



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura

Take home Dvar Torah

תשפ"ה Parshat Vayara

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Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

***Partners in Torah
has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.***

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

This week's Parsha ends with Avraham's last and most difficult test: the binding of Yitzchak, *the Akeida*.

Hashem told Avraham (Genesis 22:2):

ב) וַיֹּאמֶר קַח אֶת בְּנֶךָ אֶת יְחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר אָהַבְתָּ אֶת יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ לְךָ אֶל אֶרֶץ
הַמֹּרְיָה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אֶחָד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ

2) *And He (Hashem) said, "Take your only son whom you love, Yitzchak, and go to the land of Moriah and bring him as an offering on one of the mountains that I will designate."*

The bringing of one's son as an offering-- sacrificing him on an altar (!)-- is daunting enough, but there were many other factors present, which made the test ever-so-much more difficult.

The first and probably the most difficult is that Hashem had just told Avraham that Yitzchak would become the heir to his legacy (Genesis 21:12):

כִּי בְיִצְחָק יִקְרָא לְךָ זָרַע

12) *For in Yitzchak will be your future.*

How could Yitzchak be the future of the Jewish nation if he is dead? This contradiction alone should have created a doubt in Avraham's mind about the correctness of Hashem's instructions to him.

Yet an even deeper layer of difficulty appears in this concept, *viz*, the nature of the prophesy that Avraham would have received from Hashem.

Hashem's message to a prophet begins in the highest ethereal places, becoming more and more tangible as it makes its way to the prophet, finally reaching the prophet's soul as a vision or a story, similar to a dream, that the prophet must correctly interpret to derive the message. But the vision or story playing on the prophet's soul is clouded.

It is like a blurry movie or picture where it is hard to discern exactly what is happening. This is the meaning of a frosted or foggy mirror (the form of prophecy that all prophets except for Moshe - the message is unclear. The prophet must carefully study the story and figure out the correct message.

The soul of the prophet is like a mirror that reflects the message of the prophesy. If the mirror is warped or has a colored coating on it, the prophet will see everything distorted or with a hue, similar to the wavy mirrors in amusement parks designed to make you look fat or skinny. Similarly, if the prophet's soul was warped or tainted or not perfectly clean, he will see his prophecies through that distortion and will misinterpret the intended message.

Although in the Torah it is expressed as a clear instruction, only Moshe, as noted, received clear instructions from Hashem. Moshe's prophecies were באספקלריא המאירה through *a clear mirror*. All other prophets including Avraham, received their prophecies through an אספקלריא שאינה מאירה - *an unclear mirror*. This put the burden of correctly interpreting the vision or dream upon Avraham's shoulders.

In light of what Hashem had just told him - that Yitzchak would be his future - how could this possibly be the correct interpretation? And if Avraham misinterpreted the prophesy, and mistakenly sacrificed Yitzchak, he would be guilty of murder! But because Avraham was so pure in his desire to do Hashem's will there was no tainting of the message at all. He was completely confident that he had interpreted the prophesy correctly and understood the contradiction with what Hashem had previously told him. Even though he could easily have justified ignoring the commandment, or misinterpreting it, saying, "But You told me that my future is in Yitzchak," he ignored the contradiction and proceeded to do what Hashem had told him, with no hesitation.

This was Avraham's initial hurdle, but this was just the beginning of his challenges. The Midrash fills in some of the behind-the-scenes information, which is not obvious from the verses in the Torah.

The Torah begins the story of the *Akeida* with the following words.

א) וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָאֱלֹקִים נִסָּה אֶת אַבְרָהָם

1) *And it was after **these matters** that Hashem tested Avraham.*

What were the **matters** that prompted the test of the *Akeida*?

מדרש רבה בראשית - פרשה נה פסקה ד

על דעתיה דרבי אליעזר דאמר: אלקים והאלקים הוא ובית דינו מלאכי השרת אמרו אברהם זה שמח ושימח את הכל ולא הפריש להקב"ה לא פר אחד ולא איל אחד אמר להן הקב"ה על מנת שנאמר לו שיקריב את בנו ולא יענב יצחק

Rebbe Eliezer explained the preceding events as follows: The angels said before Hashem and His court, "Avraham rejoiced and celebrated with many others (at Yitzchak's bris) and he didn't offer up even one cow or ram to Hashem?" Hashem responded, "If I would ask him to offer up Yitzchak himself, he wouldn't hesitate!" The angel said, "Let's see!" And Hashem said, "Okay, I will show you!"

An important point of information: The שטן - *Satan*--is an angel created by Hashem to challenge us and present a counterforce to doing a mitzvah. His ultimate goal is for us to override him and not listen to him so that we get rewarded for overcoming the challenge he presents. Despite his being Hashem's messenger and *not* an opposing force to Hashem (which is impossible), the Satan sets up roadblocks wherever he can to provide us with larger and larger challenges to vanquish.

The Midrash reports that in Avraham's situation, the Satan was going to try to prove Hashem's answer wrong.

מדרש תנחומא וירא - פרק כב

קדמו השטן בדרך ונדמה לו כדמות זקן א"ל לאן אתה הולך א"ל להתפלל א"ל ומי שהולך להתפלל למה אש ומאכלת בידו ועצים על כתפו א"ל שמא נשהא יום או יומים ונשחט ונאפה ונאכל א"ל זקן לא שם הייתי כשאמר לך הקב"ה קח את בנך וזקן כמותך ילך ויאבד בן שנתן לו למאה שנה לא שמעת המשל מה שהיה בידו אבדו ומבקש מאחרים וא"ת יהיה לך בן אחר תשמע מן המשטין ותאבד נשמה שתחייב עליה בדין א"ל לא משטין היה אלא הקב"ה יתברך היה לא אשמע ממך

The Satan stood in Avraham's way and appeared to him as an old man. He said to Avraham, "Where are you going?" "To pray," answered Avraham. "What does someone going to pray need fire, wood and a knife for?" ask the Satan. "Maybe we will stay a few days and we will need to slaughter an animal, cook it, and eat it," responded Avraham. The Satan then said, "Old man! (Who are you fooling?) I was there when Hashem told you to sacrifice your son. And a person of your age is going to kill a son that he received at the age of 100 years! Don't you know the adage, "He ruined the one I gave him, and now he wants another one!" And even if you do get another son, are you going to listen to the force of evil and kill an innocent soul and commit a murder?" Avraham responded, "It wasn't the force of evil; It was Hashem Himself who commanded me, and I won't listen to you!"

When the Satan saw that he had no success with Avraham, he tried his luck with Yitzchak. The Midrash continues.

הלך מעליו ונדמה לבחור ועמד על ימינו של יצחק א"ל לאן אתה הולך א"ל ללמוד תורה א"ל בחייך או במיתתך א"ל וכי יש אדם שילמוד אחר מיתה א"ל עלוב בר עלובה כמה תעניות נתענית אמך עד שלא נולדת והזקן הוא השתטה והוא הולך לשחטך אמר אעפ"כ לא אעבור על דעת יוצרי ועל צווי אבי חזר ואמר לאביו אבי ראה מה אומר לי זה א"ל אל תשגיח עליו שאינו בא אלא ליעף לנו

He left Avraham and, appearing as a young man, stood at Yitzchak's right and asked him, "Where are you going?" "To learn Torah!" answered Yitzchak. "While you're alive or dead?" asked the Satan. "Who can learn Torah when he's dead?" responded Yitzchak. The Satan then said, "You embarrassment the son of an embarrassment! Do you know how many times your mother fasted to conceive you, and this old man has gone crazy and he is going to slaughter you!" Yitzchak said, "Nevertheless, I will not cross my Creator or my father." He then turned to his father and said, "Father, do you hear what this guy is saying?" Avraham responded, "Don't listen to him, he is only trying to tire us out!"

When all this did not faze Avraham or Yitzchak, the Satan tried a different tactic.

כיון שראה שלא קבלו ממנו הלך ונעשה לפניהם נהר גדול מיד ירד אברהם לתוך המים והגיעו עד ברכיו אמר לנעריו בואו אחרי ירדו אחרי כיון שהגיע עד חצי הנהר הגיע המים עד צוארו באותה שעה תלה אברהם עיניו לשמים

The Satan then went and became a great river in front of them. Avraham, undaunted, went into the river up to his knees and then called for the others to follow him in. By the time he got halfway across the river the water was up to his neck. At that moment, Avraham lifted his eyes to Hashem and prayed for the opportunity to complete his mission. Hashem dried up the river, and Avraham and Yitzchak completed their journey to Mount Moriah.

We get a glimpse of the strength of Avraham's faith and resolution to fulfill Hashem's will. Here especially, Avraham could have thrown his hands up in despair and said, "Look, I tried my very best. It is just impossible! How can I go further? We will surely drown, and what would Hashem have from that?" But Avraham did not take the easy way out. He prayed to Hashem to take away the water so he could continue with his mission.

The Satan tried one more thing:

מדרש תנחומא וירא - פרק כג

ונטל את הסכין כדי לשחטו עד שיצא ממנו רביעית דמו ובא השטן ודחף ידו של אברהם ונפלה הסכין מידו וכיון ששלח ידו לקחתה יצאה בת קול ואמרה לו מן השמים אל תשלח ידך אל הנער

Avraham took the knife to slaughter Yitzchak, and the Satan came and pushed Avraham's hand knocking the knife to the ground. When Avraham went to retrieve it, the angel called out to Avraham and told him not to touch the lad.

Once again, Avraham could have easily seen this as a sign not to slaughter Yitzchak. After all, the indicators seemed to point away from sacrificing Yitzchak. But Avraham persisted once again and went to retrieve the knife.

There are two takeaways from this.

The first is a lesson in how to deal with the Satan, that force that tries so hard to take us off our game to do the wrong thing. One of his most potent tools is to place a doubt in our minds. He may even create a situation or two that will give us the impression that performing a mitzvah is not the right thing to do. The way to deal with this is just not to address the questions, which are just attempts to prevent us from doing what we need to do. Avraham stoically ignored the fatal contradiction and all the questions the Satan posed to him. If we know that we are doing the right thing, we don't have to answer all the questions. Things will work themselves out, just as they did in this case.

How was that? When Hashem gave Avraham the instructions, He said, "Bring him up for as a sacrifice." I commanded you only to bring him up, *not* to slaughter him. Thus, Hashem never intended Avraham to kill

Yitzchak, although He wanted Avraham to think that that is what He wanted.

The second and most important takeaway is to understand that as the grandchildren of Avraham Avinu, we have inherited this amazing ability to stand strong in the face of the most difficult tests. This is the accomplishment of successfully passing a test. The tested quality emerges from the potential to the actual and, thus, plants that quality so deeply into the person that he will now be able to pass it on to his progeny.

This is the meaning of זכות אבות - *the merits of our fathers*. It is not because they were our grandparents that we ask for mercy; rather, it is because we have inherited their superior qualities. Having their great qualities gives us greater potential to reach higher levels of service to Hashem. This is why we are favored by Hashem.

We see this concept in the Akeida itself. The Akeida was a test to Avraham, not to Yitzchak. What about Yitzchak who was 37 years old at the time and was a willing participant in the sacrifice? Why wasn't this a test for him also?

The answer is that Yitzchak inherited the power to sacrifice himself for his belief in Hashem through one of Avraham's earlier tests, the test of *Ur Kasdim*. This test was when Nimrod gave Avraham the ultimatum of either bowing down to him in recognition of him as a god or being thrown into a fire. Avraham chose the latter, and miraculously survived the flames. Our Sages teach us that the many brave and dedicated Jews who gave their lives for their belief in Hashem, instead of worshipping idols, also used this trait inherited from Avraham Avinu.

This concept answers a difficult question. Many times, in our prayers, especially on Rosh Hashana, we invoke the Akeida as a reason for Hashem to have mercy on us. Indeed, one reason for using the ram's

horn for the Shofar is to remind Hashem of the ram that was used at the Akeida instead of Yitzchak.

Great! Avraham Avinu passed the test. But what does that have to do with *me* on Rosh Hashana? Why should Hashem be lenient in my judgment just because my great great grandfather Avraham Avinu was a hero?

The answer is that what I am really saying is, "Hashem, as the grandson of Avraham Avinu, if I were put to the test, I have the power within me to do the same." That makes me worthy of Your mercy.

As the grandchildren of Avraham Avinu, we all have the ability to withstand even the most difficult tests. If we use the tactics we learned from him in dealing with the Satan, the force of evil always trying to trip us up, we will certainly succeed.

There is yet another strategy that the evil force in the world employs to get us to lose our mitzvot.

The Midrash reveals what happened after the Akeida.

פרקי דרבי אליעזר פרק לב

כְּשֶׁבָא אַבְרָהָם מִהַר הַמִּזְבֵּיחַ אָפֹּי שֶׁל סַמְאֵל [נ"א: שטן], שָׂרָא שָׂא עֲלֵתָה בְּיָדוֹ תֵּאוֹת לְבוֹ לְבִטֵּל קִרְבָּנוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם. מָה עָשָׂה, הֲלֹךְ וְאָמַר לְשָׂרָה, אֵי שָׂרָה לֹא שָׁמַעְתְּ מֶה שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה בְּעוֹלָם, אָמְרָה לוֹ לֹא, אָמַר לָהּ לְקַח אִישׁוֹ הַזֶּקֶן לְנַעַר לְיִצְחָק וְהַקְרִיבוֹ לְעוֹלָה, וְהַנַּעַר בּוֹכָה וּמִילַל שֶׁלֹּא יָכוֹל לְהַנְצִיל. מִיָּד הִתְחִילָה בּוֹכָה וּמִילָלָת. בְּכֵתָה שֶׁלֹּשׁ בְּכֵיזוֹת כְּנֶגֶד שֶׁלֹּשׁ תְּקִיעוֹת, שֶׁלֹּשׁ יְלִלוֹת כְּנֶגֶד שֶׁלֹּשׁ יְבֻבוֹת, וּפְרָחָה נִשְׁמָתָה וּמָתָה. בָּא אַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוֹ וּמְצָאָהּ שֹׁמְתָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר [בראשית כג, ב] וַיָּבֹא אַבְרָהָם לְסִפְדֵּי לְשָׂרָה וְלִבְכָתָהּ.

When the Satan saw that he could not deter Avraham from sacrificing Yitzchak, he went to Sarah and said to her, "Sarah! Do you know what has just happened?"

"No."

“Your old man took the lad Yitzchak and sacrificed him! The lad was crying and screaming, but he couldn’t save himself!”

Upon hearing this, Sarah started crying. She let out three sobs and then died.

Upon Avraham’s return, from the Akeida, he found that Sarah had died. This is what the verse states, “*And Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her.*”

Where did Avraham come from? The Akeida. Connecting Avraham’s return to Sarah’s death teaches us that the *Akeida* caused Sarah’s death.

This raises a very important question:

We can understand the Satan’s extreme effort to stop Avraham from performing this great deed; that is his job: To put up a challenge to mitzvah performance so that we have a choice. If there were no option other than to do the right thing, we would be like robots programmed to do what they do. Doing what we are programmed to entitles us to no reward for our actions. But Hashem put us here to earn reward! Only when we choose to *ignore* the temptation of the wrong path are we eligible for reward. Because then we, and we alone, have correctly chosen to follow Hashem’s instructions.

What was the reason for killing Sarah? Revenge? Impossible. Because ultimately, the Satan is an angel of Hashem who really wants us *not* to listen to him! He is here solely to be defeated, and he is happy when we ignore him. But he’s tough, and that does not stop him or curtail his wiles.

The Talmud (Tractate Kiddushin 40b) says the following:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף מ/ב

ר"ש בן יוחי אומר: אפילו צדיק גמור כל ימיו ומרד באחרונה איבד את הראשונות
שנאמר צדקת הצדיק לא תצילנו ביום פשעו

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said, "Even if a person was righteous his whole life, but he rebelled at the end of his life by regretting all the good that he had done, he loses the merit of all the good deeds that he did during his lifetime."

This was the Satan's goal in causing Sarah's death. He had one final card to play. If he could get Avraham to regret the Akeida, he would lose the mitzvah. The Satan hoped that when Avraham returned and found his beloved wife Sarah dead as a result of the *Akeida*, he would say: "Oh no! The *Akeida* cost me my dear and holy wife! I wish I had never done it!" Then, he would have lost the entire mitzvah! But Avraham did not fall for it. He realized that this was just the method that Hashem used to take Sarah from the world. She had lived the full 127 years that she was allotted when she was born. This is why the verse repeats, "*the years of Sarah's life.*" That was the number of years that Sarah *had* to live.

This lesson is extremely necessary for anyone who gets involved in public service. A person becomes involved in a mitzvah with a pure heart, wanting to do a perfect job. He gives it his all and is doing an excellent job. But, because one can't please everybody, before long, the complaints start. With one's best intentions, there will always be people who are not happy, and they loudly make their dissatisfaction known to the public . One may easily reach the point where he becomes so frustrated that he says, "I wish I never got involved in this!"

That is exactly what the Satan wants. The second a person regrets his mitzvah, he loses it. The Satan has won. You were such a hero in doing the mitzvah, the right thing, the Satan cunningly took it away.

Being aware of the Satan's tactics helps us overcome him and persevere in our efforts to do Hashem's will. He is smart and cunning, but we can be smarter.