

And Hashem tested Avraham. (22:1)

With the *Akeidas Yitzchak*, Avraham Avinu reached the summit of spiritual commitment to the Almighty. He was prepared to sacrifice everything--even his only son, his future--to serve Hashem. Avraham Avinu demonstrated obedience by listening to the command of Hashem. He showed unparalleled *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, when he listened to Hashem without question. The **Netziv, zl**, emphasizes Avraham's readiness to accept Hashem's command without questioning, as one might listen to a close friend. Avraham was in awe of Hashem, a state of being which precludes the question, "Why"? Fear is equated with unequivocal acquiescence; no questions are asked, one just readily performs the will of Hashem.

Avraham listened to Hashem's command to sacrifice Yitzchak. He also listened to Hashem's angel when he was told to halt the sacrifice. Avraham did not suddenly "come to his senses," as some alienated Bible scholars would have us think. Avraham acted with complete obedience. In fact, he set the criteria for halting the sacrifice; the ram that was to replace Yitzchak must carry the same degree of holiness as if Yitzchak had been sacrificed. Regrettably, these people refuse to acknowledge the truth that one can reach the spiritual zenith of serving the Almighty and still remain in complete control of his faculties.

Avraham set the standard for *avodas Hashem*, serving the Almighty through *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice. The *pasuk* attributes the test to Avraham. Is this title misplaced? After all, Yitzchak was the one who was to be the *korban*, sacrifice, not Avraham. In the **Drashos Ha'ran** the point is made that a test is a test the first time it is initiated. After the first person undergoes the trial, it becomes easier for the person who follows. With this in mind, **Sefer Aperion** comments that Yitzchak's test, his willingness to give up his life for Hashem, was not novel. He inherited his devotion from his father, who was thrown into a fiery furnace and who risked his life in battle to save his cousin, Lot. Avraham, on the other hand, was undergoing a trial that had not been previously experienced. Never had an individual been asked to slaughter his son for the sake of the Almighty. This was the supreme test. Avraham had no one from whom to learn.

Horav Elchanan Wassermann, zl, observes that *mesiras nefesh*, sacrificing one's life in order to sanctify Hashem's Name, is not really a significant test. One is exchanging a temporal world for an eternal world. An individual who is bound up in the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush Hashem* acts with remarkable courage and enthusiasm, excited in the knowledge that he is relinquishing *Olam Ha'zeh* for *Olam Ha'bah*. He will now be inducted in the *Yeshivah Shel Ma'alah*, the Heavenly *Yeshivah*, where he will accompany the great *tzaddikim* of old. If this act of *Kiddush Hashem* causes him to lose his portion in the World-to-Come, if by performing this act of *mesiras nefesh* he is left with nothing, will he still go forward for the sake of the Almighty?

That is the definition of true *mesiras nefesh*, claims *Reb Elchanan*. A *nisayon* is a test of one's dedication to the Almighty. Throughout history, Jews have demonstrated their commitment and have given up their lives as they have sacrificed themselves for the Almighty. They were oriented

towards *Olam Habah*. They always had something to look forward to. The opportunity to die as a Jew, to achieve the ultimate closeness with Hashem, to have a "ticket" to *Gan Eden*, is the reward of he who is *moser nefesh*. Avraham Avinu did not undergo that type of *mesiras nefesh*. If he had carried out Hashem's will, if he had sacrificed Yitzchak and passed the test, he would have lost everything. What did Avraham want most of all? His greatest desire, his ultimate goal, was to spread Hashem's Name throughout the world. His mission in life was to unite the world in monotheistic belief in Hashem. He told Hashem, "What can You give me, if I go childless? What benefit is *Olam Habah* if I have no son to carry on my work? What good is *Olam Habah* for me if all the work I have accomplished in this world is to be wasted because I have no heir to continue what I have initiated?" This was Avraham's test. His *mesiras nefesh* comprised his willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak, to give everything up, to relinquish his *Olam Habah* for *Kiddush Hashem*. Yitzchak's death would bring an end to Avraham's dreams. He would not have *Olam Hazeih* or *Olam Habah*. No, we cannot compare Avraham's zenith of *mesiras nefesh* to that of the ensuing generations.