tradition exists among Jewish commentators who question Abraham's actions. Martin Buber suggests that Abraham may not have heard the voice of God, but something else.<sup>8</sup> Others view the *Aqedah* as a story of atonement in which Abraham seeks to atone for his weakness when he allows Sarah to expel Sarah and Hagar into the wilderness.<sup>9</sup> Emil Fackenheim regards the story as a communal experience of Jews (not just that of an individual, Abraham), who know that Isaac will not die and that Israel will receive the Torah. He focuses

not on the experience of the protagonists in the story, but on the readers who experience the story.<sup>10</sup> Emmanuel Levinas suggests that ethics impinge on the story, when Abraham refuses to stab Isaac with his knife. In Levinas' view, it is the face of Isaac (not God's words) that changes the direction of Abraham's actions.<sup>11</sup>

Interpreters from very earliest Christianity have traditionally seen the *Aqedah* as a paradigm for God's sacrifice of his son, Jesus.<sup>12</sup> Modern Christian interpreters have taken various approaches to the dilemmas posed by Genesis 22. For the Danish theologian, Soren Kierkegaard, Abraham's loyalty to God takes precedence over his commitment to family, just as "religion" takes precedence over "ethics." For this reason, Kierkegaard reads Genesis 22 as a meta-ethical text, from which he coins the famous phrase, "teleological suspension of the ethical."<sup>13</sup> According to Gerhard von Rad, God tests Abraham's willingness to give up everything, placing his trust in God's grace. When faced with tragic circumstances, humans should (like Abraham) recognize God's beneficent intentions and have faith in God.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Arguing with God as an Alternative to André LaCocque's Approach*

While a text such as the *Aqedah* has many potential, legitimate readings, most of them do not fully acknowledge the immoral and unethical nature of the passage as standardly read. Sometimes, they sidestep the difficult questions. More often they attempt either to exonerate God and Abraham or to mitigate their culpability. This is what André LaCocque also does in his reading of this passage.

Many (both Jewish and Christian) have done this in the past and continue to do so. They have a rich interpretive and theological tradition on which to rely. This does not make it either correct or salutary, however. Characterizing the story as a meta-ethical narrative (as Dr. LaCocque does, following Kierkegaard) may acquit God and Abraham of a crime, but it does not acknowledge that numerous lay readers of the Bible (and many non-lay readers as well) regard these texts as morally binding and view the behavior of the protagonists as paradigmatic. Indeed, Kierkegaard saw himself as a kind of modern-day Abraham, who abandoned his paramour, Regina, in favor of his devotion to writing and theology.

In contrast to Dr. LaCocque,<sup>15</sup> Jewish interpreters recognize that the entire *Torah* impinges on ethics. Dr. LaCocque apparently does not understand this, when he critiques Ibn Ezra for allegedly misunderstanding the distinction between "commandment" and "law."

*Mitzvah* (“commandment,” or perhaps better, “obligation”), *huq* (“law”), *Torah* (properly translated “teaching” or “guide,” more accurately than “law”), and *halakah* (“case law”—law through legal precedent), all fall within the category of ethics and law. That is simply what the Hebrew means and has meant for generations.

At the same time, a “covenant” implies a mutual relationship that binds both parties. Each has responsibilities and obligations. Contra Kierkegaard (who ironically shares much in common with Friedrich Nietzsche),<sup>16</sup> this partnership places human beings and God within an ethical framework, in which each commits to acting appropriately and morally toward one another.

For this reason, Jewish tradition has a long history of pious Jews (including Abraham and Moses) who engage God in dialogue, debate, and even protest.<sup>17</sup> In the Jewish worldview, God understands the relationships of humans and God as one involving negotiation, bargaining, and debate. Indifference is the worst sin, whether on the part of Jews or of God. Engaging God in lively repartee, and even one-upmanship, shows that humans at least acknowledge the presence and influence of God. Even more important, an argument forces both parties to clarify their positions and compels them to relate to one another in a meaningful way. Arguing with God also implies that humans have a role to play in the world’s development.

This is a practice in which Abraham should have engaged, as he did at Sodom in Genesis 18, challenging God to act in a just and compassionate manner. This is certainly what (according to the Bible, TaNaK) God expects of human beings. At the very least, an argument would have forced God to clarify the motivations behind, and reasons for, the hideous request to murder a child. At the most, God might have reconsidered (as God did after obliterating humanity with the flood in the Noah story), when God promised never to destroy humanity again.

Instead of challenging God, Abraham obeys God without hesitation in silent obedience: no argument, no debate, no questions even. This seems the opposite of the typical Jewish approach. Here is a passage from “Tevye Strikes it Rich” by the renowned Yiddish short-story writer, Sholem Aleichem, as spoken by Tevye the Milkman, famous for his exploits in the film musical, “Fiddler on the Roof.” A poor Jew in a small village, he said:

. . . Master of the Universe, what have I done to deserve all this? Am I or am I not a Jew like any other? Help! *Re’ey-no be’onyeyno*, See us in our

affliction—take a good look at us poor folk slaving away and do something about it, because if You don't, just who do You think will? . . . *Refo'eynu veneyrofey*, Heal our wounds and make us whole—please concentrate on the healing because the wounds we already have . . . . *Boreyk oleynu*, Bless the fruits of this year – kindly arrange a good harvest of corn, wheat, and barley, although what good it will do for me is more than I can say: Does it make any difference to my horse, I ask You, if the oats I can't afford to buy him are expensive or cheap? But God doesn't tell a man what He thinks, and a Jew had better believe that He knows what He's up to. *Velamalshinim al tehi tikvoh*, May the slanderers have no hope – those are all the big shots who say there is no God: what wouldn't I give to see the look on their faces when they line up for Judgment Day! They'll pay with back interest for everything they've done, because God has a long memory, one doesn't play around with Him. No, what he wants is for us to be good, to beseech and cry out to him . . . . *Ov harakhamon*, Merciful, loving Father! *Shma koyleynu*—You better listen to what we tell You! . . . *Khus verakheym oleynu* – pay a little attention to my wife and children, the poor things are hungry! . . . *Retsey*—take decent care of your people again, as once You did long ago in the days of our Temple, when the priests and the Levites sacrificed before You . . .<sup>18</sup>

Note that the most important thing a Jew can do is beseech and cry out to God.

Real-life Jews also have argued with God. Most famous is the great Hasidic rebbe, Levi Yitzhaq of Berdichev (1740-1809) who constantly engaged God in lively arguments on behalf of the Jewish people. Here is one example.

After *Yom Kippur* the Berditchever called over a tailor and asked him to relate his argument with God on the day before. The tailor said: “I declared to God, You wish me to repent of my sins, but I have committed only minor offenses: I may have kept left-over cloth,

or I may have eaten in a non-Jewish home, where I worked, without washing my hands. But you, O Lord, have committed grievous sins: You have taken away babies from their mothers, and mothers from their babies. Let's call it quits: You forgive me, and I'll forgive You." Said the Berditchever, "Why did you let God off so easily? You might have forced Him to redeem all of Israel."<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, God might have expected Abraham to ask questions and parse God's words, interpreting the Hebrew more carefully and subtly. While faith has an important role to play, it does not displace reason and tradition as modes through which humans interpret the words of God, whether orally or in scripture. On this account, Jews can interpret biblical texts on the basis of logic and of customary practice, especially in response to changing circumstances.

Starting from that vantage point, I offered "another reading" (*davar aher*) of Genesis 22 that has its origins in *midrash* and Jewish Bible commentary: *Genesis Rabbah*, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Gersonides and Bachya.<sup>20</sup> *'lh ('alah)* does not really mean a sacrifice, but rather an "ascent," a "bringing up" (the literal meaning of the word). When God speaks to Abraham, God speaks elliptically. God never tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, but rather to bring Isaac up the mountain. In this way, God allows God's message to have multiple interpretations. Abraham chooses the sacrificial interpretation, but an alternative exists where Abraham could choose the climbing expedition. There are several internal clues to support this reading: 1) the ram suddenly appears to Abraham; Abraham could have seen it, if he was not looking down; 2) God does not intervene at the end of the story, but angels intervene, suggesting that God does not approve of Abraham's choice; 3) the absence of Isaac on the way down the mountain, as well as the subsequent silence between Abraham and Sarah and between Abraham and Isaac, implies a criticism of Abraham: Moriah effectively ends Abraham's career as a patriarch.

Abraham fails to question God, and he, his family, and his descendants must suffer the tragic consequences of his inaction and silence. To some extent, we all must face this. By reinterpreting the text, we can begin to transform the past and encourage one another to encounter God as adults who think for ourselves.<sup>21</sup>

This is not an "escape," as Dr. LaCocque describes my position,<sup>22</sup> but rather an attempt to maintain the viability of certain

biblical passages in a modern context. If we accept Dr. LaCocque's approach, how then is Abraham's unquestioning obedience any different from that of Adolf Eichmann who claimed that he was simply following orders when he oversaw the construction of the gas chambers? The holocaust and other modern atrocities force one to reexamine scriptural texts and question their traditional interpretation.

*Other Issues Elicited by André LaCocque's Article*

Dr. LaCocque suggests that I am shifting the burden of blame from God to the victims of the holocaust – a surprising statement in light of Jewish experience.<sup>23</sup> In fact, I am comparing Abraham to the European bureaucrats and soldiers who unquestioningly obeyed unconscionable orders. In spite of its flaws, Milgram's experiment certainly showed the extent to which human beings are willing to obey orders in spite of the horrific consequences. I am suggesting that human beings need to rethink their relationship to authority and that reinterpreting Genesis 22 constitutes a small part of that process.

Further, calling both Kierkegaard and Abraham "giants" (i.e. "great"), rather than "average" or "good,"<sup>24</sup> implies that "greatness" means overriding ethics and renegeing on the obligation to "love your neighbor." (Leviticus 19:18). It is likely that Isaac and Regina thought differently about the supposed "greatness" of father and lover respectively.

In this regard, Dr. LaCocque's reference to the execution of Adolf Eichmann is gratuitous.<sup>25</sup> In spite of the horrors of the holocaust (resulting in the murder of close to half the world's Jewish population), the Israeli government has executed only one of the Nazi mass murderers (Eichmann). This contrasts starkly with the American record on capital punishment. Comparing the Israeli treatment of Eichmann to the visionary peacemaking of Anwar Sadat also is specious. Before he became a peace maker, Sadat was a military leader responsible for the deaths of thousands. Sadat was indeed a great man, but not in the way Dr. LaCocque envisions. Like Sadat, Yitzhak Rabin, the former prime minister of Israel, also broke with aspects of his military past to reach out in peace to the Palestinians. The greatness of Sadat and Rabin stems not from their "beyondness" (as Dr. LaCocque puts it),<sup>26</sup> but from their immersion in the hard realities of life, often violent, that led them to propose a relationship between Arabs and Jews that is grounded in common humanity and shared values.

*Tiqqun Olam*

Rather than focusing on the flaws and lapses of the protagonists in the *Aqedah*, I would like now to suggest yet another reading of the passage. This involves the treatment of Abraham and God in a more favorable fashion, by examining the broader context of Genesis 22 and by attempting to understand the predicament in which both found themselves.

From the very beginning of the biblical story, disorder existed in the created world. Genesis 1-2 described this chaos and confusion, using the Hebrew phrase, *tohu vebohu*, variously translated: “shapeless and formless,”<sup>27</sup> “unformed and void,”<sup>28</sup> “unformed void,”<sup>29</sup> “without form and empty,”<sup>30</sup> “astonishingly empty,”<sup>31</sup> “wild and waste,”<sup>32</sup> and “welter and waste.”<sup>33</sup> The rest of Genesis describes God attempting to impose order on a recalcitrant creation—with mixed success.

In response to the evident disorder of the world and of human society, especially as described in Genesis, Kabbalistic writers offered the story of the broken vessels (*shevirat ha-kelim*).<sup>34</sup> In particular, Isaac Luria (1534-1572) saw it as the defining myth for the cosmos.<sup>35</sup> For Luria (and for other Kabbalists), God (*Elohim* = God in an impersonal sense; *YHWH* = God in personal sense) was *Ain Sof* (“that which is without limit”), having no dimensional or physical boundaries, unlike creation which is made with limitations, both dimensionally and physically. Thus, God is truly “nothing” (*ain*) in the sense that God is “no thing” (not a definable object). Originally God had to withdraw from the world (*tsimtsum*) to allow creation to take place, because the unlimited cannot coexist with the limited; destruction would ensue. But events went awry. During the process of creation, the “vessels” (human, animal, vegetal, and inorganic) that channeled the divine light shattered (because the light was too powerful). This fractured, fragmented, and scattered the light of the vessels, especially that of primordial Adam, in many directions and places. Human beings possess small bits of these as “sparks” in their souls.

The breaking of the vessels and the ensuing entropy is something that took place before the universe was ever created. This chaos is part of the world and not fully under God’s control. It explains random accidents and natural disasters. The reference in Genesis 1:1 to *tohu vebohu* refers to it. After the creation, human beings attempted to reintegrate the fragmented sparks of God. For practitioners of mystical prayer, “intention” (*kavvanah*) and practice demand a continual effort to restore the light to the vessels and thus make our universe whole again:



*Tiqun Olam*.<sup>36</sup> It is also why many Jews came to accept the idea of reincarnation (*gilgul*), because it was the only way that individuals could fully reconnect to their proper place in the original soul of Adam that had fragmented. For Orthodox Jews this means fulfilling all 613 commandments. Exile (*galut*) exists so that Jews can help the entire world to lift its sparks of light to their proper place.

The universe is engaged in a perpetual process of self-restoration, moving inexorably to original perfection. This does not mean that God is not involved in history, but that God has limitations, given the coexistence of a limitless God (*Ain Sof*) and a world with boundaries. The infinite (God without boundaries) and the finite do not coexist easily, and often destruction and havoc result from their interaction. Further, this world by definition involves change, random accidents, growth, death, and rebirth. That is the natural process that characterizes this world that God has created. God and humanity must therefore partner to be able to effect a more perfect world and both must face together the uncertainty of the created world. For the sake of the world, God needs humans as much as humans need God.

Throughout the Torah, human beings attempt to restore the unity of the universe, but only succeed in reenacting the original fragmentation: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Babel, the drunkenness of Noah, the Golden Calf, and the breaking of the Ten Commandments tablets are all failed attempts at *Tiqun Olam*. Humans must make the right choices for integration to happen, but they usually fail to do so.

In the Garden of Eden, when presented with a choice, Adam and Eve choose disintegration. This decision sets humans and God on a difficult path. After the expulsion, God must experiment on humans and test them in various ways in order to have them use their free will to make the right choices as together they and God remake this world. God must respond to changing circumstances and unexpected developments. This sometimes involves God using subterfuge and “temptation” in Franz Rosenzweig’s sense.<sup>37</sup> In the Garden of Eden, God tempts Adam and Eve. Parents know what happens when children are told not to do something, but God does not yet have that information about humans and needs a partner with whom to work. Sometimes God commits outrageous acts, such as when God destroys all humanity in Noah’s time or when God scatters humanity when people cooperatively build the tower of Babel.

This also leads to the story of Mt. Moriah, where God does not test Abraham’s faith in my interpretation, but rather Abraham’s capacity to engage in intelligent interpretation and dialogue with God. God

creates the impression that God is referring to human sacrifice, when God is actually trying to encourage Abraham to think carefully and look at the depths of God's words. The events of Moriah are another of the incomplete attempts at universal integration. God gave Abraham the opportunity to recognize the ambiguity and malleability of divine language, but Abraham took God's words at face value (literally), envisioning those words as fixed objects, not as the flowing verbal wave of *Ain Sof*—that which is without limit.

Now Abraham does not pass the test with flying colors, but he, like his predecessors and his children, experienced extensive trauma.<sup>38</sup> In Genesis 22, he acts like an “automaton” and moves about his business in silent and grim obedience. When he finally arrives at Mt. Moriah, his eyes are like those of holocaust camp inmates looking down at the ground, going about the business of preparing to die, or preparing to deal with the murders of their family members and neighbors. For this reason, Elie Wiesel has rightfully called the story of the *Aqedah* “a survivor's story.”<sup>39</sup> Upon what does Abraham have to look back in the mythic story that precedes him: the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and the hard life that ensues for humans; the murder of Abel; God's genocide against humanity in the time of Noah; the loss of Abraham's own home, culture, and life in Ur; the twice-made promise of posterity for Abraham's family, each time dangled before Abraham, only to have God threaten to take it away from Abraham; the destruction of Sodom even after Abraham's courageous challenge to God; and the humiliation and expulsion of Hagar and Abraham's elder child, Ishmael. This is not an easy history or an easy life, though it may certainly reflect the situation of Israel in exile in the sixth century BCE and fits the experience of Jews over the centuries. It also reflects a world in which random accidents accumulate and in which human errors create a series of catastrophes.

Abraham is a victim entrapped in a cycle of violence, in which his own pain sometimes transforms itself into that of an abuser of his own family members. Faced with human beings who consistently make the wrong choices and with a world filled with random accidents out of God's control, God must try to find a way to lead Abraham, Israel, and humanity to a position where it can partner with God. This means actions on the part of God that are often at odds with human ethics and values.

For Jews and Christians, these stories do not serve as historical descriptions, nor do they necessarily provide models of behavior that we are supposed to imitate. Rather, they often function as mythic object

lessons meant to induce people to make better decisions than did the biblical protagonists themselves. The Moriah story should not serve to make readers do what Abraham did, but rather to learn from what he did not do (though one may admire and respect him). If we think that we understand the words of God, think again and examine the words closely. Maybe we are missing something: God's words have depths that we cannot easily plumb.

In Genesis 32, Jacob takes a different approach. Instead of surrendering to God, Jacob wrestles with God in human form and refuses to withdraw until God blesses him. This is the model (not that of Abraham at Moriah) that Jews have generally followed in their approach to the deity. God expects responsibility and responsiveness through engagement, questioning, and contestation – even aggressive resistance. The human relationship with God is not one-sided and entails forceful effort. *Tiqun Olam* inevitably involves resistance to God, even to the point of questioning God's own interpretation of biblical passages. To illustrate this, note a plea from Levi Yitzhaq of Berditchev:

Master of the World, David Your servant said *They stand this day for Your judgment, for all things are Your servants* [Psalm 119:91], and I, Levi Yitzhaq, will explain these words: *They stand this for Your judgment*, that is, the Children of Israel, the people You have chosen, the people who fulfill Your Torah, they stand this day—if one may utter it—to judge You! *For all things are your servants*, that is, they judge You for everything we bear—wicked and cruel decrees, pogroms and persecutions, poverty and sorrow—all these things are come upon us only because *we are your servants*. Just as King David said elsewhere: *For Your sake we are slain all the day long, and we are taken as sheep for the slaughter* [Psalm 44:23]. O Master of the World, since it is *for Your sake* that we die before our time, the judgment is that You must redeem us, and without delay.<sup>40</sup>

In the same manner as Levi Yitzhaq, we must seek to interpret Genesis 22 in order to protect the current sheep for the slaughter. In the twentieth century, humanity has experienced violent death on a massive scale, and Jews experienced the holocaust, horror beyond measure. That would certainly justify an argument and debate with God. If that does

not, I cannot imagine what would. As Rabbi Hillel said over two thousand years ago, "If not now, when?"<sup>41</sup>

Abraham reacted out of pain and anguish (the perspective of a victim) and made an understandable error on Mt. Moriah when he obeyed God unquestioningly. We have the opportunity to break the cycle of abuse and victimhood that Abraham initiated in his own family, learning from Abraham's error by listening to God more carefully and by arguing with God when necessary. In doing this, we begin to transform ourselves and one another into healthier human beings, made in the image of God—neither victims nor abusers; neither oppressed nor oppressors; neither persecutors nor martyrs. Then we can truly partner with God and activate the healing of the world, *Tiqqun Olam*.

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#### End Notes

<sup>1</sup>Laurence H. Kant, "Some Restorative Thoughts on an Agonizing Text: Abraham's Binding of Isaac and the Horror on Mt. Moriah (Gen. 22)," "Part 1," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 38 (2003): 77-109; and "Some Restorative Thoughts on an Agonizing Text: Abraham's Binding of Isaac and the Horror on Mt. Moriah (Gen. 22)," "Part 2," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 38 (2003): 161-94. Thanks to Dianne M. Bazell for her assistance with several points in this article.

<sup>2</sup>Except where indicated, all materials in this summary refer to L. H. Kant, "Restorative Thoughts."

<sup>3</sup>See L. H. Kant, "Restorative Thoughts," Part 1, 96-8; also Louis A. Berman, *The Akedah: The Binding of Isaac* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1997), 151-57.

<sup>4</sup>L. A. Berman, *Akedah*, 81-4; Jerome I. Gellman, *Abraham! Abraham! Kierkegaard and the Hasidim on the Binding of Isaac* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 65-75.

<sup>5</sup>L. A. Berman, *Akedah*, 111-16.

<sup>6</sup>Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial on the Legends and Lore of the Command to Abraham to Offer Isaac as a Sacrifice: The Akedah*, trans. Judah Goldin (New York: Pantheon, 1967) [originally published as *Me-agadot ha-akedah* (New York: Bet ha-Midrash le-rabanim ba-Amerikah, 1951)]; and L. A. Berman, *Akedah*, 123-34.

<sup>7</sup>L. A. Berman, *Akedah*, 123-34.

<sup>8</sup>Martin Buber, "The Suspension of Ethics," in Ruth Nanda Anshem (ed.), *Moral Principles of Action* (New York: Harper, 1952), 223-27 [reprinted in Will Herberg (ed.), *Four Existentialist Theologians*:

A Reader from the Works of Jacques Maritain, Nicolas Berdyaev, Martin Buber, and Paul Tillich (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1958), 248-53].

<sup>9</sup>David Polish, "Aqedat Yitzhaq—The Binding of Isaac," *Judaism* 6 (1957): 17-21; Marc Gellman, "Abraham and Isaac," *Moment* 1.10 (1976): 39-41; and L. A. Berman, *Akedah*, 81-84.

<sup>10</sup>Emil Fackenheim, *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 37-50. For a discussion of Fackenheim in this regard, see David Ellenson, "Emil Fackenheim and the Revealed Morality of Judaism," *Judaism* 100 (1976): 402-13.

<sup>11</sup>For a summary of Levinas' views, see Michael R. Michau, "The Ethical and Religious Revelation of the *Akedah*," *Minerva* 9 (2005): 134-52.

<sup>12</sup>See Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1993), Chapter 15; and L. H. Kant, "Restorative Thoughts," Part 1, 78-79, 95-98.

<sup>13</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983) [originally as *Frygt og Baeven* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1843)].

<sup>14</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (The Old Testament Library, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1972), 237-45 [originally published as *Das erste Buch Mose* (Das Alte Testament Deutsch, 2-4, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1972)]; and Gerhard von Rad, *Das Opfer des Abraham: Mit Texten von Luther, Kierkegaard, Kolaakowski, und Bildern von Rembrandt* (Kaiser Traktate, 6 Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1971).

<sup>15</sup>See LaCocque, 191-93, 198-99.

<sup>16</sup>Both Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and Nietzsche (1844-1900) share the idea that other factors trump ethics. For Kierkegaard, God's purposes may occasionally abrogate ethical codes. For Nietzsche, human moral regulations should ultimately not restrain human free will. Nietzsche expresses his views on this subject eloquently in *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) [originally published as *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (Leipzig: Naumann, 1894)].

<sup>17</sup>See Anson Laytner, *Arguing with God: A Jewish Tradition* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1990).

<sup>18</sup>1894/1897. The translation comes from Sholem Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman and The Railroad Stories*, trans. Hillel Halkin (Library of Yiddish Classics, New York: Schocken Books, 1987), 6-7.

<sup>19</sup>As quoted (with minor modifications) in Louis I. Newman (ed. and trans.), *The Hasidic Anthology: Tales and Teachings of the Hasidim: The Parables, Folk-Tales, Fables, Aphorisms, Epigrams, Sayings, Anecdotes, Proverbs, and Exegetical Interpretation of the Hasidic Masters and Disciples; Their Lore and Wisdom*, in collaboration with Samuel Spitz (New York: Scribner, 1934), 57 [I changed “thou” to “you” and “let us be quits” to “let’s call it quits:.”]. For full discussion of Levi Yitzhaq and his arguments with God (including this passage), see A. Laytner, *Arguing with God*, 177-84.

<sup>20</sup>L. H. Kant, “Restorative Thoughts,” Part 2.

<sup>21</sup>As one Pharisaically trained Jew put it, children may drink milk, but adults require solid food (Paul, 1 Cor. 3:1-2).

<sup>22</sup>See LaCocque, 198-99

<sup>23</sup>See LaCocque, 199

<sup>24</sup>See LaCocque, 193-94

<sup>25</sup>See LaCocque, 194

<sup>26</sup>See LaCocque, 194

<sup>27</sup>Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah with a New English Translation* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

<sup>28</sup>Jewish Publication Society (1985).

<sup>29</sup>New Revised Standard Version (1989).

<sup>30</sup>Aryeh Kaplan, *The Living Torah: The Five Books of Moses and the Haftaret* (New York: Moznaim Publishing, 1981).

<sup>31</sup>Nosson Scherman, *The Stone Edition Chumash: The Torah: Haftaras and Five Megillos with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (The Art Scroll Series, Brooklyn, New York: Mesorah Publications, 1996).

<sup>32</sup>Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995) [*Genesis* originally published in 1983].

<sup>33</sup>Robert Alter, *Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2004) [*Genesis* originally published in 1996].

<sup>34</sup>For Kabbalah in general, see the following: Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1943); Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 1974); Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (SUNY Series in Judaica, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988); Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*

(New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1988); Aryeh Kaplan, *Innerspace: Introduction to Kabbalah, Meditation, and Prophecy*, ed. Abraham Sutton (Brooklyn, New York: Moznaim, 1991); Eliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994); Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002); Lawrence Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003); Arthur Green, *A Guide to the Zohar* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004); and Eliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). Fundamental now is the ongoing multi-volume edition and translation of the *Zohar: The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, ed. and trans. Daniel C. Matt (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002).

<sup>35</sup>For Luria, see L. Fine, *Physician of the Soul*.

<sup>36</sup>On *Tiqqun Olam* in Luria, see L. Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, Chapters 6-7. For *Tiqqun Olam* in general, see the following: Arthur Waskow, "Tikkun Olam: Adornment of the Mystery," *Religion and Intellectual Life* 2 (1985): 109-15; Michael Lerner, *Jewish Renewal: Path to Healing and Transformation* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994); David Shatz, Chaim I. Waxman, and Nathan J. Diament (eds.), *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law* (The Orthodox Forum Series, Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997); and Elliot N. Dorff, *The Way Into Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World)* (The Way Into..., Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005).

<sup>37</sup>Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. by Babara E. Galli (Modern Jewish Philosophy and Religion, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 283-85 [originally published as *Der Stern der Erlösung* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kaufmann, 1921)].

<sup>38</sup>Today this is commonly recognized as PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder).

<sup>39</sup>Elie Wiesel, *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Summit, 1976), 69-97 [originally published as *Célébration biblique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975)].

<sup>40</sup>As quoted (with minor modification) from Samuel H. Dresner, *Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev: Portrait of a Hasidic Master* (New York, NY: Shapolsky Publishers, 1986), 81 [I changed "Thy" to "Your"]; discussed in A. Laytner, *Arguing with God*, 184-85.

<sup>41</sup>*Pirqa Avot* 1.14.