

Please take your son, your only one, whom you love, Yitzchak. (22:2)

In the preface to his commentary to *Meseches Shabbos*, *Minchas Asher*, **Horav Asher Weiss, Shlita**, writes that in the above *pasuk*, Hashem is spelling out to Avraham *Avinu* the principals upon – and manner in which – the *Akeidas Yitzchak* should be executed. He focuses on what many of us conceive as being the state of mind that permeated the two giants who took part in the *Akeidah*. Avraham and Yitzchak must have been on such an incredibly lofty spiritual plane, completely divested of any physical, mundane emotions which would have run contrary to Hashem's command to them.

Throughout the generations, the greatest, finest and most righteous have served Hashem under the most difficult and challenging conditions, both physically and emotionally, yet did so with unbelievable conviction and calm. They elevated themselves to the land of angels, whereby they were despoiled of their physicality. Should Avraham and Yitzchak be any different? Certainly not! After all, it had to start somewhere. The joy that must have been inherent in the holy Patriarch was unbelievable. This is what seems to have been, or, at least, we perceive that this must have been the case. Veritably, *Chazal* teach us that this was not the case. Rather, as they describe the scenario, we see an elderly Jew, broken-hearted, tears falling freely down his cheeks, a tormented man about to slaughter his only child, his future.

Indeed, the *Midrash* presents the following picture. Avraham reached out to take the slaughtering knife in his hand. As he positioned the knife over Yitzchak's throat, Avraham began to cry uncontrollably, and his tears, the tears of compassion for his child, fell on Yitzchak's eyes. Nonetheless, despite the outward display of sad emotion, Avraham's heart was filled with unbridled joy. Reading this *Midrash*, we wonder why Avraham was weeping so bitterly? He was carrying out Hashem's command. How could he be sad? Avraham approached serving Hashem much differently than we do. If his heart was filled with joy, it should have been manifest on his face.

Rav Weiss explains that, if Hashem had given Avraham permission to divest himself of all physicality, to elevate himself to the level of *Malach Elokim*, an angel of G-d, the *Akeidah* would not have been much of a *nisayon*, test. It would have been very easy for him to achieve and triumph over the test – because it would not have been a test! An angel has no emotions, therefore the filial, fatherly emotions that prevail in a “normal” situation would be no match for an angel. Hashem did not permit this. Avraham was to take this test as a man – not an angel.

Hashem said, “Please take your son, your only one, whom you love...Yitzchak... and bring him up there as an offering.” Do not act like an angel. Act like a father whose only son, whom he loves with unparalleled devotion, is to be sacrificed. The *Akeidah* was to be a father's sacrifice – not an angel's sacrifice. Avraham was commanded to transcend the fatherly emotions and offer his son

to Hashem amid tears and emotion, as would a father.

We have no conception of this form of *nisayon*. Essentially, it is impossible for two opposing emotions, joy and mourning, happiness and grief, to work in tandem within the same person in executing the same activity. Avraham led the way. He could do it. Although his eyes poured forth their tears, his heart reached the epitome of joy in serving his Master.

This, explains Rav Weiss, is the underlying meaning of Yitzchak's question of his father, "And Yitzchak said to Avraham, to his father, 'Father,' and he said, 'Here I am, my son.'" At first glance, Yitzchak's question makes no sense, nor does Avraham's reply. We now understand that Yitzchak was wondering, if in the course of carrying out the *mitzvah*, Avraham had ceased to be his father. Was he now an angel? Yitzchak asked, *Avi*, "My father? Are you still my father?" Avraham replied, *Hineni beni*, "(Of course) behold, my son!" I am still your father; I have not changed.

Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, explains this attitude as intrinsic in the exhortation, *V'ahavta es Hashem Elokecha b'chol levavcha*, "Love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart." *Rashi* notes the word *levavcha* is actually written in the plural, rather than as *b'chol libecha*. From here we derive that one must serve Hashem *b'shnei yitzrecha*, with both inclinations – good and bad. Harnessing the evil inclination to serve Hashem is not easy, but whoever said that serving Hashem would be easy? It is demanding – as is anything which is important. The *Rosh Yeshivah* adds that *b'shnei yitzrecha* refers to one's emotions: sadness and joy. Just as one is to serve Hashem during periods of joy, so, too, must he serve his Creator during moments of pain and anguish. This is indicated by the *halachah* that if one's father passes away, the son recites the blessing, *Baruch Dayan HaEmes*, "Blessed is the Truthful Judge," as a way of proclaiming his acceptance of the Divine decree. He also recites, *Baruch HaTov v'Hameitiv*, "Blessed is the One Who is good and does good," since now he will inherit his father's material possessions. One must serve Hashem with all of his emotions – even if they contradict one another.

In the *Toldos Admorei Bobov*, an inspiring episode enables us to see this idea in action. The **Bobover Rebbe, zl, Horav Shlomo**, together with his son and successor, *Horav Naftali*, were in an underground bunker beneath a hospital in Grosswardein, Hungary. They were hiding in a room in which there was so little oxygen that the candles which they lit kept going out. The air was stale, and food was at a premium. When they were fortunate to obtain a piece of moldy bread, they quickly gulped it down. The men passed their time underground studying and teaching Torah and telling stories about righteous Jews of old. This made it easier for them to bear the ceaseless hunger.

The *Rebbe* originally had an old pair of *Tefillin*, which he continued repairing until the strap finally tore for the last time. He immediately burst into tears, "Now, I have lost yet another *mitzvah* when I have so few left." His misery was not long-lasting, as a gentile farmer who heard of his plight shared a secret with him. Apparently, earlier in the war, a Jew escaping the Nazis had left his brand new *Tefillin* with the gentile, telling him that one day he would be able to fetch a large sum of

money for them. The *Rebbe* promised to pay him as soon as he made it across the Romanian border.

Two months later, however, the *Rebbe* was in Grosswardein, hiding from the Germans. He did have his precious *Tefillin* with him. He realized that, during the last few months, his young son, Naftali, had reached the age of *bar mitzvah*. It would be celebrated joyfully in the bunker in Grosswardein. He would wind the *Tefillin* on the arm of his son – the only survivor of his entire family.

Prior to the celebration, the *Rebbe* and his son endangered themselves by sneaking out of the bunker and heading for the hospital's showers. No *mikveh* was available to purify their bodies before putting on *Tefillin*. The showers would do. The *Rebbe* looked at his young son and, with fierce pride, he said, "You know, we are in danger of losing our lives. If they catch us, we will be immediately terminated, and there is no *chevra kaddisha*, Jewish burial society, to tend to our bodies. So, it is a good thing that we have cleansed our bodies."

He added, as if thinking out loud, "Who would have thought we would come to such a time when a *bar mitzvah* boy washes up equally for *Tefillin* and for his departure from this world?"

This is another example of *b'chol levavcha – b'shnei yitzrecha*.