

Why God Doesn't Try To Talk To Us Directly Anymore
A Modern Midrash
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Although the Torah was written more than 3000 years ago, interpretation of it has never stopped. One way of understanding Jewish text is Midrash, filling in the gaps with new stories. Modern midrash allows us to reflect on those Torah events in the light of the complex present world. I wrote this modern Midrash about this morning's Torah portion taking place in contemporary times. It is a tale titled, "Why God Doesn't Try to Talk to Us Directly Anymore."

Thursday Evening

Abe was trying to look interested. "Yes, Lot," he mumbled. These Skype chats that his nephew insisted upon since Lot had moved to Arizona were trying. First, Lot was such a downer. And second, Abe had to actually pay attention as they chatted on screen. "Yes, times have been rough for me too since we split the business." ("Not!" thought Abe who was having his best year ever.) "It must be hard since your wife's..." Abe searched for the right words, "untimely passing to go it alone. But you have your girls.... Right.... Right.... I know exactly what you mean."

Ring

The house phone's shrill noise disturbed him. Only telemarketers and political solicitors used that phone number. Abe didn't even know what it was. Everyone else called his mobile phone. But any excuse was a good one.

"Oh darn it," Abe lied. The bright caller ID screen simply read, "Private."

“I better take it,” he sighed gratefully. “It’s probably Hagar calling to complain about my being late with Manny’s tuition. I’ll talk to you later. Bye.”

Abe clicked the close button on the Skype call before Lot could respond and put the cordless phone to his ear.

“Hello?”

Abraham.

“Here I am.”

This is God. Take your...

“Who is it? Rod?”

This is God. Take your...

“God? Ohhh. Look, my wife takes all the fundraising calls and she’s asleep. Call back another time. Better yet, don’t.”

Abe clicked off the line and stared at the abstract screen saver on the computer screen. At least the call got him off the phone with Lot. His nephew could rub salt on his wounds all night.

“I wonder what religious group that was?” Abe thought as he lay back on the couch with the caffeine free Diet Coke that Sarah made him drink now. He flipped on the clear, bright images of ESPN on his new colossal flat screen as

SportsCenter came into view. “I suppose I could have been nicer,” he admitted to himself as he turned up the volume. “But some things just can’t wait.”

As he watched the highlights leading off the show, the brief phone conversation replayed in his head. There was something familiar about the whole thing, he mused. “Oh, well.” The evening’s events quickly left his mind as football news came on.

Friday Morning

“Morning, Eli!” Abraham called, mid-slurp of his coffee.

“Morning, Boss!” Eli replied. Eliezer had been Abe’s assistant for as long as he could remember. Abe could never have run the business without him.

“Busy this morning?” Abe asked.

Eli shook his head. “Just the usual.”

One of their trucks rolled past the window. It was blue with large white letters. *Abraham and Nephew Plumbing*. Abe hadn’t changed the name after buying Lot out of the business years ago. It was then already a brand name around Kew Gardens – the largest independent plumbing firm in Central Queens. If people asked, Abe told them that Eliezer was his nephew.

Abraham walked through the hallway as he finished his coffee, greeting each employee by name with a warm hello. The receptionist, Keturah, was talking

into her phone headset as he approached his office. She gave a broad smile and friendly wave. He responded with a simple nod. After his affair with his secretary Hagar, Abe was wary about being too friendly anymore. Sarah was so suspicious, and he didn't want that *tzuris* all over again.

"I left the morning mail and some other papers on your desk," Keturah told him as he dropped into his office chair.

Abe quickly recycled most of the junk mail on his desk, filing the other items. Nothing that couldn't wait. Except the last one, which caught his eye. It was a single paper addressed to Abe at Abraham and Nephew Plumbing and was marked personal. It consisted of only one sentence.

Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him up as a sacrifice there on the heights that I will show you.

"Keturah!"

The young woman came running in recognizing the urgency.

"Where did this come from?" he demanded, shaking the paper.

"It was a fax. It was here when I got in," Keturah stammered. "It was by itself. Just this one page."

Abraham looked at the paper more carefully. No phone number or company name on the top. Probably sent directly from someone's computer. Maybe one of those e-fax things he'd considered getting.

"Eliezer, get in here!" Abe barked into the phone intercom.

"What do you make of this?" he asked his trusted assistant thrusting the fax into his hands.

"Sounds like a threat. Against Isaac," Eli responded with some doubt.

"Where's Moriah?" asked Keturah.

"I think it's in Utah," said Eli.

"That's Moab," Abe corrected him.

"Who would want to hurt Isaac?" Eli asked.

"I don't know. Maybe someone is trying to scare me."

Looking more carefully, Eli pointed to the top of the page. "Did you see this? In the fax header? Three letters. G. O. D."

Abe wrinkled his brow trying to remember something. "Maybe... Wait a minute. G-O-D... Hmm... You know that new firm in Glendale – Delancy Plumbing?"

"Sure," said Eliezer. "Gary Oliver Delancy. Thinks he's God's gift to plumbing. ... Oh! I get it. Gary Oliver Delancy. G-O-D. That's twisted and sad."

“Exactly,” said Abe, calming down for the first time. “Well no one gets anywhere threatening me or my family. Four Kings Plumbing learned that the hard way a few years ago and so will this G-O-D. See about getting Isaac some protection.”

Eliezer nodded and left the room with Keturah.

Abe shook his head in disbelief. Hurt Isaac. He wouldn't let it happen. By anyone. Abe could do stupid things, but he learned his lessons. Thirteen years ago, just after Isaac was born, he was so stressed and foolishly he revisited his old affair with Hagar. Then Sarah find out. This time she couldn't forgive. It got so ugly. The fighting, the lawyers, the threat of divorce – right when they should have been celebrating his newborn son. Abe had to relocate Hagar to Florida. But it was Manny who took the brunt of the fight. Ishmael, his then thirteen-year-old son from his first affair with Hagar. Everyone called him “Manny.” Manny suffered the most and Abe had done a lousy job of protecting him from the pain or being there for him. Well, not this time.

“Keturah,” Abe called into the intercom. “Get me and Isaac tickets to Sunday's Mets game. Good seats.”

Sunday Afternoon

“No batter, no batter!” Isaac was yelling at the opposing hitter. They were sitting along the first base line in the fourth inning. Isaac was carefully enjoying his third hot dog making sure not to spill mustard on his brand-new Yoenis Cespedes jersey he had somehow talked his father into buying. Abe smiled. “This should happen more often. I really need to spend more time with Isaac.”

Baby Baby Baby Oh!

Even among the raucous din of the game, the sound of Justin Bieber’s high-pitched voice pierced through. Isaac smiled. He was always changing his father’s ring tones. Abe jumped up. “I’ll be right back.”

As he reached the concourse, Abe glanced at his iPhone. The screen read “G-O-D”. He smacked his earpiece and a voice instantly spoke,

This is God.

“Listen, you nut,” Abe shouted into the phone. “You stop bothering me. You stop threatening my son. If you ever come near him, you’ll regret it. Understand?”

Abe returned to his seat turning off his phone. Isaac was looking at photos on Instagram that all seemed to be of some placed called Moriah. Abe watched the batter strike out.

Isaac had just turned 13, but he still seemed so innocent and pure to Abe. “He’s still as beautiful as when he was a miracle baby.” Abe and Sarah had resigned themselves to never having a child. They were an older couple, fertility treatments had all failed, and Abe, in that fit of stupidity, had years earlier gotten his secretary, Hagar, pregnant.

But Abe could remember that wonderful miraculous day so clearly. He and Sarah were playing Scrabble. The doors and windows were all open to let the spring breeze blow. Abe saw some approaching visitors. To their surprise, it was three of their doctors. Dr. Gabriel was Sarah’s OB/GYN. Dr. Raphael was the family’s general practitioner. Dr. Michaels had been their fertility specialist. They were all part of the same medical group, but Abe was quite surprised to see them all together at his front door. He quickly invited them in.

They got to the point right away. They had confirmed all the tests. Given both of their ages, Sarah’s medical history, and everything else, it was impossible. But it was true. Sarah was pregnant. Sarah burst into laughter, thinking it was a cruel joke. But after the doctors showed the shocked couple their findings, they weren’t laughing, but crying with joy. “A child of our own!” exclaimed Sarah.

“It truly is a miracle from God.” Abraham embraced his wife and they held each other for a long time.

“No one’s gonna hurt my miracle.” Abe thought as the fifth inning began.

Tuesday Evening

Chirp.

Abe groaned with what he saw. He had almost finished working out a trade on his fantasy football team, but he stared in disbelief at the return address of the newly arrived email.

To: AbePlumber@gmail.com

From: GOD@Eternity.net

Subject: Misunderstanding about previous messages

Abraham,

I think you might not have heard my previous messages. I simply want you to take Isaac to the land of Moriah, and offer him up as a sacrifice there on the heights that I will show you.

Talk to you later,

God

The beep from his cell phone startled him. The text message flashed on screen from G-O-D.

GOD: I see you got my e-mail.

Abe typed back.

Abe: Stay away from my son!

GOD: Just do as I ask, Abraham.

Abe: Y should I?

Abe was fumbling. He hated texting and only did it to chat with Isaac and try to be like the younger dads. The messages back were instantaneous; as soon Abe hit send, a new message seemed to pop in.

GOD: Don't you remember all those promises? How I will bless those who will bless you and curse those who will curse you?

Abe: I have a few curses for u

GOD: Don't you remember how you got the message to move to where you are now?

Abe stopped typing. Sure he remembered. He was at a crossroads in his life. Suffering under his father's shadow in their plumbing business in Utica. Sarah was unhappy. Lot was unhappy. One night, maybe a little drunk, Abe had called that radio call-in show, Dr. Yahweh. The doctor immediately sized up his problem and told him to start his own life. Abe had waffled about when he should move on. The doctor tried to end the call, telling him that the show needed to wrap up, but Abe had remained on the line.

The doctor said, "Well, Abe, it's been nice chatting with you. But I gotta get going."

“What?” Abe asked him, momentarily lost in his own thoughts.

“Get going! Get going!” Doctor Yahweh had shouted at him and hung up.

Abe was out of Utica by the week’s end.

Another message came across the phone.

GOD: So you see?

Abe typed slowly and carefully.

Abe: Stay away from Isaac or else.

He shut the cell phone and used the house phone to call the local precinct.

Friday Evening

The rabbi’s sermon was somewhat interesting, but Abe’s mind kept wandering. He hadn’t been to services in forever, but something made him want to go. Sarah was thrilled. Isaac was not. But they went, and it calmed Abe down. Isaac didn’t understand why his dad was spending so much time with him lately, but secretly he was glad. The rabbi was starting a new point in the sermon.

Halleluyah

Abe looked around and then realized the sound was coming from his pocket. Oh, God! His cell phone. He had forgotten to turn it to silent. The rabbi stopped mid-sentence, distracted by the jarring, inappropriate ring. Every head in the congregation turned towards Abe with a nasty look.

Halleluyah

Isaac burst into laughter as Abe quickly moved down the aisle towards the door. Isaac must have changed his ring tone again, this time to Handel's *Messiah*.

Halle...

Abe made it to the lobby in time to catch the phone mid-third ring.

"Hello?"

Abraham, don't hang up.

"You just don't get it," Abe told the voice. "I don't know who you are, but you are one persistent jerk. And...wait a minute, if you're God, why would you call and interrupt a rabbi's sermon?"

I've heard this one before. He gave it a few years ago. It only goes downhill from here.

"Hey!" Abe interrupted. "I recognize your voice. I thought it sounded familiar. About ten, fifteen years ago, I went to the fortune teller on a whim. I was having those problems with Sarah and Hagar. He was all in shadows, but he had that voice...it was you."

That's right.

"You made all those ridiculous predictions about my having lots of children, and giving me a promised land, and so on. Well, I only have two kids, one house, and a business, so there goes those predications, Nostradamus! And you

encouraged that painful, elective surgery too. I mean, on an eight-day-old it's one thing, but I'm not a young guy."

Those promises will all come true.

"Well, true or not, my son means everything to me, and I won't have some crackpot psychic ordering around my life. Look, the Mourner's Kaddish is about to begin. Might I go and pray that...God?"

Sunday Afternoon

The notification on his iPhone said he had one voice mail. He had forgotten the phone when he, Sarah, and Isaac, went out for a spontaneous picnic in the park. Forgetting the phone and having the picnic were both firsts. He hit play.

Abraham, this is God. This is the last time you'll hear from Me. There's no use in My trying to reach you anymore. I used to find ways, and you used to hear Me. But now, despite all the means of technology, so many things seem to get in the way. You hear everything, but Me. Something seems to keep you from hearing Me, believing Me, trusting Me. I will still talk to you Abraham, as I do to all My children, but from now on you'll have to go looking for My messages. You'll have to try and hear My voice. And it won't be easy.

Enjoy your time with Sarah and Isaac. And give Ishmael a call too. There I go again, trying to send you messages when you won't let yourself hear Me.

Take care, Abraham. And I hope you'll try and hear My voice again one day.

The message ended.