

AN UPLIFTING EXPERIENCE

by Rabbi Dovid Green

There is a Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Chapters of the Fathers) which teaches us that Abraham underwent ten tests. Several of them can be found in this week's parsha. The question is, what is the purpose of G-d testing anyone? He certainly already knows what the results will be, so why put anyone through the trouble?

The question is really based on a false assumption. The assumption is that a test is merely an evaluation. We're used to school, and grades, and being evaluated by means of a test. In today's society, this is the sole purpose of a test; judgement.

In Hebrew, the word for test is "nesayon". It is related to the word "nes" which translates as banner, and also miracle. By understanding this relationship, one can derive a better understanding of the purpose of a test. A miracle is very often a public manifestation of divine power. A banner is held high for all to see. A "NESayon" is designed as a prescription for a person to elevate him/herself. It is meant to cause one to flex his/her spiritual muscles and raise him/herself up.

As a teacher, my intentions in testing are twofold. The first is evaluation. It evaluates how the students are doing in understanding the material, and how the teacher is doing in teaching it. The second purpose is to motivate my students to study well, and achieve the best understanding possible of the material. I want them to study so well that they will always remember what they learned. Many students study only for the test, and immediately afterwards forget most of what they learned. Contrary to this I want the study to be of lasting value, and I tell my students this.

When G-d tested Abraham the purpose was to raise him up to a higher level; to attain levels of accomplishment which he had not done previously. Each of the ten tests brought him to a higher level, and in a way, made him a different person with a greater closeness to G-d.

We are all Abrahams in our own way. We all find ourselves in numerous tests each day. Each time, we have an opportunity to elevate ourselves, and make spiritual acquisitions which manifest themselves in our personalities.

A woman became a widow years ago in Poland. With her husband went their source of livelihood. Among the few things he left were his boots. Her nine children had no shoes. During the winter she would take her children to cheder (Jewish School) one at a time in that pair of boots. She would remove the boots from the child upon his arrival at cheder, and go home and let the next child wear them, until they had all arrived. At the end of the day she would go through the entire routine once

again. This was the routine every day! Here is a woman who was able to translate vision into action. This is a woman with great perseverance. This is heroism on a daily basis. This is the message she gave to her children about the importance of learning.

Great people view difficulties as challenges for growth. Through tests and challenges we raise ourselves up to new levels of attainment. This is the lesson we learn from Abraham our forefather.

Good Shabbos!

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