

"And Hashem tested Avraham." (22:1)

Chazal state that this was the tenth time that Hashem tested Avraham *Avinu's* devotion. The first nine tests were only preparations for the *Akeidah*, the ultimate test of faith. *Horav Nissan Alpert, z.l.*, offers two insights regarding the *Akeidah* which shed light on this incident and its ramifications for the future of our People. Throughout Avraham's previous tests, he clearly displayed his tenacious devotion and utter loyalty to Hashem's imperative. Indeed, in *Uhr Kasdim* he was prepared to die for his belief. At the *Akeidah*, however, he indicated his willingness to give up all that he possessed for Hashem. All his efforts, teachings, and accomplishments would have been sacrificed with Yitzchak on the *Akeidah*. He was about to publicly contradict everything which he had been teaching about a loving G-d, whose hallmarks are benevolence and altruism. He was suddenly directed to perform the most irrational act of his life by the G-d upon whom this belief focused. Perhaps the greatest test of faith is to perform an act which is not justifiable under ordinary circumstances. The ultimate validation of one's conviction is the ability to pierce through the veil of ambiguity and remain steadfast in one's belief in Hashem. People will always raise questions regarding Hashem's Divine Providence and make demands for explanations. We should respond with expressions of belief in Hashem despite the shadow of uncertainty.

There is yet another aspect of the *Akeidah* which demands interpretation. Why was this test oriented towards Yitzchak, his son? Until this juncture every trial was of a personal nature, focusing on Avraham's own compliance. *Horav Alpert* suggests that until now it was not clear whether Avraham's devotion had been transmitted to Yitzchak. Did this devotion begin and end with Avraham, or was this the beginning of a family, and, consequently, a nation? Would Yitzchak show the same resolute faith which his father had taught the world, or would it become extinct with Avraham? Was this belief inculcated into the next generation, or was it a sterile spirituality? Was Avraham a "father" whose lifelong goal was to transmit this heritage to his offspring? The involvement of Yitzchak in the test transformed it into the ultimate test of Avraham. This trial would assess the extent of Avraham's spiritual success and his ability to transmit his spirituality and faith to future generations.

We may suggest another aspect of Avraham's trial. We tend to view *Kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of Hashem's Name) through the perspective of one's willingness to abdicate his life for the sake of Hashem. We often overlook another form of *Kiddush Hashem*. The ability to maintain one's faith in Hashem despite serious hardships has the capacity to establish spiritual affirmation. The Jewish People's ability to withstand suffering and deprivation is testimony to the eternity and to the greatness of their spirit.

There is a famous story told about the *Bluzover Rebbe, z.l.*, which took place as he lit the *Chanukah* candles in the concentration camp. Standing amidst death and desperation, he recited the first two *brachos* (blessings) over the candles. As he was about to recite the third *bracha* of "*shehechyanu*" - blessing Hashem for keeping us alive and preserving us- he suddenly stopped, looked around the room into the faces of the other inmates, and then recited the blessing. Later, he

explained why he had hesitated. How could he say, "*Blessed are you Hashem who has kept us alive, and preserved us, and enabled us to reach this season?*" How could he utter this blessing amidst the hundreds of dead bodies which were lying literally in the shadow of the *Chanukah* candles - when thousands of Jewish skeletons were walking around the camp and millions more were being massacred? How can one praise Hashem for being kept alive to witness this travesty?

He turned around, however, and noticed the throng of Jews who, despite their obvious misery, stood resolute with tears streaming down from their glistening eyes. Their faces expressed faith and concentration as they listened to the rite of the kindling of the candles. He, therefore, felt it was mandatory to exalt Hashem. A people who continues to serve Hashem despite all of the anguish which its members have undergone truly exemplifies the concept of *Kiddush Hashem*. Avraham's distinctiveness lay not only in his willingness to die for Hashem, but also in his inclination to serve Him despite such extremely adverse circumstances.