

“And G-d tested Avraham...and He said, ‘Please take your son...bring him up there as an offering.’” (22:1,2)

Akeidas Yitzchak, the Binding of Yitzchak, was Avraham Avinu's tenth trial. It is considered the zenith of his devotion to Hashem, the culmination of his spiritual journey, indicating his uncompromising conviction and faith. The first trial took place in Uhr Kasdim, when Avraham was thrown into a fiery furnace. Interestingly, the *Torah* does not mention this supreme act of self-sacrifice. The *Torah*, however, dedicates an entire *parsha* to telling the story of the *Akeidah*. Every generation of Avraham's descendants conjure up the memory of Avraham's and Yitzchak's devotion, but nothing is even mentioned of Uhr Kasdim. Furthermore, at Uhr Kasdim, Avraham took the initiative by going into the furnace strictly based upon his own conviction. No one commanded him to do so. In contrast, the *Akeidah* was a response to G-d's command. Apparently, we must endeavor to understand the underlying significance of *Akeidas Yitzchak*.

Horav Eliyahu Lopian, z.l., explains that *Akeidas Yitzchak* was like no other trial. Its inexplicability was its uniqueness, as it defined the very relationship a committed Jew should strive to develop with the Almighty. The preceding trials made sense to an individual who understands that it is necessary to demonstrate commitment, to give up his material resources and comforts, even his life, in the service of Hashem. The *Akeidah*, however, is the single test that defied rationale. It was as incomprehensible as the others were reasonable. To destroy Yitzchak meant to destroy everything for which he had worked. To destroy Yitzchak meant to destroy the future. Yet, Avraham Avinu did not permit his bewilderment to impede his fulfillment of Hashem's command. He did not falter; he did not hesitate. He surrendered his own *seichel ha'yashar*, common sense, his ethical will, for the will of Hashem. He exemplified Judaism at its ideal, *Yiddishkeit* at its apex.

Divine imperative supercedes human analysis. The human cognitive mind defers to the will of G-d. That is the essence of what Judaism is all about. The lesson of the *Akeidah* is that the *ratzon Hashem*, will of G-d, is to define religious commitment. A committed Jew ascribes to Hashem's *mitzvos* precisely because they constitute the will of G-d. All *mitzvos* are equally significant since their source is the same. Practical application may cause a classification of *mitzvos* according to various categories. The *Torah* prescribes punishments for the violation of *mitzvos* according to varied degrees of severity. Yet, the basic premise – that the fundamental religious commitment is to the will of Hashem – remains paramount. Thus, the commitment to each individual *mitzvah* is equal to the others, because its source is identical.

We may supplement this thesis with the following idea: While no one detracts from the greatness of Avraham's devotion, a number of commentators have noted that Jewish history is replete with martyrdom. Although Avraham's son was spared, many of our brethren perished *Al Kiddush Hashem*. The classic story of Chanah, who witnessed her seven sons killed as a result of their refusal to bow down to a pagan idol, certainly is a strong example. Does her devotion surpass the devotion of Avraham, or is there something about Avraham's act of devotion that transcends all

others?

The simple response is that Avraham set the tone; he set the standard. He was the first one to demonstrate his readiness to sacrifice his most prized treasure, his son. His willingness to execute Hashem's command taught his future descendants the level of commitment to which a Jew should aspire.

There is, however, a more profound and fundamental response, one that goes to the very core of Jewish commitment and observance. One detail in the *Akeidah* narrative is frequently ignored: The *Torah* tells us, "*And Avraham arose early in the morning.*" If he awoke, apparently he must have gone to sleep that night. How does one go to sleep knowing that in the morning he will be going to sacrifice his beloved son? The answer lies in one word – equanimity. Avraham *Avinu* faced this challenge with a presence of mind that evinced his total composure in the face of an event that would literally have shattered a lesser person. What seems to us the greatest challenge was to Avraham no challenge at all. He was carrying out the will of Hashem – whatever it may have been. This was his *raison de etre* for living.

If we could only strive to attain an element of equanimity in our lives, we would be much happier people. When we realize that everything comes from the Almighty and that we are here to do His will, we will achieve a more serene and tranquil attitude towards life. This attitude will enable us to enjoy what we think is good and the courage to accept what we think is not good.