

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
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Akeidas Yitzchak

When Avraham Avinu lived in Ur Kasdim, Nimrod threatened Avraham that if he didn't bow to idols, he would be thrown into a fiery furnace. Avraham passed this test and chose the furnace over bowing down to idols. This story, while very well-known, isn't explicitly written in the Torah, and according to the Rambam, this test doesn't count as one of Avraham's ten major tests. We wonder, why is that? It sure seems like a very difficult test!

We also wonder why *akeidas* Yitzchak is considered Avraham's test and not Yitzchak's. As the Torah says (22:1), והאלקים נסה את אברהם, "Hashem tested Avraham." Avraham was tested, not Yitzchak, although it was Yitzchak's life that was on the line.

The Shem Mishmuel answers that it was easy for the holy avos to be moser nefesh for Hashem because their emunah was on a very high level. Ur Kasdim isn't counted among Avraham Avinu's ten tests because, of course, Avraham preferred to give up his life for the sake of Hashem Echad. Akeidas Yitzchak was also an easy test for Yitzchak Avinu.

However, at the time of the akeidah, Hashem took away Avraham Avinu's clarity in emunah. He was plagued with questions and contradictions (as we will explain). That was Avraham's test.

The Yesod HaAvodah writes, "A human mouth cannot express the high levels that Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov attained. There isn't a man in the world who can comprehend it. Even malachim cannot grasp their greatness. Nevertheless, they only passed the test of the akeidah thanks to their temimus and emunah peshutah." This is because at that time, Hashem took away

their madreigos. The only way to pass the test was with emunah peshutah.

It states (22:4) וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא את המקום מרחוק, "Avraham lifted his eyes and saw the place [of the akeidah] from afar." The Yesod HaAvodah *zt'l* (vol.4, 2:7) writes that the severity of the test is hinted at in these words. The word המקום refers to Yaakov Avinu because it states (*Bereishis* 28:11) ויפגע במקום, "[Yaakov] arrived at the makom, place." When the Torah writes here וירא את המקום מרחוק, it means that Avraham Avinu was trying to figure out how Yaakov Avinu could enter the world if his son, Yitzchak, were slaughtered before he bore children.

Rashi (22:12) writes, "Avraham said to Hashem, 'I will explain my complaint before You. Yesterday, You said to me (21:12) כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע,' for in Yitzchak will be called your seed.' But then You retracted and said (21:2) קח נא את בנך 'Take now your son [Yitzchak and sacrifice him].'"

What did Avraham do? The pasuk uses the word מרחוק, "from a distance." Avraham distanced this question from his mind so that he could do Hashem's will with *emunah peshutah*.

We now go to the Avodas Yisrael *zt'l* (*Vayikra* (ד"ה ויקרא), who explains the words וירא את המקום מרחוק as follows:

"When Hakadosh Baruch tests a person, Hashem conceals Himself and takes away the person's perception of Hashem that he had previously. This is because if a person has clarity in emunah (as he had before the test), it won't be a test at all. When one is aware that he is standing before the great and awesome King and knows that Hashem is looking at him, of course, he won't rebel against Hashem. A test occurs when one loses his clarity in emunah. Therefore, we can assume that when Hashem tested

Avraham and said קח נא את בנך, 'Please take your son... Hashem took away Avraham's clarity in emunah deveikus in Hashem. The test was whether he would maintain his righteousness even then. This might can be the translation of the pasuk וירא את המקום מרחוק. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is called מקום, for He is the מקומו של עולם 'the place of the world.' Avraham didn't experience deveikus like he generally did. He felt that Hashem was far away from him. Even so, וילכו שניהם יחדו, Avraham and Yitzchak went together to do Hashem's will with love and emunah peshutah."¹

So, according to the Avodas Yisrael, המקום refers to Hashem, and the test was וירא את המקום מרחוק, that Avraham saw Hashem from a distance, without his usual clarity in emunah. At such times, the test is extremely difficult.²

So, how did Avraham pass the test?

The Yesod HaAvodah explains that "Avraham passed the test only with the power of his *temimus* and *emunah peshutah*." Avraham lost his deep perception and deveikus at that time. He was like a simple person who believed in Hashem. With this emunah, he passed his tests. Sure, he had questions, but he knew this was Hashem's will, and he happily obliged.

There is yet a third hint in the word המקום to that talks to the severity of Avraham's *nisayon* at that time.

It states (22:4) ביום השלישי וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא את מקום מרחק, "On the third day, Avraham lifted his eyes and saw the place from afar."

How did Avraham know that this was the place? Hashem didn't specify the location of the akeidah. Hashem told him that he would reveal to him the place (see Rashi 22:3 on the words אל הארץ אשר אראך). So, what did Avraham see there that convinced him this was the right place?

Rashi answers that he saw a cloud tied to the mountain and understood that this was where the test would take place.

A cloud denotes concealment. As we explained, when Hashem tests a person, He conceals His presence. When Avraham saw the cloud over the mountain, he understood that this concealed place was the location of the akeidah.

Reb Mendel of Vitebsk zt'l (Pri HaAretz, Vayeira, כלל דמלתא עיקר הנסיונות) explains that all ten tests that Avraham Avinu's passed were similar to the akeidah in that Avraham could have asked questions, but with emunah peshutah he passed them all.

For example, one of the tests was that Hashem told Avraham to go to Eretz Canaan, and shortly after, Hashem brought a famine in Eretz Canaan, forcing Avraham to leave! Rashi (*Bereishis* 12:10) writes, "The hunger was only in Eretz Canaan, to test Avraham, to see whether he will ask questions on Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Because Hashem told

1. People become very distraught when they encounter tests in emunah. They think they should at least be on the level that their emunah is solid and never doubted. But we see that this is how Hashem tests people. He challenges their emunah. Otherwise, it would be easy to pass every test.

2. The Targum Yonason (22:10) writes that at the akeidas Yitzchak, "Yitzchak asked his father to tie him down so he won't move from the pain of the shechitah and invalidate the korban. Avraham was looking into Yitzchak's eyes, Yitzchak was looking up at the *malachim* in heaven, but Avraham didn't see any *malachim*."

Why did only Yitzchak see the *malachim* and not Avraham?

We can explain that Yitzchak was tied down on the *mizbeiach*, as he requested, so his part of the test was already completed. Therefore, he was permitted to see the great revelations that took place at that time. But Avraham was in the middle of his test, therefore, he couldn't see the *malachim*, or it would not be a test.

him to come to Eretz Canaan, and now Hashem is causing him to leave."

Then his wife, Sarah, was taken by Pharaoh. Avraham could have asked, "doesn't someone who serves Hashem deserve a better life? Why are these troubles befalling me? I listened to Hashem, I came

to Eretz Canaan, but see what this brought me?" But Avraham didn't ask these questions.

All ten tests were similar, and Avraham passed them with *emunah peshutah*.³

We are also confronted with tests like the trials that Avraham Avinu endured. Hashem's divine providence is often

3. A group of people were thinking of opening a girls' school in a non-religious area as a kiruv initiative. To encourage them, the Brisker Rav told replied with the following story:

There was a girl who did teshuvah, but she didn't want her parents to know too much about the extent of teshuvah because she knew they would be upset. One Shabbos, her parents were traveling and asked her to man their store. The girl was afraid she might need to desecrate the Shabbos, so she prayed that no customers should come. Her tefillos were answered, and no one came.

But then, she feared that if she didn't make any sales, her parents would accuse her of keeping Shabbos. Just then, someone walked into the store. He inquired about the price of a small, inexpensive product. "It costs five *liros*" she told him. He was ready to buy it, so she immediately raised the price.

The man was upset, "So much money for this product?" and left the store.

But he really needed the product, so sometime later he returned to the store and said that he was willing to pay this higher price.

But she raised the price again, "It costs one hundred."

"Are you insane?" the man asked her and again left the store. But it didn't take very long before he returned. He said that he was prepared to pay what she requested.

"I'm sorry," the girl told him. "Now it costs two hundred."

He left the store. A half-hour before Shabbos was over, he returned and said, "I really need the product, so I'll pay this exorbitant price." She told him to wait a half hour, and then he could buy it.

When Shabbos was over, she said to the man that he could have it for five *liros*, which was its true price. She didn't want to earn from business transactions that took place on Shabbos. But the man insisted that he was a man of his word, and since he said he would pay two hundred, that is what he will pay.

When her parents returned, she gave them the huge sum of money and said, "This is my reward for keeping Shabbos." Her parents were astonished, and they also did teshuvah.

Hashem's providence was clearly seen in this story. The reward for keeping Shabbos was evident. But generally, things aren't as obvious. There are questions, questions, and questions – similar to the questions that Avraham Avinu endured when he was confronted with his ten tests. Yet we persevere. We stand up to the challenge and pass the tests.

The Ruzhiner zt'l told his chasidim a story of a businessman who lost out on a lucrative business deal because he didn't want to do business before Shacharis. He had many animal skins, and he had a hard time selling them. A customer came to his home and wanted to buy all of them, but it was before Shacharis, and the businessman didn't want to wait. So he left and bought the skins elsewhere.

The chasidim were silent, waiting for the end of the story. The Rizhiner told them, "I see that you want to hear the end of the story, but that is the end. He kept the halachah, he didn't sell before Shacharis, and he lost a lot of money."

This might arouse a question. How could keeping Hashem's mitzvah result in a loss? But we believe with *emunah peshutah*, even when things don't seem right.

And there will yet be a time when we will understand how everything was for our good.

concealed. We don't understand why good people suffer, or why our tefillos aren't immediately answered, and so on. If we ask questions, we fail the test. The counsel is *המקום מרחוק*; keep the questions far away from you and trust in Hashem with *emunah peshutah* that everything happens precisely as it is meant to.⁴

The Questions are the Answer

As we wrote above, Avraham Avinu had a question: If he sacrificed Yitzchak, how would Klal Yisrael survive?

But the question was really the answer. For if it weren't for the akeidah, Avraham's seed would cease because, by nature, Yitzchak couldn't beget children. The akeidah opened the gates for the future of Klal Yisrael. So, what appeared to be the destruction of the Jewish nation was the source of its continuation.

The explanation is as follows:

Yitzchak Avinu had a female-type neshamah that couldn't beget children. At

the akeidah, his neshamah departed, and he received a new neshamah, a male soul, and now he could have children.

The Midrash Talpiyos (יצחק) writes that Yitzchak's previous soul went into the *איל*, the ram that got snagged in the brush. This is the reason Avraham sacrificed the ram and said that it should be considered as if he sacrificed Yitzchak. It was Yitzchak in a sense because Yitzchak's neshamah was in it.

It states (22:13) *וילך אברהם ויקח את האיל ויעלהו לעולה תחת בנו*, "Avraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a *korban olah* instead of his son."

Rashi writes, "After it states *ויעלהו לעולה*, that Avraham sacrificed the ram, nothing is missing from the text. Why does the pasuk add *תחת בנו*, that the ram was instead of his son? The answer is that during each action of the *korban*, Avraham prayed, 'May it be Your will as if this was done to my son: as if my son was slaughtered, as if his blood were sprinkled, as if my son were skinned, as if he was burned and became ashes.' The

4. The Baal HaTanya *zt'l* was in the beis medresh of the Magid of Mezritz *zt'l* and heard three people discussing the *akeidah*. "What is so special about this test? Wouldn't every yid sacrifice their child if Hashem spoke to them and told them to do so?"

One answered that it's true that every Yid would do the same, but that's because Yidden are descendants of Avraham Avinu, and they inherited Avraham's devotion to Hashem. But Avraham was the son of Terach. He didn't have the genes from his ancestors to draw upon. He had to reach this level on his own. That's the reason the *akeidah* was a very difficult test for Avraham.

Another person said that he isn't fully satisfied with that answer because when one is commanded directly by Hashem to do an *akeidah*, he would undoubtedly do so, even without the influence of his parents and ancestors. "In my opinion, the greatness of the *akeidah* is that Avraham performed it immediately, and he didn't push it off for another time. When Hashem told Avraham to perform the *akeidah*, Hashem didn't specify *when* he should do it. Technically, Avraham could have waited several years before bringing Yitzchak as a *korban*. But because of Avraham's great love for Hashem, he didn't wait — and that's the greatness of his deed."

Yet a third person was not satisfied with that answer either because every Yid would also go immediately to do Hashem's will if they received this message directly from Hashem. "In my opinion, the greatness of Avraham is when the *malach* came and instructed Avraham not to sacrifice Yitzchak. At that moment, Avraham wasn't any happier than when Hashem told him to *ויעלהו לעולה*, to sacrifice Yitzhak. This is the aspect of the *akeidah* that is so unique."

The Baal HaTanya commented that they each spoke in accordance to the level they were on.

Midrash Talpiyos adds that Avraham said these tefillos because Yitzchak's initial neshamah was in the ram.

So, akeidas Yitzchak didn't jeopardize the future of Klal Yisrael. It caused it to materialize. It gave Yitzchak the neshamah he needed to have children.

At the beginning of the parashah, it states לך לך, and Rashi says that this means the trip will be "for your good and your benefit: (להנאתך ולטובתך). When Hashem instructed Avraham to perform the akeidah, Hashem once again said לך לך. This means the akeidah will be for Avraham's good, and indeed it was. The continuation of Klal Yisrael came from the akeidah. Furthermore, many brachos come to Bnei Yisrael every day in its merit.⁵

Similarly, whenever we go through hard times, we think the problems prevent us from reaching our goals. Actually, the problems enable us to reach our goals.⁶

The Toldos zt'l (Rebbe Yaakov Yosef of Palnoa) zt'l and Rebbe Nachman Horedenka zt'l were traveling to the Baal Shem Tov zt'l, and they wanted to arrive in Mezhibuz well before Shabbos. However, they had to travel slowly because the wagon in front of theirs belonged to the governor, who was traveling slowly. The law of the land forbade passing a governor on the road.

The Toldos became anxious and said, "We will never get to Mezhibuz in time."

Rebbe Nachman Horedenka replied, "I always strive to live with the emunah that the matter we think is a problem and a deterrent will actually help us achieve our goal. Somehow, this problem will enable us to get to Mezhibuz on time."

"Halavay, may it be so!" the Toldos replied.

To reach Mezhibuzh, they had to pass through a town that was having an outdoor market that morning. Tables with food and goods were spread out all over the long street which passed through the town. From one end to the other, hundreds of people were on the road, making it nearly impossible to pass through. But in honor of the governor, everyone moved their wares to the side of the road so that the governor could pass by. The carriage of the Toldos and Rebbe Nachman Horedenka were right behind, so they were able to pass through the town, too. When they reached the other side of the road, the governor turned left, the Toldos and Rebbe Nachman Horedenka turned right, and they arrived in Mezhibuz before noon.

As Rebbe Nachman Horedenka said: What they thought was a deterrent turned out to help them get to their destination on time.

I heard a marvelous story that happened with Reb Ovadyah Yosef zt'l. Just a week before his chasunah was scheduled, his

5. After the akeidah, it states (22:16-17) כי יען אשר עשית את הדבר הזה ולא חשכת את בנך את יחידך כי ברך אברכך והרבה ארבה את זרעך "because you have done this thing and you did not withhold your son, your only one, that I will surely bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed..." The Ramban (22:16) writes that these pesukim contain a promise that sin won't destroy the Jewish nation or cause them to fall forever into the hands of the goyim. This is a promise of future redemption."

So, the akeidah was certainly for our benefit, although initially, it seemed that it was going to end the existence of the Jewish nation.

6. After Noach and his family and all animals entered the teivah, it states (Bereishis 7:16) ויסגר ה' בעדו "Hashem shut him in." The Targum Yonoson (and see Rashi) writes, ואגין ה' עלוהי, "Hashem protected him." I heard from a talmid chacham that this tells us that when one feels ויסגר ה', that Hashem closed him in and is limiting his successes, he should know that it is for his benefit. ואגין ה' עלוהי, Hashem is protecting him and helping him with this matter that he thinks is bad.

kalah began talking about a lifestyle that Reb Ovadyah hadn't planned on living. She expressed her desire to go with him to theatres and the like.

They didn't end up marrying. Reb Ovadyah married another woman, Rabbanit Margalit.

When Reb Ovadyah was ninety years old, just a few years before his petirah, a woman arrived at his house, shouting that she must speak with Reb Ovadyah. They brought her in, and she said, "Do you remember me?"

Reb Ovadyah didn't. "We were supposed to get married many years ago, and a week before the chasunah, it was called off. You should know that Hashem loves you because now I am an almanah, and all the years I was married, I never had children. Doctors told me that I can't have children."

Reb Ovadyah went through a hard time when the shidduch had to be called off, but it was all for his benefit. Similarly, when something difficult happens to us, let us remember that it is for our good. Something very good will come from it.

The Benefit of Tests

The Maharal writes that the purpose of tests isn't to let Hashem know where we are up to in our avodas Hashem because Hashem knows this information even before we are tested. The purpose of the tests is to help us bring out our potential to reality.

Tests can bring out the best in people. The potential which was there beforehand is brought out, which develops your personality and spiritual growth.

The Ramban writes that there were other tzaddikim in Avraham Avinu's era who kept the Torah, but they didn't reach his level because they didn't pass ten tests (*asarah nisyonos*) just as Avraham had.

Avraham Avinu had ten trials, and he passed them all successfully. This made

Avraham unique and greater than all other tzaddikim of his generation.

Reb Aryeh Levine *zt'l* would visit the Yidden of Yerushalayim who were in jail. When one prisoner was freed, someone asked him whether he planned to steal again. He replied that he wouldn't turn to crime again. And then he said, "Maybe I will steal once more. Reb Aryeh Levine doesn't have a watch, and I want to get him one. If I can't get it for him in legal ways, I will steal. But after that, I won't do it again."

The man asked Reb Aryeh Levine, "What type of students do you have? I just spoke to one, and he said he would steal to get you a watch."

Reb Aryeh Levine replied, "I don't give them mussar, and I don't tell them not to steal. I teach them one thing: They must be cautious about speaking the truth. And as you saw, this person was very truthful. He admitted that he would steal once. If someone is careful never to lie, he won't steal. He knows that if he is asked whether he stole, he will have to admit the truth, so with this one precaution, he will be protected from thefts and all other aveiros.

Once, a man was smoking a cigarette on the street on Shabbos, and Reb Aryeh Levine was approaching from the other side. One of Reb Aryeh Levine's post-jail friends went over to hear what Reb Aryeh Levine would tell the smoker. Reb Aryeh said, "I won't tell you to stop smoking because you know on your own that it is Shabbos, and you are smoking, regardless. But I will tell you that you shouldn't extinguish the cigarette when you finish smoking it. Let the coal extinguish on its own. That way, you will have one aveirah less on Shabbos."

A couple of weeks later, this man said (to the person who had gone over to listen to the conversation): "Now, not only do I not smoke on Shabbos, but I also don't smoke during the weekdays, either."

This story has several lessons. It reminds us that we can grow with small steps, and it

is a lesson in ahavas Yisrael. It demonstrates how R' Aryeh gave *tochachah* with *chachmah* with the potential to bring out the best in people. This person passed his test. He didn't extinguish the cigarettes on Shabbos, which later brought him to higher and better madreigos.

A man suffered many challenges in his life, and he told his Rebbe that he didn't want the tests. His Rebbe told him, "Take three pots filled with water. Cook a potato in one, a raw egg in the second, and put coffee, sugar, and milk in the third."

An hour later, the rebbe showed him that the raw egg became hard, the hard potato became soft, and the third pot had sweet coffee. The rebbe explained, "The boiling water represents life's tests. Tests toughen soft people, soften tough people, and it can make someone sweet like sweetened coffee."

This is because people grow from the hardships they overcome.

The Gemara (Yoma 69:, based on Nechemya h 9) teaches how the chachamim abolished the *yetzer hara* for *avodah zorah*. The community fasted for three days and three nights, and the *yetzer hara* came out of the *Kodesh HaKedashim* (Holy of Holies) appearing like a lion of fire. Zecharyah HaNavi told them, "This is the *yetzer hara* for *avodah zorah*!" and they captured the *yetzer hara*.

But we wonder, from all places, why did the *yetzer hara* come out of the *Kodesh HaKedashim*? Why was the *yetzer hara* in the holiest site of the world?

The answer is that the *yetzer hara* elevates people to the highest levels – to the *Kodesh HaKedashim*. The challenges that the *yetzer hara* gives us enable us to grow higher.⁷

Avraham's first test is לך לך to leave his father's home to go to Eretz Canaan. The tenth test is קח נא את בנך... ולך לך, that Avraham should go to the akeidah. By both tests, לך לך is written. The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 39:9) states, "It says twice לך לך; we don't know which is more beloved, the second or the first?"

The Midrash concludes that the second לך לך, of the *akeidah* was a greater test, and, thus, more beloved to Hashem.

But isn't it evident that the tenth test was more difficult? What could be harder than to bring one's own child as a korban?

Perhaps the answer is that the most challenging part of tests is at the start. After one becomes accustomed to passing tests, it becomes easier. Therefore, the Midrash thought that perhaps the first test of לך לך might have been a greater one.

The explanation is that tests bring forth the person's potential. Therefore, in a way, the tenth test was easier than the first one

7. The following story demonstrates that when one knows he is being tested, he will pass the test:

A group of Arabs kidnapped a high-ranking Israeli Intelligence official (from the *Shabak*). They tortured him and hardly gave him any food and tried to get him to reveal Israeli military secrets. But he was loyal and didn't speak. One day, his cell door was slightly open, as his captors stood outside his room, conversing with each other. He saw them holding screwdrivers and hammers, and he understood that they planned to smash his skull. He realized that he had no choice; he would tell them everything he knows.

As he strained his ears to hear their conversation, he realized they were speaking *Hebrew*! He then understood that they weren't Arabs after all. They were members of the Israeli Intelligence, testing his loyalty. Suddenly, they entered his cell with their "tools" and warned him that if he didn't speak, they would crack his head, but he remained silent. He wasn't afraid. He knew it was only a test.

Because when one knows that he is being tested, he feels empowered. He has the strength to stand up to difficult challenges and to remain faithful.

because it came after Avraham trained himself in his loyalty to Hashem.

It is written in sefarim that the best time to serve Hashem is early in the morning because that sets the mode for the rest of the day. If one is lazy in the morning, the day will likely pass without too many accomplishments.

We learn zerizus from Avraham Avinu. By the akeidah, it states (22:3) וַיִּשְׁכֶּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר, "Avraham awoke early in the morning." Also, when Avraham davened for Sedom, it says (19:27) וַיִּשְׁכֶּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר. We should do the same. We should get into the mode of serving Hashem early in the morning, and then we will be able to accomplish a lot during the day.

Hashem says (Shemos 19:4), וַאֲשַׁח אֶתְכֶם עַל כְּנָפֵי, "I carried you on eagle's wings..." An eagle carries her children on her wings. As the eagle flies high in the sky, the children can look down and see the world below. But how do the birds climb up onto the eagle's wings? The young birds have to hop on. The mother eagle doesn't help them. This hints that Hashem can raise us to very high levels, but we must take the first step.⁸

Akeidas Yitzchak Today

Akeidas Yitzchak happened in the year 2085. That's 3,698 years ago.

Not exactly, because Akeidas Yitzchak actually happens every day. It transpired today, and there will be another Akeidas Yitzchak tomorrow. When you have a temptation and you overcome it, or when you have a test and pass it, that is your personal Akeidas Yitzchak.

In Shemonah Esrei of Rosh Hashanah we say, וַעֲקֵדֶת יִצְחָק לִזְרְעוֹ הַיּוֹם תִּזְכּוֹר, "Remember Akeidas Yitzchak *today*..." We want Hashem to remember the Akeidas Yitzchak that happens today, and every day, when we overcome the *yetzer hara*.

It states (22:13), וַהֲנֵה אֵיל אֲחֵר נֹאחֵז בְּסִבְךָ בְּקִרְנָיו, "Avraham saw another ram caught in the bushes by its horns," and Avraham sacrificed this animal instead of Yitzchak. The *meforshim* seek to understand the word אֲחֵר, "another," since there was only one ram.⁹

The Or LaShamayim (חוקת ד"ה עלי באר), quoting the Chozeh of Lublin *zt'l*, explains that the pasuk is telling us that there are many akeidas Yitzchak's. Whenever a person overcomes his *yetzer hara*, that is another *akeidas Yitzchak*.

The Chozeh explains the pasuk as follows:

וַהֲנֵה אֵיל אֲחֵר, there are other *akeidas Yitzchaks*. נֹאחֵז בְּסִבְךָ, when one is trapped in the lure of temptation and bad habits and he overcomes them and he passes the tests, בְּקִרְנָיו, "His light shines up to Hashem's throne." (קִרְנָיו means to

8. The following *din Torah* came before Reb Nissin Korelitz *zt'l*: In an apartment building in Bnei Brak there's an elevator, which can only carry four people at a time (as the sign in the elevator clearly states). Four people were already on the elevator, and two more climbed in. As the elevator headed up to the next floor, the elevator broke. The question was who was responsible for paying for the repairs. Some said the two people who entered last must pay because they overloaded the elevator. Others claimed that all six were responsible because when they saw two people insisting on coming in, they should have left the elevator. (See *Bava Kama* 10:, regarding ten people sitting on a bench and the bench broke, which discusses a similar scenario.) Reb Nissin Korelitz ruled that it wasn't the last two or all the six that were responsible. The person who pressed the elevator button to send up the elevator must pay because he caused the elevator to overwork and collapse.

Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Succos passed, and baruch Hashem, we are 'loaded' with holiness. But that isn't sufficient. We must "press the button" to go up to the next level. We have to continue growing. We shouldn't be complacent and satisfied with our current level.

9. Rashi translates אֲחֵר as "after." He saw the ram *after* the *malach* spoke to Avraham and told him that he shouldn't sacrifice Yitzchak.

shine, as in *Shemos* 34:35, כי קרן עור פניו, Moshe's face shone.)

The Shlah Hakadosh zt'l says that we should think: If Avraham Avinu was moser nefesh to sacrifice his own son on the mizbeiach, we should at the very least be moser nefesh in regard to minor matters, like to overcome temptation or to pass a test.

Hachnasas Orchim

It states (*Bereishis* 21:33), וישע אשל בבאר שבע, "Avraham planted an *eishel* in Be'er Sheva." What was this *eishel*? The Gemara (*Sotah* 10.) gives two explanations. Reish Lakish says, "Avraham planted an orchard of sweet fruits." Rashi explains that Avraham did this, להחנות עוברים ושבים, "To give pleasure to the people passing by."

The Gemara's second translation of אשל is an inn. Avraham set up an inn, so those tired from their travels could rest up. Rashi writes that אש"ל stands for לוייה, שתיה, אכילה, because Avraham provided food and drink for the travelers, and Avraham also escorted them when they left.

The beginning of the *parashah* elaborates on Avraham's *hachnasas orchim*.

The holy *sefarim* say that when a tzaddik excels in a mitzvah during his lifetime, he continues to perform this mitzvah after his *petirah*. For example, Avraham Avinu excelled in his *hachnasas orchim*, and until today, when a Yid performs *hachnasas orchim*, Avraham comes to help him perform the mitzvah.

The story of Avraham Avinu's *hachnasas orchim* and the three *malachim* is written in the past tense: "He took... He went... He hurried... etc. The exception is the words (18:8), והוא עומד עליהם תחת העץ ויאכלו, "[Avraham] stands above them..." These words are written in the present tense. This implies that until today, when Yidden do *hachnasas orchim*, Avraham stands there. He is present, for he wants to partake in the mitzvah.

Reb Chaim of Brisk zt'l was extremely ill as a child and all the doctors lost hope. Rebbe Moshe Kobriner was visiting Brisk at the time, and he stayed in the home of Reb Chaim's grandfather. The grandfather said to the Rebbe, "What's going to be with my Chaimke?"

Rebbe Moshe Kobriner told him the *vort* that אברהם עומד indicates that Avraham is present at every *hachnasas orchim*. He added, "Chazal (*Bava Basra* 16:) say, 'A precious stone hung from Avraham Avinu's neck. Whoever saw it was healed.' Since you are hosting me and performing *hachnasas orchim*, thiaham Avinu is right here, in this home. Avraham has the gem that brings *refuah*. Your Chaimke will surely have a *refuah sheleimah*."

And indeed, he did.

Once, Rebbe Moshe Kobriner was a guest in the home of Rebbe Aharon Karliner zt'l. Reb Aharon told him that his daughter was ill. Rebbe Moshe Kobriner said to the sick girl, "Your father is performing *hachnasas orchim*. This means the stone of healing is hanging on his neck. Look at your father, and you will be healed."

Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zt'l was once talking with his chassidim about a certain Yemenite tzaddik who fed hundreds of refugees that lost their homes in World War I.

One of the chassidim said, "I heard that this tzaddik was a *chavrusah* with one of the kabbalah giants..." He was implying that in addition to his *chesed*, this tzaddik was a scholar in the hidden parts of the Torah.

The Rebbe replied, "Why do you mention that? Right now, we're discussing that he fed hundreds of homeless Yidden..." as if to say that the merit of feeding Yidden is so great it isn't necessary to add anything else.

The Sar Shalom of Belz zt'l built a majestic shul in Belz. Two generations later, his grandson, Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz zt'l, added the Groiyse Shtub, a large room where the *tishen* were celebrated. When the

Groiye Shtub was completed, Rebbe Yissachar Dov said, "A thousand years ago, on this spot, there lived a yid who excelled in the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim* like Avraham Avinu. When my grandfather built the shul, this yid thought it was time for *techiyas hameisim*. He got out of his grave and came to my grandfather. The Sar Shalom told him it wasn't *techiyas hameisim* yet, and the *niftar* returned to his grave. In the merit of his *hachnasas orchim*, which he kept with all his might right here, he merited that the Groiye Shtub be built on this location." Yidden will eat at the same place where he had fed hungry people.

The Maharil Diskin *zt'l* excelled in the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*. Once, the Maharil Diskin suddenly stood up from his in-depth studies and went over to the table to help an old man separate the soft parts of the challah from the crust, so it would be easier for him to eat it.

People asked the Maharil Diskin, "You were immersed in your studies. How did you notice that this elderly man was struggling with his bread?"

The Maharil Diskin said the answer to this question is written in this week's *parashah*. The *parashah* begins וַיְרָא אֱלֹהֵי ה', Hashem came to Avraham, and Rashi writes, "It was the third day after the *bris milah*, and

Hakadosh Baruch Hu came to ask him how he was feeling." It was a wonderful moment. Avraham was having a conversation with Hashem. So, how did Avraham notice the three travelers approaching? The answer is that Avraham was extremely dedicated to *hachnasas orchim*, and when a person is devoted to a mitzvah, he is alert and aware of everything associated with this mitzvah."

Two travelers came to Kozmir in the middle of the night, and they needed a place to stay. They knocked at the Rebbe's home, the only home that was lit. The Rebbe took them in, prepared a meal, and a place to sleep. This caused a bit of noise, and the *gabbai*, who slept in the next room, awoke. The *gabbai* thought, "Who could come to the Rebbe's house so late at night? I must be hearing *neshamos*. The *gabbai* thought that *neshamos* came to the rebbe so that he could rectify their souls! The *gabbai* was afraid to see *neshamos*, so he stayed in his room.

The next morning, at *shacharis*, the *gabbai* was telling his fellow *mispallelim* about the *neshamos* who came to the rebbe's home the previous night. The rebbe said, "It's true that two *neshamos* came to me last night, but they didn't come to me so I can fix their *neshamos*. They came to fix my *neshamah*" because with them, he had the merit to perform this special mitzvah.¹⁰

10. The Avnei Nezer *zt'l* once served a guest. The guest protested, "I'm a simple person. I don't deserve this honor."

The Avnei Nezer opened the window and pointed to a tannery across the street. The Avnei Nezer said, "In this tannery, there are animal hides. But when these hides become tefillin, they become holy. Similarly, regardless of your level, now you are a mitzvah, a *chefetz shel mitzvah* (an item used for a mitzvah), so now you are *kadosh*.

The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* was taking care of his guest. The guest protested and said, "You don't have to do this for me. I can set up the room myself."

"Really?" the Chofetz Chaim asked. "And tomorrow, will you wear tefillin for me?"

As a *bachur*, Reb Chaim Brim *zt'l* would often travel to Bnei Brak to speak in learning with the Chazon Ish *zt'l*, and then return to Yerushalayim, where he lived. One night, he missed the last bus back, so he had to stay in Bnei Brak in the Chazon Ish's home. He recalled feeling very uncomfortable because three great people served him: the Chazon Ish, the Steipler (his brother-in-law), and the Steipler's *rebbeztin*. The Chazon Ish gave orders; one brought *negel vasser*, one brought food, and another prepared a bed. He said, "Please don't do this for me."

When the Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* was very old, he couldn't travel anymore to rabbinic gatherings, so the rabbanim once held a meeting in the Chofetz Chaim's house. Reb Chaim Ozer Grodzhinsky *zt'l* also came to this meeting, and the Chofetz Chaim was very happy to see him. One of the rabbanim said, "Now that Reb Chaim Ozer arrived, we are ten people. Perhaps we should daven *minchah*?"

The Chofetz Chaim disagreed. He said, "It doesn't state anywhere that we should ask a guest if he wants to daven."

The Chofetz Chaim added a lesson from this week's *parashah*: Avraham told Avimelech (20:11), רק אין יראת אלקים במקום הזה, he saw that there was no *yiras Hashem* in his land. How did Avraham perceive that? Rashi writes, אכסנאי שבא לעיר, על עסקי אכילה ושתייה שואלין אותו, או על עסקי אשתו שואלין אותו, אשתך היא או אחותך היא, "When a guest comes to your city, do you ask him about food and drink (whether he has where to eat) or do you ask him about his wife, 'is she your wife or your sister?'"

The Chofetz Chaim explained, "This means, when a guest arrives, you are supposed to ask about him whether he is tired or hungry."

So, the Chofetz Chaim asked Reb Chaim Ozer *zt'l* whether he wanted to eat. Reb Chaim Ozer said that he didn't. The Chofetz Chaim replied, "But you are certainly tired. You just arrived. Go rest up a bit."

Avraham told the guests (18:5), ואקחה פת, "I will take bread". Should he have said "I will give you bread?" The Ahavas Yisrael *zt'l* replied that when one gives bread to the hungry, he is the one who "takes." This is as Chazal say, "More than the

wealthy does to the poor man, the poor man does to the wealthy," having given him the opportunity to perform the mitzvah of *tzedakah*.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 127.) states, גדולה הכנסת אורחים יותר מקבלת פני השכינה, "Taking in guests is greater than greeting the *Shechinah*."

בדרך צחות, we can explain that we greet the *Shechinah* once a month, by *Kiddush Levanah*, as we say, לא זכו ישראל אלא להקביל פני אביהם, "If the Jewish nation would greet their Father in heaven once a month, it is enough." But *hachnasas orchim* should be יותר מקבלת פני השכינה, more often. We should have guests more than once a month.¹¹

Segulah for Bearing Children

The Baal HaTanya *zt'l* petitioned the Magid of Mezritz *zt'l*, "It's already twenty-four years after my *chasunah*, and I still don't have children." The Magid advised him to perform *hachnasas orchim* and he would merit children. As it states (*Tehillim* 119:9), במה יזכה נער את, "How does one merit children? את, by hosting guests."

The Magid added, "The father of the Baal Shem Tov also merited his child in the merit of *hachnasas orchim*."

This is as it states (Bereishis 47:23), הא לכם זרע, the *הננסת אורחים* is *roshei teivos* for *הננסת אורחים*. With *hachnasas orchim* one can merit זרע, bearing children.

In this week's *parashah*, Avraham Avinu was ninety-nine and Sarah Imeinu was eighty-nine, and they were both barren. In the merit of *hachnasas orchim* they had a child the following year.

The Chazon Ish replied, "Since when does an *esrog* tell the person holding him how he should be handled? Now you are a mitzvah, and you can't tell the people obligated to do this mitzvah how to perform it."

11. Although we want guests, we mustn't compromise on *tznius*.

Avraham's guests asked, איפה שרה אשתך, "Where is Sarah, your wife?" Avraham replied, הנה באהל, "She's in the tent." Rashi writes, צנועה היא, she has *tznius*, and remains in the tent.

The Ishah Shunamis also bore a child in the merit of hosting Elisha HaNavi. It states (*Melachim* 2 ch.4), "One day, Elisha traveled to Shunam. An important woman lived there, and she convinced Elisha to eat bread at her home. From then on, when Elisha was in Shunam, he ate there. The woman said to her husband, 'I know he is a holy man, a man of G-d. Let's make him a nice room upstairs, where we will place a bed, table, chair, and lamp. When he comes to us, he can go there. [The next time Elisha was in Shunam] he went to this room... Elisha asked Geichazi (his servant), 'What should we do for her [in return for this favor]?' Geichazi replied, 'She doesn't have children...' Elisha said, 'Call her.' She came and stood in the doorway. Elisha said, 'You will bear a child...'"

She merited this child in the merit of *hachnasas orchim*.

The Midrash (*Tanchuma Ki Seitze* 2) states, "There are mitzvos whose reward is children, like Sarah who hosted guests, and the Shunamis [woman] who hosted Elisha."

Women were cursed (*Bereishis* 3:16), בעצב תלדי בנים, that they will suffer the pain of childbirth. עצב is *roshei teivos* for עיניה צרה באורחין, which means that a women's nature is to be stingy with the guests. If she won't have עצב, which means that she is generous with guests, she won't have the עצב of בעצב תלדי בנים, the pain of labor, either.

On the words (21:33) ויטע אשל, the Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes that the only other place we find the word ויטע is (*Bereishis* 2) ויטע גן בעדן מקדם. This hints that for the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*, one will merit Gan Eden.

The reward of *hachnasas orchim* is received even in this world. As we say every morning, אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פירותיהם בעולם הזה... הכנסת אורחים, "These are the things that one eats the fruits [of his good deeds] in this world..." and one is *hachnasas orchim*.

Help Your Brothers

The Gemara (*Moed Kattan* 28.) tells stories of the holy Tana'im and Amoraim with whom the *malach hamaves* had a hard time taking their lives because they were always learning Torah or because they were so clean of sins. One example is Reb Chiya. Heaven sent the *malach hamaves* to bring Reb Chiya up to heaven, but as much as the *malach* tried, Reb Chiya remained alive.

The *malach hamaves* came up with a plan. He dressed up like a poor person, knocked on Reb Chiya's door, and asked for food. Reb Chiya instructed his family to give him bread. The *malach hamaves* said to Reb Chiya, "I see you have compassion for the poor. Why don't you have compassion on me? I was sent to take you, I'm trying, and I'm unable to."

The *malach hamaves* showed him a staff of fire. This is how Reb Chiya knew that he was the *malach hamaves* (*Rashi*). Others say that with the rod of fire the *malach hamaves* was showing Reb Chiya that he was being beaten with fiery rods, because he hadn't yet brought Reb Chiya's soul, as he was supposed to. He therefore requested that Reb Chiya have compassion on him (*Anaf Yosef*).

Reb Chiya accepted the argument and allowed the *malach hamaves* to bring his *neshamah* to Olam Haba.

Let us analyze this Gemara. The *malach hamaves* told Reb Chiya, "If you have compassion on the poor, why don't you have compassion on me?" But how can you compare having *rachmanus* on the poor to having compassion on the *malach hamaves*, and willingly allowing oneself to die? True, Reb Chiya was compassionate, but we don't see that his compassion was with *mesirus nefesh*.

The answer is that Reb Chiya's *tzedakah* was also with *mesirus nefesh*. He helped the poor with self-sacrifice. Therefore, the *malach hamaves* told him, "If you do so for the poor, why don't you have *mesirus nefesh* and compassion on me, too?"

We should try to help the poor with all our strength and self-sacrifice.

For some people, it is *mesirus nefesh* just to be kind. When they see a poor person, they are tempted to shout, "Why don't you get a job!" or other humiliating words. They don't realize that if it weren't for Hashem's help, they would be just like that poor man, begging at people's doors.

And for some, it is *mesirus nefesh* to part with their money.¹²

It states (20:13), ויהי כאשר התעו אותי אלקים... אמרי, יהי כאשר התעו אותי אלקים, when Yidden are sent to *galus* הוא, please say about your fellow man "You are my brother." If you feel the poor person is your brother, you will certainly help him.

The Bardichover Rav *zt'l* (quoted in *Bas Ayin*) explains אחד in Shema stands for אח ד', to be אח, the brother, דל"ת, of the poor.

The Yid HaKadosh of Pshischa *zt'l* on (*Bereishis* 19:7) אל נא אחי תרעו explains that נא means half (as in *Shemos* 12:9, אל תאכלו ממנו נא, "Don't eat the *korban Pesach* half roasted"). The *pasuk* is saying, אל נא, don't let your friendships be incomplete. אחי תרעו, be a complete friend to your fellow man.

Such friendship banishes the *yetzer hara*. As it states (18:5), וסעדו לבכם אחר תעבורו, the Beis Avraham *zt'l* explains, וסעדו לבכם when Yidden eat together (for the sake of increasing friendship) אחר, the *yetzer hara* (as the Gemara *Shabbos* 105: calls the *yetzer hara* א"ל אחר) will be removed.

12. When we serve Hashem beyond nature, Hashem performs miracles for us beyond the rules of nature.

The Be'er Mayim Chaim (*Noach*) discusses how supernatural miracles happened to Avraham but not to Noach. Avraham threw earth and they turned into weapons. He was thrown into a burning furnace and survived, and so on. Whereas Noach was saved naturally, בדרך הטבע. He built a *teivah* and was saved by natural means. The difference between them is that Avraham served Hashem beyond the rules of his nature. As Chazal (*Bereishis Rabbah* 42:13) teach, "The entire world was on one side, and he was on the other." He also went beyond his nature with the ten tests, especially with the *akeidah*.¹³ Since he served Hashem beyond nature, he was awarded מדה כנגד מדה that Hashem performed miracles for him beyond the rules of nature. Noach served Hashem according to the laws of nature, as it states (66:9), את האלקים התהלך נח, "Noach walked with אלקים, nature" (because אלקים is *gematriya* הטבע, nature). He served Hashem within the confines of nature, so he was saved according to the rules of nature.

The Be'er Mayim Chaim writes, "Even in our generation, one sees clearly that miracles often happen for the *gedolei yisrael*, the true *tzadikim*. Nature bends for them. This is because they serve Hashem with righteousness and truthfulness beyond the rules of nature [therefore, miracles happen to them beyond nature]."

We add that in our generation, too, miracles and wonders will happen to those who serve Hashem beyond their natural limits. One doesn't have to do literal *mesirus nefesh* to do something outstanding for Hashem. Even the small tests like learning Torah when one doesn't feel like it, refraining from speaking *lashon hara*, remaining silent in a *machlokes*, overcoming anger, dressing more modestly, and so on, are examples of *mesirus nefesh*, and passing these tests, great miracles will happen.