

For now, I know that you are a G-d-fearing man. (22:12)

We wonder what is the meaning of the words, *Atah Yaadati*, “Now I know (that you fear G-d)? Did we ever harbor any doubt concerning Avraham *Avinu’s* fear of Hashem? He was the consummate *oved* Hashem, servant of Hashem. Certainly, his *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, was unparalleled. *Imrei Noam* (*Bereishis* 32B) quotes the *Gaon, zl, m’Vilna* who explains that a person achieves spiritual perfection only if he must deal with two incompatible, incongruous character traits. For example, the heart of someone who is by nature the paragon of lovingkindness overflows with love for his fellow. No activity is too large or too small that he will not do to help his fellow. When such a person is asked to go against his proclivity, his basic nature, and act with extreme cruelty, and he does – he evinces *shleimus*, perfection. True spiritual growth and perfection occur when a person aligns his actions with the will of Hashem – even when it goes against his natural inclinations. By doing so, he shows that his actions are driven by a higher purpose, rather than personal desires or natural tendencies.

A naturally kind person might find it difficult to act with strictness or severity when he must administer discipline or justice. Conversely, someone who has a naturally harsh disposition might view acting compassionately as a struggle. Avraham *Avinu’s* life was dedicated to promoting acts of kindness, hospitality and promulgating monotheism in the world, using benevolence as his vehicle for outreach. Yet, when Hashem asked him to sacrifice his beloved son, he said, *Hineni*, “I am here,” ready to carry out Your will. Our Patriarch did not hesitate, arising early in the morning with great alacrity, prepared to perform Hashem’s will. *Atah yadati*, now I know that you are a true *yarei Shomayim*. You are prepared to go against your natural emotions, your inborn character traits, in order to serve Hashem. This is *shleimus*.

Moshe *Rabbeinu*, the *anav mikol adam*, symbol of humility and patience, acted decisively and severely when he shattered the *Luchos*, rebuked the nation and called for the punishment of those who had sinned. He went against his natural persona, transcending his own inclinations to do what was necessary. This was a testament to his strength of commitment to Hashem. He aligned his actions with Divine will, even when it meant going out of his natural comfort zone.

The *Gaon* posits that Hashem gave us two *mitzvos* that are basically incongruous with one another. *Shiluach ha’kein*, sending away the mother birds, so that she should not see her offspring being taken away. On the surface, this *mitzvah* smacks of cruelty. Separating parent from child is always difficult, but, it is necessary for both. On the other hand, the *mitzvah* of *kibud av v’eim*, honoring father and mother, is one which represents great compassion. Parents age and find it difficult to do what they used to do. They have mobility issues, health issues, and, as they age, cognitive challenges might arise. All these require compassion from children who, incidentally, have their own lives and families to attend to. Two *mitzvos*, which both carry the reward of longevity. Why? Because by fulfilling these two conflicting *mitzvos*, one demonstrates *shleimus*, spiritual perfection.