

# Abraham & Sons

## Jewish/Muslim Genealogies, Theoretical Interventions

### A Research Workshop, 13-14.5.2024, Berlin

Abraham, the biblical/Quranic protagonist and his Sons, Ishmael und Isaac, are associated with mighty tales of sacrifice and rescue. The binding (*aqedah/aqīdah*) of Abraham's sons is a major notion in the Jewish and Muslim traditions, yet it already a well-known subject of literary, philosophical, and artistic interventions. Different versions of the tales – adaptations, additions and corrections – are found in the Talmud, in Midrash (*Rabba* and *Tanchuma*) and (in the) *Tafsīr*, in liturgical poetry (both of Ashkenaz and of Andalusian origins), in modern literature (Søren Kierkegaard, Franz Kafka, Samuel Joseph Agnon, Ghassan Kanafani) and in contemporary theory (Erich Auerbach/Edward Said, Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas), all of which aiming to save the sons. These writings address the dialectics of sacrifice and salvation, the concept of tradition (*masoret/taqlid*), ethical judgment, the issues of divine violence and human justice, while discussing the narrations of the *aqedah*, often associated with gender criticism.

The workshop seeks to introduce and to discuss anew major texts from the biblical and Quranic sources, via Midrash and *Tafsīr*, to contemporary literary compositions, addressing the bindings of Abraham's sons as a method of learning and of being-together (*chavrutha*). The framework of the workshop is comparative, dealing with both Jewish and Muslim sources, Hebrew and Arabic scriptures and texts, while reflecting European and German(-Jewish) perspectives of the *aqedah/aqīdah* (the binding/sacrifice of the sons, the act of belief). The workshop rephrases the question of saving Abraham's sons, while exploring how could study itself, efforts of re-interpretations, conversation and dialogical forms of learning create an ethical intervention, a and a renewal of Jewish-Arab scholarship. The workshop will host senior and young researchers from Israel and Germany, scholars of Jewish studies, Islam, Hebrew and Arabic literature, to engage together these tasks of research.

The workshop is planned to include two major parts – the first one on **Genealogies** (on sacrifice and rescue in Jewish and Muslim traditions), the second one on **Interventions** (contemporary literary and theoretical perspectives of the *aqedah/aqīdah*), addressing writings on prophesy, sacrifice, and ethical judgment.

The workshop's method is based on (short, selective) readings of primal sources and discussions led by senior and young scholars. Every session is designed around a major topic, addressing the dialectic of sacrifice and methods of rescue.

# Program (tentative)

## Day I

**Introduction** (Prof. Dr. Liliana Ruth Feierstein & Prof. Dr. Galili Shahar)

## Genealogies

**Session I (10:15-11:45):** The Tale of Sacrifice (Hebrew bible and Quran) – What is being Told, what is left Untold?

**Session II (12:15-13:45):** Midrash, *Tafsir*, Literary Theory – how does exegesis save life?

Lunch Break

**Session III (16:15-17:45):** Gender matter (Mothers and Sons)

Dinner

## Day II

## Interventions

**Session I (10:15-11:45):** Another Abraham? German-Jewish Readership, Arabic Storytelling, World-literature (Kafka, Auerbach, Anton Shamash)

**Session II (12:15-13:45):** The Tale in its Counterparts (Modern Hebrew and Arabic Literature on Sacrifice)

Lunch Break

**Session III (16:15-17:45):** On Laughter (The Return of the Sons, Another Story?)

Dinner

**The workshop is planned to take place in Berlin, at the Selma Stern Center for Jewish Studies Berlin-Brandenburg, 13-14th May 2024.**

**Principal Researchers (Co-organizers):** Prof. Dr. Liliana Ruth Feierstein (Humboldt University, Kulturwissenschaft, Jewish Studies); Prof. Dr. Galili Shahar (Tel Aviv University, Comparative Literature, Jewish Studies).

**Bibliography** (Selective)

*Midrash Rabbah, Vayeira, Genesis 18:1–22:24*

*Quran*, Surah 37: The Arrangers (*As-Saffat*)

Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis. Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*, Bern, 2001

Jacques Derrida, "Whom to Give To," *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret*, trans. D. Wills (Chicago, 2008), 54-81.

Yael S. Feldman, *Glory and Agony: Isaac's Sacrifice and National Narrative*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.

Emmanuel Levinas, "Kierkegaard: Existence and Ethics," in *Proper Names*, trans. M. B. Smith (Stanford, Calif., 1996), 66-74.

Stephen Stern, "The Unbinding of Isaac", in: Ann W. Astell and Sander Goodhart (Eds.), *Sacrifice, Scripture and Substitution. Readings in Ancient Judaism and Christianity*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011, 261-283.