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**“And The Two of Them Walked Together”**

When I was a kid my father always made us feel special. He “told” us he loved us in so many ways-- He said “I love you” when he scooped me up in his arms on a warm summer evening and took me out for my favorite ice cream cone...My sisters and I could jump on him, climb on him like a jungle gym, mess with his hair while he was dozing in a chair...

My Dad spoke of love in the picture postcard of a kitty complete with squeaker that he sent me while he was working away from home. He said “I love you” when he patiently taught us to figure skate in the cold of January in Chicago.

He let us know, “I’m with you”, when, one evening my sister and I were dissolved in a fit of giggles at the dinner table. My mother obviously irked at the disturbance, said, “alright, the next one to laugh takes her dinner plate and eats upstairs”. When we, once again, exploded with laughter, my father winked at us, took his plate and joined us upstairs.

My father said, “I love you” with the dozen red roses he gave me every year on my birthday. Upon his passing, I paid tribute to his love with an armful of red roses, lovingly placed on his grave.

Abraham the father, didn't say, "I love you" to Isaac, his son, in anything he did during their mutual trial, described in the selection of Torah we just read. Not while he gathered the necessary provisions for their journey to the land of Moriah; not while they walked, not while they were on top of the mountain. **God** describes Isaac as "the one whom you love" (*Genesis 22:2*) when he commands Abraham to offer him up as a sacrifice, yet Abraham never gives us any indication of this. Isaac is mentioned as an "afterthought" in the description of Abraham's preparation, "Abraham rose early, saddled his donkey, and took with him his two servants and Isaac, his son" (*Genesis 22:3*).

The entire narrative is written in the singular until the time that Abraham leaves his servants behind with the donkey to ascend the mountain with Isaac. Only here, does the language switch to the plural, "The boy and I will go up there, **we** will worship and **we** will return to you" (*Genesis 22:5*). "Maybe now," we think, "when the two are alone, Abraham will express his love for his son Isaac." But, alas, there is only heavy silence. The eighth verse of the chapter is the **only** time in the story we hear Isaac speak. He asks: "Here is the firestone and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" Abraham answers: "God will see to a lamb, my son." The verse concludes, "And the two of them walked on together."

The editors of the Etz Hayim commentary to the Torah say at this point, "There appears to be perfect harmony between father and son."

TOGETHER?! IN PERFECT HARMONY?!

In physical proximity, perhaps, but in no way does the text hint at emotional closeness. What of Abraham's fears for his son's welfare? He does not

express them. What of Isaac's feelings? We hear nothing of him, other than as a symbolic object used by his father to expedite the fulfillment of God's will. Surely he was afraid; surely he was in need of a hug, some reassurance from Dad? The Torah goes to great lengths to point out the significance of Isaac's birth to his parents in their advanced age. Once Abraham's son Ishmael is banished with his mother Hagar, Isaac remains to him his "only son". Therefore, no reference to Abraham's concern for his son's feelings in the story of the *Akeidah*, strikes us as very strange. Despite the fact that Abraham tells his servants that he and the boy will pray and return together down the mountain, once Isaac's life is spared up on the mountain, we never hear of him again in the story.

Abraham the Patriarch had many gifts and qualities which equipped him with the necessary gumption to heed God's call to leave his home and kin, and become the "father of a great nation". While we may seek to emulate his positive qualities--his daring, his unshaken faith in God-- he is **NOT**, as we have seen, a role model of good parenting.

Today, the challenge of raising up healthy, productive human beings is just as daunting as it was in the days of our patriarchs. Each of us has had parental figures who served as our guides through the "maze" of becoming an adult. Many of us have raised or are raising children. We all interact daily with the ones we love.

By their actions and their modeling, **both** my parents taught me how critical fostering an abiding connection is between parent and child. Our

very sense of self and how we function in the world are dependent upon this foundation. What are we modeling to those we love through our own behavior?

*Do we model a life of passion and purpose, where we feel vibrant and alive, or do our lives include things, such as our work, that we constantly complain about and profess to hate?*

*Do we effectively resolve conflicts with other people, or do we withdraw, get mad or do everything we can to avoid confrontations?*

*Do we handle life's disappointments with a rational, positive strategy, or might we medicate the problems with food, alcohol, or other addictive behaviors?*

*Do we seek to avoid such behaviors as gossiping, lying, cursing and taking unfair advantage?*

*Do we model social responsibility?*

*Do we model properly defined self-worth and self-esteem based on character traits, or might we pursue worth and value through material things?*

*Do we approach problems and setbacks as opportunities, or do we label every problem a crisis?*

*Do we model relationships with other people that are loving, affirming and supportive, or might we be critical of others, tear them down or talk behind their backs?*

In this season of *cheshbon ha-nefesh* , soul-searching, I invite us to reflect on our connections with all those whom we love, our children, our parents our partners in life. So that we may feel the true intent of the phrase, ***“The two of them walked on together.”***

*Amen, keyn y’hi ratzon!*