

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

The Nature of a Nisayon – Actualizing Potential

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The word *test* as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “something (such as a series of questions or exercises) for measuring the skill, knowledge, intelligence, capacities, or aptitudes of an individual or group.” Unlike mankind, Hashem is acutely aware of every outcome of our behavior and the precise capacity of our intellect; He doesn’t need to measure our skills, knowledge, or intelligence. Therefore, the word *nisayon*, which is often translated as a *test*, requires explanation.


Ramban in this week’s *parasha*, when observing the *nisayon* of the *Akeidah*, notes that the word *nisayon* is in fact only accurate from the perspective of the person being tested since he has the free will to either succeed or fail. However, from the vantage point of Hashem, the function of a *nisayon* is to transform the potential of a human being into reality. The transformation of potential to actuality allows for an incredible increase in reward, for the reward which one receives for that which he believes in his heart cannot be compared to the reward which one receives for that which he practices in reality. Following this notion, Ramban comments that Hashem tests the righteous only because He loves them and desires to grant them abundant reward.

Avraham *Avinu* had perfect faith in Hashem which was the product of his decades of

searching for and internalizing the truth about Who created the universe. However, Avraham’s faith was largely still in its potential form and had not been concretized in the *Olam Hamaaseh* (the world of action). Hashem placed Avraham through a series of ten tests, well aware of what the outcome would be. His desire was to actualize Avraham’s faith in order to increase his reward in the World to Come.

Ramban’s profound explanation of the nature of a test adds another layer of meaning and depth to the challenges and struggles that we face. Hashem is testing us for one purpose only – to bring out the best within us, which will thereby increase our eternal reward. If we are subjected to a test or a challenge, it must mean that there is potential that needs to be transformed. Although it is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to decipher the will of Hashem, this perspective provides us with the strength and courage to tackle each set of challenges which come our way.

The *nisayon* of the *Akeidah* is unique in the fact that it uncovered a new dimension in Avraham’s unwavering faith in Hashem. Hashem instructed Avraham to bring his son, Yitzchak, onto an altar. Avraham interpreted this to mean that he was supposed to slaughter his only son, an act which would terminate his vision for humanity. Avraham toiled his entire life to spread the belief in one G-d, and his son Yitzchak was destined to carry on that legacy. Avraham’s eagerness to perform an act which would crush his entire life’s mission expresses his sincere and complete faith in Hashem, a facet of his *emunah* which had yet to be realized.

The process of *nisayon* brought out the inner greatness of Avraham *Avinu*. Likewise, our perseverance through difficulty and challenge will surely bring out the unique greatness that lies within each of us. 

THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH
RABBI YITZCHOK PREIS

This week’s *parasha*:

Q) The translation in my *Chumash* describes Avraham having made a big feast when Yitzchok was weaned from nursing. Is this translation accurate and if so – why the banquet? (Baby food isn’t cheap!)

A) Although *Tosfos* translates “*b’yom higoel*” as referring to celebration of the bris, and one approach in the *Medrash Rabbah* can be understood to refer to Bar Mitzvah, your *Chumash* is translating based on the more often quoted opinion in the *Medrash* [as well as primary *meforshim* such as *Rashi*]. As such, your question as to “what’s up with this feast” is certainly appropriate?

I would like to suggest the following: Avraham is the paradigm of *chesed*/kindness. Each baby is born as a “taker.” [See *Koheles Rabboh* 5:14 about every baby clenching his fists as if to say, “It’s all mine.”] As long as the baby is nursing [or being bottle fed], he continues to be exclusively on the receiving end. And there is nothing about the experience that allows him to begin to develop into a “giver.” That changes once the child starts eating “real” food. Even if it is being spoon-fed to his mouth, he is witnessing an action that he can mimic. As he starts to grab the spoon and tries feeding himself, he is shifting from “taker” to “partner” to “giver.” Even if the first attempts involve baby food splattered all over his face and beyond, he is learning to stop receiving and he is developing skills that can be used to provide to others as well.

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Shmiras Halashon Couples Learning Project learning

A Daily Companion will be starting 11/17/20. New this year Monthly Q&A’s with Shmiras Halashon expert Rabbi Aharon Sorscher.

Email Rabbi Stettin at ezrastettin@gmail.com for questions or to sign up.

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

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To Avraham, for whom life is all about developing into a G-d-like “giver” this is an extremely significant juncture worthy of celebration. For other approaches see Rabbeinu Bechaya.

Last week's *parasha*:

Q) Why does Sarah feel justified tormenting Hagar, and why did Avraham seemingly give her license to do so? And why does the Angel indicate that Hagar should accept abuse from Sarah?

A) Rav Yakov Weinberg, zt”l, pointed out that Sarah's plan, that a child born through Hagar should carry on the Abrahamic destiny, was predicated on Hagar continuing to view Sarah as her mentor and including Sarah in the rearing of her child. But when Hagar became pregnant she presumed that she was in fact more righteous than Sarah. She ceased viewing Sarah as her role model and put the whole plan at risk. Sarah, Avraham, and the angel, were all attempting to reorient Hagar and have her once again accept Sarah's spiritual superiority which would ultimately have been in the best interest of Hagar and her offspring. 🤖

Something always bugged you about the upcoming *parasha* (or last week's)? Ask! If you would like to submit a question on the *parasha*, please email it to parasha@cincynkollel.org. Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.

A SHINING EXAMPLE

Yehuda had been found on the doorstep of the family who adopted him when he was a baby. As he grew older and he learned of his history, it troubled him greatly. The feelings he had inside led him to act out and his behavior became very difficult for his teachers to deal with. One year in *yeshiva* he was even threatened that something needed to change, otherwise he would be sent to find a different one to attend. At first the threat seemed like it would unfortunately need to be carried out, as Yehuda defiantly refused to change. Then, during the term in *yeshiva* preceding Rosh Hashana, everything changed. Yehuda, as if overnight, became a model boy. To everyone's amazement, the transformation continued and did not stop. Years later one of Yehuda's *rebbeim* had the temerity to ask him, “What happened? What caused you to change?” Yehuda smiled and said, “Do you remember that it was during the month of Elul when I changed my behavior? One morning I actually paid attention to what I was saying when I said *L'Dovid* (a chapter from *Tehillim* customarily said during the month of Elul). In there are the words ‘*Ki avi v'imi azavuni vaHashem ya'asfeini*,’ ‘for my mother and father abandoned



Starting this week!
Friday Night Learning @ the
Kollel. There will be a Daf Yomi
shiur at 8:30pm.

A BA'AL HATURIM FOR YOU

There are three times in Tanach that the phrase “*Behar Hashem*” (“on the mountain of Hashem”) is used. This hints to the three festivals Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, that the Jewish people would ascend the mountain of Hashem to perform the *mitzvah* of *Aliyah L'Regel*, the *mitzvah* to visit the *Beis Hamikdash* on the festivals.

Yaakov ben Asher, known as the *Ba'al Haturim*, was a scholar and biblical commentator who lived most of his life in Spain from approximately 1275 to approximately 1340. His classic commentary is printed in many editions of the *Chumash*. 🤖

me and Hashem gathered me in.’ I realized King Dovid was talking about me! I acted out because I felt abandoned by my parents and was therefore alone, and then I realized Hashem is taking special care of me because I was abandoned. I could see how Hashem had brought me to a loving and caring family to live with.” Yehuda then looked up at his Rabbi's eyes and said, “Most only say this chapter during Elul. I say it the rest of the year too. I want to remind myself every day that Hashem is taking care of me!” 🤖



THE FALSE MESSIAHS OF JEWISH HISTORY

RABBI NOSSON WIGGINS

THE BAR KOCHBA REVOLT (PART I)

The year is 3282, and the Roman war machine, commanded by the mighty Titus, has plunged the sanctity and grandeur of Jerusalem into a state of impurity, immorality, and self-indulgence. The city that had once been the epicenter of holiness and purity is now void of the slightest vestige of Jewishness. Instead, now renamed *Aelia Capitolina*, the Roman metropolis sports large theaters, public swimming pools and bathhouses, and a host of statues attributing great honor to the powerful Caesars of the Roman Empire. Tens if not hundreds of thousands of Jews have been killed and more than a million have been exiled. But, as Divine Providence has mandated, *Am Yisrael* must endure. Across the rolling Judean hills, the sound of tens of thousands of young Jewish children studying Torah emanates from the city of Beitar. And not too far away, the sages and judges of Yavne convene under the leadership of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai and his successor – Rabban Gamliel II. Meanwhile, under the military leadership of Shimon bar Kochba, the Jews began to organize a mass rebellion against the Roman occupation in *Eretz Yisrael*. Subterranean tunnel complexes and bunkers were dug, and Bar Kochba strategically chose for himself the mightiest and toughest warriors from the youth of Israel – 400,000 infantry. Stationed in his new capital city, Beitar, Bar Kochba claimed himself “Messiah” – the redeemer of the Jewish people. A series of strategic victories against local Roman legions led all the Jewish citizens of *Eretz Yisrael* and most, if not all, of its rabbinic leaders (including the holy sage Rabbi Akiva) to believe that he was in fact the Messiah. A decisive triumph against a Roman stronghold in Alexandria, Egypt, evoked a sense of trepidation into all those who stood in Bar Kochba's way. Bar Kochba's uprising swiftly gained momentum as his armies swept across the Roman-occupied territories of Judea, Samaria, and the Galil. Within just one year, Bar Kochba and his militia had reconquered some 50 forts and nearly 1,000 cities across *Eretz Yisrael*. Since Bar Kochba believed he was the Messiah, undoubtably his next step was to reconstruct the *Beis Hamikdash*, the third and final Temple. 🤖