

BIG POTENTIAL

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

"Abraham our patriarch underwent ten tests and he passed them all" Pirke Abot 5:3

It is difficult to understand the word "nisayon" -- trial or test -- when one is referring to G-d. Why would G-d test anyone? He certainly knows what one will do before He subjects one to trial. Yet our sages chose the fact that Abraham was tested ten times and passed all of them as THE sign of His love for G-d and the prompt of G-d's love for him.

In order to understand the purpose of the trials one must first realize that when Hashem created the physical realm He formed an image of the perfect Abraham in heaven. Our patriarch was given great spiritual powers that could enable him to match the perfection of his heavenly self. Those powers, however, existed only as potential. His service to G-d, his performance in a successful way during times of test were designed to bring out the potential into reality.

How does one understand this difficult concept of spiritual physics? Imagine a person born with a good physique -- strong arms and legs, powerful muscles and good heart and lungs. This athletic type might also have good instincts and quick reaction times as well as good hand-eye coordination. In street talk -- he is a "natural". Yet all the talent is nothing but potential. The athlete must train his body to perform by practicing the techniques of the sport. He must watch his diet and sleep habits and most important of all -- he must work his body to the limit. He must use and develop the strengths with which he was born. Should he lay back and expect success he will surely qualify as "the most likely to succeed" who ultimately failed. He will quickly learn that "you use it or you lose it."

In the first test Hashem tells Abraham -- "Lekh Lekha" -- "Go for yourself". Rashi comments: "For your benefit." In the last of the ten tests G-d again commands "And go for yourself to the land of Moriah." Hashem's message to Abraham is that He has no doubts as to the outcome of the trial. The trial is needed for the benefit of the human being. It is a spiritual workout under the guidance of the best trainer G-d Himself. He knows what latent powers with which He has endowed the individual and He knows best how to develop that spiritual muscle to its ultimate perfection.

This lesson applies to everyone. We all have our individual ingredients for greatness instilled in our being when we are born. Hashem knows what tests we need to turn our potential might into real powers. We must study Torah in order to perfect our Yirat Shamayim -- fear of G-d so that when the test hits we react in a way that will please G-d.

Perhaps our potential is not as great as Abraham's - or -- at least in a relative sense -- perhaps it is. One thing is certain -- G-d knows what we are capable of achieving and He will provide the precise, personalized training program to develop our self into the perfect "ME". Our job is to rise to the occasion -- to accept the challenges and build our spiritual muscle step by step to reach our full potential. May we all use it so that we don't lose it.

Shabbat Shalom.

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