

## **Be not distressed over the youth. (21:12)**

Avraham *Avinu* experienced ten trials which he successfully passed, elevating himself to Patriarchal status. While focus is placed primarily on the first and tenth, the ninth, which meant sending Yishmael from his home, is glossed over. This is enigmatic, since the nature of the *nisyonos*, trials, becomes more challenging as they increase in sequence. Sarah *Imeinu* felt that Yishmael would have an adverse effect on Yitzchak (*Avinu*), so she demanded that Avraham send him and his mother from their home. Understandably, this was a difficult demand that she placed on Avraham. Hashem agreed with Sarah, and our Patriarch set about executing the deed. What was the test?

We must understand that compassion and lovingkindness are the *middos* that characterized Avraham. Sarah asked him to act somewhat cruelly, against his grain, and send away his son, who was quite ill. Yishmael was sixteen-years old at the time and, under different circumstances, he could have walked on his own volition. Due to his illness, however, his mother had to carry him on her shoulders. One wonders: Could Avraham not have waited another few days? Apparently, this *nisayon* needed to be carried out with immediate haste and prejudice. Why? Was Yishmael more evil than the people of Sodom for whom Avraham had prayed? What about the sixteen-year-old Yishmael compelled Avraham to send him away with a fever?

The *Ponovezher Rav*, zl, offers a powerful insight and, consequently, teaches us a critical lesson in Torah *chinuch*. Veritably, the people of Sodom were *ra'im v'cha'ta'im*, evil and sinful, but they were not in Avraham's proximity. Neither he nor anyone in his family had had any social interaction with these people. They were evil, but their miscreant behavior was centered in their community. Yishmael, however, interacted with Yitzchak on a regular basis. His sinful behavior, be it idol worship or moral and ethical perversion, was overt, and Yitzchak was watching. This posed a clear and present danger to the *kedushah*, sanctity, of *Klal Yisrael*. Sarah left no room for negotiation; Yishmael had to go. While some might contend that Yitzchak was only two-years-old at the time, our future Patriarch's sanctity and purity could not tolerate any incursion. Therefore, as much as it was against Avraham's *middah* of *chesed*, when the future of *Klal Yisrael* was at risk, he had no room for compassion.