

And G-d tested Avraham (22:1)

Avraham *Avinu* withstood the ten *nisyonos*, trials, with which Hashem tested him. What is so special about these trials that the Torah makes note to elaborate on them? Just about every one of them is recorded in the Torah, with the *nisayon* of the *Akeidas Yitzchak* achieving special prominence. Our Torah is neither a history book, nor does it relate stories needlessly. Every letter in the Torah is present for a profound reason. What is the Torah's message with the redacting of these trials? Furthermore, why is it only with regard to Avraham *Avinu* that the Torah calls attention to his achievement? The other *Avos* – Yitzchak and Yaakov – also confronted challenges and emerged triumphant. The *Nesivos Shalom* quotes the *Me'or Einayim* (commentary to *Parashas Va'eira*) who writes that, just as our Patriarch Avraham withstood ten trials, so, too, must every Jew confront ten challenges in his life and hopefully emerge triumphant.

Every Jew is on a Heavenly mission in this world. He achieves success when he passes ten trials in his life. Indeed, *Chazal* praise Avraham for his emergence from the ten trials more so than for keeping the entire Torah. By withstanding challenge, Avraham demonstrated his abiding unequivocal love for Hashem. Observing the Torah is basic, but it does not attest to one's deep love for Hashem. Only *nisyonos*, challenges, of all kinds achieve this ideal. Thus, it is possible for a Jew to adhere successfully to the entire Torah; to suffuse himself in its scholarship and observe each of its *mitzvos*, without revealing his love or fulfilling the Heavenly mandate for which Hashem sent him to this world.

The *Nesivos Shalom* expands on this idea. The *Sefarim HaKedoshim* underscore the fact that surmounting *nisyonos* manifests one's love. Triumphant over challenge demonstrates that one serves Hashem with love. It is not always easy, but when one serves with love, it is doable.

At times, a person can do nothing but accept Hashem's challenge. When Avraham was confronted with famine, he continued his unwavering commitment. This is love. When Avimelech took Sarah *Imeinu* from him, his commitment did not waver – because of his love. The *nisayon* of the *Akeidah* was a *nisayon* of love, from arising early in the morning, to performing every aspect of the command both meticulously and with alacrity. Indeed, every aspect of the *Akeidah* tested his abiding love for Hashem.

The *parshios* which address Avraham's life and his ability to rise above the challenges that he confronted teach us that every *mitzvah* has two components: the *kiyum*, actual fulfillment of the *mitzvah*; and the spirit of the *mitzvah*, which is transformative and changes the person. We associate the *mitzvah* of *milah*, circumcision, with joy. It is a milestone day when a Jewish father brings his son into the *ligyono shel Melech*, G-d's legion. Some *mitzvos* are intrinsically connected with joy; others with love. The *penimius*, intrinsic love of a *mitzvah*, should be the primary focus of its *asiyah*, execution, of the *mitzvah*. In other words, "doing" without focus or purpose undermines the "doing" and diminishes one's achievement. Everything that we do as Jews must promote and manifest our love for the Creator. Otherwise, we have missed the mark. Our life's challenges are

vehicles for expressing this profound love. Thus, we endeavor to accept and triumph over every *nisayon*, so that we can authenticate our love for Hashem. The next time Hashem “provides” us with a test, we should remember that He is availing us the opportunity to demonstrate our love for Him.

As a young man, Horav Elazar Koznitzer, zl, asked his uncle, the saintly Saraf of Mogolnitz, Horav Chaim Meir Yechiel Shapiro, zl (early nineteenth century grandson of the Koznitzer Maggid), for a blessing. “What blessing would you like?” he asked. “That I should not be challenged with *nisyanos*,” he replied. The Saraf countered, “This is not a blessing. One cannot achieve greatness; one cannot rise up ladder of spirituality without first having overcome various trials. I bless you, however, that, when you confront a *nisayon*, you should be aware that it is only a test. With this in mind, you will merit to withstand life’s trials.”

An Israeli soldier who had fought in a number of battles and had served with distinction left his base to go on furlough to spend quality time with his family. He grabbed the first minibus that passed by and sat down, closed his eyes and looked forward to a restful weekend. Suddenly, he heard the other passengers speaking among themselves in Arabic. He immediately froze with fear with the realization that he had been duped. The passengers on the bus were not Jews, but Palestinians. They were up to no good. As a high-ranking officer of *Tzahal*, he was privy to many high-level secrets, which these terrorists would do anything to extract from him. He knew that he would be in for a traumatic and painful questioning. His resolve was as strong as his fear. He would not commit treason and give up any secrets – regardless of the torture to which he would surely be subjected. He would not bring shame on his parents. First and foremost, he was a Jew with a responsibility towards his people. If necessary, he would give up his life, but he would never reveal any information.

The bus stopped at a far-off campsite, and he was taken off. He was cuffed, dragged off and bound to a chair. It did not take long before the terrorists got down to business. They asked question after question, all to which he did not reply. They became physical with him; yet, his silence continued. To maintain his fortitude, he visualized the damage to national security which the secrets he carried could engender.

After about an hour of non-stop questioning and threats, they took a break and went out, leaving him alone in the room. He realized that they had not shut the door completely. He eased over to the door to listen to their conversation, to get an idea about what was next. How shocked he was to hear the “Palestinians” speaking among themselves in *Ivrit!* These were Jewish officers who were testing his ability to withstand pressure and not reveal secret information. He decided not to let on that he knew. Thus, when the tribunal of questioners returned, he was ready for them. He was no longer afraid. This was not real. It was only a test to determine his level of commitment: Was he a security risk, or could he achieve the next security level?

This is what the Saraf meant. Realizing that life’s challenges are all a test to determine where we

stand with regard to our commitment -- and to avail us the opportunity to manifest our abiding love for Hashem -- is the key to passing life's challenges successfully. Indeed, at the end of the day, they are "speedbumps" to slow down our aimless running and allow us the chance to think about our purpose and goal in life.

In his *Lapid Eish*, the *Klausenberger Rebbe, zl*, writes: "Many times, I have contemplated and wondered why Hashem spared me. [The *Rebbe* lost his entire family, wife and eleven children, ages two to twenty-one in Auschwitz. This was in addition to his mother, brother, sisters and their entire families. Over one thousand members of the *Rebbe's* extended family were slaughtered in Auschwitz. The *Rebbe* himself suffered physically and emotionally more than the mind can imagine. Yet, he adhered to all the kosher dietary laws and attempted as best as possible to observe *mitzvos*.] After all the horrific troubles that I had experienced, I merited to survive, rebuild my family and establish congregations and *yeshivos*. [In *Eretz Yisrael*, he established his *Chassidic* court in Netanya, build the Laniado Hospital and established *Mifaal HaShas*, to promote greater Torah scholarship. His achievements are mind boggling.] I continue to wonder what is it -- what could it be -- for which Hashem has rewarded me so.

"I came to the conclusion, that the one good thing that could stand in my behalf is that: During the most difficult and painful times that I experienced, amidst the most mind-numbing tragedies, I never complained against Hashem. With every wave of pain that passed over me, I shook my head in acquiescence and accepted it with love."

Navigating life's challenges is much like driving over speedbumps. They may slow us down and test our patience, but they also remind us to proceed with caution and grace, ensuring we stay on course and grow stronger from each experience.