

# USE THEM OR LOSE THEM

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape # 70, Bris Mila: The Metzitzah Controversy. Good Shabbos!*

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## Actions of the Mothers Foreshadow the Fate of the Children

At the end of the parsha, the Ramba"n comments that Sarah insists on sending away Hagar and Yishmael. The pasuk [verse] uses the expression, "And Sarai afflicted her and she fled from her presence" [Bereshis 16:6]. The Ramba"n points out, "Our Matriarch sinned with this cruelty and also Avraham in allowing her to do it."

[Of course whenever we use the expression "Our Matriarch or our Patriarch sinned", it has to always be emphasized that it is not a 'sin' in our terms. We are referring to a minuscule type of 'sins.' **We** do not have the right to say such things. When the Rishonim say such things, that is when we can accept it.]

The Ramba"n continues and says that as punishment, "G-d gave Hagar a son who was a 'Pere Adam,' who went on to afflict the descendants of Sarah and Avraham with all types of cruelty, for all generations." We all know who this son is, and we all know who his descendants are.

If we ever wonder why Jews have so much 'tzores' from the Arabs, like everything else in world history, it can be traced back to "The actions of the Patriarchs foreshadow (the actions that happen) to the children." This lack of compassion that was manifested by Sarah, was the cause -- as the Ramba"n points out -- of the persecution manifested by the descendants of Yishmael to the Jewish people.

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## Easier to Die With Mesiras Nefesh than to Live With Mesiras Nefesh

The parsha begins with one of the Ten Tests with which Abraham was tested [Avot 5:3]: G-d commands Avram to leave the place where he grew up, the place he was well known, the place

where he was accepted, the place where he already had success... to go to an unknown place and an unknown land. This was a Test for Avraham Avinu and it was the first Test that the Torah deals with in detail.

We know, based on tradition, that there was a Test that preceded this test. That was the Test of 'Ur Casdim,' where Avram was thrown into the fiery furnace in persecution for his belief in One G-d. That Test of Sanctifying G-d's Name and of Mesiras Nefesh (giving over one's life,) is only hinted at by the Torah. The Test of 'Lech Lecha' is written explicitly and in much greater detail.

At first glance, it would seem to us that the Test of being prepared to give one's life for Kiddush Hashem is a far greater accomplishment. Yet, by virtue of the fact that the Torah only reveals it through hints, the Torah is telling us that in comparison to 'Lech Lecha,' it is a less significant accomplishment. 'Lech Lecha,' was a greater Test than the Test of 'Ur Casdim.'

In past years we have given different explanations as to why this is true. I recently the following suggestion in the name of Rabbi Dovid Kviah, in his work 'Succas Dovid': It is easier to die in Sanctification of G-d's Name, than it is to live in Sanctification of G-d's Name.

An act of Mesiras Nefesh is a tremendous achievement. However, the person only deal with the situation for a minute, thirty seconds, or however long it takes to die. Then the person is 'home free.' But, if a person lives his daily life with Kiddush Hashem and faces constant tests, that can be an even greater achievement than giving up one's own life.

If Lech Lecha entailed from Avram, going away from a country in which he had already made 'in-roads,' a country about which the Torah tells us "the souls that he had made in Haran," [12:5] and to go away to a new country where he was not known and start all over again, and to live a daily Test (of being a newcomer and a stranger) that is perhaps a greater Test than the one-time Test of dying to Sanctify G-d's name.

In davening we say "Remember for us the Akeidah, in which Avraham bound up Yitzchok his son upon the altar". The question can be asked -- why are we invoking only the merit of Avraham, what about Yitzchok? Was Yitzchok not willing to be killed to Sanctify G-d's name?

The answer is that it is more difficult for a father to live the rest of his life with the knowledge that he has sacrificed his favorite son, than it is for that son to give up his life in that one moment and not to have to live with enduring pain and anguish. It is easier to die with Mesiras Nefesh than to live with Mesiras Nefesh.

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## **Personal Strengths and Gifts from G-d: Use Them or Lose Them**

The Medrash says on the pasuk "Say you are my sister..." [12:13] that there were two personalities in Tanach that were the main characters of the story, but they made themselves secondary and as a

result, they in fact became secondary. Who were they? Avraham and Barak ben Avinoam.

We all know the story that Devorah came to Barak and charged him to go out and do battle with Sisera, but he responded that he would only go if she accompanied him [Shoftim 4:6-8]. The Medrash says that he became secondary in the events as it says "And Devorah and (then) Barak sang" [5:1]. Barak was supposed to be the main character, leading Klal Yisroel into battle. But he hesitated, looking for Devorah's support, consequently he became secondary to her.

Likewise, Avram was the main character, but he made himself secondary to Sarai as it says "...in order that it will be good with me for your sake, and I will live as a result of you" [Bereshis 12:13]. So, he in fact became secondary, as it is written "And Avram was given goods because of her..." [12:16].

This Medrash is telling us a powerful lesson. The Yefe Toar comments on this Medrash, "This is an open rebuke against false modesty. At a time when one is supposed to take charge, when the hour calls for him to be the main character, he should not claim that he is not worthy and shun the limelight.

Modesty does not mean denying one's talents and one's role. Modesty means to know one's talents and one's role, but to know that it is not "My strength and the power of my hand that made me this great wealth" [Devorim 8:17].

The Medrash is saying is that if you have these strengths and you are cast in that main role, but you fail to rise to the occasion, then you become different -- you lose it. You lose the strengths that you had. We are granted gifts and strengths by G-d. There are occasions that call for us to take charge, to be the main character. To 'cop out' by saying "It's not for me; I'm not worthy" is false modesty, the result of which is that we may lose these strengths. They were given to us for a purpose. If we fail to use them, G-d will take them away from us.

If the moment calls for greatness, we must rise to that challenge!

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### Personalities & Sources:

**Ramba"n** -- R. Moshe ben Nachman (1194-1270); Gerona, Spain; Eretz Yisroel. One of the major commentaries on Chumash.

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### Glossary

**Rishonim** -- literally "the first ones"; refers to the age of the Classic Torah commentaries (e.g. -- Rash"i, Ramba"n, Ibn Ezra, etc.)

**Pere Adam** -- wild donkey; a rebel [Bereshis 16:12]

**tzores** -- troubles

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## **Kiddush HaShem** -- Sanctification of the Name of G-d

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Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.  
Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#); Baltimore, Maryland.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#69). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Ma'ariv and Mitzvos in the Land of the Midnight Sun. The other halachic portions for Lech Lecha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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