

LEAVE THE TESTS UP TO HIM

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

After all these events, God tested Avraham and said to him, "Avraham," and he answered, "I am here." (Bereishis 22:1)

The Akeidah was Avraham's tenth and final test. Whatever God expected Avraham to become he became it through his ten tests, the Akeidah finishing off the program. His problems in life weren't over, but his tests were, and his was a perfect score.

Others have not fared so well, even great people. In fact, the Talmud brings one particular case of such a failure:

[Dovid HaMelech] asked [God], *"Master of the Universe! Why do we say [in prayer] 'The God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak, and the God of Ya'akov,' but not the God of Dovid?"*

He answered, *"They were tried by Me, but you were not."*

So he said, *"Master of the Universe, examine and try me,"* as it says, *"Examine me, O Lord, and try me"* (Tehillim 26:2).

He answered, *"I will test you, and give you a special privilege, for I did not inform them [of the nature of their test beforehand], yet I inform you that I will test you in a matter of adultery."*

Immediately, *"And it came to pass in the evening that Dovid arose from off his bed etc."* (II Shmuel 11:2). . . And he walked upon the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself . . . Bas Sheva was washing her hair behind a screen when Satan came to him in the shape of a bird. He shot an arrow at him, which broke the screen, and she stood revealed, and he saw her. Immediately, *"And Dovid sent and enquired after the woman"* (II Shmuel 11:3).

Someone said, *"Is she not Bas Sheva, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"* (II Shmuel 11:3).

And Dovid sent messengers, and took her, and she came to him, . . . Thus it says, *"You examined my heart, You searched at night; You tested me—You found not; my thoughts do not transgress the words of my mouth"* (Tehillim 17:3). He said: *"Would that a bridle had fallen into the mouth of my enemy (i.e., himself), that I had not said this."* (Sanhedrin 107a)

What is the fundamental difference between passing a test and failing one? The Talmud says: Not asking for one. In Hebrew, it is called *"nichnas b'nesayon b'lo reshus,"* which translates as, *"entering a*

test without permission," without Divine permission, that is.

Life is full of tests, many of which we never ask for. They sort of spring up on us, and sometimes, at the most inconvenient times. But that is Divine Providence for you, and that is what often makes a test a test. After all, for example, it is easy not to lose your temper with someone who rear ends your car after just winning the lottery for 250 millions dollars. It's when you lose \$250, and someone hits the back of your car, that truly tests one's mettle.

However, sometimes we ask for tests without even knowing it, by taking unnecessary spiritual risks. In such situations, it is called entering a test without God's permission, so-to-speak, since it was not a function of Divine Providence, but of our own lack of care or foresight. That is when everything can go wrong, and sometimes, in a very big and unforgiving way.

Such catastrophic mistakes have a long history, reaching all the way back in time to the beginning of mankind's history, as the Leshem explains:

Thus, this was the first stumbling block for Adam HaRishon: he allowed himself to look at the strength of the reality of spiritual impurity, to understand the extent of its power. He investigated how it operates in general and in detail, and delved into this using his great wisdom until it pursued him and became attached to him, as the Zohar explains. In the beginning, he had acted this way for the sake of Heaven, assuming that The Holy One, Blessed is He, only warned him against eating, but not against touching the tree. Thus, [he wrongly assumed that] the only prohibition was against tasting and enjoying it, whereas approaching and touching it was not. If so, then investigating [the tree which was the only real source of spiritual impurity at that time] was also permissible, for it was the level of touching and not eating, the latter being more a matter of tasting and enjoying. And, in order to protect himself from being seduced after it into actually enjoying it, he relied upon his great wisdom. Thus, in the end, it was his [great] wisdom that was his stumbling block, even though his intentions were for the sake of Heaven. This is, after all, the greatest service [of God] and that which brings the highest pleasure to God, when someone enters a test in peace and leaves in peace, as the Zohar says: It is fitting for a man to know good and evil, and return himself to good. This is the sod of faith. (Zohar, Bo 34a). (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Drush Aitz HaDa'as, Siman 3)

In other words, Adam HaRishon took on the negative force of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil of his own volition, and not because God caused him to do it. His intentions may have been pure, but his actions had been premature, and they led to the downfall of mankind early in the history of the world.

Regarding those who have passed their tests, the Leshem continues:

This was the accomplishment and greatness of the level of the Forefathers and Moshe Rabbeinu, which resulted in the merit they achieved. This is also the matter of Hoshea HaNavi, when The Holy One, Blessed is He, told him to take a harlot and children of a harlot. He was, in fact, telling him to enter and see into the Sanctuary of Impurity. For, since the Jewish people of that generation were stumbling in this

[sin], He commanded him to enter and withstand the test in order to rectify the blemish of that generation. This is like what the Zohar says: In Egypt, Yosef HaTzaddik entered and left in peace (Zohar, Pekudei 245a) . . . However, all of these holy people only entered after they had already sanctified themselves through mitzvos and countless good deeds. They had refined their bodies and their souls after many years, year after year. And even then, they only entered with permission and as a decree from The Holy One, Blessed is He . . . Therefore, all of them left in peace and they merited to become very elevated. (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Drush Aitz HaDa'as, Siman 3)

In other words, when God tested Avraham Avinu in this week's parshah, it was only after Avraham had already passed the previous nine tests, and had grown from each one. Had the Akeidah been the fourth or fifth test, the result might have been different. Had Avraham designed the test of the Akeidah for himself, it probably would have ended disastrously.

Instead, Avraham, like the rest of our greatest ancestors, left the tests up to God. They served Him to the best of their ability, and avoided unnecessary spiritual risks, something that has become exceedingly difficult in our generation. If God wanted to test them, that was His business, and because it was, they knew there was always a good chance of success. The Akeidah, as difficult as it was for Avraham Avinu, is a great case in point.

Text

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