

Go from your land and your birthplace and from your father's home. (12:1)

Hashem's command to Avraham *Avinu*, instructing him to leave his present surroundings is "stretched" out a bit. The Torah emphasizes the various phases of his departure: his land, his birthplace, his father's home. The **Mizrachi** suggests that the purpose in this emphasis was that the Patriarch would digest all that he was abandoning. It was not just his land; it was also his birthplace, and his father's home. Uvr Casdim meant a lot to Avraham. To leave was to forsake a major part of his past. He had a history in Uvr Casdim. The purpose of this detail was to increase the Patriarch's reward. He was not merely giving up his condo in Uvr Casdim; he was relinquishing a part of yesteryear. Obviously, with increased yearning comes greater reward.

We find *Rashi* expounding a similar interpretation when he addresses Hashem's command to Avraham concerning the *Akeidah*, Binding of Yitzchak *Avinu*. Hashem instructed Avraham to sacrifice: "Your son, your only one, whom you love – Yitzchak" (*Bereishis* 22:2). The Almighty could have simply said Yitzchak, without the buildup. *Rashi* explains that Hashem was underscoring Avraham's loss, thus adding to his reward. It was not merely his son; it was his only, beloved, Yitzchak, thereby making the Patriarch's sacrifice and devotion that much greater.

There is – or should be – a glaring difference between Avraham's love for Yitzchak and his relationship to his home. Uvr Casdim may have played a significant role in Avraham's life, but his love for it was nothing like his feelings towards Yitzchak. Furthermore, Uvr Casdim was not Yerushalayim. It was a spiritually bankrupt city, under the rule of a morally depraved demagogue, Nimrod. It was a community where paganism was rampant and licentiousness a way of life. Avraham must surely have been averse to living in such a community. Indeed, this was the place where he was thrown into a fiery cauldron! What affection could he possibly hold for such a repugnant community?

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, explains that a *tzaddik* is not a machine, a marionette that turns off to evil and thrives only on virtue. A *tzaddik* is cognitive of his environment and has feelings of emotion, just as everyone else does. He has desires, natural inclinations and feelings. He has not just overcome his natural tendencies and reprogrammed himself to care only for Torah and *mitzvos*. On the contrary, he is just like the rest of us, but he has learned to control his urges, to curb his emotions, to channel them in positive directions. Uvr Casdim may have been a perverted community, but it was Avraham's birthplace, his father's home. He had feelings for the place, an innate sense of love for the country in which he had spent most of his life. Yet, his love for Hashem was greater. Thus, when he was commanded to leave, he did so with a co-existent love in his heart for the past and an excitement concerning the future.

When Avraham held the knife over his son, Yitzchak, he did not for one moment ignore the fact that this was his beloved son. He was no robot, blindly following Hashem's command without feeling

towards his son. The **Yalkut Shimoni** points out that burning hot tears flowed from Avraham's eyes as he prepared to slaughter Yitzchak. Is this the reaction of a machine? Did he pretend that he was not holding a sharp knife poised over his son's throat? Avraham did not suppress his love for Yitzchak. He allowed his tears to flow freely, expressing his love for his only son. It was just that his love for-- and obedience to-- the Almighty took precedence.

Hashem does not want us to be robots, zombies, dehumanized dimwits. There is regrettably a religion of terrorists bent on destroying our People which preaches such automated, mindless devotion. The Almighty has endowed man's heart with an aggregate of emotions. We are warm, sensitive human beings, who love our parents, our spouses and our children. Our homes mean something to us. Natural affections are a part of our lives. We are normal people – and proud of it. The emotions Hashem bequeathed us should be nurtured and cultivated, because the greater the ability to love others within our family circle, the greater ability we possess to love Hashem. If we begin to desensitize ourselves, we become cold, dehumanized machines who have no emotion, no feelings, with no way of expressing our love to Hashem. The Almighty does not want a nation of mindless, cretinous imbeciles, who are unaware of their surroundings and inattentive to the feelings of others. He wants normal people, with normal emotions and caring hearts. Then He wants them to take it "all" and focus it on serving Him. This is what Avraham *Avinu* taught us. Take everything with which Hashem has endowed you and apply it to your service of the Almighty.