The Test: Rabbi Zimmerman instructed Ibrahim to tell about his journey, the hardships, the truth behind the published version that the editors hadn’t known. At first Ibrahim was reluctant to talk, and I had to coax him. I won’t say how I got it out of him, you’ll have to take my work for it. This is what he said.

[7](http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8217%22%20%5Cl%20%22v%3D7) Itzak spoke to me, Ibraham his father, and he said, "My father!" And I said, "Here I am, my son." And Itzak said, "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

It was hard to answer Itzak’s question, when no one knew the answer, and what had come before. So, I will have to tell you about that unknown beginning, which I would more willingly forget than remember.

Itzak was really all that I had left to me when we left. Lake Chad had started to dry up, and the life of a fisherman had become increasingly difficult. By the time I, Ibrahim, had decided to leave,11 of our 12 children had died, and Sarai was no longer able to nurse binyamin our last much less bear children. But Itzak was the oldest, already big enough to help me out, his old father, when I would clean the nets and repair the pirogue, and I started to count on him, without admitting it to myself. All my life, I had worked hard, and succeeded. Now there was this strapping son to take up some of the slack. I remember the heat of that day when he asked me about the lamb. I was sweating already, and wiped my forehead, remembering the stories of other young men in the village who had made it to Francia, to Italia, and who had sent back money to their families.

If we stayed, there were increasing risks of the militias, and worst of them boko haram, and the famine with most of the fish stock depleted. Why shouldn’t we be able to make the journey too. I’d find the place where the others had gone when we arrived, I’d would work hard and impress the toubabs, the whites, and they’d take us in. I didn’t need much, only the minimum, the fire and the wood. God would provide the lamb if I couldn’t.

So I said to him,

 "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." After that we left.

The journey took us north, through Kano and Agadez, the last city before the desert, and then through the oasis cities: Bord El Houas, Djanet, Ghat, and then Germa where we’d would find transport on pickup trucks across to Sabha, in Libya. We googled it: 3,755 kilometeers, 62 hours. From there I counted on pickups to the coast, and a quick trip across the seas to Lampadusa, where we could complete the trip.

Of course Itzak would come with me; he would learn to do what no one in Chad had done before. We would build altars to god with the wood, we would carve stone statues with the features of blind deities, and the infidels would place sacrifices on the heights so that the smoke could rise unimpeded. We would even become like that father and son known to the toubabs as Abraham and Isaac, and there would be glory and irradiated glowing light that would mark our passage into the future.

Ibrahim’s head turned and turned in the heat, as they went for sixty-two hours without water or food. But they were men of the Aouzou cast who had walked for days in the sands. He was so sure when he had answered the call, take your son, the only one, whom you love, Itzak, to the land of the toubabs, and bring him up there for a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will tell you about when you arrive.

Only it was harder than he thought. At Sabha the evil hearted Libyans took him and Itzak captive as soon as they descended from the truck. When he asked them how to get to the mountains of Jebel Akhdar, they laughed and whipped him. And when he turned his face away from them, hard as the basalt stones of lake chad, they whipped his son till he cried. They took his fire and wood, and told him to call home to send money, or they’d cut off his hand. When he turned left, they abused him; when he turned right, they abused him. Itzak had asked, where is the lamb, father, and now he was left without words to answer.

They had arrived, but what could he now say about this place where so many men were being sold and whipped. He could hardly sleep, he could hardly dream. Their nights became filled with torment as they saw the arrivals being turned into hostages, tortured so that they would cry out while calling their relatives back home in Nigeria or Cameroon, begging them to send money.

Ibrahim and Itzak were from Chad. The poorest of the poor. Of course they couldn’t call home: they had only their clothes, their shoes, and nothing to call home with. Their captors knew that as well, and so they were whipped to force them to labor for their owners, breaking stones, collecting wood, carrying it on their backs, and then obediently lighting the fires so as to boil the water. There was little, there was nothing. They were simply there, ready to answer the call Ibrahim expected, telling him what he should do when they arrived.

One night the cries became too great for Ibrahim to bear. He spoke in a whisper to the men who were chained in the place where they were lodged, and told them of his first dreams of this journey. He asked, was this the place of which God had spoken to him?

One of the men responded, and told the story of his homonym, and quoted the lines to him. “Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and he bound Isaac his son and placed him on the altar upon the wood.

10And Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife, to slaughter his son.”

Ibrahim stopped him. The man waited, knowing what he would say, but Ibrahim appeared to be choked up. He turned away for a moment, and put his hand on Itzak’s head while he slept, and said, I thought we were to be leaving on a boat for the north, and that we would find our brothers there to help us. So did we all, replied the man. We will, said his neighbour, I am not going back. I’d go home if I could, said another. They all spoke now about their fears and their dreams, and for a moment it was as if they were not in chains, waiting for the whippings and slave labor of the next days.

Ibrahim knew he was different, that he and Itzak had to be there for a reason, that he had not come that far only to fail. That they couldn’t die in that place like the four Nigerians who had been beaten to death only a few days earlier. That they would be the ones who could reach the shores, get there, get there, get there. That he had not been wrong in bringing his son into that hellhole. That he would be different, he and his son Itzak.

11And an angel of God called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham! Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

12And he said, "Do not stretch forth your hand to the lad, nor do the slightest thing to him, for now I know that you are a God fearing man, and you did not withhold your son, your only one, from Me."

13And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and he saw, and lo! there was a ram, [and] after [that] it was caught in a tree by its horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

So Ibrahim and Itzak crossed the Mediterranean into Lampadusa. They were given their refugee cards, they went to work, and learned how to live in the new lands, with shopping centers and fast cars. There was no irony in the end, no tragedy, no new revelations. They changed their names, they became fathers and grandfathers, they had sons, and daughters, they lived new lives. They became ordinary people like us.

Oh god, he thought, thank you for saving my son, Isaac, for saving our children. Hinani, hinani, hinani, he said, over and over.

And then, the next day, when he woke…. No the story didn’t end there. It has no beginning, it has no end. It is too painful to recount again.

Ibrahim asked the man how it ended, and he said the story had no end, but someone had added this part on, so that it wouldn’t be too hard to hear. It was about Isaac’s daughter in law, who had also wept for her children.

Shall we weep for them, as Rachel wept for her children? Or remember their dreams, like the last dream of Jeremiah, the one where he hears Rachel’s voice: 14A voice is heard on high, lamentation, bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, she refuses to be comforted for her children for they are not.

15So says the Lord: Refrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is reward for your work, says the Lord, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy.

16And there is hope for your future, says the Lord, and the children shall return to their own border.

17I have indeed heard Ephraim complaining, [saying,] "You have chastised me, and I was chastised as an ungoaded calf, O lead me back, and I will return, for You are the Lord, my God.”

And Ibrahim, now called Abraham, heard the answer, "Is Ephraim a son who is dear to Me? Is he a child who is dandled? For whenever I speak of him, I still remember him: therefore, My very innards are agitated for him; I will surely have compassion on him," says the Lord.

Hag Sameach.