

And G-d tested Avraham. (22:1)

In Judasim, *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice is about aligning one's life with Hashem's will, even at great personal cost. One must be prepared to go as far as making the ultimate sacrifice in order to demonstrate his consummate dedication to Torah and *mitzvos*. The *rosh ha'maaminim*, head of the faithful, Avraham *Avinu*, demonstrated his unequivocal conviction throughout his life. It reached its crescendo during *Akeidas Yitzchak*, the Binding of Yitzchak, when the Patriarch acquiesced to sacrificing his only beloved son and successor, Yitzchak *Avinu*.

Someone who is studying *Chumash* for the first time may wonder: What is all the great to-do over Avraham *Avinu's* willingness to slaughter Yitzchak? We have no question that it is self-sacrifice at its apex, but, if we were to peruse Jewish history, we would see that *mesiras nefesh* is part and parcel of the Jewish DNA. Our history is replete with thousands of instances of people relinquishing their lives out of their devotion to Hashem. We may suggest that, while this is all true, it began with Avraham and Yitzchak. They were the first examples of *mesiras nefesh*, and, if *mesiras nefesh* is in our DNA, they have endowed it to us. Nonetheless, we still must endeavor to understand the depth of Avraham's *mesiras nefesh*.

Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, explains that actually the basic concept of *mesiras nefesh* requires understanding. Let's face it, a person who gives up his life in this temporal world is exchanging it for life in *Olam Habba*, the eternal World-of-Truth. He is trading up (so to speak). Thus, it is understandable that one who has reached an elevated level of spirituality comprehends that he is benefitting with his act of sacrifice. Now, if he were to lose his portion in the World-to-Come as a result of his *mesiras nefesh*, we would posit that he is truly unique, because now he has neither this world nor *Olam Habba*. He has lost it all. Let us go one step further. If, for instance, we were to have something more precious than *Olan Habba*, and by giving up his life he was losing this, it would mean that his act of *mesiras nefesh* was over the top, nothing could compare to it.

Let us now analyze what the *Akeidas Yitzchak* meant to Avraham. What was he giving up? In *Bereishis*, Hashem tells Avraham, *Anochi magen lach, s'charcha harbei me'od*; "I am your shield, your reward is very great." *Chazal (Bereishis Rabbah 44)* explain *Anochi magan lach* --- in this world; *s'charcha harbei me'od* -- in *Olam Habba*. This *pasuk* informs Avraham of his destiny of longevity in this world, followed by a robust share in *Olam Habba*. Yet, Avraham replies, *Mah titein li, v'anochi ariri*, "What can You give me? I am left alone. (I have no children to whom to pass on my legacy.)" The commentators explain that Avraham *Avinu* served Hashem solely out of love; thus, nothing he did was for reward. Promises of mortal or spiritual longevity were secondary to his being able to promote Hashem's Name in the world. He did not want his passing (he had already reached an advanced age) to put an end to all of his work. This is why nothing was more important to him than his legacy -- an heir who would succeed him and continue his work. He had waited for the glorious moment thirty-seven years earlier when he was blessed with the birth of Yitzchak. Hashem was now asking him to give it all up: his dreams of changing the world through Yitzchak would soon be shattered, when he carried out Hashem's will. This is the level of

Avraham's *mesiras nefesh* – the ability to give up what is most important to you; to be able to relinquish the reason for which you are living. This defines *mesiras nefesh* at its summit. Avraham was prepared to give up something more than his life: his destiny.