

# Call and Crisis: The Divine Pedagogy of Formation

---

**Paul Kalluveetil**

Mary Matha Major Seminary, Trichur, Kerala, India

## *Abstract*

The divine call and the progressive training given to Abraham in order to be a 'blessing to the nations' provide us with a clear notion of the divine pedagogy of formation. Unlike an overprotective mother who refuses her baby to grow up by not letting it go off her knees, the divine formator often leaves humans alone in order to face challenges. The humans through bumping into crisis one after the other and employing every bit of their survival skills, are expected to develop the divine maturity and to realize that their ultimate survival is in God. Failures and falls form an integral part of this formative dynamics which serve to imprint in the mind of the formees the eternal truth about their absolute dependence on the divine providence. They are feeble creatures who cannot subsist by themselves. The formee must again and again confess that he/she is an *agathi*, who needs to cling to God. The divine pedagogue often makes use of various situations and persons to realize his goal rather than directly getting involved in the formative process.

## **Introduction**

We live in an era where new and new methods of religious and priestly formation are being experimented. The old methods are often rejected and sometimes held in contempt. Many have recourse to techniques developed by psychology. Sometimes the candidates are given only a psychological formation. Some seem to think that a degree in psychology may qualify a person to become a formator. At this juncture one may ask few questions. What is the method of formation used by God? What are

its traits? Does the divine pedagogy of formation have any relevance for modern times? This article does not directly deal with these questions. It is left to those who are being engaged in the area of formation to evaluate and adduce the logical conclusions. I restrict myself to the field of Bible. There we find that God employs venturesome methods of putting the one whom he has called into a crisis situation. This is the first part of the study, in which we analyze the pedagogy used by Yahweh to transform Abraham into a mature and authentic human being.

### **An Unexpected Call**

All on a sudden the Lord came to the life of Abraham, who was then leading a comfortable and secure life in the company of his relatives. At that time he had not known the God of the Bible. As a pious person he was venerating the deities of his ancestors. Abraham was rather a wealthy man. He had many sheep and cattle as well as servants. One may designate him as a person who was filled with ego-consciousness. "I am somebody and I have something" – such an attitude of 'beingness' and 'havingness' had its dominion over him. He enjoyed self-security and comfort of religion, and was filled with self-complacency.

The unexpected encounter with Yahweh brought a radical change in the life of ease and peace. The unknown deity told him: "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" (Gen 12:1). It was not a request, but an order. The Lord was demanding him a very difficult task - a radical break from the past. This amounted to self-annihilation.

One has to understand Yahweh's command in the background of the tribal system. The called one had to leave his tribe and embrace a life of uncertainties and insecurities. Practically it meant a leap into the dark. One who leaves his tribe and goes elsewhere will meet insurmountable predicaments and plights. Since Abraham was a stranger, others will not welcome him. They will not provide him shelter or food or a place to sleep. Rather, he will be considered as an enemy, and will be attacked, despoiled, and even killed. At least this outsider will be expelled. Thus Abraham was called, or better to say compelled to become a vagabond, without any abode or amenities. He was not sure what would happen at the next moment. Will his sheep and cattle be condemned to a premature death without having forage and water? Will his wife be abducted, and he be killed? Thus God was asking Abraham to become a destitute (*agathi*) whose subsistence was incessantly threatened.

Call is indeed a challenge, which paves the way for crisis. It demands an unconditional repudiation of the past life. No trace of the old lifestyle should remain. Everything should be uprooted and torn down, destroyed and overthrown (Jer 1:10). God will never allow constructing a house on old foundation. He will not sew a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. The Lord will not pour new wine into old wineskins (Mk 2:21-22). There is no place for the compromising mentality in the divine formation scheme. The Master will not be satisfied with a half-hearted attitude. He wants only those who are ready to put a full stop to the old way of life. 'Yes' or 'No' - this is the pedagogy of the divine formator.

Unexpectedness or non-foreknowledge is another factor that was involved in the call of Abraham. Abruptly Yahweh comes into his life. It was indeed a stunning surprise. The Lord flings down a challenge, shakes the human being out of his/her microcosm and compels him/her, so to say, to take daring decisions. This is also the method used by God in calling Jeremiah, Mary of Nazareth and Saul, who was the persecutor of Christ's followers. Does this dynamic reflect deep psychological insight?

### **The Elements of Promise in Call**

Together with the demand to radically break with the past, certain promises or graces are offered to the one who is called. Yahweh said to Abraham: "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, I make your name great, and you will be a blessing. . . ." (Gen.12:2-3). The divine Master always rewards those who resolutely set out to follow him. He fills them with his wellbeing and welfare. This is the meaning of the Hebrew term *brk*'bless'. God bestows upon them his *kshçmam* (wellness), and *kalyānam* (plethora) – to use the Indian classical terminology. He, the *nanmaswaroopan*, (the very form of goodness) transforms them into his living images, so that they also could become like him irradiating figures of bliss and glory.

Call is not an unilateral act. Both parties should be actively involved in that process. Only when human being voluntarily responds, can the call become personal and one's own. He/she has to appropriate it by saying 'amen' and tries to live up to the call. For that one has to pay a great price. We find this in the life of Abraham. Immediately he broke with his past and set out. His subsequent life was a continuous setting-out (exodus). Genesis 12 repeatedly used terms such as 'went out', 'set out' (4, 5, 6, 9, 10). The one, who is called, has to embrace the lifestyle of a vagabond (11, 14, 19, 20). His life has to become an uninterrupted walk towards God. To assume the lifestyle of a wayfarer is the true mark of the one who is called.

The formator who had called Abram to embrace the lifestyle of a wanderer often comes forward with words of consolation and encouragement (Gen 12:7). He appears to him and renews the promises. At the initial stages of formation the Master has to provide the formee shelter and support. Only then the disciple can commit himself/herself to the divine ways. The formee is like a child who needs milk, and not solid food (1 Cor 3:2; Heb. 5:12). The divine formator is well conscious of this truth. He was ever ready to extend his hands to the one who was called. Abraham willingly said 'amen', and as a sign of his gratitude he built altars (Gen 12:7, 8). Here we can find the progress of exodus out of himself and the march towards God.

## **The Challenge and the Fall: Text I**

### **The First Challenge**

The one who is called, needs to pass through the period of training. This period extends to the whole life, which is indeed the auspicious time to grow into the divine stature and be filled with the celestial bliss and become persons of goodness. God brings forth in the life of Abraham crisis after crisis. The called one has to encounter challenges, only through which he/she can grow into the divine maturity and become an authentic human being. The first dilemma occurred at the first stage of formation (Gen 12:10-20). Because of a severe famine Abram was compelled to go down to Egypt, a gentile country. He was afraid that the beauty of Sarah, his wife, will put his life in danger. The unscrupulous Egyptians will put the husband to sword and abduct her. The formee did not cling to the one who has called him and made him a vagabond. Rather, he put his trust in his own intelligence. He weaved out a plan to save his skin. Abraham forced Sarah to behave as his sister. This was indeed an immoral and reprehensible act of unfaithfulness. At the time of crisis the trainee easily forgot the divine promise of blessings which guaranteed him the status of great nation and a renowned person. Instead of blindly committing himself into the hands of the almighty, Abraham had recourse to a human method in order to save his life.

Why could the father of salvation history do such an abominable thing? Although he was called and given promises, the Lord did not give him any precise instructions how to behave in times of crisis. The divine formator leaves humans alone in order to face the challenges. He is not like a mother who holds her baby on the knees and clasps caressingly. The humans should try to grow through the crisis; they have to learn how to surrender themselves into the divine hands. Only then they can achieve

the divine maturity. This is the divine pedagogy of formation. It is indeed a test. God does not want to be like an affectionate mummy who does not allow her child to learn how to walk, because of fear lest may stumble and fall.

### **Fall, a Formative Element**

In the first crisis Abraham failed miserably. He himself was the cause of the fall. If he would have trusted in the one who had called him, he would not have fallen. Although he could save his life, he was endangering the unfolding of salvation history. Pharaoh took Sarah to his harem in order to make her one of his mistresses. If the king of Egypt would have succeeded in it, the divine scheme that Abraham would become the patriarch of a great nation and the father of the blessed would have become futile. God's plan of salvation would have been thwarted.

Lifting up the fallen is a part of the divine pedagogy of formation. God will not abandon those who have abandoned him. He will hurry up to draw out those who have jumped into the depths of abyss. Yahweh afflicted severely Pharaoh and his family who had forcefully taken Sarah. The king repented of his sin and gave her back to Abraham. Pharaoh bestowed bountiful gifts on him. In his pedagogy of formation God brings good even from the evil deeds of humans. At the same time he tries to make the formee conscious of his unfaithfulness. He made use of the king of Egypt for this. The harsh words of Pharaoh (18-19) served to humiliate him and make him ashamed of his blatant lie. The called one could not defend his action. The pathetic figure of the reprimanded and upbraided father of the salvation history will naturally evoke our commiseration. One thing needs to be noted. The formator does not directly rebuke or discipline the formee. If He would have done so, Abraham should not have felt shame and disgrace to such a degree. Here we find another aspect of the divine pedagogy of formation.

Fall forms part of formative dynamics. It serves to imprint in the mind of the formee an everlasting truth. If humans depend upon themselves they will necessarily fail. They are feeble creatures, who cannot subsist by themselves. The formee must again and again confess that he/she is an *agathi* (destitute) who needs to blindly cling to God. This truth, one will not learn by a single experience. It needs time to become fully conscious of this reality. God the Formator patiently deals with the formee till he/she achieves such a mature attitude. The Lord will hasten each time to extend a helping hand. He will harvest good from evil. Thus the Formator brings back to the right path Abraham who tried to leave the Promised

Land because of famine and thereby defeat the divine plan. He does not do anything directly. Rather he makes use of Pharaoh whom Abraham feared as an adversary, to send back the called one from Egypt (19-20).

### **The Formee Grows**

Abraham may have, at least temporarily, learned a lesson from his failure to face up to the first challenge. At the same time he would have felt gratitude and love towards his Master who came to lift him up, without uttering a word of accusation. With this positive attitude he continued the process of formation. Gen. 13 narrates the second period of the exodus from himself. The term 'go' is repeated 5 times in that chapter (1, 3, 5, 9, 18). In his march towards God Abraham calls on the divine name (4).

There occurred another crisis in the life of the formee. Till that time Lot the son of his brother was accompanying him, with his servants, flocks and herds and tents. A quarrel arose between the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot. The formee solved the issue in a praiseworthy way, as fitting to the nature of his call. Abraham generously allowed Lot to choose the fertile land. At the departure of his nephew and family he would have felt heart-ache and solitude. Then the Lord appeared to him with consoling words and renewed the promises of blessing (14, 16). Yahweh spoke to the one who had become cheerless and depressed, in order to inject alertness, vigor and dynamism into him. Note the verbs used by the formator: *lift up your eyes, look at, get up, and walk*. The Lord promises to give to him and his offspring all the land that he sees for an everlasting possession. . . . God assures that he will multiply his descendants like the dust of the earth. The formator should be ready to shower upon the formee encouraging words as the occasion demands. It will engender self-confidence in the formee. Accordingly, Abraham became once more an involving person. He continued to undertake the process of exodus. The formee built an altar as a sign of his gratitude for the timely help of the formator (18).

### **Formation, a Dialogical Process**

God in the beginning itself promised blessings to the one whom He had called. Now Abraham felt that such promises were not getting realized. The promise of progeny remained unfulfilled. He became dejected and restless. Now the formator who can read the inner thoughts of the formee, comes forward to inject courage and strength into him (15:1-21). He calls him by name, an act which engenders personal and intimate relationship, and tells him: "Do not be afraid, Abraham; I am your shield,

your very great reward" (1). Now the formee directly confronts the formator. He freely gives vent to his thoughts of complaint. What is the use of reward, since he remains childless? His household servant is going to inherit his possessions (2-3). One of the most important elements in the formation process is the sincere dialogue between the parties. The disciple should be ready to fully expose his problems and complaints before the master. Yahweh, the greatest pedagogue teaches us how to react to the inner agonies of the formee. The Lord promises by an oath that he will solve the existing difficulties (4ff).

## **The Challenge and the Fall: Text II**

### **The Second Challenge**

Still the Lord did not immediately fulfill his promises. Here we find another element in the divine pedagogy of formation. The formee must get enough chances to grow in faith and trust. He must learn to hope against hope. A disciple of Christ has to build up a lifestyle based on faith. By retarding the fulfillment of the promise Yahweh was teaching Abraham to grow in the discipleship.

The barren Sarah was already old. Thus humanly speaking she could not bear a child. The dutiful wife had recourse to a practical method. Her husband can beget a child from Hagar, the slave girl (16:1-4). He succumbed to the temptation. Abraham would have justified himself this way. What is wrong in making use of the intelligence, which God has given him, in order to have progeny? Here we find a case of a very complex challenge, a temptation to make realize the Word of God through human means and methods. Or better to say, it was a way to compel God to fulfill his promises. Still the Lord does not immediately respond to this act of confrontation. He allowed the formee to do what he had decided, in order to help the formee to ultimately find his refuge in Him. Only when a trainee learns to grow into the non-having and non-being attitude, can he cling totally to the Master for his existence and survival, and can commit himself blindly to the divine providence.

### **The Attitude of the Formator**

Abraham failed in the test. He did not face the crisis situation in the light of faith. Instead of listening to the voice of the Master, he hearkened to his wife (16:2), and tried to speed up the divine promise by begetting a son from the slave girl. Practically he was thwarting God's plan of salvation. Here we find at least an unconscious attempt to become the father of the generations of slavery.

God the formator does not get angry and accuse the formee. The divine pedagogue takes into account the human weakness and frailties. Because of the unfaithfulness to God, there arose a tense situation in the family. Sarah began to ill-treat Hagar (16:6). Because of that, the slave girl had to flee from the house. The husband seems to connive at the situation. He did not want to meddle with the entire affair. He assumed the attitude of an innocent person. The formator, however, behaved as if he had not noticed such an insincere conduct. He showers his mercies on Hagar and her child (16:7-16; 21:10-21). When Sarah demanded to send away the slave girl and Ishmael a second time, Abraham felt uneasiness about it. Then the formator hastens to console him (21:11-13). He even promises to make that son of the slave girl the father of a nation. Thus the divine Master could trace out even the hidden heart-ache of the formee. He considered it as if were his own problem and took effective steps to solve it in a magnanimous way. Here we find the divine pedagogy of formation.

### **Confirmation of the Call and the Response**

Thus during the crisis situation the formee conveniently forgot his call. His commitment to the one, who has called him, had practically ceased to exist. At that juncture the formator appears to him, and firmly reasserts under an oath his covenant promises (Gen 17). Even when the Lord repeatedly told him that He would give him a son from Sarah, the formee was not ready to believe it. "Abraham fell face down; he laughed and said to himself, 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?'" (17). Indeed, these were the words of incredulity and sardonic attitude. One may doubt whether the laughter had a tint of mockery. Still he was not ready to give vent to his inner thoughts in the divine presence: "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" (18). One can thus interpret the underlying idea in this response. God has inadvertently uttered an impossible thing. Now the formee wants to save the formator from the embarrassing situation. He provides God a chance to swallow his own words. An interesting attempt of the disciple to help the Master to head off from the issue!

Here we find a disconcerting situation which every formator may come to face. How to react at this juncture? How to deal with a formee who tries to outsmart the Master? Yahweh sets before us a model response. He did not betray his inner feelings. Rather he behaved in a serene as well as solemn way. The divine formator did not appear to be confused. He was not angry or tried to reprimand this unworthy demeanor. At the same time the divine master was not ready to withdraw his words. What he did

was to reconfirm his covenant promises. The Lord even decides the very name of the future child. He used strong and absolute words. Such a response helped to evaporate the traces of unbelief in the formee. At the same time it contained, though in a hidden way, an implicit rebuke for the negative reaction of the one who was called.

Yahweh's next words were concerned with the request of Abraham. He assures the formee that he would bless Ishmael. Here we find the special trait of the formation pedagogy of the Lord. He does not scold the one who declined to believe; rather he is generous enough to respect and give due importance to the words of the disciple.

### **A Friendly Approach**

Genesis 18 unfolds some lofty steps of the divine formation. In the first part (1-15) the formator receives the hospitality of the formee. He goes to the tent of Abraham as a guest, and gives the one who is called a chance to welcome him with respect. Yahweh makes use of the scene of the festive meal to make the faith of the formee deeper. In his heart the Master imprints the truth that there is nothing too hard for the Lord (14). The formee was granted the gratification of ministering to the formator. One can look at this as a part of the divine formation process. At the same time the divine pedagogue tries to elevate the occasion to spiritual horizons.

In the second part (16-33) the formator opens his heart to the formee. He seeks counsel from the disciple as a friend by giving articulation to his inner agonies. This is called a most apt method to inculcate self-confidence in the formee, as well as to make him grow to the divine maturity. Yahweh did not know what to do with the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. They were worthy of terrible punishment. Still the merciful Lord did not want to destroy them. He allows the trainee to act as a mediator, and creates chances to bargain with him. The formee takes the place of counselor of the formator!

### **The Challenge and the Fall: Text II**

#### **Ego-Centeredness and Its Consequence**

Abraham was living in the illusion that he had attained the divine union. This is indeed a very dangerous mentality in the formee. Genesis 20 depicts how the formator brings down this house of sand by putting him into a crisis. Through this challenging situation the Master was testing the commitment of the disciple. At Gerar the incident of Egypt was

again repeated. The trainee behaved as if he had utterly forgotten the bitter past experience of unbelief and infidelity (12:10-20). At the crisis he does not even think about the one who has called him, nor entrusts him into His hands, nor requests his help. How to save his skin – this was his only thought. He did not bother to utter a blatant lie by presenting his wife as his sister. At his word the King Abimelech took Sarah to his harem.

Here we find the total failure of formation which Yahweh had till now given to him. The formee does not make even a single and simple attempt to encounter the challenge. The one, who had been proud of having been attained maturity, falls deep down into temptation. This is indeed a lesson for the modern formators and formees. Both of them should maintain a constant attitude of humility and a non-having and non-being mentality. The master should not succumb to the illusion that he/she is a successful and skilled formator. Also the disciple should not think that he/she has attained perfection. The formative charism is a constant journey from failure to success, from downfall to loftiness. The more both of them appropriate the self-emptying process of the Son of God, the more they will grow into Christ. Like him they should train themselves in the school of suffering in order to learn obedience to the will of God (Heb 5:8).

### **The Teacher's Art of Discipline**

The formee who failed to confront the challenge and cowardly yielded to the temptation, was indeed defeating the divine plan of salvation. Still God the pedagogue does not burst out. With an unimaginable patience he tries to reverse the critical situation. The Lord threatens Abimelech who was about to commit a sin with Sarah, although with a clear conscience. The formator presents the guilty formee as a prophet before Abimelech. Only through the prayer of Abraham, he can survive. Here we find the unique trait of the divine pedagogy of formation. The Master introduces the unfaithful, selfish and lying formee as His prophet. Only his intercession can be effective before the divine presence.

Although the formator does not directly scold the unfaithful formee, he makes him ashamed of himself through the mouth of a foreigner. The king sharply questioned the behavior of Abraham: "What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should not be done" (9). The Patriarch could not utter a single word. Even then

Abimelech did not leave the called one of God alone. He forced him to respond by asking him: "What was your reason for doing this? (10). The embarrassed one tried to justify himself and adduced a holy reason, "There is surely no fear of God in this place!" (11). Even he tried to establish that Sarah was his sister.

Ironically the formator forced the unfaithful formee to act as a man of God, who can heal the royal household by prayers (17-18). Let us try to read the mind of the miserable man who tried to justify himself and was forced to act as God's prophet. He would have taken it as the greatest punishment for his unbelief, ingratitude and unfaithfulness. He was compelled by the formator to play the role of the divine prophet and intercessor! Nothing could have brought upon him such a deep conviction of his faithlessness in the One who had called him. Indeed the most skilled formator was forming the formee through the humorous method of poking fun at him.

Also the Master's use of the generous gifts and positive attitude of Abimelech (14-16) helped to speed up the formation process. The king treated Abraham as if he had done a very laudable deed. Many gifts were bestowed on him as a reward for it. Abimelech was not satisfied in giving to him sheep and cattle and male and female slaves. The king presented him a thousand shekels (about 11.5 kilograms) of silver. The foreigner allows him to live wherever he likes in the royal land. All these acts of Abimelech would have helped the formee to become more conscious of his guilt. Thus the formator used the crises to make the disciple to grow into maturity.

### **The Gladdening Act as a Formative Lesson**

Now the formator provides the formee temporary rest from the tension, created by the crises. He makes use of the oil of delight and joy to heal the wounds of the fall. Yahweh fulfills the postponed promise of progeny (Gen 21:1-8). Sarah "bore a son to him in his old age, at the very time God has promised him" (2). The child was named Isaac, which means "he laughs." This name has deep theological implications. Childlessness was considered then as a divine curse. Now the formator makes the formee the father of salvation history as well as of the blessed generation. He filled him with the saving joy. The blessing of the son served as a medium for experiencing the divine presence on earth. Indeed, the formator made the life of the formee a festal celebration. He became the prototype of those who could irradiate everywhere the celestial bliss. Sarah thus gives vent to this phenomenon: "God has prepared for me laughter, and

everyone who hears about this will laugh with me" (6). The divine pedagogue, who is the very source and fullness of joy, wishes to make every formee a child of divine laughter, which is the trait of the saved ones and the children of God. It is his heartfelt desire to give form to a new generation who makes their life a blissful celebration on earth. This will serve to fulfill the divine plan to transform the earth as the replica of heaven.

In enjoying the blissful days on earth in the company of Isaac ("one who laughs") the formee was tending to the stage of formative maturity. The saving joy helped him to be filled with gratitude and love, faith, dedication and fidelity towards the divine pedagogue. The self-realization led him to God-realization. It provided him trust in God and the courage to confront the challenges which the call will necessarily bring out in the human life. Thereby the intimacy with the formator got deepened. In short, Abraham was becoming a real disciple. He could wholeheartedly receive from his Master joys and sorrows, failures and successes. The forthcoming events bear witness to this fact.

When Sarah compelled him to send away Hagar and Ishmael, he was greatly distressed (21:8-13). The formator hastened to him with words of consolation and of promises of blessings for the evicted ones. Next scene is that of establishing a treaty of peace with the King of Gerar (22-34). Abimelech wanted to participate in the divine blessings, since he realized that "God is with you in everything you do" (22). He treated Abraham with respect and honour as if he were a higher monarch. See how the Master bestows upon his disciple more and more blessings and elevate him above the earthly kings! The formee lives up to his call of blessing others (Gen 12:2-3) by generously offering sheep and cattle to Abimelech, who had earlier maintained a hostile attitude towards him.

### **The Call and Crises: Text IV**

#### **A Challenge for Self-Abnegation**

As the disciple had more and more grown into the divine perspectives, the divine surgeon decides to perform in the formee the heart transplant, about which the prophets had foretold (Ez. 11:19). One may call the test "the dark night of the soul," days of passive purification – to use the terminology of the Carmelite mystic St. John of the cross. Genesis 22:1-19 depicts it in a most touching way. This challenge was totally different from the past crises. While the human agents and difficult situations produced them, here it is God himself who plays the role of the 'villain.'

The account begins with the statement that "God tested Abraham." In the former crises the formator did not directly appear on the scene, nor the narratives indicated about the divine test. Now the Master gets directly involved in the critical challenge. We humans may evaluate the episode as God's attempt to find out whether the disciple had actually grown up to the divine stature. This was not the divine perspective. The heavenly formator will trim clean the branch that does bear fruit so that it can yield more fruits (Jn 15:2). One may compare it to the process of purifying the gold in the furnace, so that every trace of impurity will be removed. The divine pedagogue wants to transform humans into pure gold like Himself, in whom there is no trace of duality. In the Indian terminology He is *Advaitaropan*. Only then a creature can with heart and soul follow the divine path. Yahweh had very often made clear this fact (Ex. 16:4; Dt. 8:2; Jg.2:22; II Cro 32:31; Ps.26:1-3).

All on a sudden God came to the life of Abraham by calling him by the name. Immediately the formee responded, "Here I am (*hinnçni*)," as if he was living a life of being attuned his ears to the divine voice. This is the ideal portrait of a disciple. The meaning of his response may be thus explained: Your servant is ever ready to execute your will. Please speak, your servant is listening (see 1Sam 3:10). This is the mentality of one who has finished his/her formation; he/she is being transformed into a living and loving *hinnçni*.

Now the Master asks him to take his only son whom he loves to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him as a burnt offering. No reason is given for the order. Humanly speaking it was very irrational and illogical from the part of God who had given Abraham a son in his old age according to the promise, to slaughter him. It was through Isaac that the dream of Yahweh concerning humanity had to be continued and fulfilled. Now the demand to sacrifice the only son practically amounted to reject and destroy the salvation history of blessing for humanity. How can the Lord ask to perform such a contradictory deed? Was it truly the very voice of Yahweh that Abraham had heard, or was it his own self-imagination? The Almighty will never demand a thing which is unreasonable. The ordinary people may think such a way. But Abraham had already grown up to the heavenly realm as not to succumb to this kind of thoughts of a finite mind.

### **The Formee as the 'Amen' of the Formator**

The author of the letter of Hebrews in 11:17-19 thus gives articulation to the *amen* of Abraham: "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. . . Abraham reasoned that God could raise the

dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." It is this kind of blind obedience, which is centralized upon trust in God that is the very climax of formation.

The formee did not waste time to argue or to ask explanations to the formator. He sets out to fulfill the divine order. To slaughter his only son would have been an agony to that beloved father. It hit the vital parts of his being. He could see only darkness, utter darkness everywhere. Still the formee was not ready to turn back from executing the divine will. He suffered in silence, a silence which cannot be defined or described. Even before he laid the beloved son on the altar to offer him to God, he had already offered himself on the inner altar as an offering agreeable to the Lord (Lev 2:9). Thus he became the pre-figuration of the new Isaac, who will totally empty himself as to be converted into an "aroma pleasing to the Lord" (Lev. 3:5). The journey towards Mount Moriah took three days. It can be called as the anticipatory Calvary experience of Jesus and his days in sepulcher.

### **The Culmination of Formation**

Formator was well pleased with this mentality of total dedication of his beloved servant. He called out to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham" (11). The Lord not only did not feel ashamed to be called the God of Abraham (Heb 11:16), but also was proud of pronouncing the name of his beloved disciple. The formee has grown into the stature of the formator; the disciple has become alike the Master (see Mt 10:24-25).

Even at this juncture the response of the formee was the same *hinnçni* of verse 1. That single word encapsulated his attitude of humility, dedication to the divine will as well as his self offering. The Master was well pleased with his disciple and exclaimed: "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son" (12). To 'fear' the Lord meant to accept and acknowledge him as his everything. The Hebrew verb 'to know' denoted that Yahweh accepted and took into himself the very person of Abraham. This is indeed the greatest testimony that the Almighty can give about a human being.

Now the Master bestows upon his disciple his choicest blessings (17-18): "I will with blessings bless (the literal translation in order to give more emphasis for the act of blessing you) and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the towns of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you

have hearkened to my voice." We can find here the growth of the formative process. In the beginning Abraham had said 'amen' to the voice of his wife (16:2; 21:12). Now the trainee becomes an integral person who says 'amen' only to the voice of the divine pedagogue. When one attains such a status, then the formative process will come into fruition; there concludes the dynamics of transformation into God.

### **Conclusion**

The story of Abraham provides us only one example of the divine pedagogy of formation. We can trace out different formative dynamics of God throughout the Bible. The crisis serves as a formative method. God uses challenges to lead an individual as well as a community to the divine maturity. He teaches us to make use of the instances of fall as a grace to grow into persons who totally cling to God with the conviction that without the divine assistance we cannot survive. To lead the formee to this non-having and non-being mentality should be an essential element of formation. Let us re-think and re-formulate our present concepts and ideas of formation in the light of the divine pedagogy in the Bible.