

By Rabbi
Warren Kasztl

AKEYDAS YITZCHAK – THE REST OF THE STORY

Based on the Hashkafa of HaRav Shimon Kessin, SHLIT'A

In memory of Eliyahu ben Yehuda – Dr. Elliot Hahn

The articles that appeared on Rosh Hashana and two weeks ago expressed that there is an aspect of the Akeyda, indeed a major issue that would be addressed this week. The time has finally arrived to review “the rest of the story” with all of you. I will begin with a brief review and move forward from there.

Two weeks ago, we learned about the kivshan ha'aish, a series of events that culminated in Avrohom (age 52) being cast into a furnace. Nimrod challenged Hashem through Avrohom to save him. Two realities were on the line here: How real was Avrohom's relationship with our Heavenly Father, and would Hashem miraculously save Avrohom from the fires of the furnace in front of over seven-hundred thousand people? We know that after three days in the furnace, which took on the public appearance of a orchard the fruit of which Avrohom enjoyed, he emerged unscathed. Everyone beheld this undeniable miracle. It was not a moment, a “flash in the pan” magic trick, but a three-day occurrence. Anyone who went home after day one questioning the veracity of what they saw had day two or three to return and confirm the reality of the event. By the end, everyone had no choice but to conclude that Avrohom had a very real relationship with Hashem and that a full-fledged public miracle occurred on his behalf, saving his life. What the masses beheld was a sight they were not worthy of. They did nothing to deserve the privilege of experiencing Hashem first-hand as they did. Their response to this event – or better stated, their lack of a response – created a heavenly prosecution that culminated in the Akeyda. What does this mean?

Following the kivshan ha'aish, the masses should have rebelled against Nimrod and replace him with Avrohom as their king. Had Avrohom not earned the privilege to lead them? Had the reality of Hashem, as preached by Avrohom, not been fully confirmed? The fact that most everyone, (except for those “souls” who decided to follow Avrohom & Sarah), returned to their everyday immoral, idol worshipping lifestyles resulted in a “kitrug”, a heavenly accusation by the Middat HaDin – the Satan. The world had reached a point where it was no longer worthy of existence, and the Satan was pushing for Hashem to destroy everything. Hashem had two problems: He knew that the Satan was correct and justified in his demand. Hashem's greater problem was that, despite their evil leanings, He loves mankind!! He pushed off the Satan and said that with time, they will come around. Avrohom's positive influence will win the day and they will repent.

Time passes on. Avrohom enjoyed his first prophetic vision with Hashem at age seventy-five. Although the Torah tells us about his descent to Egypt, we don't know how long Avrohom, Sarah & Lot were there before the royal guards revealed the beauty of Sarah to Pharaoh. HaRav Yosef Soloveitchik, ZT'L thinks it was many months, during which time Avrohom did everything possible to bring the Egyptian population to the reality of Hashem Yisborach. No luck – they remained steadfast in their commitment to avoda zara. World War One – the four kingdoms against the five – broke out. The four kings, secure in thinking they were victorious were shocked as Avrohom and either Eliezer alone or three hundred eighteen men destroyed them and rescued Lot. The king of Sodom was miraculously saved from the tar pits. Still, no change in the masses. Sodom and its surrounding cities are destroyed in a manner never seen before or since then – fire and brimstone directly from heaven. People communicated, and the world soon became aware of the super-natural event. No response, no repentance. And finally, Avrohom, age one-hundred and his beloved wife, Sarah, age ninety are miraculously blessed with a child. The whole world knew how extraordinary this

Noach 5779

TORAT HAR SHMUEL

by

TASHMA

harshmuel.com

sharabymail@gmail.com

972-54-2002882

was. The man saved from the furnace decades earlier and his post-menopausal wife *miraculously* become parents. Those who doubted the lineage of the child were soon convinced that indeed, the child was theirs. Sarah was able to nurse not just Yitzchok, but every child brought to her by the mothers who came with their children to see for themselves. She may have been ninety, but she had the strength and vitality of a twenty-five-year-old woman. As Yitzchak grew, his facial features were virtually identical to those of his father's. Any doubt as to who Yitzchok's father was, was quickly and effectively erased. Avrohom and Sarah were literally world renown. After everything described above (and more), no movement, no Teshuva.

Let's digress for a moment. "And Elokim tested Avrohom" (Bereshit 22:1). The concept of Hashem testing Avrohom is discussed at length by our Sages. Hashem knew how it was going to turn out, so it appears – on the surface – that the test is for Avrohom regarding the lengths he was willing to go in confirming his relationship with our Heavenly Father. Rov Kessin takes this to a much greater place, one that most everyone overlooks. He raises a question that requires serious understanding. All of us know that one of the goals of every Jew is founded in the words, "Imitatio Dei" – imitating Hashem Yisborach. He is kind, so we strive to be kind. He is compassionate, so we strive to be compassionate. Hashem is just, so we do everything possible to live our lives in a just manner. How do we understand Hashem asking His beloved Avrohom Avinu to sacrifice his son, Yitzchok? Can you think of anything as cruel as this? Hashem holds the keys of life and death. If He wants Yitzchok, take him. Why does Avrohom have to kill the son he waited one hundred years for? Why is Avrohom's active participation in the death of Yitzchok of such critical importance?

Following each of the events described above, the Satan came before Hashem demanding ibud, total destruction. Hashem continually pushed off the Satan. Eighty-five years after the kivshan ha'aish, the dialog between the Satan and Hashem reached a fever pitch. The Satan claimed that if mankind hasn't changed by now, it's not going to happen, despite Avrohom and Sarah's best efforts. Something must give!! How was Hashem going to save mankind while retaining the integrity of the Middat HaDin?

There is a place from which Hashem, by design, runs the world that He and He alone has access to. It's referred to as "Hanhogat HaYichud". We all recall that in the Tefillah of Musaf – Yom Kippur, we read about the Ten Martyrs. The angels question Hashem, "Is this Torah and is this It's reward"? Hashem warns the angels that if they push the issue, He will return the world to a state of *tohu v'vohu*. If Hashem shared with the angels the secrets of the Hanhogat HaYichud that explains their deaths, that same understanding would then be available to the Satan, and he would be able to use that knowledge to strengthen his position. The "request" to sacrifice Yitzchok came from the same place,

the Hanhogat HaYichud.

Hashem wanted to bring an end to the demand of the Satan for world destruction and proposed the following. Hashem reiterated His love for mankind and asked the Satan, "If I can find a person who loves someone as dearly as I love mankind, and ask him to kill that person as you are asking Me to kill mankind, if he does so, will you let this go and agree with My will to allow mankind to endure"? The Satan figured that there is no such person in the world and declared to Hashem that he would agree to these terms. Avrohom was that person, and that's the reason he was asked to kill his beloved son. Avrohom stood in the place of Hashem with an intent that was so real, so pure, that even though Yitzchok was spared, it was as if Avrohom offered him up as a Korban Olah. What's the proof? What is situated, especially on Rosh Hashana, the Day of Judgment, before the throne of the Almighty? It's not Yitzchok, but the ashes of Yitzchok. What were the consequences of Avrohom fulfilling the request of Hashem? "And in your seed, all the nations of the world will be blessed" (Bereshit 22:18). His children will be the source of blessing for all of mankind because ***Avrohom literally saved the world from total destruction.***

We need to place everything expressed above into a context that addresses the reality of Hashem's Existence. On the one hand, all of us realize that Hashem resides in an infinite medium that is beyond human comprehension. Within His Infinity and Reality, He is all-knowing as it relates to the finite world of humanity. A drop of water does not fall, and a blade of glass cannot grow without Hashem's direct intervention imposed on those events. Nonetheless, as described above, (and in other events as they relate to mankind), we envision Hashem in anthropomorphic form, taking on what appears to be human characteristics. Hashem knew the outcome of Akeydat Yitzchok before the world was created. (Hashem's Existence is static, above the medium of "time" and the dynamic existence that accompanies it.) So, how are we to understand Hashem negotiating with the Middat HaDin, the Satan, "testing" Avrohom, and the appearance of cruelty in what is one of the hallmark events in the history of our people and all mankind? The answer begins with the understanding that Hashem relates to mankind in ways that we can comprehend. That is why we find Hashem's Infinite Strength described as, "The Hand of G-d", even though physicality has nothing to do with Hashem's Reality. What this implies is far greater than many realize. Hashem brings Himself down to the level of mankind in the hope that we will elevate ourselves and have a relationship with Him. Hashem's relationship with the attributes of Din and Rachamim take on a form *as if* they are living entities, demonstrating how important, how integral they are to the wellbeing of mankind and the very order of the universe in

which we live. When we are confronted with a personality trait, such as cruelty, that contradicts everything we know about Hashem, we should realize that there is much more going on within the storyline than appears on the surface. Hashem was and is fully capable of pushing the Satan aside, since there is nothing compelling Him to deal with the Satan altogether. Nonetheless, Din must be heard and respected, and if mankind has lost its merit to live, to endure, it must be retrieved and reestablished by mankind, not Hashem. What may appear as cruelty is a barometer of how far mankind sank in the eighty-five years spanning from the kivshan ha'aish event until Akeydat Yitzchok. Desperate times – precipitated by mankind – call for balance in the form of desperate measures which must be accomplished by mankind as demanded by Hashem's attribute of Din, justice. The fact that Hashem knew the outcome ions before any of this took place is irrelevant because He created us with free will. With the misused freedom to sink ourselves into oblivion comes the responsibility and capability to take responsibility for our actions and repair the damage mankind precipitated.

Everyone may know that Hashem Yisborach imbued within mankind free will. Very few appreciate how great this reality is. Our Messorah teaches that the Zuloso that manifested itself as Adam was viewed by the angels as above them and G-d like specifically because of the free will he possessed. The Messorah also expresses that we are a "Chaylek E-loka m'maal". We were not created in the classic sense of the word, something from nothing as per the Rambam. At the moment of tzimtzum – Divine retraction – the Zuloso was "m'chalek" differentiated from Hashem, referred to as the Ain Sof. We are a "chaylek" of Hashem Yisborach!! There is much more to this than can be expressed herein but suffice it to say that when we fully realize how much of Hashem is in each of us, we will understand the transformation our people experienced on Har Sinai between Matan Torah until the sin of the egel. This also gives us a taste of how much Avrohom elevated himself as his relationship with Hashem grew throughout his life. By learning who Hashem is, he learned who he was. The Shechina rests within each of us and serves to define how close we are with Hashem Yisborach. The more we achieve as a "chaylek" of Hashem, the brighter our souls shine. The proof that Avrohom became a beacon of G-dly Light is in the reality that he was willing to sacrifice his son, simply because Hashem asked him to do so. Avrohom realized that he, and by extension we don't own anything. We don't own our businesses, our families – we don't even own ourselves. Everything belongs to Hashem! Achieving these

realities, these heights, cause one's soul, their unique Shechina within, to shine like a beacon, capable of saving mankind then, and to a certain extent even now. Before the first Shema at the beginning of Shachrit, we recite a verse that translated means, "What more is a man than an animal? 'Oyin' – because everything is 'hevel' – physical". 'Oyin' can have one of two meanings. It can either mean "nothing", expressing that we are no better than an animal. Or, to the contrary, we can recognize that 'oyin' is spelled aleph, yud, nun, and stands for 'amira', 'yediah' and 'neshama', that mankind can speak, reflecting the knowledge he has acquired and the fact that he has a soul. We choose, as did all our Avot, whether we want to be no better than animals or above the heavenly angels, manifested in the free will we choose to exercise properly.

With this understanding, what may appear as cruel in the request Hashem made of Avrohom takes on whole new light. This three-day period that culminated in the Akeyda established Avrohom as the savior of mankind and the world, and us, his children, as the source of blessing that is destined to bring redemption to Olom HaZeh and zichuch transformation that will result in Olom HaBah. Many of us speak of Geulah. Some of us are excited by its imminent arrival. How many of us see within ourselves the heroic possibility of precipitating the Geulah and causing it to arrive even a moment earlier than its scheduled to happen? If the life of one man, Avrohom culminated in being able to save the world, then we, his children can bring the Geulah ahead of schedule. How much earlier is not near as important as what we can actively accomplish by being whole with our Avoda of Torah learning, Mitzvah observance, and Ma'asim Tovim, all of which serves the purpose of enabling us to "hold our Heavenly Father's Hand" as we live our lives properly.

I close with a suggestion. If we choose one aspect of our lives to improve upon, let it be Shalom within our families and communities. It's simple: If sinat cheenom destroyed the second Bait HaMikdash, then ahavat cheenom can build the third Bait HaMikdash. One cannot be real with Avinu She'ba'Shamayim until we are real with each other. If this brings the Geulah one day, indeed one hour earlier it will be most worthwhile because the quality of the Geulah we will experience will be better since it arrived because of us rather than because the appointed time had arrived. May we be zoche together to earn the Geulah in all its splendor and glory, hurriedly in our days.