



# MISHNAS CHAYIM

# משנת היום

## MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת וירא תשס"ט • Parshas Vayeira 5769

### THIS IS A TEST

Many of us are familiar with the inspiring narrative of Avraham in Ur Kasdim. When Terach learned that his idols were smashed by his son, Avraham, the irate father approached King Nimrod to complain about his “wayward” son. Summoned in front of the king, Avraham clung to his belief in the One True Hashem, despite the peril this entailed. Subsequently, he was cast into the flames of the royal furnace. Because of Divine protection, however, he ultimately emerged from the fire unscathed (*Sefer Hayashar, parshas Noach*).

The surprising aspect of this story, however, is the manner in which it is treated by *Chazal*, as we shall see.

Throughout the course of his illustrious career of serving Hashem, Avraham was confronted with numerous trials. As the Mishnah states (*Avos 5:3*):

עֲשָׂרָה נְסִיחוֹת נִתְּנָה אֲבָרָהָם אֶבְרָהָם אֶבְרָהָם אֶבְרָהָם אֶבְרָהָם  
וְעָמַד בְּכֻלָּם, לְהוֹדִיעַ כְּמָה חֲבָתוֹ שֶׁל אֲבָרָהָם אֶבְרָהָם  
עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם.

“Our forefather Avraham was tested with ten trials, all of which he successfully passed. This was done to demonstrate the remarkable extent of Avraham’s love for Hashem.”

The Rambam (*ibid.*) identifies all ten of Avraham’s trials, culminating in the command to sacrifice his son, Yitzchak. Yet, herein lies the surprise: the Rambam doesn’t include the episode of the furnace in the list of trials. Why did this act of heroism – when Avraham literally risked his life instead of betraying His G-d – fail to “make the cut”?

To gain a full understanding, it is worthwhile to first take a closer look at Avraham’s career of spiritual growth.

### SMART FOODS

As we discussed last week, Avraham was able to recognize the Creator at the young age of three. This he was able to accomplish because of the obvious, logical notion that “there is no building without a builder.” As R’ Elchonon Wasserman put it: imagine that someone finds a watch and contemplates its origin. Reaching his conclusion, he declares, “No one made this watch. It just developed by itself.” What would we call such a person? A fool! Surely the universe is no different; filled with stunning beauty and myriad wonders, it should be clear to anyone of sound mind that it must have been fashioned by the Creator.

The section known as *Sha’ar Habechinah* of the *Mussar* classic *Chovos Halevovos* elaborates on the theme of recognizing the Hand of Hashem from the numerous natural wonders that surround us. In our times, the *Gaon* R’ Avigdor Miller, was widely recognized as a master of this particular aspect of *avodas* Hashem. In his many works and lectures, R’ Miller would portray countless vivid examples of the intricacies of Creation, all with the stated purpose of aiding people in strengthening and internalizing their *emunah* (faith).

R’ Miller himself states that Avraham Avinu utilized this very method to advance in degrees of *emunah*. By consistently reflecting on the marvels of Creation, he perceived the sheer ingenuity of Hashem’s handiwork. According to the Rambam, this is the key to fostering a deep love of and devotion to Hashem (*Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah, 2:2*).

One of R’ Miller’s oft-repeated examples was the apple. In his inimitable way, he demonstrated the plan and purpose that is apparent when contemplating this magnificent object. While still developing on the tree, it remains a drab, green color, hidden amongst

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the leaves. Only when it is ripe and ready for consumption does it turn a brilliant, eye-catching red color, as if declaring: "Come and get it." Additionally, it emits a tempting aroma, further increasing its attractiveness to would-be eaters. The skin serves a dual purpose: not only as a grand advertisement, but also as a waterproof wrapper, maintaining the freshness of the nutritious fruit within. And this is not all; the apple comes with an "intelligent" time-release stem. During its development, the stem remains strong and tight. Suddenly, upon ripening, the stem begins to loosen its grip, until the now-ready apple simply drops to the ground. How convenient for the wingless creatures (people) waiting below to partake of the delicious fruit!

### BEYOND COMPREHENSION

In short, Avraham Avinu studied the natural phenomena that are present in this world in

abundance. Each time he reflected on Hashem's creations, his conviction, knowledge of, and belief in Him was strengthened immeasurably.

The choice Avraham was faced with standing in front of Nimrod was, in effect, a no-brainer. He was well aware that his fellow countrymen were completely out of their minds, attributing divine powers to clay toys. He thought clearly and had long ago reached the inescapable conclusion that there was only One True G-d. This conviction was reinforced throughout a career of recognizing the plentiful and overwhelming evidence of the perfect works of Hashem. He was more than ready and willing to lay his life on the line for what was the obvious truth.

Hashem desired that Avraham should grow even greater, and so He introduced a series of *nisyonos*. R' Yeruchem Olshin explains that there was a key difference between the nature of these tests and that of the Ur Kasdim episode, which accounts for the Rambam's omission of that event from the list of the ten trials. The challenge at Ur Kasdim was characterized by logic; it was obvious and logical to remain loyal to Hashem and reject the idols. The ten trials, however, were characterized by the exact opposite: on the surface, they appeared to go against rational thought.

A prime example is the *akeidah* (binding) in this week's *parshah*. Hashem had promised Avraham that he would beget a great nation through his son Yitzchak. He was now told to take this (unmarried) son and offer him as a sacrifice. On the surface, this directive was contradictory and incomprehensible. This itself was the test. Avraham had proven that he would subjugate himself to Hashem's Will as far as logic was concerned. Would he do so even when the command seemed to make no sense?

By passing these tests, Avraham set an important example for his offspring, to always remain loyal to Hashem, even in situations where logic escapes us.



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