



Vayera 5777

November 18, 2016

A Taste of Torah

Tests, Trials and Tribulations

by Rabbi Avraham Dovid Karnowsky

From the time you get out of bed in the morning until you collapse into bed at night, you feel like you just ran through an obstacle course. Every step of the day, there was a test, trial or tribulation. Here are some common examples: "I really want to get up on time for *shacharis*, but the baby cried all night, and I can't get out of bed." "I would love to give my spouse more attention, but my job takes up all of my day (and night)." And the list goes on and on!

Let us delve into the topic of tests: What is their purpose, why do I need them, and, most importantly, can I really overcome them?

If we want to understand this subject, the place to look is in this week's Torah portion. Our forefather Avraham was subject to the biggest trial in history, *Akeidas Yitzchak* (the Binding of Isaac). Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1892-1953) explains that there were three aspects to this test: 1) He was asked to sacrifice his only son, his beloved child, for whom he waited so many years. 2) Avraham spent all his life teaching the world to be kind and upstanding people, and here he was ordered to perform an act which appeared to be the ultimate cruelty. 3) G-d had already promised Avraham that his son Yitzchak would be the one through whom a nation would emerge, and G-d seemingly contradicts that promise and orders him sacrificed upon an altar. Nevertheless, Abraham was silent; he didn't ask, he didn't question,

he didn't even pray. All he did was hasten to carry out G-d's request with incredible devotion. How did he do it? What was the secret that gave him the strength to achieve the impossible?

The answer is breathtaking in its simplicity. It *was* impossible! He couldn't possibly perform such an act! Rabbi Akiva Tatz points out an amazing insight. The Hebrew word for "test" is *nisayon*. The root of this word is "nes," which means miracle. This is the secret. The feeling that I cannot possibly do this is accurate; *it really is beyond my ability*. However, if one does it anyway because G-d has that it be done, MIRACLES will happen! When one leaps a chasm he cannot cross, Hashem will miraculously help him overcome it. And this is the secret that Avraham taught us and instilled in our spiritual genes - to completely nullify oneself, throw oneself into following G-d's will even though it is impossible. Through that devotion, one will receive Divine assistance and the miraculous will occur.

Now we can understand why we are constantly being tested wherever we turn. The purpose of this world is to reveal G-d's Name - His presence - in the world. The ultimate revelation of G-d comes through overcoming tests. By following the will of G-d even though we don't seem to be equipped for it, we let go of our ego, and G-d performs miracles. What better revelation can there be!

Stories For The Soul

Desperate Kindness

Rebbetzin Batsheva Kanievsky (1932-2011), wife of the famed and saintly Torah scholar Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, was renowned for her great compassion for others, even under difficult circumstances. Stories abound of her patience with others, even when they abused her kindness.

One woman once asked Rebbetzin Kanievsky for a large sum of money to pay a bill. The rebbetzin handed her a nice amount of money, but the woman began to scream, "This is not nearly enough! You don't care about me! Otherwise, you'd give me more!"

Rebbetzin Kanievsky calmly told the woman she could return the next day, and hopefully she'd be able to give her some more money.

A grandson who was present asked his grandmother, "Why did you tell her to come back after she insulted you?"

Rebbetzin Kanievsky replied, "If she reacted that way, she must be desperate. I decided to do more for her."

Our patriarch Avraham was not just someone who performed acts of kindness. Our Sages describe him as someone with "a good eye," one who saw the good in everything, and thus acted based on his vision of the positive attributes contained in all that G-d created.

Kollel Happenings

FAMILY FUN AT JEWISH FAMILY EXTRAVAGANZA ON DEC. 25TH

Join the Kollel for family fun at the annual Jewish Children's Extravaganza on Sunday, Dec. 25th, from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The event will be held at South Suburban Family Sports Center, 6901 S. Peoria. Cost: \$15 per child, \$7.50 per adult - includes entire facility; discounted group rates are available before 12/21. Visit www.mazetogether.org to find out how to join for free until 12/23. For general information, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org.

LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING THIS THANKSGIVING

Start your day off on the right foot with Torah study! Join the Kollel for learning at three locations around Denver. At the Kollel West Side Bais Medrash and at the Kollel Southeast Torah Center, shacharis at 8 followed by breakfast and learning at 9, and at EDOS, shacharis at 7:30 followed by breakfast and learning at 8:20. Topic being studied is *True Thanksgiving: The Laws of Birchas Hagomel*.

LEARN 2 LEARN

You have long dreamed of acquiring the tools to achieve proficiency in learning Gemara on your own. But how? The Denver Community Kollel offers a comprehensive, step-by-step, level-by-level program crafted for people just like you. All you need is the ability to read Hebrew; we will teach you the rest. For more information, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: During which exact days in the months of Cheshvan and Iyar do we begin reciting the BaHaB prayers?

A: According to the Eastern European custom (followed by most *Nusach Ashkenaz* communities), they are begun on the first Monday following the first Shabbos after Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan

and Iyar. According to the Western European custom, however, the BaHaB series of Cheshvan is practiced during the second half of the month.

This week's question: What is the reason for these starting dates of BaHaB fasts and prayers (i.e., the first Monday following the first Shabbos after Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan and Iyar)?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

The Ran – Part V

Another major student of the Ran was Rabbi Chisdai Crescas (c. 1340-c.1415). Rabbi Chisdai, along with the Rivash, became the major Torah authorities of Spain following the passing of the Ran. Rabbi Chisdai resided initially in Barcelona, but, in 1389, he moved to Saragossa, the capital of the crown of Aragon, where he became the rabbi. Rabbi Chisdai was a close adviser King Juan (John) of Aragon, and in 1390, the king appointed him as the highest judge of the Jews in the crown, bestowing him with a significant degree of authority.

Rabbi Chisdai achieved fame as a philosopher, as well. However, he strongly opposed Aristotelian philosophy, and asserted that Torah stood above all philosophy, though philosophy might help one achieve greater understanding of Torah.

During the terrible riots of 1391, Rabbi Chisdai's son was martyred. Following the riots, the pressure by the Christian priests, monks and, tragically, Jewish apostates upon the Jews of Spain increased considerably. This would continue for the next hundred years until the final Expulsion in 1492. Rabbi Chisdai wrote works against the theology of Christianity, hoping this would provide a bulwark for his brethren against the Church's

continued encroachment into the Jewish communities. He expended much effort, with the assistance of King Juan, in rebuilding the Jewish communities decimated by the riots and subsequent mass conversions of Jews. Despite his efforts, though, the decline of Spanish Jewry continued, as Church persecution continued unabated.

Rabbi Chisdai had a number of prominent students. His most famous student was Rabbi Yosef Albo (c. 1380-1444), author of the *Sefre Ha'ikkarim*, a work on the principles of Jewish faith.

In closing this review of the lives of the Ran and his disciples, it is important to note that these great men lived during extremely trying times. The Jewish communities of Spain that had flourished for centuries were disintegrating, and the final blow of the Expulsion was on the horizon. Despite the terrible difficulties, however, these scholars and leaders did their utmost to ensure that a Torah-true life would continue. Their writings, borne of pain and suffering, have been immortalized as part of our Torah. Their lives are shining examples of adherence to G-d and His mitzvos under all circumstances, proving that it is possible to achieve and accomplish great things in the face of great adversity.