

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Dov ben Mordechai a”h

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

Testing the Great

PARSHAS VAYEIRA 5776

When contemplating the trials endured by the patriarchs, we are awed by the self-sacrifice and devotion they displayed. The Mishnah in Avos (5:3) expresses just such a sentiment:

עֲשָׂרָה נְסִיוֹנוֹת נִתְּנָסָה אַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם וְעָמַד בְּכֻלָּם, לְהוֹדִיעַ כַּמָּה חֲבָתוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ.

“Our forefather Avraham – may peace be unto him – was tried with ten trials, and he withstood them all; this reveals the extent of Avraham Avinu’s love (for Hashem).”

Akeidas Yitzchak (the Binding of Yitzchak) serves as the model for dedication to Hashem, as it constituted a supreme act of self-sacrifice. As described in this week’s *parshah*, Avraham was called upon to offer up his son to Hashem, and he showed an immediate readiness to comply. The stirring narrative culminates with the Divine intervention at the last moment, as the angel dispatched by Hashem told Avraham to stop just as he was raising the slaughtering-knife. Avraham was promised abundant reward, for him and his descendants, as a result of his display of faith. And to this day, we continue to evoke – such as during the prayers of the *Yamim Nora'im* (High Holidays) – the merit and memory of this watershed moment.

No Challenge?

Yes, we recall this episode with wonderment. It is difficult to imagine how even someone on the level of Avraham would be able to withstand such a heart-wrenching prospect.

Or is it? On second thought, the matter could almost seem... too simple. Let us recall that the trial was preceded by a singular event: Hashem Himself *appeared to Avraham and bid him to perform the deed*; as the *passuk* states: וְהָאֱלֹקִים נִסָּה אֶת-אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו... קַח-נָא אֶת-בְּנֶךְךָ – “And G-d tested Avraham, and He said to him: ... ‘Take your one and only son, whom you love – Yitzchak – and go for you to the land of Mori’ah, and sacrifice him there as an offering” (*Bereishis 22:1,2*). Consider a hypothetical scenario in which an average person of no special spiritual stature was put in the same position. If this person received a bona-fide vision of Hashem, Who instructed him likewise – would he also not rush to carry out the deed? Now, granted that Avraham is in a class by himself, in that he earned, by merit of his own righteous path, to be privy to such Divine communications. But once he had attained that level and Hashem Himself issued a command – is it really any wonder that he listened? Why, indeed, is such a premium placed on Avraham’s succeeding in this trial – or any test, for that matter? Wouldn’t anyone who saw Hashem as clearly also rush to do as he did?

The *Nesivos Shalom* (*parshas Vayeishev*) addresses this issue; in so doing, he provides us with an entirely new understanding of this epic event.

Fire!

The Gemara in *Kiddushin (81a)* relates the encounter of R’ Amram Chasida (“the Pious”), who was spared from sin in the nick of time. It happened that some young female captives were redeemed through R’ Amram’s efforts; in the immediate aftermath, they needed a place to stay. To be on the safe side, it was decided that they be stationed in R’ Amram’s house. He had a chamber on an upper floor that could only be accessed through a huge, ladder-like

structure. As an added precaution, the ladder was temporarily removed, blocking anyone's entry into the attic. Ten men were needed to accomplish the feat of moving the ladder.

And then the unbelievable occurred. When R' Amram was alone, one of his charges peeked down below; caught off guard, R' Amram glimpsed her countenance and was seized with a sudden bolt of energy. By himself, he grabbed the ladder, returned it to its place and hastily began making the climb.

Midway through, he realized what was happening; with all his might, he forced himself to freeze in place and called out, "Fire!" Instantly, a number of Torah scholars from the environs came running, only to discover there was no real fire. R' Amram related that they had saved him from much worse than an earthly fire, explaining that he called them in so that, in their presence, he would be shamed and his inclination subdued. Having restored his presence of mind, R' Amram now utilized his great spiritual powers and decreed that this *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) must depart from within him. At that moment, a great pillar of fire exited his person.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of this account, explains the Nesivos Shalom, is the personage to whom this occurred. All the Amora'im mentioned in the Talmud, of course, are of immense spiritual caliber; but they are not all granted the appellation "Chasida." The fact that R' Amram was so titled indicates a level of even greater magnitude. And yet – how could such a circumstance befall him, a scenario seemingly so incongruous with such a pristine soul?

The key, however, is in the story's conclusion. The fact that when banished, the *yetzer hara* took such an extraordinary form reflects the fact that this was no ordinary *yetzer hara*. This was the nature of R' Amram's *nisayon*: he was temporarily imbued with a unique inclination of epic proportions, which could only be vanquished by a *tzaddik* of R' Amram's mettle.

In a sense, the Nesivos Shalom explains, the *nisayon* of R' Amram was patterned after that of Avraham his forefather, for Avraham's test was of a similar nature. Of course, anyone who would be directly addressed by Hashem Himself would feel little challenge to carry out His instructions. That is, unless Hashem deems to make it a challenge – by imbuing the individual with a supernatural inclination, one strong enough to counter the imperative to do the right thing.

And this was precisely the challenge that Avraham faced at the time of the *Akeidah*. An amazing thing happened when Hashem uttered the initial instruction. Every parent, of course, bears a strong love for their child. The Nesivos Shalom explains that when Hashem said, "Take your son... that you love," Avraham was suddenly imbued with the most extraordinary feeling of love for his son – a feeling so strong as never before or since experienced. It was a love for his child greater than an amalgamation of all the love that exists in the world. It was against such a force that Avraham had to battle – and he succeeded. In the words of the Mishnah cited at the outset, he truly displayed the extent of his great love for Hashem, which outweighed everything else.