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TOWNELEY CYCLE 4: Abraham

Draft 2

Abraham follows

ABRAHAM: Oh thou true God, great Adonai,  
Now hear us when we to thee call,  
As thou art he that best help may,  
And art most succour and help of all.  
Almighty Lord, to thee I pray 5  
Let once the oil of mercy fall,  
Even should I not see that day -  
Though truly I do hope I shall!

Mercy, Lord, almighty one!  
'Tis long since this world first wrought; 10  
But where have our forefathers gone?  
Greatly this occupies my thought.  
Since Adam by Eve was first undone,  
And ate that apple, sparing not,  
For all the wisdom that he won 15  
That bargain has he dearly bought!

For paradise they put him from;  
He went lamenting, with little cheer,  
And after, lived here ages long -  
More than three hundred year - 20  
In sorrow and in travail strong,  
And every day in strife severe.  
His children quarrelled themselves among:  
Cain slew Abel, his son so dear.

Then Noah, that was true and good - 25  
He and his children three -  
Was saved when all was in a flood:

That was a wondrous thing to see!  
 And Lot, when he from Sodom strode:  
 Three cities burned, yet escaped he. 30  
 As man's sin troubled my Lord's mood,  
 Vengeance he took most powerfully.

When I think of our elders all  
 And of the marvels that have been,  
 No gladness in my heart I feel: 35  
 My comfort goes away then, clean.  
 Lord, when shall Death make me his thrall?  
 A hundred years, for certain, have I seen.  
 Upon my faith, soon let him call,  
 For it is now high time. 40

Yet Adam is to hell gone  
 And there has lain for many a day;  
 And all our elders, every one,  
 They are gone the selfsame way  
 Until God will hear their moan. 45  
 Now help, Lord, Adonai!  
 For answer can I think of none,  
 And none there is that better may.

GOD: I will help Adam and his kind,  
 If love and faith in them I find; 50  
 If they are true and put aside  
 Their sinfulness and all their pride.  
 To Abraham my servant will I go  
 To prove if he be true or no.  
 By certain ways I shall him prove, 55  
 If he to me be true in love.

Abraham! Abraham!

ABRAHAM: Who is that? make way! let me see!  
I heard one call my name.

GOD: It is I; attend to me 60  
That formed thy forefather Adam,  
And every thing in its degree.

ABRAHAM: To hear thy will, ready I am,  
And to fulfil whatever it be.

GOD: For mercy have I heard thee cry; 65  
Heard thy true prayers, every one.  
If thou love me, now take thy way  
Unto the Land of Vision;  
Be there, I bid, by the third day,  
And take with thee Isaac, thy son 70  
As sacrificial beast to slay:  
To slay him, see thou do not shun,  
And burn him there as thine offering.

ABRAHAM: Ah, loved then be thou, Lord in throne! 75  
To me with thy hand blessing bring,  
For thy bidding surely shall be done.  
His praises every man should sing  
That his servant would visit thus, so soon.  
I shall in gladness do this thing -  
It profits not to grouch nor groan. 80

This commandment must I needs fulfil,

Though heart should grow as heavy as lead;  
Should I offend my dear Lord's will?  
Nay, I had rather my child were dead.  
Whatever he bids me, good or ill, 85  
It shall be done, let this be said;  
If wife and child he bids me kill  
There shall I follow, where he has led.

Whether Isaac be far or near  
He would be aghast now 90  
If he knew this of which I fear,  
Isaac, son, where art thou?

ISAAC: Father, I am already here -  
Was coming to you even now!  
I love you so much, father dear! 95

ABRAHAM: And do you so? I would know how  
Thou loves me, son, as thou has said.

ISAAC: Oh, Father, with all my heart,  
More than all that ever was made.  
God keep you long in every part! 100

ABRAHAM: Now who would not be glad that had  
A child as loving as thou art?  
Thy loving comfort makes me glad  
And many times has cheered my heart.

Go home, my son; come soon again 105  
And tell thy mother I shall come fast.  
God keep thee from all pain!

Here Isaac moves from his father

Now, glad I am that he is passed!  
Alone, right here upon this plain,  
Oh I could speak till my heart burst, 110  
Might all be well, and none to blame.  
But it must needs be done at last.

Now must I take some thought today,  
And it is good that I prepare:  
The land of Vision is far away; 115  
By third day's end must I be there.  
Mine ass shall go with us, I say,  
Our harness, less and more, to bear.  
Since far off my son I must slay  
To carry a sword must be our care, 120

And to make ready I shall prepare:  
This night will I be on my way.  
Although Isaac be never so fair,  
And mine own son, the truth to say;  
And though he be my own true heir, 125  
And should wield all after my day,  
God's bidding now shall I not spare.  
Should I gainsay it? Ma Foi! nay, nay!

Isaac

ISAAC: Sir?

ABRAHAM: Make ready soon

For, son, thy self and I surely, 130  
We two, must now go forth from town  
To sacrifice in far county  
For certain causes of great renown.  
Take wood and fire along with thee.  
By hills and dales, both up and down 135  
Son, thou shall ride, and I walk with thee.  
  
Forget thou nought that thou should need;  
Now make thee ready, my darling.

ISAAC: I am ready to do this deed,  
And ever to fulfil your bidding. 140

ABRAHAM: My dear son, see you have no dread  
We shall come home with great loving:  
Both to and fro I shall us lead;  
Come now, son, in my blessing.  
  
Ye two, here with this ass abide 145  
For Isaac and I will to you hill;  
It is so high we may not ride,  
  
Therefore ye two shall abide here still.

FIRST BOY: Sir, your word ought not to be denied  
We are ready your bidding to fulfil. 150

SECOND BOY: Whatever to us shall betide,  
To do your bidding we ever will.

ABRAHAM:            God bless you both together here;  
                      I shall not tarry long from you.

FIRST BOY:           Sir, we shall wait till you appear;                            155  
                      Out of this place we shall not go.

ABRAHAM:            Children, to me you are always dear;  
                      I pray God keep you ever from woe.

SECOND BOY:         We will do your bidding, never fear.

ABRAHAM:            Isaac, now are we but we two:                                    160  
  
                      We must walk on a goodly pace,  
                      For it is farther than I thought.  
                      We shall have joy and great solace  
                      When this thing to an end is brought.  
                      Lo, my son, here is the place.                                    165

ISAAC:                Wood and fire, as ye me taught,  
                      Are in my hand - now tell apace,  
                      Where is the beast which burn we ought?

ABRAHAM:            Now son, no more may I delay;  
                      My heart determines to do his will                            170  
                      Thou ever cheered me, night and day  
                      Mine intent ever thou didst fulfil  
                      But certainly I must thee slay:  
                      It must be thus, for good or ill.

ISAAC: My heart is heavy - what may I say 175  
Thus hastily that thou shall kill?

ABRAHAM: Isaac!

ISAAC: Sir?

ABRAHAM: Come hither to me:  
Thou shalt be dead whatsoever betide.

ISAAC: Ah, father, mercy! mercy!

ABRAHAM: What I tell you may not be denied! 180  
Take thy death, therefore, meekly.

ISAAC: Ah, good sir, abide!  
Father.

ABRAHAM: What, son?

ISAAC: To do your will I am ready.  
Wheresoever ye go or ride,  
If I may somehow stay your will, 185  
Since I have offended, then beat me I pray

ABRAHAM: Isaac!

ISAAC: What sir?

ABRAHAM: Good son, be still.



ISAAC:           Father!

ABRAHAM:           What son?

ISAAC:                   Think on thy child today:  
What have I done?

ABRAHAM:           Truly, no ill.

ISAAC:           And shall be slain.

ABRAHAM:           So did I say.

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ISAAC:           Sir, what may help?

ABRAHAM:           No earthly skill.

ISAAC:           I ask mercy!

ABRAHAM:           That may not delay.

ISAAC:           When I am dead, and closed in clay,  
Who shall then be your son?

ABRAHAM:           Ah, lord, that I should see this day!

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ISAAC:           Sir, who shall do what I have done?

ABRAHAM:           Speak no such words, son, I thee pray.

ISAAC: Shall ye me kill?

ABRAHAM: I must, my son:  
Lie still! I smite!

ISAAC: Sir! - let me say -

ABRAHAM: Now, my dear child, thou may not this shun. 200

ISAAC: The shining of your bright blade  
Makes me to quake most fearfully.

ABRAHAM: On thy face therefore, thou shall be lain,  
That, when I strike, thou shalt not see.

ISAAC: What have I done, Father? What have I said? 205

ABRAHAM: Truly, nothing ill to me.

ISAAC: And thus, guiltless, shall I be dead?

ABRAHAM: Now, good son, let such words be.

ISAAC: I love you always.

ABRAHAM: So do I thee.

ISAAC: Father!

ABRAHAM: What, son?



At my command he does not complain:  
Release him now from his intent;  
Bid him go home again -  
I know well how he meant. 240

ANGEL: Gladly, Lord! I am ready.  
Thy bidding shall be magnified;  
I shall betake me speedily,  
Thee to obey at every tide;  
Thy will, thy name, speak gloriously 245  
Over all this world so wide:  
And to thy servant hastily,  
Good, true Abraham, will I glide.

ABRAHAM: Oh that I might this weeping cease,  
Till this my sacrifice of him was done; 250  
Yet I may find here no release,  
For all that I may grieve and groan;  
The more my sorrow it will increase  
That I lament to look him upon.  
I will rush on him apace, 255  
And, as he lies there, slay my son.

ANGEL: Abraham! Abraham!

ABRAHAM: Who is there? Tell me!  
Away! let me go!

ANGEL: Stand up now, stand!  
Thy good will shall rewarded be  
Hold thy hand therefore, I command! 260

ABRAHAM: Say, who bade so? Any but ye?

ANGEL: God, who as offering sends this beast to hand.

ABRAHAM: I spoke with God too, after thee:  
He did this deed demand!

ANGEL: He has perceived thy great meekness 265  
And thy good will also in this.  
He wills thou do thy son no distress,  
For he has granted thee his bliss.

ABRAHAM: But art thou sure now, that it is  
As thou has said?

ANGEL: I tell thee, yes. 270

ABRAHAM: I thank thee, Lord, well of goodness,  
That has released me now from this;  
  
To speak with thee have I no space  
Until this news my son has learned.  
My good son, know thou shall have grace: 275  
My hand gainst thee shall not be turned!  
Rise up now, with thy noble face.

ISAAC: Sir, shall I live?  
  
Yea, by this kiss, well-earned,  
And he kisses him  
  
Son, thou has escaped a fearful place:  
Thou should have broken been, and burned. 280

ISAAC: But father, shall I not be slain?

ABRAHAM: No, truly, son.

ISAAC: Then am I glad;  
Good sir, put up your sword again.

ABRAHAM: Nay, my dear son, be not afraid.

ISAAC: Is all forgiven?

ABRAHAM: Yea, son, certain.

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ISAAC: For fear, sir, was I nearly mad.  
I tried with all my might and main,  
Yet could not still the fear I had.

ABRAHAM: My son, be glad, and make good cheer,  
That God to us has comfort lent;  
I love thee Lord with heart entire  
That of thy love this gift has sent,  
To save my son, my darling dear,  
And sent this sheep to thy intent:  
That we shall offer it to thee here  
My Lord, that all to us has lent.

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[They sacrifice the sheep]

ANGEL: Abraham! Abraham!

ABRAHAM:                                   Lo, here indeed.  
   Hark, son, some salving of our sore

ANGEL:                                    God wills of this ye take good heed,  
   Which shall you comfort more and more.                                   300  
   Since thou for him would do this deed  
   By me he sends these tidings sure:  
   He means to multiply your seed  
   Even as sand upon the shore.

  This promise, too, he sends by me:                                   305  
   That, for his voice thou has obeyed,  
   All nations shall be blessed in thee  
   And in thy seed; thy foes, dismayed  
   Now henceforth from their gates shall flee.

ABRAHAM:                                   Then shall we no more be afraid.                                   310  
   But ever praise him joyfully,  
   For this great promise to us made.

  Now son, since we thus well are sped,  
   Let us hence homeward as we may,  
   Bringing no tidings there of dread,                                   315  
   But bide in bliss in Barsabé  
   Until that time that thou shalt wed  
   And thy seed spring, as he did say.  
   Thus, by God's laws let all be led:  
   He grant you bliss - now have good day!                                   320