

THE AKEDA (THE BINDING)

translated by Donny Inbar

From "Queen of Bathtub," Cameri Theater, Tel Aviv, 1970.

Hanoch Levin

Translation: Donny Inbar

Abraham Isaac, my son, do you know what I am going to do to you now?

Isaac Yes, father, you are going to slaughter me.

Abraham God commanded me.

Isaac I have no complaints against you, father. If you need to slaughter, go ahead, slaughter.

Abraham I have to slaughter, I'm afraid there's no choice.

Isaac I understand. You don't have to make it hard for yourself. Simply get up and draw the knife at me.

Abraham I am only doing it as God's messenger.

Isaac Sure, as a messenger, father. So get up, as a messenger, and draw the knife, as a messenger, at your son, your one and only, whom you love.

Abraham Very nice, Isaac, make it hard on your poor father, put him in a mood, as if he hasn't got one anyhow.

Isaac Who's making it hard, father? Get up quietly, and liquidate, in one fatherly motion, your miserable son.

Abraham I know, the easiest thing is to blame me. Sure, why not, blame your lonely father.

Isaac Why blame? You're only God's messenger, right? And when God tells you to slaughter your son like a dog, you just have to run ahead and slaughter.

Abraham Great, great, this is just what I deserve at my age. Put *all* the blame on me, if it makes things comfortable for you. On your old and broken father, who is obliged, at his age, to climb this mountain with you, to bind you to the altar, to slaughter you, and then go tell everything to your mother. Do you really think I have nothing better to do at my age?

Isaac I totally understand you, father, I'm really not complaining. They tell you to slaughter me? To sever with your own hands your dynasty, to wash your hands with your own blood? I'm ready. Go ahead, father, slaughter. Come on, slaughter.

Abraham So that's it, my dear son, playing with the emotions of a father who's about to

become a bereaved father. Go on, break, just break my heart, a well-bred son who respects his parents. Look at me with your big eyes, darling son, and shorten to your ancient father, squashed under the decree, the couple of years left for him to live after you.

Isaac I don't get you, father, you see that it's fine, as far as I'm concerned. If you're willing to murder me in cold blood, me, your child of old age, you see that as far as I'm concerned it's fine. If you're willing to murder me in cold blood, me, your son of old age, your child of pleasure that you received miraculously at the age of ninety, your sole consolation in life, if you're willing to, am I the person to tell you no? They tell you to slaughter, father, so up on your feet and slaughter. And you shouldn't have any pangs of conscience. What's the big deal here? A child is being slaughtered. Big deal to slaughter a small and weak son? After all, what's slaughtering a child? What's a child? Especially when the slaughterer is his father, and he is an authorized slaughterer, and on top of everything, only a messenger?! So get up and shove the blade of the ritual knife into my young flesh, Daddy, and slit open my throat until the blood bursts out and splashes all over the earth like a cow's blood. Turn me into a cow, Daddy, and when my eyes are wide open and almost leap out of their holes and my tongue turns blue and swings out with my very last broken cry – then, Daddy, turn your ritual knife inside my neck, while I, blood of your blood, and flesh of your flesh, am fidgeting with my legs on the altar and am having my last dying quivers. Well, Dad, they told you to slaughter? Go ahead, slaughter.

Abraham Yeah, yeah, that's it. What can I do? I was born to be a victim. That's the gratitude you get after giving your entire life and soul to your sons, eh? A spit in the face. Why not dance all over my conscience, if you can? Why not drop me like an unwanted rag to hell, while all I'm trying to do is fulfill what the Heavens commanded me to do? Why not, really? An old, weakly man, half way in the grave already. So maybe Isaac'ele, my loyal son, how about just getting off the altar all of a sudden, and running away? How about letting me chase you with my stumbling knees?! Or how about also snatching the knife from me, eh?! Why not?! Why not take the knife and slaughter me instead?! Go on, slaughter your feeble father, that's exactly what I deserve.

Isaac No, you slaughter, merciful and compassionate Daddy, you slaughter me, pious Daddy.

Abraham Kill your father, bandit! Kill him!

Isaac Slaughter, exemplary Daddy, Daddy with a warm Jewish heart, Slaughter!

Abraham Burry your only father alive, you scoundrel!

Isaac Cut, Pappé'le, cut and bring the flesh home to Momme'le!

Abraham Murderer! *(He grabs Isaac by the neck)* Lie down!

Isaac A voice! A voice! I hear a voice!

Abraham What voice? No way. Lie down!

Isaac A voice from Heaven!

Abraham Where do you get a voice from Heaven?! Lie down!

Isaac I don't know. He said, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad."

Abraham I heard nothing.

Isaac You've been hearing impaired for a long time now. Here, he's repeating it for the second time, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad," didn't you hear?!

Abraham No.

Isaac I swear to you... "Lay not thine hand upon the lad."
(Pause. Abraham loosens his grip)
Father, I swear to you I heard a voice from Heaven.

Abraham *(After a pause)* Well, if you heard, I guess you must have heard. I am, as you said, a little deaf.

Isaac No problem, you know that on my part I was ready, but a voice is a voice.
(Pause) You saw for yourself that on my part I was fine. *(Pause)* We were both fine. *(Pause)* On our part we were both fine, right father? *(Pause)* We weren't fine? *(Pause)* It all ended happily, father, why are you sad?

Abraham I'm thinking of what's going to happen if other fathers have to slaughter their children, what will save them?

Isaac There always can be a voice from Heaven.

Abraham *(In acceptance)* Well, if you say so.

FATHER DEAR, WHEN YOU STAND OVER MY GRAVE אבי היקר, כשתעמוד על קברי

First performed in "The Queen of Bathtub," Cameri Theater, Tel Aviv, 1970

Revived in "Murder," Cameri Theater, Tel Aviv, 1997.

Hanoch Levin

Music: Zohar Levi

Translation: Barbara Harshav

חנוך לוין

מוסיקה: זוהר לוי

Father dear, when you stand over my grave,
Old and tired and forlorn here,
And you see how they bury my body in the earth
And you stand over me, father dear,

אבי היקר, כשתעמוד על קברי
זקן ועייף ומאוד ערירי,
ותראה איך טומנים את גופי בעפר
ואתה עומד מעלי, אבי,

Don't stand then so proud,
And don't lift up your head, father dear;
We're left flesh facing flesh now,
And this is the time to weep, father dear,

אל תעמוד אז גאה כל-כך,
ואל תזקוף את ראשך, אבי,
נשארנו עכשיו בשר מול בשר
וזוהו הזמן לבכות, אבי.

So let your eyes weep for my eyes,
And don't be silent for my honor here,
Something greater than honor
Now lies at your feet, father dear,

אז תן לעיניך לבכות על עיני,
ואל תחריש למען כבודי,
דבר-מה שהיה חשוב מכבוד
מוטל עכשיו לרגליך, אבי,

And don't say you've made a sacrifice,
For the one who sacrificed was me here,
And don't say other high-flown words
For I am very low now, father dear,

ואל תאמר שהקרבת קורבן,
כי מי שהקריב הייתי אני,
ואל תדבר עוד מלים גבוהות
כי אני כבר מאוד נמוך, אבי.

Father dear, when you stand over my grave,
Old and tired and forlorn here,
And you see how they bury my body in the earth
Then you beg my pardon, father dear.

אבי היקר, כשתעמוד על קברי
זקן ועייף ומאוד ערירי,
ותראה איך טומנים את גופי בעפר
בקש אז ממני סליחה, אבי.

The song was recorded (by Yisrael Gurion) in the original "Queen of Bathtub" cast album.

Printed in Levin, Hanoch. *Why Should the Bird Care (Ma Ikhat La-tsipor)*. Tel Aviv: Ha-kibutz Ha-Meu'had, Siman Kri'aa, 1987.

Also printed in Levin, Hanoch. *Those Who Walk in the Darkness and Others (Ha-Holkhim Ba-Hoshekh Ve-Akherim)*. Tel Aviv: Ha-kibutz Ha-Meu'had, Siman Kri'aa, 1999.

The English Translation is in Levin, Hanoch (Barbara Harshav, trans.). *The Labor of Life: Selected Plays*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

The Creation (according to Hanoch Levin)

A short story

translated by Donny Inbar

In the beginning God created the Heaven and the earth.

And the earth was chaos, without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the abyss.

And a wind from God moved over the surface of the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light!"

And there was darkness.

And the earth was chaos, without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the abyss.

And there was evening, and there was morning, one day.

And God rose on the second day, and he said, "Let there be light!"

And there was darkness.

And the earth was chaos, without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the abyss.

And there was evening, and there was morning, a second day.

And God rose on the third day, and he said, "For the third and very last time: Let there be light!"

And there was darkness.

And the earth was chaos, without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the abyss.

And there was evening, and there was morning, a third day.

And God kept his mouth shut on the fourth and the fifth days.

And on the sixth day God rose let out a mighty roar, "Either I'm God or what?! Let there be light, damn it!"

And a small little light was lit in a window of one of the houses, and a man in his pajamas peeked out and asked, "Who's screaming that he's God at midnight?!"