

# THE REAL TEST

*by Shlomo Katz*

## **Hamaayan / The Torah Spring Edited by Shlomo Katz**

Vayera  
Volume XVIII, No.4  
20 Marcheshvan 5764  
November 15, 2003

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Today's Learning:  
Ohalot 13:5-6  
O.C. 124:3-5  
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Menachot 40  
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Yevamot 3

The Midrash relates that after Avraham would feed the guests who passed his way, he would say, "Now thank G-d whose food you have eaten." If the guest refused, Avraham would say, "Then pay me! The wine costs such-and-such, the meat costs such-and-such, the bread costs such-and-such. Who would give you wine in the desert? Who would give you meat in the desert? Who would give you bread in the desert?" At that point, Avraham's guests would agree to thank G-d.

The commentaries ask: Why did Avraham do this? Of what value is a blessing which is extracted under financial duress? R' Yitzchak Or Zarua z"l (13th century) answers that Avraham did not actually ask his guests for money. Rather he argued, "Think how much you would be willing to pay for food and drink in the desert. Behold! G-d has prepared that food and drink for you by causing me to be here in your time of need. Moreover, it's all free. You would have been willing to pay a small fortune had I requested it, but I ask you for nothing for myself."

Upon realizing that G-d indeed looks out for each person's needs, Avraham's guests would willingly thank G-d for their food, the Or Zarua explains.

R' Moshe Zuriel shlita (former mashgiach of Yeshivat Shaalvim) adds: At first glance, the above Midrash appears to say that Avraham practiced "kefiah datit" / forcing others to observe halachah against their will. However, the Or Zarua's explanation reveals that the opposite is true. Avraham caused people to serve Hashem by showing them how Hashem cares for every human and by demonstrating the beauty of serving the One G-d. (Otzrot Hatorah Vol. I. p.54)

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### *"G-d tested Avraham . . ." (22:1)*

What is the purpose of G-d's testing man? Obviously, G-d knows in advance whether man will succeed or fail!

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; 1194-1270) explains: Man has free will; if he wishes, he can do what G-d orders, and if he wishes to disobey G-d, he can. Thus, man can be tested only from his own perspective. [Man can never know for certain how he will react to a given challenge until he actually faces it.] From G-d's perspective, the purpose of the test is to bring man's potential into the open, in order to reward him for a good deed, rather than merely for good thoughts.

Know, Ramban adds, that G-d tests only the righteous who he knows will obey. He does not test the wicked, who will not listen. Thus, a test can only be for the good of the person tested. (*Commentary on the Torah*)

R' Yehonatan Eyebchutz z"l (died 1764) adds: People have the mistaken impression that G-d rewards man for "good intentions." That is not the case. Rather, our Sages say that G-d "joins" good intentions to good deeds. Thus, one who does a good deed is rewarded also for the thoughts that led to the deed. However, one who merely thinks of doing a good deed, but then does nothing, receives no reward [unless he was prevented from acting by forces beyond his control]. (*Tiferet*

*Yehonatan)*

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R' Elchonon Wasserman z"l hy'd (rosh yeshiva in Baranovich, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) writes: People ask, "What is so impressive about Avraham's behavior at the Akeidah? After all, how many millions of Jews throughout history have given their lives al kiddush Hashem / to sanctify G-d's Name even though they were not prophets like Avraham?!"

He explains: Giving one's life al kiddush Hashem is not difficult if a person has faith that he is going to a better world. Imagine, however, if a person thought that by giving his life he would lose, not only Olam Ha'zeh / This World, but also his share in Olam Ha'ba / the World-To-Come! For that person, the test would be difficult beyond imagination.

Avraham devoted his life to spreading knowledge of the One G-d. He knew that all of his efforts would have been wasted if he had no son to carry on his legacy. Indeed, for him, that would be a fate even worse than losing his share in Olam Ha'ba. That was the challenge he faced at the Akeidah. (*Kovetz Ma'amarim*)

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*"He said, 'Please take your son . . . and go to the land of Moriah; bring him up there as an offering . . .'" (22:2)*

R' Elazar M. Shach z"l (Ponovezh rosh yeshiva) asks: If G-d spoke to any of us, would we hesitate for an instant to fulfill His command, no matter how strange? Certainly we would not! If so, what was Avraham's test?

He answers: R' Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam) writes that Moshe Rabbeinu's prophetic experience differed from the experiences of all other prophets before and after him. Specifically, Moshe saw his prophecies clearly -- the Torah describes it as G-d speaking to Moshe face-to-face -- while all other prophets saw "parables and riddles." In other words, all prophets except Moshe had to interpret their own prophecies. And, as Chazal say about a person's dreams, the interpretations that those prophets gave to their visions actually had an impact on how those prophecies came true.

It follows that when Hashem appeared to Avraham and instructed him to bring Yitzchak to Har Ha'moriah as an offering, Avraham did not hear an unambiguous command. Rather, Avraham had to interpret the prophecy. It turns out, then, that our original question was not valid. Of course, if G-d spoke to one of us, we would not hesitate for an instant to fulfill His command, no matter how "strange." However, that would only be true if He spoke to us unambiguously. If we had to interpret His command, would we have the courage and the intellectual honesty to realize what He was saying, or would we rationalize the command away? (*Mai'rosh Amanah*)

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*"He [the angel] said, 'By Myself I swear - the word of Hashem - that because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only one, that I will surely bless you . . .'" (22:16-17)*

The Midrash relates that after the Akeidah, Avraham said to G-d, "I will not budge from here until You swear to me that I will never be tested again, for if I had not obeyed You, I would, G-d forbid, have forfeited all that I accomplished in my lifetime." Therefore we read, "By Myself I swear . . ."

R' Shmuel Yaffe Ashkenazi z"l (Turkey; 1525-1595) ask: How are we to understand Avraham's demand? Was he refusing to fulfill the tasks that G-d had in store for him?

He answers: The Akeidah was the hardest test that a person could face short of physical suffering like that of Iyov (Job). Avraham did not know whether he could withstand such suffering. Indeed, many generations later, Chananiah, Mishael and Azaryah would be thrown into a furnace just as Nimrod had done to Avraham, yet the Gemara tells us that if those three tzaddikim had been tortured, they would not have withstood the ordeal. Avraham therefore asked that he not be tested further, in fulfillment of the Mishnah: "Do not feel confident in your righteousness until the day you die." (Quoted in *Meorei Ohr on Avot D'Rabbi Natan p.307*)

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## **R' Yaakov Beruchin z"l**

R' Yaakov ben R' Aharon was born in 5548 (1787/8). He and his brother, R' Yitzchak (author of the Talmud commentary *Keren Orah*) were among the leading students of R' Chaim of Volozhin. It is said that R' Chaim sometimes asked R' Yaakov to lecture in the yeshiva.

R' Yaakov was rabbi of Karlin and was recognized as one of the leading sages of his generation. He is best known today for his halachic work *Mishkenot Yaakov*.

R' Yaakov is credited with "discovering" R' Yitzchak Elchonon Spektor, who would be the leading Lithuanian posek / halachic authority of the second half of the 19th century. This happened after R' Yitzchak Elchanan lost all of his wedding presents in a business venture and came to seek R' Yaakov's advice. Finding R' Yaakov immersed in a Talmudic problem, R' Yitzchak Elchanan volunteered that the question was answered in a certain work. R' Yaakov was so impressed with the young scholar that he recommended R' Yitzchak Elchanan for his first rabbinical position. (He also gave the young scholar 40 rubles.)

R' Yaakov died in 5605 (1844/5). In his last minutes, he asked his son to read to him from Ramban's Torah commentary because he was very fond of that work. The tombstone which R' Yaakov shares with his brother reads in part:

On the death of the two sons of Aharon - The staff of Aharon gave forth a blossom and a flower and it was to the congregation of Israel a miracle and a wonder. The honor of Hashem shone on the

house of Aharon. These two sons of his were a wonder; they were known as the genius of Yaakov and Yitzchak, and they raised a banner and a mast on the sea of Torah. They were known to their nation for their [written] works Kehillot and Mishkenot Yaakov and Keren Orah. Woe! The cedars of G-d in the land; they studied the Torah of Hashem the entire day. Who will teach our nation? Who will close the breach?

*(Readers may recognize the many biblical allusions in the above text.) (Source: Gedolei Torah p. 571-572; Avi Ha'yeshivot p.416)*

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