

Will He Forgive?

Rosh Hahanah Day 2 Sermon, October 4, 2016

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“So how’s the family? Where are they worshipping?” asked Rebecca.

“Leah and Rachel are both doing the Shir Libeynu children’s programme and are off to lunch at the Tashlik with the rest of the crowd who came down for services,” Jacob replied. “The boys are all scattered at shuls large and small across the world and the religious ideological spectrum. But next year in Jerusalem! Of course, Dina is sitting with Dina Rosenberg , both kvelling over Rabbi Aviva Goldberg’s inspired leadership.”

“This is all very nice,” said Sarah, “But your grandfather has something very important to say. Don’t you Avie?”

“Yes, I do, but maybe I could do it over coffee?” replied Abraham.

“You’ve waited three thousand, five hundred years, and now you’re putting it off again!”

“Alright! Alright! Isaac, I know I’ve waited much too long, and it is so clear that without you there would be no people of Israel, can you ever forgive me for being ready to sacrifice you to HaShem?”

“Now you ask for forgiveness! You didn’t ask when G_d provided the ram to show you were a mixed up old fool. You didn’t ask when mother died of grief for what you did. Or when Rebecca gave me Esau and Jacob. Or when I unknowingly set the twins at war with each other.

“Or later when we were both with HaShem and disaster after disaster befell the Jewish people and then rebounded to even greater heights!”

“But Isaac, these things take time to digest!”

“Time! You’ve been there for the revelation of Torah and millennia of exegesis, especially on you. And everyone who was any sort of mensch pointed out that you were such a schmuck!

“Maybe you’re right. It’s too late to forgive me. Let’s eat our bagel plates.”

Despite the tension Avoteinu V’Imoteinu did settle into polite and almost friendly

talk, mostly about the Torah-tueu ways of Jewish life just in this one city of Toronto. Despite its many tongues, its major mode was sharing and conviviality, despite the fate of Babel.

Some shul-based communities emphasized the continuation of our traditional rituals, others Am Israel Echad and still others Tikkun Olam. And of course, these and other core principles balanced in various blends.

Of course, Sarah and Rebecca were impressed by the strong role of so many women in communal and religious leadership. Our three patriarchs agreed that their original doubts had proved to be gloriously wrong.

But what about the celebration of the varieties of erotic love, committed partnerships and families?

“Well, Shir Libeynu is a fine example of being untraditionally traditional,” said Abraham. “By being open and even celebratory of all varieties of Jews, many more remain mishpochah. They are increasing my seed as G_d promised.”

“Well I take my lead from Shir HaShirim,” added Rebecca. “Rabbi Akiva says it is worth all the other books of the larger written Torah. It is clearly **both** a strong and beautiful poem of erotic human love and also of divine love of Adfnai for his people Israel and of Israel for HaShem.”

“But doesn’t the ground story clearly only tell of love between two young lovers, a man and a woman?” interjected Jacob.

“Don’t we all have feminine and masculine aspects to our souls?” replied Rivka.

“Didn’t Isaac de Luria not only identify the Shechinah as the spiritual feminine aspect of G_d but further realised that Shabbat celebrated the mystical but full sexual union of HaShem’s male and female selves,” emphasized Sarah.

“So ?” asked Abraham.

“If HaShem can deeply express love in multiple ways, so must we humans in our more limited capacities. We each can celebrate our human and divine love in our own special ways.”

“This is good, but I must go. I promised to meet my Rebbe for Tashlik,” announced Isaac.

“Who would this be?”

“The Torontoer Rebbe, Emil Fackenheim.”

“Wasn’t he Reform?”

“But these and these are the words of the Eternal One , Blessed be He , Blessed be She,” retorted Isaac as he left.

Since they were to meet by the little steam in Cedarvale Ravine, Isaac boarded the St Clair streetcar across from Kiva’s to get off at the St. Clair West subway station.

He emerged directly into the Park, just above the stream through the rarely opened south side exit from the station. Turning right he climbed the wooden steps for his rendez-vous with Fackenheim.

Fackenheim was waiting there. “Shalom aleichem!” “Aleichem shalom!” they greeted each other.