

# TRUTH

*by Shlomo Katz*

BS"D

Volume 32, No. 4

15 Marcheshvan 5778

November 4, 2017

Sponsored by

Martin and Michelle Swartz

on the 125th yearzeit (17 Marcheshvan)

of Martin's great-great-great-grandfather

Elazar Kohn a"h of Pressburg, Hungary

At the end of this week's Parashah, we read about Akeidat Yitzchak, which is introduced with the words (22:1), "It happened after these things [literally, 'after these words']." Rashi z"l explains: It means "after the words of Yishmael," who boasted to Yitzchak that he had been circumcised when he was thirteen years old without resisting (whereas Yitzchak was circumcised as a newborn and deserves no credit). Yitzchak, replied, "If the Holy One blessed be He, were to tell me, 'Sacrifice yourself to Me,' I would not refuse." [Until here from Rashi]

R' Eliyahu Dessler z"l (1892-1953; rabbi and Rosh Yeshiva in England; later, Mashgiach Ruchani of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak, Israel) asks: It seems that Yitzchak's saying "If the Holy One blessed be He, were to tell me . . ." required that Hashem in fact give such a command. Why?

He explains: The Gemara (Shabbat 55a) teaches, "Hashem's seal is truth." And, we are taught that Hashem's "light" is revealed through the Jewish People. Therefore, the Jewish People--especially, Tzaddikim--are held to a very high standard of truth. According to that high standard, a thought that has not been fulfilled is an untruth, and that cannot be tolerated.

For the same reason, R' Dessler explains, the Gemara (Makkot 11a) teaches that a curse uttered by a "Chacham" will be fulfilled in some way even if it was said conditionally or without complete justification. [Thus, our Matriarch Rachel died because of a curse Yaakov uttered inadvertently.] Since the Chacham uttered the curse for a reason, "truth" requires that it be realized on some level. (Michtav M'Eliyahu V p.57)

\*\*\*\*\*

***"For I [Hashem] have loved him [Avraham], because he commands his children and his household after him to keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice, in order that Hashem might then bring upon Avraham that which He had spoken of him." (18:19)***

R' Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer z"l (1815-1871; rabbi and Rosh Yeshiva in Pressburg, Hungary) writes: This verse could be read as stating that Avraham served Hashem in order to receive reward. However, that cannot be true, for our Sages teach that a person should not serve Hashem in order to receive a reward.

Rather, R' Sofer writes, the verse is teaching that the proper way to motivate children is to promise them a reward. (When they are older, they will learn that that is not why we serve Hashem.) Only by promising rewards will a person persuade "his children and his household after him to keep the way of Hashem." A person might obtain his children's compliance through threats and punishments, but that will only work so long as he is around, not "after him," i.e., when he is not present. (Ketav Sofer)

\*\*\*\*\*

***"The matter greatly distressed Avraham regarding his son." (21:11)***

Rashi z"l explains: "Because Sarah had told Avraham to send Yishmael away."

R' Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov z"l (1698-1760; founder of the Chassidic movement) teaches: We read (Mishlei 16:3), "Turn your deeds toward Hashem, and your thoughts will be set right." Whatever happens to you ("your deeds"), attribute to Hashem. A person should pray that Hashem always bring upon him what Hashem knows is for the person's own good, not what the person has made up his mind is good for him. Perhaps what a person thinks is good for him is actually bad for him [and vice versa].

R' Yitzchak Moshe Erlanger shlita (Ashdod, Israel) writes: Avraham Avinu's reaction in our verse exemplifies this trait. Specifically, his reluctance to send away Yishmael, as seen in our verse, illustrates his Emunah Peshutah / absolute faith and unquestioning belief that Hashem knows what He is doing. Whatever faults Yishmael had, he was a son that Hashem gave Avraham, and Avraham accepted that gift lovingly.

This is evident in last week's Parashah as well, R' Erlanger notes. Hashem blessed Avraham (17:20), "Regarding Yishmael, I have heard you. I have blessed him, will make him fruitful, and will increase him most exceedingly. He will father twelve princes and I will make him into a great nation." Which of us would feel blessed if Hashem promised him a billion Arab descendants?! Avraham, however, was happy with whatever Hashem gave him. (Shiurim B'Sefer Tzavat Ha'Rivash p.21)

\*\*\*\*\*

***"[Avraham] replied, 'Because you are to take these seven ewes from me, that it may serve me as testimony that I dug this well.'" (21:30)***

How did Avraham's giving Avimelech seven ewes prove that Avraham dug the well? R' Yissachar Dov Rokeach z"l (1854-1926; Belzer Rebbe) explains: Surely Avraham's sheep would not drink from someone else's well. Avraham said, "Look! These sheep are drinking from this well. Now I will give them to you, and they no longer will drink from the well." That proves the well is mine. (Lekket Imrei Kodesh)

\*\*\*\*\*

***"Avraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slaughter his son." (22:10)***

A Midrash relates: As Avraham reached for the knife, tears fell from his eyes out of the compassion that a father has for a child. Even so, he went joyfully to do the will of his Creator. [Until here from the Midrash]

R' Yaakov Kranz z"l (1740-1804; the Dubno Maggid) asks: How could Avraham cry while performing a Mitzvah and not fulfill the injunction (Tehilim 100:2): "Serve Hashem with joy"? Moreover, the first and second parts of the Midrash seem to contradict each other!

He explains: The Midrash wants to teach us how great Avraham's test was [and how well he passed it]. Indeed, another Midrash teaches that Avraham walked Yitzchak to the Akeidah with the same joy that a person walks his son to the Chuppah / marriage canopy. However, precisely because of that joy, Avraham was concerned that the value of his Mitzvah might be lessened; if it was not a challenge for him, it was less of a test. Therefore, as Avraham prepared to perform the Shechitah, he aroused in himself feelings of love for his son to the point that he cried at the thought of losing him. Then, he subjugated that love for his son to his love for Hashem, as we say in our daily prayers following the recitation of the Akeidah: "Just as Avraham suppressed his mercy for his only son . . . so may Your mercy suppress Your anger." (Ohel Yaakov)

*A related thought:*

R' Avraham Kleinman z"l (late 18<sup>th</sup> century-early 19<sup>th</sup> century; student of the Vilna Gaon; later, Maggid in Minsk, Russia) writes: We read (22:2), "Please take your son, your only one, whom you love -- Yitzchak -- and go to the land of Moriah; bring him up there as an offering upon one of the mountains which I shall tell you." The phrase, "which I shall tell you," also can be translated, "where I shall speak to you." The Gemara (Pesachim 117a) teaches that the Shechinah rests only on a person who is experiencing the joy of performing a Mitzvah. Thus, the Hashem's command to Avraham can be interpreted as reminding him to perform this Mitzvah with joy so that Hashem will be able to appear to him in the midst of it. (Derashot Amud Ha'yemini: Drush 1)

\*\*\*\*\*

**A Torah Tour of the Holy Land**

***"Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre . . ." (18:1)***

R' Moshe Nussbaum/Reisher z"l (19<sup>th</sup> century native of Yerushalayim; author of Mishlei Yaakov, a collection of the teachings of the Dubno Maggid z"l) writes:

Elon Mamre is a large plain, beautiful and abundantly full of trees and good plants. The tomb of the prophet Yeshayah is there. To the west is a mountain, and in it is the grave of Yishai, father of David. On top of it is an ancient building. Nearby is a cave containing the graves of Otniel ben Kenaz [Yehoshua bin Nun's successor as leader of the Jewish People] and other Tzaddikim. Below that is a cemetery containing the graves of many Tzaddikim, pious and holy people, including: the holy rabbi,

R' Eliyahu de Vidas, author of the holy work Reishit Chochmah [16<sup>th</sup> century]; the great rabbi, R' Yissachar Ber, author of Matnot Kehunah [died 1590], a student of R' Moshe Isserless; the rabbi, author of Zoharei Chamah [R' Avraham Azulai (1570-1643)]; [and others]. Near the city [Chevron] is the grave of the prophet Natan and the ruins of the palace in which King David a"h lived during the seven years when he ruled in Chevron. These ruins still testify to the former beauty and majesty of the place. (Sha'arei Yerushalayim p.139)

Regarding the burial place of the prophet Yeshayah, R' Yechiel Halpern z"l (1660-1746; Lithuania) writes: Yeshayah is buried in the village Bar'am. Above his grave is a nut-bearing tree, and next to it is a spring. (Seder Ha'Dorot Year 3140)

[Today, maps place Yeshayah's grave near the village of Bar'am on the Israeli-Lebanese border. This may find support in the Gemara (Yevamot 49b), which relates that he was murdered while hiding in a cedar tree.]