

The Knife and The Scalpel

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

A few weeks ago I had brain surgery to repair a breach that opened from brain surgery seven years ago. The experience gave me an insight into the story of the *Akedah*, the binding of Isaac. (Gen. Ch. 22)

Commentators ask how God could have instructed Abraham to sacrifice his son, or why Abraham acquiesced. More rarely do we wonder about Isaac. Most assume that when Isaac survives he is traumatized and damaged. Some note that he and Abraham never speak again after this experience. How could he undergo such an ordeal and not be devastated?

When I left the hospital three days after surgery I was surprised that I felt buoyant. I recalled Churchill's words after fighting in the Boer war: "It is exhilarating to be shot at without result." Unpleasant as the whole experience was, I had gone under the knife again, and emerged healthy and whole.

Perhaps Isaac knew that each of us must endure a test. We are not all Abraham, but we are all Isaac, all literally or figuratively under the knife, all tested. No one escapes fear, loss, sickness, sorrow. But we do control our reactions. Isaac's name is often translated "laughter" but "*Yitzkhak*" literally means "he will laugh." Yet the Bible never tells us when Isaac does indeed laugh. As I walked out into the sunshine after being under the knife, I thought maybe, just maybe, Isaac laughed as he came down the mountain.