



# Avrom

## (When God was Wrong)

by: Rex Maurice Oppenheimer

Avrom squinted into the sun's rays as he awoke. He turned to Suzanne lying beside him and gently kissed her shoulder. Smiling in her sleep, she lifted her leg and wrapped it over his.

He touched her, smoothing his hand down her side and along her thigh. Sighing, she nuzzled in, holding him, warming like a lioness in the sun. Their love and desire shimmering like heat rising on the savannah. When their skin touched, Avrom knew he was right where he was supposed to be

Suddenly he sat up. "Oh my god, the kids!" Wide-eyed, he stared at the clock, "I forgot the kids were here."

Avrom and Suzanne had been married a year. The children were from his previous marriage. He had custody of them two days a week and every other weekend. Suzanne loved them, but getting used to an instant family hadn't been easy.

"It's late," explained Avrom, as he slid from Suzanne's arms, "Rachel's lunch, their breakfast, I've got to get them to school." Suzanne held on, for a minute, teasing, and yet, a little miffed. She felt cheated. So did he.

Trying to hurry, Avrom pulled on his underwear before wrapping himself in a robe. The underwear beneath the robe was for modesty's sake in front of the children. In the past, Avrom would walk around stark naked, but Suzanne insisted that he not only wear a robe when the kids were there but underwear, too. She had told him that to only wear the robe, which would swing open when he moved, was covert abuse.

He'd thought that was bullshit. Psychobabble. When he first met Suzanne, her bookcase contained nothing but self-help books and myriad volumes on various approaches to spiritual awareness. Avrom detested psychology, "that's where all the psychos come from," he used to say, and before he'd met Suzanne, and before he'd crawled back into recovery from the substances that were destroying him, reading books about spiritual awareness meant you didn't get it.

He had always figured he knew what was in all those books anyway, and that none of it did any good, unless of course you could really believe it, but then being a Seventh Day Adventist or a Moonie, or an orthodox Jew could work, too — if you really believed it.

Avrom hadn't believed in gurus, religions or spiritual paths. For if they worked, he thought, they would produce a golden people walking among us. But there were none. Only tarnished idols with Swiss bank accounts.

Although Avrom still didn't believe in gurus, and continued to think that a lot of psychology was misguided, misused and mistaken, he now knew that there was much that he didn't understand. Suzanne could communicate concepts in a way that made sense, and, although his first reaction was often to reject her insights, the same way he rejected the flat-screen revelations on Oprah, he had learned that if he was going to find anything even resembling contentment in this life he was going to have to change.

Rachel was in the bathroom, experimenting with various tubes and bottles of cosmetics, curling irons and straightening gels. She was as insecure as she was beautiful, because she was 13 years old, and because the modern world had given everyone so much, including a million new forms of fear, and had taken away so much, like the security of family continuity, believing in something and having a sense of meaning.

Growing up was probably always hard, but it seemed to Avrom that it must have been easier when people's lives were smaller. When their geography consisted of a village and their future path was already full of the footprints of their family that had gone before them.

That there were no guarantees in life was a joke, "all you can count on is death and taxes," people would say. Avrom understood that nothing in life could provide surety, no matter how well one lived, or what one achieved, whether it was fame, wealth, or even love. Catastrophes seemed to orbit the globe like some cosmic cloud, and at any moment a piece of horror could come burning through the atmosphere like a meteor, to strike one's life with cancer, car crashes, murder, disaster.

Once, his friend, Alan, had asked, "What do you believe in?" Avrom didn't know what to answer. There seemed a point at which everything seemed suspect, untrustworthy or at least unsure. He thought he believed in love, but doubted its power. How many concentration camp victims had had their babies torn from love's hands and smashed like a melon against a wall?

Avrom knew that if there were a God, such horrors weren't God's fault. God gave everyone free will. People committed those wrongs. But why would there be the whole drama of a creator, a God, and its creations, if there weren't a purpose? Most religions and spiritual paths allude to a progression, whether it's through reincarnation, transcendence, or following commandments, which advances the soul. But toward what and for what purpose?

Why create a life that is just a test track? Where God is just a bureaucrat or a pedant, turning his back on babies that are being tossed in the air and caught on bayonets in Nanking, while saying to himself, "Gee, I wish these people would get it and follow my commandments," (or whatever it is God wants).

Avrom just couldn't believe in a God anything like any of the Gods in any of the religions. God cannot be a super-powered being of any kind; God just couldn't have a mind, or a conscience.

Walking into the kitchen, Avrom began to make coffee and start on the lunches before he had to wake up Simon. His son was in fifth grade, just turning 11, and Avrom loved him with a deep and passionate love that filled his very being. He'd catch sight of the little boy's sneakers, the soft hair on his small arms, or the concern in his immature face, and his heart would grieve for his son's uncertain future in what could be a wicked world, yet also smile with sweet pleasure at his very presence filled with promise.

Avrom poured the French roast coffee beans into the grinder, pressed the button and listened to it buzz. He thought of when an insect dances, twists and flexes in a mating ritual, and a simple gesture, a stretch of the wings, a display of color and design in a tiny, bug-sized

corner of the world, is part of a huge scheme for the propagation of a species.

“What do I know?” thought Avrom.

He walked into Simon’s room, switched on the light and pulled open the blinds, “Good morning, Simon. Time to wake up.” No movement. Waking Simon was a task. He never woke easily. He relished the comfort of the bed. The little boy stretched and yawned but didn’t rise. He turned back into the sheets, pulling up the blanket.

“Simon,” Avrom almost yelled. “Get up!”

Nothing.

“If you don’t get out of bed, I’m going to smear honey all over you and bring in a pack of wild coyotes,” Avrom said, with mock sternness.

Simon bit at the joke. He jumped up, a look of alarm on his face. Not scared of the coyotes, but amused by Dad’s inventive discipline. He smiled. They did this every morning that Dad woke him up.

Avrom smiled, too. He was thankful for the coyotes’ assistance. Avrom would feel so frustrated when Simon wouldn’t obey him, even over relatively small things. It was partly because the kid would commit the same offenses again and again. It was the old parent’s refrain, “If I’ve said this once I’ve said it a thousand times,” but on a deeper level, not knowing what to do or how to be sure he was doing the best thing, frightened Avrom.

It was hard for him to discipline or punish Simon. He’d shout threats that he didn’t mean or wouldn’t carry out, which he knew just made the matter worse. Simon was a little boy; he needed guidance, but Avrom had no role model of how to be a father. Sure, he could see how it should be done. There were examples. But he lacked the emotional imprint that comes from experiencing a father’s guiding hand in his own life. Lack of discipline had been his dilemma and his downfall.

As he made Rachel’s turkey sandwich and put some chips in a baggie, Avrom gazed at the window, beyond which the blossoms were blurs of color. Looking at the

transparent glass separating the clean, dry, warm living space from the outdoors, he thought about a civilization that could turn sand into glass, transmit information through midair, create weapons of mass destruction and waste billions of dollars on meaningless fads and fashions, while being unable to solve so many basic problems. Focusing on the flowers, he thought about the simple mystery underlying it all.

After his constant struggle to make sense of the concept of God, what an irony it was that Avrom’s new life, in which he was at least willing to be sober and responsible, depended upon a belief in what could be referred to as a higher power.

Despite his beliefs and doubts, and because of the gift of desperation, Avrom had begun to pray. He was honest when he said that intellectually he didn’t believe in God, that his mind could imagine a million arguments against the existence of a God that cares or intervenes on his behalf. “Why care for my future, or me?” thought Avrom, “and not care for some child somewhere being raped? And to think that God would have a mission for my life, what is that but ego?”

Despite all those doubts and disbeliefs, and because of his recovery from drugs and alcohol, Avrom had begun to pray. It didn’t matter whether there was a God or not, nor whether his prayers were heard by anything. He did it as a ritual, a discipline, which is something that had been sorely lacking in his life. It was part of the actions he took, whether they made sense or not, which kept him sober. The fact that his life was so much better overruled the need for debate, or to even make sense.

Not long ago, while he and Suzanne were praying before going to bed in their Paris hotel room, offering words to a God he couldn’t define or didn’t particularly believe existed, it dawned on him that if he didn’t believe, he was alone.

He wasn’t alone in the sense of loneliness; he had Suzanne in his life. She was his wife, lover and best friend, a compatriot and a confidant. But all his life he had always had the burden of deciding, of knowing what to do, how to live. It rested on his shoulders, alone. He had been trying to figure everything out,

think of the missing key that would open the door and set him free, and he had been unable to make it work.

Ironically he had turned his back on all the paths others seemed to follow to make sense of their lives. He'd dropped out of school, found the ability to cope through drugs and alcohol and kept making wrong choices, even when he knew better. He had been miserable. His life had been a shambles. A refuse pile of spoiled opportunities and burned bridges. Junk.

Oh there had been adventures. He'd vagabonded around the world, rescued time and again by beautiful women and good fortune. But beneath it all he was empty, insecure and lost.

But now he prayed and he wasn't alone anymore. Prayed not because he wanted to, or believed he was petitioning a king on a throne, but because he had to. He found he could ask for the strength to walk through his fears and deal with the results. It wasn't belief so much as action.

He and Suzanne were so different and yet so similar. Searching, she had been willing to follow almost any guru that caught her fancy, looking for a divinely inspired guiding hand. While Avrom had been hunkered down in dope-filled darkness, dreams of grandeur dancing like sugar plums, expecting the hand of Divinity to crash through the roof and elevate him to greatness.

Avrom was cynical and Suzanne was mystical, both had lived in expectation, rather than in the present, and both were separated from themselves and the world. Now Avrom realized that cynicism blocked his spiritual development, and Suzanne knew that the gurus hadn't helped her; they'd led her astray. The gurus had catered to her self-centeredness, even while preaching humility and self-sacrifice. Their spiel was all about losing the ego but people's egos and their needs were what drew them to the gurus. Avrom and Suzanne had met in a place strange to them both — reality.

He was happy. Dreams had not come true, but the surprises had turned out even better. Accepting his limitations, not as restrictions, but as the design of his

life, becoming honest and really who he was, had set him free to live unfettered by expectation, able to find joy in the grandeur of an ordinary day.

Checking his watch as they left the house, he beseeched Simon, as he had a million times before, "Don't slam the door. Have some consideration for Suzanne; she's still asleep. You know how hard she works."

Late again. He'd have to rush. It took an hour out of his day to drive them to school. First they'd drop off Rachel, then drive about 20 minutes in the opposite direction to get Simon to his school. As soon as they sat in the car Rachel turned on the radio and started scanning stations for music.

Avrom had never envisioned himself as a father, making his kids' lunches and taking them to school. His own father had been a washout. He was a flawed, if sometimes interesting, human being; he definitely wasn't a father, to Avrom or anyone. Avrom doubted if his father had ever really loved him. He wasn't there for him in the simple, everyday ways a boy needs a father in his life. Not for philosophical insight, or great wisdom, but just being there to play catch with, to be a male presence in the house, to discipline him and teach him the responsibilities of being a man. Being a man wasn't easy for Avrom, neither was being a dad.

After he dropped off the kids, Avrom switched the radio to "Morning Edition" on National Public Radio. Then he reached up and pulled the switch that opened the moonroof, letting the soft blue and yellow Los Angeles morning into the car. He felt the warmth of the sun and the coolness of the air, ignoring the invisible pollutants that plagued this gorgeous part of the planet.

The traffic was heavy. Avrom concentrated on the stream of cars on the road and drifted in thought at the same time, all these lives, fantasies and fates.

The voice shocked him.

"I AM THE LORD, THY GOD!"

Avrom almost slammed on the brakes and stepped on the gas at the same time. His head jerked to the left,

right, behind him. What was that? It was so loud, not from the radio.

"AVROM," came the voice again.

My god, thought Avrom, I'm going nuts. I'm hearing voices. Why? Why now? He was freaking out. He tried to stay calm, hoping it would go away, like a chest pain he thought was a heart attack but turned out to be gas.

Suzanne had told him that she used to hear voices during her psychic phase, but then she had been delusional, seeing spirits filling her room. His daughter, Rachel, used to say she heard voices when she was very little, but they'd gone away.

He always thought that when people heard voices it was all in their heads, just their own thoughts attacking them. But he'd heard this from outside. And it was loud. It boomed so that it seemed as though every car on the road should have heard it. It was loud in volume, but the timbre of the voice was soft, yet scary. Ominous.

"PULL OVER AVROM," said the voice, "I DON'T WANT YOU TO GET IN AN ACCIDENT."

Avrom pulled to the side of the road. He was gripping the wheel so tightly he thought he could feel it flex, as if it were about to snap. He was shaking, "Wh-wh-who are you, what are you?" he asked.

"I am God." The voice was a little less strident now, "The God you don't really believe in. The one who is too simple for your sophisticated conception of existence."

"Wha-a-a-a-t?" Stuttered Avrom, "Bu-bu-but, why are you here?"

Avrom thought he could feel God smile, as he heard the voice say, "That's a rather silly question. I am everywhere," said God. "If you mean why are you now cognizant of my presence, it is because I have come to command you, Avrom. I have come to make a pact with you so that you may lead the world to righteousness."

"No." Protested Avrom. "This isn't real. I must be nuts. Totally crazy. I'm losing my mind."

"No," said God. "This is real."

"But why me?" asked the astounded Avrom.

"Another funny question, particularly coming from you, Avrom. Haven't you always felt that you were great but undiscovered? That you couldn't manifest your desires. You walked like a stranger in the world, and you didn't understand, so you thought that you understood too much. You couldn't believe, so you couldn't participate. You wasted your life."

"But I've changed," Avrom protested.

"And I have not." The voice intoned. "I have just been waiting. Now, I am giving you what you always wanted — confirmation of the mystery of the universe, proof that I exist, and a mission to perform on my behalf."

The red lights flashing in his rearview mirror startled Avrom. He felt like he'd just woken from a dream. He heard banging on the window.

"Roll down the window," said the cop with the no-nonsense look staring out from his white motorcycle helmet.

Avrom's eyes went to the cop's bulky jacket and the heavy gun strapped to his waist. "Yes Officer, what is it?" he asked.

"This is a no-stopping zone," came hurriedly out of the cop's mouth. "Is something wrong?"

Avrom had been shaking all the way home. What if he'd told the cop that he'd pulled over because God had told him to? Would God have bailed him out? What should he tell Suzanne, Avrom wondered, as he opened the front door.

Suzanne was getting ready for work.

"God spoke to me," blurted Avrom.



"That's great," she said, sorting through her purse.

He persisted, "No, I mean God really spoke to me. I heard him. I can describe his voice. It wasn't the deep, echoing sound of a movie God; it was loud but calm. Like an emphatic whisper, scary."

"You mean, like the Godfather?" asked Suzanne, looking up and smiling.

"I'm serious!" thundered an angry Avrom, storming off into the kitchen. He grabbed a bottle of water. Twisting off the cap, he threw back his head and downed the whole 16.9 fluid ounces. In days past it would have been a beer. But now he chug-a-lugs water when he's angry or scared.

He knew he wasn't crazy, but he also knew this was insane. God was talking to him.

Weeks went by without God speaking to him again. Avrom began to think that he had been nuts. That it was just some episode of emotional imbalance. Still, sometimes, like after dropping the kids off at school, he would try to make himself ready, but God didn't speak. Every day, Avrom woke up thinking about God. Every day he expected to hear that voice, but nothing happened.

Avrom started reading books about spiritual matters. He read the Bible. He pored over Suzanne's collection, and he got volumes from the library. He'd discovered so many opinions and ideas. Most of them still seemed like people trying to make absurd stories plausible. Stories that were totally unsupported in modern life, for which there was no evidence, and which all logic and experience seemed to debunk. Yet intelligent people defended the stories. They created myriad explanations, allegories and metaphors to support their belief in them.

He read one scholar that thought Abraham, his namesake, had been the central figure in Judaism, not only because he was the beginning, but because he was the one who had trusted God with absolute faith, unlike Adam who had forsaken God for Eve.

Avrom began to have grandiose thoughts. Every day he talked about his acquaintance with God to Suzanne. Perhaps God's will for him was to usher in a new era on earth. Maybe Avrom's faith was true enough for God to trust him with this mission.

"Don't say this in public," she'd say, with a smile. But she had started to worry. Was Avrom just emotionally unstable because of pressures in his life, or had he gone completely crazy?

It got worse, and Suzanne had insisted that Avrom seek outside help. He wouldn't. He knew that nobody would believe him. Avrom needed proof to show the world.

That's when God told him the numbers for the lottery. One morning, as he awakened, a vision of a lottery ticket formed in Avrom's mind, on it he saw 13, 15, 23, 24, 25, 32. He heard God say, "Play these numbers."

Avrom told Suzanne. She looked at him with that look. It made him feel empty; she was fed up. But what could he do? "Okay," she said. She was angry now, "Go buy the ticket, but if it doesn't win, Avrom, you've got to get help. What am I saying, 'if it doesn't win'? Maybe we both need help!"

He drove down to the Pavilions on Sepulveda, but, 'temporarily out of order,' was lit up on the machine, traveling across the screen like a movie title on a marquee. So, he went to a little liquor store, took the card and filled in the numbers that God had given him.

Avrom didn't buy lottery tickets very often. He'd won \$54 once and \$5 a few times over the years. But in his whole life, he probably hadn't bought more than 15 tickets. When he did play the lotto, he'd wait until the morning to find out what the winning numbers were, either hunting for them in the newspaper or looking them up on the Internet.

But that night he and Suzanne had watched it on TV. One after another, the numbers came up. The jackpot was \$84 million. There was one winning ticket, and it was theirs. Suzanne just stared at him. Her anger was gone.

It still didn't seem real, even after they'd claimed the prize and returned home. Avrom wanted to run out and buy a Ferrari, just to prove to himself that it was true. They were all still in a state of shock trying to comprehend how their lives were going to change, talking about things they wanted to buy, places to go. Simon planned to buy every video game ever made, and Rachel was thinking about clothes and cars. She still couldn't drive for more than two years, but that didn't matter.

Avrom had taken the L.A. Times into the toilet with him. He didn't usually read in there, but he thought he'd start looking for houses, castles for God's sake, whatever he wanted. He was still sitting there in his reverie, when he heard, "Avrom."

He looked up, "Oh, God, this is wonderful, incredible. I've always had to struggle, I've never had any money, but now..."

"I have something I want you to do," said God.

"Sure," said Avrom. "What?"

"On the next Shabbat, I want you to wash Simon and wrap him in white cotton. Then take him to Joshua Tree. There I want you to offer me what is mine."

"What?" asked Avrom. "Are you asking what I think you're asking?" There was no response. "Are you asking me to kill my son?"

"Yes." Came the godfather-like voice.

Avrom jumped up. "No! No! No! No!" he screamed, "no fucking way!" Avrom's throat went dry. His heart ached as if his chest were being crushed; he began to shake with rage, "Take the money, the goddamn money — hell, I don't care, but I will not kill Simon!"

God tries to reassure Avrom. He tells Avrom that the boy will be better off; he will be with God in eternity. Avrom must trust him, look how powerful God has been in Avrom's life. Isn't it selfishness for Avrom to want to keep the boy for himself? That is pointless any-

way, "I God can take the boy. I can take you, or anything you have, anytime I want to. You are powerless," says the Lord.

Avrom is resolute but silent, and God continues, "Look who I am! I will once again intervene directly in human affairs; I will make my presence dramatically and plainly known. Do as I command and you can lead humanity to fulfillment!"

Suzanne was in the garden, watering. She dropped the hose and ran to Avrom when she saw him. He looked terrible, distraught. "What happened?" She asked.

Avrom told her what God had asked.

"You are insane!" She screamed. "Avrom, I'm calling the police!" But looking into his eyes, which were full of tears, her anger subsided. She realized it was fear causing her rage. She reached out and took him in her arms, holding him tight and sobbing. She knew Avrom wasn't crazy.

Later, inside, they sat on the couch and talked. "You told him no, she said, "So that's it."

"But this is God," said Avrom. "I mean, I'm not going to kill Simon, no matter what, but this is God asking me to do this. Why?"

"Shit, Avrom," said Suzanne, "who cares? You can't kill your son."

"But why was Abraham willing?" asked Avrom. "I've been reading the Bible. Abraham argued with God about other things. He protested when God wanted to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. But he didn't say a word when God asked him to kill Isaac. He just obeyed." Avrom looked into Suzanne's eyes, "was that the right thing to do?" asked Avrom.

"I don't know," said Suzanne, reaching out and taking a book from the shelf. "I think it's in here. Yeah. Listen to what Immanuel Kant said he would tell God." She started reading, "Look that I ought not to kill my son is certain beyond the shadow of a doubt. That You, as You appear to be our God, I am not convinced and will never be convinced even if Your voice resounded from

heaven.”

“But God’s voice did resound from heaven,” said Avrom. “It’s one thing to speculate and philosophize about what you would say, but it’s another when God actually talks to you. When the mysteries of the universe, the question of whether God exists or not, all become moot points. When God tells you that the future of humankind is in your hands.”

Avrom got up and paced the room. Now Suzanne was emphatic, “People say no to God all the time. They say no to the commandments, kill and steal and covet their neighbors’ wives. They say no so they can indulge selfish impulses and desires. It happens every day.”

“But this is different. I want to give God a reason,” Avrom replied.

“Why is that important?” asked Suzanne.

“Because God is wrong,” said Avrom.

Distraught, he walked to the window. Sunlight filled his eyes as his shadow spread across the carpet.

Suzanne tilted her head to one side, and said, “Some scholars have said that when God asked Abraham to kill Isaac, it wasn’t a test of love but a demonstration of a moral principle, that the binding of Isaac represented a major break of Judaism with pagan culture. It showed that human sacrifice was wrong and not what God wants.”

Avrom responded, “If that’s true, why didn’t God just issue a commandment, like He gave Moses on Sinai, not to do it?”

“You know that questioning God won’t get you anywhere,” said Suzanne.

“Why do we have the ability to reason if God is going to be unreasonable?” he asked.

Suzanne’s eyes narrowed; she sucked in her lips, then said, “I read that some rabbis say that the story shows what it means to be a religious person: to obey God

above all else absolutely.”

“That’s obvious,” countered Avrom,

Suzanne was trying to think, but the strain pulled at her face; her mouth was tense and her eyes overflowed with sadness. “We have to be suspect of what we think are messages from God. We can think we hear the voice of God commanding us to hijack airplanes full of innocent people and crash them into the World Trade Center.” Suzanne took a deep breath. “The most compelling argument, I think, is the rabbis who say it’s all about ethics, that the angel who commanded Abraham to stop was really Abraham’s own God-given voice of conscience. That is why a lesser power, an angel, could override the supposed commandment of God.”

“I get so sick of the fucking metaphors!” said Avrom, “If it was Abraham’s conscience why does an angel have to voice it? Because it was god given?”

Avrom didn’t believe that God would want to, or have to, talk in metaphor, riddle and allegory. If we are talking about the salvation of the world here, the purpose of life and the concepts of right and wrong, why play games? Avrom got up and went to the door, “I’m going for a walk,” he said.

Outside, Avrom looked up at the blue sky. White clouds piled up in myriad shapes and moved slowly across the heavens. “You have infinite wisdom, but are you perplexed that I don’t just trust you? You created me, but can you understand me?”

Avrom watched a bee buzzing around the garden. “I can’t understand the universe. I know there are heavens within heavens where time and space curve and warp and wend a path of purpose beyond my grasp.”

The bee descended rapidly, directly into a welcoming rose. “I look at the blink of a star that exploded nine million light years ago, yet whose light is just now reaching my eyes. I know that even more distant stars have died billions of years ago, but for me they have not yet been born, because their light has not yet traversed that vastness. And I know that those stars and I contain many of the same elements. I marvel at



the atomic similarity of blood and chlorophyll. And sometimes, I just sense the whole of being in a single breath, as if the Buddha just struck me on the head and I became one with all."

Avrom picked up a handful of earth, "But even though you are here promising that there is another world, my life is finite. I will die. My consciousness will end. And all of this, for me, will stop." The dirt falls from his hand and disintegrates into dust. "I am human. I cannot be more. My love is only human love, the love of the heart."

God remained silent; Avrom continued, "I once thought of making a bumper sticker that said, 'God is Irony;' sarcasm may be profane, but irony always seemed holy to me — a Devine smile. Irony, isn't it, that people think of themselves as children of God, and yet you don't understand a parent's love. You just don't get it."

Still, God does not speak.

"Thousands of years ago, you asked Abraham to do the same thing, and I don't know why. What are you trying to prove? You're obviously greater than I, whether you are God or the Devil, and you can have your way with many things; you can kill me, but you can't make me do your will. I have to make that choice."

Avrom waited for God's response, but there was only silence. "Why now go back on your own proscription against sacrifice? What's up with that?" smirked Avrom. He was unafraid as he spoke to God.

The look on Avrom's face was a new look, not defiant; it was confident but not haughty. Anybody looking at him would have thought that he felt good. He looked happy. "It can't be to test my faith, because it is not a test of that. It is a measure of my fear and self-centeredness. You aren't asking me to choose between my son and you, you are asking me to choose between him and me."

"You disappoint me, Avrom," said God.

"The feeling's mutual," blurted Avrom, "but that's

beside the point. It's not important what I think. What matters is what I do. It's like the Jews during the Inquisition who gave their own lives rather than to renounce their faith. If I'm willing to pay with my own life, then I am free."

Returning to the house, Avrom went into his office and shut the door. The voice of God followed him, "You are not only a disappointment to me, Avrom, you are letting down all of humanity."

"We disagree," said Avrom, "I cannot transcend being human, no matter how well I understand the world beyond the limits of humanity. I cannot be an angel. I must be a man. No matter what my philosophical or theological understanding, no matter that you have proved your existence to me; no matter what I could say to Simon, at my very core, deep in the marrow of mine and Simon's beings is only the experience we share; the love we feel for each other. You should know that. And no! Absolutely and finally, No! I will not kill my son!"

Avrom turned to leave the room. A sudden tightness clamped his chest. His breath grew short. In the first second of panic, a force hit him obliterating all light, sound, thought, existence. It was as though a fast-moving freight train had suddenly struck him. His body lay motionless. The light vibrated with gentle echoes, shimmering in the quiet.

When Simon came into the room, the train was long gone. He saw his father lying there. It seemed strange. Was he joking? He couldn't be asleep. "C'mon, Dad. Get up," said Simon.

Avrom didn't move. Simon pushed him and was shocked by the limp weight of Avrom's body. Scared, Simon fell to his knees. "Dad, get up! Please!" he pushed him again and again. He knew about heart attacks, he knew about horror. He had heard of so much terror in his young life. It was the way of the modern world.

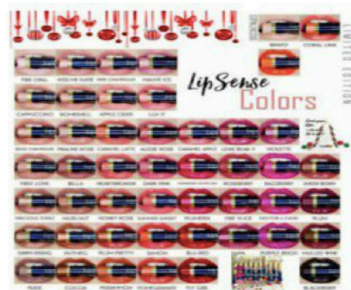
Tears were flowing down his face and he was sobbing, rocking back and forth with both hands against his father's body, he kept pushing and pushing. Avrom's body jostled back and forth, like dead weight.

Simon screamed, but the sound caught in his throat. He couldn't. He did not want to make it real. He knew someday his father would die. But not now, please, God, not now! He felt his whole life becoming barren; a vast emptiness covered with a permanent, dark stain.

He stopped pushing Avrom's limp form and sat back on his heels just staring at his father's motionless face. Simon felt all of Avrom's sweetness. His heart smiled as his tears fell. He reached out and said, "Don't make me bring in the coyotes, Dad," and touched Avrom gently with the tips of his little fingers.

His father opened an eye. Avrom saw Simon's tears and watched fear turning to joy in his son's face. Avrom burst into laughter as Simon hugged him, squeezing with all his might.

## Craft Show by Jen Lynn 3/10/17 10am



**Merchant Square Mall S 12th St Allentown**