

Toras Aish

A project of the AishDas Society

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA
HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A

Summarized by Betzalel Posy

“**A**nd after these things came to pass, the Lord tested Avraham; and He said to him, 'Avraham,' and he said, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Yitzchak, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I will show you.'" (Bereishit 22:1-2)

I would like to examine how the Rambam deals with the parasha of the akeida (the binding of Yitzchak). First, the Rambam tells us that the purpose of nisyonot (Divine tests) in the Torah is not merely to test the recipient, but to teach others important principles in Divine service. The Rambam, then, points out two messages that we learn from this, the test of tests. Let us deal with the second one first, as I want to focus on the first.

The Rambam tells us that the incident of the akeida is a proof of the perfect clarity of prophecy. After all, if there were any doubt that the command to Avraham was both of divine origin and absolutely clear and unequivocal in its meaning, would not Avraham have looked for every excuse to refrain from sacrificing his pride and joy, the son of his dreams? And not only that, but Avraham had three days to think and contemplate whether he was doing the right thing; he did not just impulsively sacrifice his son.

This is an important message for us, as Jews. Judaism is based on prophecy, on God telling us what we are supposed to do. Any doubt in the truth or accuracy of the revelation could destroy our whole system. For this reason, the Torah tells us a story of how perfectly clear the revelation of Hashem was to Avraham Avinu, and thus to all other prophets.

The Rambam says that the other message of the akeida is to show how much one must love God, even to the point of sacrificing one's only son. Avraham did so not because he was afraid that God would kill him, but rather because his strongest love and desire was to serve God. To convey this message, the Rambam quotes a verse: "Now I know that you are Godfearing, for you did not withhold your son, your only one, from Me" (Bereishit 22:12).

This point in the Rambam seems strange. After all, does God really need us to love Him to the extent that we would kill our children? Does God ever require us to do such a thing? Does He not, indeed, forbid human sacrifice? Furthermore, the verse that the Rambam himself quotes discusses yir'a (fear), not ahava (love), a recurring theme in this week's parasha.

I would like to explain the Rambam based on some letters of Rav Kook zt"l. Avraham Avinu was involved in a debate with the intellectuals of his time. Not all those who worshipped idols were merely primitives who thought that sticks and stones ran the world. Rather, many people intellectually supported the concept of attaching physical substance to divinity, to make it more palatable to the common person. "Your approach," they told Avraham, "is fine for people like yourself who are removed from the real world. But for a regular person to be willing to give his heart, soul, and very life, or the life of his son, there needs to be something he can touch, see or feel. Your pure faith is too elevated for him, me'od na'ala. He must be able to identify with the gods, to fight their battles, love their loves, and hate their hates. This is the only way for one to have true relationship with a deity." The akeida shows a person with a purified faith, the innovation of Avraham, can have a relationship with the Almighty—a relationship that goes to the extreme of devotion, and is based on the one God of truth and justice.

The alternate viewpoint is an attractive one. For many years, there were Jews who tried to attach some measure of physicality to God, until the Rambam rooted that out of mainstream belief. The Rambam says that all of Judaism is a fight against avoda zara (idolatry). Many say that today, when there is no avoda zara, emuna (faith) is irrelevant. However, I believe that there are many types of avoda zara today, just in different forms.

The editor of Ma'ariv recently wrote a book about his travels to India and his discussion with some Hindu priests there, who told him that Judaism, as well as its offshoots Christianity and Islam, had failed to create a livable system for the majority of people. When people do not have a something tangible on which to base their morality, results such as Nazism are evident. Even in America, the capital of intellectual openness, millions are attracted to cults and other primitive forms of belief, since they see that those who lack some faith, even if they are the biggest intellectuals, can be the worst people. Consider the man who spent years killing people with letter bombs: wasn't he a professor? Thus,

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the fight of Avraham Avinu is not over, and today more than ever, after the Holocaust and the rise of technology, we must show the world that faith in God is the way to achieve "tzedaka u-mishpat" (righteousness and justice).

But it is not only the outside world whom we must show. Today, many people try to sell Torah and mitzvot in the same way. There are "mystics" and "miracle workers" who claim to be able to tell the future or the past from physical objects, even if they are religious items, such as tefillin and mezuzot. Even worse, there are those who claim to have found new solutions to problems future and past by finding all sorts of codes and gimmicks in the Torah, using computers and calculators. These novelties have no importance; they are not mentioned by the Rishonim, nor did they need them! The Rambam had no codes, the Ramban had none, the Vilna Gaon, nor even the Ba'al Shem! What they had was faith and knowledge of God and His Torah. These gimmicks may seem like a good way to make "ba'alei teshuva," but a ba'al teshuva who is not for Torah and mitzvot is not a ba'al teshuva. EIN PATENTIM! There are no shortcuts or alternative ways to reach "tzedaka u-mishpat," nor are there shortcuts to reaching the Holy One, the source of tzedaka u-mishpat, who is high and exalted.

We must regain the pure faith of Avraham, who stood against the world and taught of the One God. This task falls mainly to us, the inhabitants of the batei midrash; we must purify the Torah of all dross and vulgarization, and show the world and our brethren the true faith, as we recite before blowing the shofar:

"Yediyei amim ne'esafu: am Elokei AVRAHAM; ki le- Elokim maginei eretz; ME'OD NA'ALA"—"The great of the peoples are gathered together, the retinue of AVRAHAM's God; for the guardians of the earth belong to God; HE IS GREATLY EXALTED." (Tehillim

47:10) (Originally delivered Se'uda Shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Vayera 5757 [1996].)

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Daf HaShavua

by Rabbi Rabbi Jason Kleiman, Clayhall Synagogue

There is a wonderful Jewish expression that particularly describes the greatest joy experienced by parents. It is the word nachas and it relates to the unique pleasure that parents derive from the meritorious actions and achievements of their children.

As G-d's children, all of us should seek to be a source of such nachas to our Heavenly Father and the opening of this week's Torah Parsha demonstrates how we can do that.

At the beginning of this week's Sidra, Abraham is sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day, having just circumcised himself. G-d appears to him, after which Abraham lifts up his eyes, sees three men and then makes the following request: "My Lord, if I have found favour in your eyes, please don't go away..." (Bereishit 18:3).

To whom is Abraham addressing these words? Rashi, quoting the Midrash, gives two explanations. According to one understanding, Abraham is speaking to the leader of the men and is asking him and his companions to stay and receive hospitality.

The approach of the second explanation is not that Abraham is addressing any of the three travellers but that he is speaking to G-d whose Presence has come to visit him as he endures the painful aftermath of his circumcision. In this context, Abraham is saying to G-d: "Wait a moment, until I have looked after the needs of the visitors!"

This second explanation cited by Rashi is particularly incredible. None other than the Divine Presence of G-d Himself has come to visit Abraham, whose response is to interrupt the meeting and to say to the Master of the Universe, "Hang on a moment! I've got something important to see to!"

Imagine you are present at a major communal gathering with distinguished leaders and philanthropists in attendance. You have been invited to be part of a line up who will greet the Chief Rabbi upon his arrival. How unseemly would it appear if at the moment that the Chief Rabbi approaches to engage in conversation, you reply: "Don't go away! There is something more important I have to do at the moment, so I have to leave but I will be back soon!" Yet, this is Abraham's reaction to the manifestation of the Divine Presence before him!

The answer, of course, is that Abraham would never have displayed anything other than the most fitting and perfect behaviour before G-d's Presence. Abraham knew instinctively that nothing would give G-d greater 'nachas' than looking after His children. Indeed, the Talmud teaches that "Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: Receiving guests is greater than greeting

the Divine Presence" (Shabbat 127a). Although it is a tremendous honour to entertain the Divine Presence, looking after the requirements of G-d's children at the time that they need assistance takes priority.

If we want to be the greatest source of nachas to G-d, our Father, we should value every opportunity to extend hospitality to our fellow human beings. © 2003 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's Haftorah reveals to us an incredible dimension of faith and its astounding result. Out of deep appreciation to a Shunamite lady's hospitality the Prophet Elisha promised that she would bear a son. This startling prediction raised major concern due to her elderly state coupled with her physical inability of bearing children. Indeed, she sensed some reservation in Elisha's words and expressed her strong desire that the child live a full, healthy life. (see Malbim's comment to 4:14,16) Elisha responded by repeating his promise and predicting the date of her son's birth. His promise was fulfilled and she gave birth to a boy on the exact date of prediction. When the boy matured, sudden tragedy befell him and he took seriously ill and died soon after in his mother's arms. The Shunamite lady did not despair and immediately traveled to Elisha. Upon arrival she calmly reminded him of his promise, whereupon Elisha ordered his servant to rush to the scene of her motionless child. Elisha prayed to Hashem and warmed the boy's body and Hashem responded and returned the child to life.

When reading these p'sukim we are overwhelmed by the Shunamite's manner in dealing with her son's sudden passing. Scriptures record her response and state, "She arose, placed the (dead) child on the prophet's bed, closed the door and left." (4:21) There is no mention here of any emotional outburst, cry of despair or feeling of grief or anguish. Scriptures continue to relate that she calmly requested a donkey and informed her husband that she was rushing to the prophet on a peaceful journey. Even after arriving at Elisha's doorstep she maintained that everything at home was in order. Only after entering his private quarters did she allude to his promise and hint to the seriousness of her situation.

This entire episode reveals the Shunamite's incredible strength of character rooted in her total faith in Hashem and His prophets. She displayed an unparalleled degree of trust and regarded physical impossibilities within the realm of reality. Her conviction in Hashem was so strong that she sincerely anticipated His performance of a miracle of major proportions. She simply refused to accept that her miracle boy's life ended so soon. She reasoned that if Hashem defied His rules of nature to grace her with a son He could likewise

defy them and return her son to life. Since Hashem accepted Elisha's first request for a miracle Hashem would conceivably accept Elisha's second request for another miracle. Therefore, with total conviction she calmly awaited a nearly unprecedented experience—the revival of her dead son. Indeed, Hashem rewarded her for this perfect faith and she merited to witness one of Hashem's greatest revelations of all times. Where did she develop such faith and conviction? Although we know that Hashem's ability is limitless we are also aware of the improbability of His altering His master plan for the world. The revival of the dead is an experience reserved, for the most part, for the end of days and is not meant to happen before then. Prior to the Shunamite's miracle world history saw the revival of two people, our Patriarch Yitzchok during the Akeida and the Tzorfati boy revived by the Prophet Elyahu. (see Pirkei DR' Eliezer 31, M'lochim 1 17:22) How could this Shunamite even dream of such supernatural occurrences, let alone believe that they would happen to her son?

One could suggest that she drew her strength from a lesson in this week's sedra. We read this week about three common travelers who informed our Patriarch Avrohom that his wife, Sora would bear a son. Sora, a ninety year old barren lady whose husband was also quite elderly, didn't place much value on this prediction. In fact, she found the travelers' words somewhat amusing and chuckled at the notion of her bearing a child at her ripe age. Hashem reprimanded her and said, "Why did Sora laugh saying, 'Can I give birth when I am so aged?'" Hashem continued and said, "Is anything out of Hashem's reach?" (Breishis 18:14) We are somewhat puzzled by this dialogue. Sora's response merely reflected the true improbability of child bearing at her ripe age. Why should she, physically incapable of giving birth and well past that stage, entertain the bizarre phenomena of returning to her youth? Nachmanides places this in perspective and reminds us that this prediction came from three angels disguised as ordinary Arabs. Our Matriarch Sora was totally unaware of their true identity and seemingly responded in a most appropriate way. She certainly appreciated their blessing but had long given up on considering such ridiculous things. Nachmanides questions why then did Hashem fault and reprimand her for a natural and logical response?

He answers that Sora's faith in Hashem should have exceeded such physical restrictions. With her level of knowledge she should have entertained the possibility of the nearly impossible. She should have believed that such miracles could actually happen or respond, at least, by wishing that Hashem willed them to be so. Sora's profound understanding of Hashem's ways should have left room in her mind for even the most remote of suggestions. She certainly realized that Hashem could do anything and should have eagerly

entertained the fulfillment of this blessing. (Nachmanides to Breishis 18:15)

This interpretation, apparently, understands that Sora should have valued the blessing of common ordinary travelers. Indeed, the Sages teach us never to take anyone's blessing or curse lightly because of their possible degree of truth. (Mesichta Baba Kamma 93a) In this vein, even the seemingly ridiculous words of ordinary Arabs has merit. Who knows if their words were not a reflection of a miraculous development in the near future. Although it was highly improbable for this to be so, the possibility did exist and should not have been overlooked. Maybe these travelers were angels in disguise delivering a message from Above! Our Matriarch Sora's chuckle reflected that child bearing for her was outside of reality. Hashem reprimanded her and reminded her that nothing is ever outside of reality. If she had considered things from Hashem's perspective she would have concluded that nothing is beyond His capability or difficult to bring about. Sora should have hearkened to the definitive tone of the travelers' prediction. As remote as it seemed the Arab travelers may have been sending her a message. After all, Sora was privileged to witness Hashem's involvement in every step of her life. Hashem therefore expected her never to limit His degree of involvement and respond favorably to this most remote prediction or blessing and contemplate its possible reality.

One could suggest that the Shunamite lady thoroughly absorbed this lesson and applied it to her own predicament. She, in fact, already merited to witness a miracle of major proportions. She was also incapable of child bearing and well on in her years before she miraculously conceived her son. Once she experienced this, she thoroughly researched Hashem's guidelines for miracles and concluded that nothing was beyond reality. She totally identified with this principle and continuously viewed her son's existence in this light. When her sudden tragedy occurred she saw in it the perfect opportunity to practice her belief. Drawing on her inner principles of faith she immediately engaged them into action. She fully believed that her son's death was no cause for despair because Hashem could easily restore him if He so willed. Consequently, she immediately traveled to Elisha and elicited him to daven for a miracle. Her unwavering faith served her well and in its merit Hashem responded to Elisha's prayers and restored her son to life.

We consistently daven to Hashem to end our troubles and bring us the long awaited Messianic era. For many people it is difficult to conceptualize or fathom how this phenomena will come about. At present, there are so many obstacles in the way that any stage of redemption will require unprecedented miracles. In the recent tragic American experience Hashem displayed untold levels of compassion. Close to one thousand souls were spared from a horrifying death due to unexpected Divine intervention. For those fortunate

people Hashem's perfectly timed miracles will undoubtedly remind them of His constant involvement in their lives. But, even we who are privileged to learn of these miracles can draw inspiration from them. Let us daven to Hashem that as He has begun showing us His open hand He should continue doing so until the entire world recognizes His sovereignty and warm relationship with His devout children. © 2003 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

When Avraham tried to save Sodom (and its surrounding cities) from being destroyed (Beraishis 18:23-33), he started by asking G-d if the presence of 50 righteous people would be enough to save everyone, and kept asking until he was told that even if there were only 10 He would not destroy them all. Rashi (18:32) tells us why Avraham didn't ask if even less than 10 would protect the city: His question regarding 10 already included 9 (based on his asking about 45 after asking about 50), and he knew from the flood that 8 would not be enough. There were eight "righteous" people on the ark (Noach, his three sons, and their wives), yet the rest of the world was still destroyed. Therefore, Avraham concluded, there was no reason to ask if the city would be saved if there were only 8 righteous people, as the answer would obviously be "no."

However, Rashi had previously told us (5:32) that G-d had made sure that Noach's sons were all less than 100 years old so that even if they were wicked they would not perish in the flood. He explained that before the Torah was given no one was punished by heavenly decree until they reached the age of 100 (as opposed to after the Torah was given, when a person became "punishable" at age 20), and because they could not yet be punished, their survival was guaranteed. If so, how could Avraham have thought that 8 could not possibly be enough to protect others, as it was possible that Noach's sons were not righteous, but were saved because they were "underage!" (We even see indications that Cham was not righteous, based on his behavior in the ark and after leaving it.)

If being "underage" (and therefore considered without sin) was enough to be classified as "righteous," there would have been a lot more than just Noach's sons that were less than 100 years old (read: "righteous"), and with only two more there would have been ten righteous people, enough to protect others. It is also difficult to imagine that there weren't 10 people in the Sodom area that weren't yet 100, or even 20, and they did not protect their region either.

If "wickedness" was disregarded before 100 (or 20), wouldn't "righteousness" also be disregarded? Even if Noach's sons were not wicked, how could they be considered "righteous?"

In short, why did Avraham stop asking at "8" if we can't consider Noach's sons and daughters-in-law "righteous," either because we can't know that they were, or because they were too young to be considered as such?

The whole issue of not being "punishable" until the age of 20 (or 100) deserves a closer look. Why is heavenly punishment delayed until years after reaching adulthood (12/13)? Why did the age change from 100 to 20 when the Torah was given? Those that were under 100 when the Torah was given, were they "grand fathered" to still be unpunishable until they turned 100, or did they all of a sudden become fully accountable for their actions?

Rashi's source for the age of 100 is a verse from Yishayahu, where it says that in the future (after Moshiach comes) the punishable age will (again) be 100. Why will things revert to the later age?

The Chizkuni, referring to the people that Avraham had brought close to G-d (12:5), says that this is when "Matan Torah" (the giving of the Torah) started. The Talmud (Avoda Zara 9a) seems to concur, saying that the "2,000 years of Torah" started from this point (and not from the public revelation on Mt. Sinai). (Based on this concept, the Nachalas Ya'akov (23:1) explains why Rashi (ibid) says that Sara was as sinless at 100 as she was at 20 (implying that her responsibility for sin started at 20, not 100)- because this was already after the "clock" had been switched to 20.) Why was Avraham's attracting others to monotheism considered the "giving of the Torah" vis-À-vis the "punishable" age?

The Talmud (Sotah 2a) describes two types of husband/wife matches, one based on deeds (a righteous man with a righteous woman and a wicked man with a wicked woman) and the other based on a pre-determined match. The Me'iri explains that a person is born with certain tendencies, character traits and personality. Free will can affect this inborn nature ("mazel"), but cannot change the basic nature of the person before he gets older, around 20. (He uses the term "perek," which some rishonim understand as 13 and others as 20, but since he is using it in the context of marriage- i.e. most get married before reaching their "perek," and the "normal" age for marriage is said to be 18 (and is certainly above 13)- it would seem that he means 20.) One who gets married before their free will has affected who they are (i.e. rising above their "mazel") has been set up- with someone of a similar nature- 40 days before their formation, while one who gets married after their very nature has been changed through their choices (i.e. after 20) is set up with someone appropriate for the person they have now become.

We see that while a person makes choices from the moment they become an adult, these choices can have a cumulative affect, taking years in order to remold who the person is. It is only after one has had

the ability to rise above their inborn nature that they are "punishable" for their deeds- as if the opportunity was taken, any past misdeeds would be regretted (and teshuvah done). Even if one did not take advantage of this opportunity, they are then held responsible for not doing so- since they could (should) have.

Reshaping who we are is made much easier through the study and observance of Torah. Therefore, before the Torah was given, people could not be expected to accomplish as much as quickly. As a matter of fact, until Avraham came along, no one was trying to teach the world about G-d at all. In order to find G-d, one had to start from scratch (as Avraham did), and the process would therefore have to take decades longer. However, once Avraham had created a monotheistic following, it was known that there is an individual (or group) that believes in One G-d. This caused (or should have caused) everyone to think. Was there a Creator? Does He expect something of me? Etc. Since the concept of G-d was now "out there," it would take much less time to begin the process of getting close to G-d. It was therefore at this point that the "punishable" age was lowered to 20 (with the exact number varying based on the individual).

Avraham may have seen that people had to choose to not change (i.e. to not follow his lead) if they were going to not improve who they were, and that one would not need 100 years to make this change. After all, he started to recognize G-d at age 3! When he looked around, Avraham saw a world that should be fully accountable for their actions by the time they reached the age of 20. We may be able to see (via hindsight) that it was Avraham that caused this change in age of full responsibility. But Avraham himself would not attribute the situation to his own doing. Could he really accept that he was able to change himself starting at 3 but others in the same situation couldn't be expected to change for 100 years? Or that he had changed the world so much that before him it took 100 years to accomplish what could now be done in 20? He may have thought that G-d's expectations of man had not significantly changed, and therefore that even in Noach's generation once a person reached the age of 20 they were fully accountable for their actions. And if Noach's sons (who were decades older than 20) had survived the flood, they (and their wives) must have been righteous. And despite there being 8 "righteous" people, the world was still destroyed. And so he didn't ask G-d if He would save Sodom if there were 8 (or less) righteous people living there, as he thought he knew the answer.

When explaining what was wrong with the "unity" of the builders of the "Tower of Babel," the Sefornu (11:6) says that had they succeeded there would have been just one religion. Although G-d would "tolerate" there being many different religions, having only one (false) religion was intolerable, as everyone would just follow it blindly. Once there were numerous

"gods," however, people would realize that there must be a "G-d of the gods." In other words, having just one mind set means complacency, while competing ideas spur the thought process, which will eventually (if objectively pursued) lead one to the One True G-d. It was the complacent mindset that demanded 100 years before bearing full responsibility, reduced to 20 by the "challenge" of Avraham's monotheism.

But complacency does not only lead to stagnation within a false ideology. Noach believed in G-d, but because he didn't speak of Him publicly (even after the flood), there weren't any publicly competing ideas to awaken the mind. Similarly, after Moshiach comes (may it be soon), there will be no doubt about the Creator or His will. Without the challenges of whether or not to keep the Torah, or why, complacency can easily set in. Sure everybody will keep the Torah (or honor those that do), but will it have much meaning? Perhaps it is because it will be harder to grow within that complacent stage of Torah observance that we won't be held responsible for failing to do so- until we've been given 100 years to try. ©2003 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

Chessed. Caring about others. A lacking in this midah {attribute} is reason to suspect that someone might not be a true descendant of Avraham-the person who was the total embodiment of this midah.

Our parsha leads off with Avraham recuperating from his Bris Milah {circumcision}, yet, peering out from his tent on a blazing hot day, hoping for guests. When guests do arrive, in the form of three idol-worshipping merchants who seem hesitant about bothering him, he runs out to greet them and begs them to allow him to serve them. Making it seem that it wouldn't be a bother for him by offering to serve them just a few items, Avraham and his wife, Sarah, personally serve up a major, extravagant feast. Three animals were prepared in order to give each traveler the choicest cut of meat.

Meanwhile, in a place that seemed like a different planet although it was not too far away, a very different scene was taking place. In Sodom and Gomorrah there were laws against hosting any guests. Acts of charity were strictly forbidden as they feared it would lead to a depletion of their accumulated wealth. The repercussions of breaking these laws were most severe.

And then, amazing in her audacity, a young girl was caught smuggling. She had hidden bread in her water pitcher to distribute to the poor when she would ostensibly go out to draw water. We can just imagine the elders of Sodom bemoaning just how hard it was becoming to bring up decent kids:

What's with the youth? Why aren't they following our morals? How did they get involved in such contraband? Where did they learn such things from? What will the neighbors say? An example had to be made to discourage others from following in such a path.

This young girl was taken, covered with honey and hoisted atop the city walls. Clouds of hornets attacked and her cries pierced the heavens as her soul left her.

Just a short distance away from Avraham, yet a different world. A clash of world views. A battle of values. A struggle between two opinions of how this world should be run.

Hashem then approached Avraham. He told him that Sodom had to be destroyed. Avraham should have been exuberant! The Cold War has ended—he's now the only remaining 'super-power!' His path has been shown to be correct...

"Avraham came forward and said: 'Will you even obliterate righteous with wicked? Perhaps there are fifty righteous people. Would you not spare the place for the sake of the fifty? Perhaps the fifty will lack five. Will You destroy the entire city because of the five? Perhaps forty... Perhaps thirty... Perhaps twenty... Let my Lord not be annoyed, perhaps ten would be found there?' [18:24-32]"

Avraham—the epitome of chessed. Sodom—the complete opposite. Why would he pray for them?

In regard to Hashem we say: And His compassion extends to all of His creations. The entire world only exists through Hashem's chessed. The mission of mankind is to, the best of one's ability, emulate Hashem. Avraham prayed for them. He cared for them, searched for some merit that would protect them and begged Hashem to save them. Similar to Hashem, Avraham's compassion extended to everyone. Although there was a battle of ideologies, he viewed the people of Sodom as Hashem's children and as such, tried to have Hashem's compassion extend to them.

And His compassion extends to all of His creations. Something for us to strive towards. © 2003 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd (Sarah) said to Abraham, 'Banish this handmaiden (Hagar) and her son (Yishmael), for the son of that handmaiden will not inherit together with my son, with Yitzhak' (Genesis 21:10).

The Bible clearly delineates the fierce sibling rivalry and schism between Yaakov and Esau, the twin sons of Yitzhak and Rivkah; Midrashically identified as Judaism and Christianity (Edom-Rome). However, in studying between the lines of the Bible, there appears no less of a jealous struggle between Yitzhak and

Yishmael, Jew and Moslem—with a great ramification for the Middle East today.

Despite the fact that Sarah has Abraham banish Yishmael and remove him from any inheritance with Yitzhak, Yitzhak seems to be haunted by the spectre of Yishmael throughout his life. The first time Rivkah meets Yitzhak, she falls from her camel when she sees the spiritual Yitzhak "coming out from speaking to G-d in the fields." But that very Biblical verse begins, "And Yitzhak was coming from having come from Be'er LeHai Ro'i" (Genesis 24:62). Apparently Yitzhak was enamored with, fixated upon, Be'er LeHai Ro'i—because the Bible just told us that he was constantly traveling back and forth from there (ba Meboh in Hebrew).

You will remember that Be'er LeHai Ro'i was the place where the Lord appeared to Hagar, who had escaped to there from the affliction she suffered at the hand of Sarah when she became pregnant with Yishmael. It was then and there that the angel of heaven told her to return to the home of Abraham and Sarah, and instructed her to name the child in her womb Yishmael, "because the Lord has heard your affliction." And it was then and there that Yishmael is described as "a wild ass of a man, whose hand will be against everything (yad bakol, in Hebrew), the hand of everyone will be against him, and in the face of all of his brothers shall he dwell" (Genesis 16:11).

Now we can hardly blame Yitzhak for being jealous and fearful of Yishmael. After all, he must have heard that the first time G-d announced to the aged centenarian Abraham that he would father a son with Sarah, he laughs and makes the request: "Would that Yishmael walk before You," let Yishmael be my first-born heir (Genesis 17:19). It was also at that time that G-d promises Abraham that twelve princes (corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel) will emerge from the loins of Yishmael and He will make of him a great nation (Genesis 17:20,21). Yitzhak also must be aware of the fact that the only two individuals in the family of Abraham named by G-d (or G-d's angel) is himself and Yishmael—which certainly gives his older brother special status and only adds to Yitzhak's sibling jealousy.

The parallels between these two brothers are very striking, and go even deeper, if Yitzhak undergoes an akedah, the test of a binding which almost costs his life, Yishmael had experienced even earlier a similar test of near death from thirst in the desert which almost costs his life—and each is saved by an angel deus ex machina at the very last moment. Moreover, just as G-d promises Abraham—after Yitzhak's akedah—that "I will greatly multiply your seed (Harbeh arbeh et zarekha) as the stars of the heavens and the sand at the edge of the sea" (Genesis 22:17), so does G-d promise Hagar—when He saves her life in the desert—that "I will greatly multiply your seed (Harbeh arbeh et zarekh), whose great number will not be able to be counted" (Genesis

16:10). And if G-d guaranteed to Abraham that from the Mountain of the akedah (Mount Moriah) G-d will be seen (by future generations—Genesis 22:14), so is Be'er LeHai Ro'i named for the fact that "G-d saw me," in the words of Hagar, and so saved the handmaiden and the unborn child in her womb.

Given these parallels, and the brute power with which Yishmael is endowed ("his hand will be against every thing," yad bakol), it is no wonder that Yitzhak is obsessed with Yishmael, and constantly returns to Be'er LeHai Ro' i, the place of G-d's revelation to Hagar.

Indeed, the Bible recounts that at the end of Abraham's life, he gives "everything that he has (Kol asher lo) to Yitzhak, and to the children of his concubines (including Yishmael the son of Hagar-Keturah, the concubine) he gives gifts." Yishmael apparently repents upon Abraham's death, since the Biblical text records, "And Yitzhak and Yishmael his sons buried (Abraham) at the Ma'arat Ha Mechpelah; but the incident concludes, "And it happened after the death of Abraham that G-d blessed Yitzhak his son; and Yitzhak dwelt with Be'er LeHai Ro'i." Yitzhak is apparently constantly haunted by the spectre of the power and prophecy surrounding Yishmael.

Now why must Yitzhak worry or be concerned? After all, Yishmael was banished by Sarah and disinherited—an act agreed upon by Abraham after he receives the divine directive, "Everything which Sarah says to you, you must hearken to her voice" (Genesis 21:12). Yishmael has been forced out of the picture!

The source of Yitzhak's concern is that Yishmael the metzahek (the one who laughs now, he seeks immediate gratification) never really leaves the scene. Despite the fact that Abraham gives everything (Kol) he has to Yitzhak, the verse concludes that gifts are still given to Yishmael, a son of a concubine (cf. B.T. Sanhedrin 91a). Abraham always loved Yishmael, Yishmael's progeny and twelve princes for descendants are repeated even after Abraham's death, and the Bible again reiterates, "in the face of all his brothers shall fall out his portion" (Genesis 25:12, usage based on Judges 7:12). As the great Torah teacher of Jerusalem, Rav Mordechai Allen, explains it, Sarah has him banished not because he isn't entitled to any part of the land of Israel, but rather because he would never be satisfied with only a share of the land, not even with half of the land. "The son of that handmaiden is incapable of sharing an inheritance with my son, with Yitzhak" (Genesis 21:10). He demands it all, "his hand is against everything," (yado bakol, Genesis 16:11) -- and the "everything Kol"with which G-d blesses Abraham and which Abraham bequeathes to Yitzhak is the land of Israel (Genesis 28:4). Yishmael gets other gifts, but these do not satisfy him. He is always around, in the face of his brothers, scheming and struggling to get it all, the whole land of Israel. This is what worries, consumes and obsesses Yitzhak!

(And this is the attitude of the descendants of Yishmael to this very day, when they rejected the United Nations partition of the West Bank on November 29, 1947, when they started the Six Day War in June 5, 1967, when they rejected former Prime Minister Barak's all to generous offer of 96% of Judea, Samaria and Gaza initiated this Oslo War three and one half years ago, and when they refuse to recognize that we have any rights whatsoever to the Temple Mount. "Their hand is against everything" because they demand everything!)

At least according to one Midrash, the matter will only be resolved in the pre-Messianic age, where "a star will come forth from Jacob "and destroy our enemies. Balaam cries out, "oh woe, who will live after the positioning of (the two enemy nations) with El at the end of their names, YishmaEl and YisraEl... Even the enemy will be utterly destroyed" (Numbers 24:23).

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As Hagar sits a distance from her dying son Yishmael an angel appears and declares "Mah lakh Hagar? What ails you Hagar?" (Genesis 21:17) One may claim that this question is actually rhetorical for God's emissary obviously knows what is bothering Hagar.

In truth, rhetorical questions play an important role in the Torah and usually appear in order to present a criticism. For example, when God asks Adam, "Ayeka," after he ate from the tree of the Garden of Eden he obviously knew where, physically, Adam was located. (Genesis 3:9) God was actually making a clear statement to Adam, criticizing him and asking him, "What have you done? Why did you disobey Me?"

One wonders then why was the angel critical of Hagar in our narrative?

Keep in mind that God had previously promised Hagar that she would have a child who would "dwell in the face of all his brethren." (Genesis 16:12) God later tells Avraham that Yishmael would become "a great nation," (Genesis 17:20) - a promise Avraham no doubt shared with Hagar. Still, here in the desert Hagar feared for Yishmael's life for she sensed that his death was imminent (Genesis 21:16). Her feeling displayed a loss of faith in the Divine promise. When the angel asks "what ails you Hagar?" he actually is asking Hagar, "What is wrong? Have you lost faith in God?!"

Rabbi David Silber notes that whenever the Torah uses the term to'eh it means to wander. Not in the physical sense but in the metaphysical one-to stray from the right path. Not coincidentally the Torah in the Hagar narrative states she strayed, va-teyta, in the wilderness. (Genesis 21:14) This confirms our belief that in this case, Hagar had lost her spiritual way.

This idea of to'eh is also found when Avraham, for a second time, declares that Sarah is his sister. He tells Avimelech, "and it came to pass when God caused me to wander (hit-u)." (Genesis 20:13) Here, Avraham is straying. He misidentifies Sarah as his sister, rather than pointing out that she is his covenantal wife from whom the second patriarch would come.

The term to'eh is found in one other place in Genesis. When Joseph seeks out his brethren, the Torah states, "And behold, he was wondering (to'eh) in the field." (Genesis 37:15) Once again, wander, to'eh, means that Joseph was not only lost physically. He had lost his sense of brotherhood, and he also bore responsibility for breaking up the family unit.

In all these cases the personalities who were to'eh, eventually found their way back. Yishmael is saved; Avraham recognizes that Sarah is his covenantal wife and Yitzchak his covenantal son; Joseph and his brothers unite. This teaches all of us the power to return and to correct our mistakes.

Everyone will be to'eh. Inevitably everyone makes mistakes. The question is not whether one will stray, rather how will we respond when we stray. Will we give in to our leanings and continue to be in a state of to'eh, or will we stand up and rise against the tide and work on our souls and our lives until we get back on the road of holiness and connection and walk the straight path. © 2000 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hamaayan

R' Elchonon Wasserman z"l hy'd (rosh yeshiva in Baranovich, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) writes: People ask, "What is so impressive about Avraham's behavior at the Akeidah? After all, how many millions of Jews throughout history have given their lives al kiddush Hashem / to sanctify G-d's Name even though they were not prophets like Avraham?!"

He explains: Giving one's life al kiddush Hashem is not difficult if a person has faith that he is going to a better world. Imagine, however, if a person thought that by giving his life he would lose, not only Olam Ha'zeh / This World, but also his share in Olam Ha'ba / the World-To-Come! For that person, the test would be difficult beyond imagination.

Avraham devoted his life to spreading knowledge of the One G-d. He knew that all of his efforts would have been wasted if he had no son to carry on his legacy. Indeed, for him, that would be a fate even worse than losing his share in Olam Ha'ba. That was the challenge he faced at the Akeidah. (Kovetz Ma'amarim) © 2003 Rabbi S. Katz & torah.org

