וַיֵּרָא

Parashat Vayera

Genesis 18:1–22:24 · Shabbat 31 October 2026 · 20 Cheshvan 5787

THE URIEL SIMON READER
לזכר פרופ׳ אוריאל סימון ז״ל
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Here I am, twice

Abraham argues for Sodom and is silent on Moriah. Uriel Simon on the man who says "Hineni" to God and to his son.

THE TEXT

GENESIS 18:23–25

וַיִּגַּשׁ אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמַר הַאַף תִּסְפֶּה צַדִּיק עִם־רָשָׁע: אוּלַי יֵשׁ חֲמִשִּׁים צַדִּיקִם בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר הַאַף תִּסְפֶּה וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא לַמָּקוֹם לְמַעַן חֲמִשִּׁים הַצַּדִּיקִם אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבָּהּ: חָלִלָה לְךָ מֵעֲשֹׂת ו כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְהָמִית צַדִּיק עִם־רָשָׁע וְהָיָה כַצַּדִּיק כָּרָשָׁע חָלִלָה לָּךְ הֲשֹׁפֵט כָּל־הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט:

And Abraham drew near, and said: 'Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt Thou indeed sweep away and not forgive the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, that so the righteous should be as the wicked; that be far from Thee; shall not the Judge of all the earth do justly?'

GENESIS 22:1, 7, 11–12

וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי: … וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי בְנִי … וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם ו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל־הַנַּעַר וְאַל־תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוּמָה

And it came to pass after these things, that God did prove Abraham, and said unto him: 'Abraham'; and he said: 'Here am I.' … And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said: 'My father.' And he said: 'Here am I, my son.' … And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said: 'Abraham, Abraham.' And he said: 'Here am I.' And he said: 'Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him.'

IN HIS WORDS

הניגוד השני הוא, במונחי העגה התאולוגית שלנו, הניגוד שבין "ביקורתיות" מכאן ו"קבלת דין עיוורת" מכאן.

The second contrast is, in the terms of our theological jargon, the contrast between "criticism" on the one side and "blind acceptance of judgment" on the other.

מתוך ביטחון גמור בשיפוט המוסרי העצמי שלו הריהו מטיח כלפי בוראו "חללה לך מעשת כדבר הזה להמית צדיק עם רשע"... (י״ח, 25).

Out of complete confidence in his own moral judgment he flings at his Creator, "That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked"... (18:25).

אברהם מביע את מסירותו השלמה לאלוהים באמצעות מילת הנוכחות "הנני" (כ״ב, 1).

Abraham expresses his complete devotion to God through the word of presence, "Hineni" (22:1).

אחרי שאברהם הכריע לטובת המחויבות הדתית, נתן מלאך ה׳ תוקף אלוהי למחויבות האנושית.

After Abraham decided in favor of the religious commitment, the angel of the LORD gave divine force to the human commitment.

THE TEACHING

Vayera puts the two most extreme Abraham stories in the same parasha. In one he argues with God over Sodom, bargaining from fifty righteous down to ten: *"shall not the Judge of all the earth do justly?"* In the other he rises early and goes to sacrifice his son without a word. Uriel Simon called this the second contrast in Abraham, between *"criticism"* and *"blind acceptance of judgment"*.

Of Sodom, Simon wrote that Abraham speaks *"out of complete confidence in his own moral judgment"*. He noticed that readers tend to pick a side: some admire the Abraham who fights for justice in Sodom (on what he called the mistaken assumption that there were at least ten righteous people there), and some admire the Abraham of Moriah. Simon wanted both, and noted that in each story it turns out, after the fact, that the gap between human and divine morality was only apparent.

For the Akedah he followed a single word. Abraham answers God הִנֵּנִי, "Here am I" (22:1): complete devotion. Then, on the walk up, Isaac says *"My father"*, and Abraham answers with the same word, הִנֶּנִּי בְנִי, "Here am I, my son" (22:7). Now, Simon writes, *"Abraham places himself in the terrible tension of a double, even contradictory, commitment."* He stays the boy's father to the last moment. Then the angel calls *"Abraham, Abraham"*, Abraham says הִנֵּנִי a third time, and the angel forbids him to touch the boy. *"From now on, the "Hineni" toward his God is not opposed to the "Hineni" toward his son."* The religious commitment comes first, and then heaven itself backs the human one.

This is where Simon's essay ends up, three contrasts in all: land and peace, protest and acceptance, God and son. If his plain-sense reading holds, he wrote, then Abraham's blessing to his descendants is *"in large measure, the blessing of contradictions"*: not a compromise between the poles, but the strength to hold both.

FOR THE TABLE

- Abraham bargains for Sodom but says nothing on the way to Moriah. Is the silence acceptance, or something else?
- Simon says the gap between human and divine morality turned out to be only apparent, in hindsight. What do we do before the hindsight arrives?
- Who gets your "Hineni"? When have two of them pulled against each other?

פרופ׳ אוריאל סימון ז״ל

Uriel Simon (Jerusalem, 1929 – 30 September 2026) taught Bible at Bar-Ilan University for decades. He read the Bible through its medieval interpreters, above all Abraham ibn Ezra, and wrote *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms*, *Reading Prophetic Narratives* and the JPS commentary on Jonah. He won the Bialik Prize, and he was one of the founders of Oz VeShalom, the religious-Zionist peace movement. This reader takes one text and one of his teachings each week.

READ SIMON HIMSELF

- אברהם המקראי – הברכה שבניגודים (Biblical Abraham: The Blessing of Contradictions), from *Seek Peace and Pursue It (Yedioth Ahronoth, 2002)*, the essay quoted on this sheet.
- "The Religious Significance of the Peshat," *Tradition* 23:2 (1988), trans. Edward L. Greenstein.
- "The Biblical Destinies: Conditional Promises," *Tradition* 17:2 (1978).