

וַיֵּרָא

VAYERA/AND HE APPEARED

Bereshith/Genesis 18:1-22:24

The story of **Bereshith 22**, the **binding of Yitzchak/Isaac** is commonly referred to as the **Akeida**. Seven days a week, twelve months a year, the story of the Akeida is read and prayed over by Jews in their morning prayer services. It is also the second Torah reading for Yom Teruah and of course it is studied yearly in the regular Torah cycle. Altogether, an observant Jew will read this story symbolizing the death and resurrection of Yeshua, 367 times a year! There is no other section of Scripture that is studied more frequently. Is that not amazing?!

The first verse of chapter 22 begins:

Bereshith/Genesis 22:1 Now it came to pass after these things that Elohim **tested** (nasah – נִסָּה) Avraham, and said to him, "Avraham!" And he said, "**Here I am.**"

Various interpretations will translate “nasah” (נִסָּה) as “tempt, try, prove, or test.” “Tempt” probably gives the wrong impression as the apostle **Ya’acov/James** clearly states that הַהוֹיָה does not “tempt” or entice anyone to do evil:

Ya’acov/James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by Yah"; for Yah cannot be tempted by evil, **nor does He Himself tempt anyone.** ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

Following are a few other verses where this same word (nasah – נִסָּה) is translated differently:

Shemot/Exodus 15:25 So he cried out to הַהוֹיָה, and הַהוֹיָה showed him a tree. When he cast *it* into the waters, the waters were made sweet. There He made a statute and an ordinance for them. And there He **tested** (nasah – נִסָּה) them

Shemot 16:4 Then הַהוֹיָה said to Moshe, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may **prove** (nasah – נִסָּה) them, whether they will walk in My Torah or not.

Shemot 20:20 And Moshe said to the people, "Do not fear; for Elohim has come to **try** (nasah – נִסָּה) you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin."

Psalm 26:2 Examine me, O הַהוֹיָה, and **prove** (nasah – נִסָּה) me; Try my mind and my heart.

Traditionally, the sages speak of Avraham being tested ten times. There are various lists, but let's consider these possibilities:

1. Avram is asked to leave his country, his family, and his father's house
2. Avram faces famine in Canaan
3. Avram is separated from Sarai in Egypt
4. Avram must separate from Lot
5. Avram must go to war to rescue Lot
6. Sarai is barren
7. Sarah is abducted by Abimelech
8. Avraham is given the command to circumcise
9. Avraham must expel Hagar and Ishmael
10. Avraham is commanded to bind Yitzchak upon the altar

Our list began with Avram being asked to leave his country, and ends with the binding of Yitzchak upon the altar. Notice the similar phrase in both stories which act as a sort of parentheses for all tests:

Bereshith 12:1 Now יהוה had said to Avram: "**Go for yourself** (lech lecha - לך לך) of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. 2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

Bereshith 22:2 Then He said, "Take now your son, your only *son* Yitzchak, whom you love, and **go for yourself** (lech lecha - לך לך) to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

We could say that in the first test, Avram was asked and was willing to give up all of his past because of the promise of a better future that was laid before him. In the final test, however, Avraham was asked to apparently give up his promised future. His son, Yitzchak was clearly the heir to the covenant, the land, and the promises. But now, and with no explanation, Avraham shows his willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice – his only and beloved son, the heir to the covenant promises.

In the first test, we could possibly deduce that Avram acted out of desire for blessing. After all, Sarai was barren and יהוה's promise obviously included an offspring. However, there is no promised blessing in the final test. Avraham's sole motive for obeying was simply the love of יהוה. Avraham is the father of our faith and our example that we might keep the Torah out of love for the One who created, redeemed, and sustains us.

It is often difficult for us to consider that "**trials**" may be for our own benefit. Elohim does not put people to test without a higher goal. The one being tested grows as he overcomes the challenge. "**Testing**" usually brings about a revelation, whether it be of ourselves or of Elohim. A test can reveal to us what is in our heart – how faithful, how willing, how convicted, or how much strength we have when we are forced to trust in Him. A deeper part of our soul is revealed which can bring about true transformation.

Proverbs 17:3 The refining pot *is* for silver and the furnace for gold, but **יְהוָה tests the hearts.**

Testing also refines us as we address our shortcomings and remove the dross in our lives. We will be tested in ways that will develop our weakest character traits.



Job 23:10 But He knows the way that I take; **When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.**

Isaiah 48:10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

If we learn to say “**here am I**” as Avraham did in response to his testing, we will be keenly alert to hear His Voice in the midst of these hard times. When the testing is said and done, we can look back and see how it has strengthened us. When we survive these trials by fire, we may see that it has only been by the hand and mercy of our Heavenly Father. Both the depth of His love for us and how much love we have for Him has been revealed.

Philippians 1:6 ... He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Messiah Yeshua

Actually, we should already know that faithful followers can expect “trials” in the form of persecution. In fact, Yeshua said that we should “**rejoice and be exceedingly glad**”:

Matthew 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² "**Rejoice and be exceedingly glad**, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been **grieved by various trials**, ⁷ **that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Messiah Yeshua**

Many times, we tend to view hardships that come our way as attacks from hasatan. Although even as it was the evil one who attacked Job, the Almighty had allowed those trials to transform Job. But our heavenly Father never allows us to be tested and tried beyond that which we can overcome through His strength:

1 Corinthians 10:13 No trial has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but Yah *is* faithful, **who will not allow you to be tried beyond what you are able, but with the trial will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.**

Ya'acov 1:2 My brethren, **count it all joy when you fall into various trials,** ³ knowing that the **testing of your faith produces patience.** ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, **that you may be perfect and complete,** lacking nothing.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through **Messiah who strengthens me.**

So now, just as Avraham, the father of our faith was tested, so should we the children of Avraham, also expect to be tested. As the verses above indicate, not only should we expect testing, but we should embrace it.

There is an expression in Hebrew that says, “**Ma’aseh avot siman lebanim**” which translates “**the actions of the fathers are signs for the children.**” In the test of the binding of Yitzchak, Avraham becomes a testimony of faithfulness and complete trust for all future generations. But not only is it a testimony, but Avraham’s actions become a pattern by which his children will be recognized from generation to generation.

Galatians 3:7 Therefore know that *only* **those who are of faith are sons of Avraham.**

As Avraham’s children, we inherit the characteristics of our father. Both Avraham’s profound virtues and his tremendous courage are our birthright. Everything that happened to the patriarchs is an indication for their children. All these events serve to teach us of the future and what will happen to us and our descendants. And just as Avraham endured challenges, one after another and one more difficult than the previous, we too should expect difficult, transforming experiences, perfectly orchestrated to bring us to perfection.

Many contemplate how הַרְחִיק could have suggested that Avraham violate the obvious Torah instruction of “**do not murder**” that was written on his heart. **Mark Ensign** writes in his commentary on **Va’era**:

Perhaps Avraham would not have actually slit the throat of Yitzchak. Perhaps the fact that he had stated to the young men, “We will return” is evidence of this assurance that his son would not really die as a sacrifice to YHVH. If so, this statement is an amazing expression of faith in YHVH and his ability to deliver Avraham’s only, beloved son from the death YHVH had ordered.

The story of the Akeida does not provide us with enough details to arrive at a concrete conclusion. However, one could suggest that this ambiguity is intentional, for the Torah’s intention may be that we do not resolve this conflict, rather we must ponder it. In fact, it is rather amazing how one very short but dramatic narrative (about ten verses) has sparked hundreds of philosophical debates over centuries. This is the beauty of the Word of YHVH. In other words, it is important that we be internally torn by this conflict, and make every effort to resolve it, while recognizing that ultimately a divine command could not be immoral. YHVH could not violate, directly or through an agent such as Avraham, His own divine loving instructions to His people, His Torah.

This conflict becomes more acute when we personally face a situation when it is not so clear precisely what YHVH's instruction is, when it is not so clear what is considered moral or immoral. When these situations arise, not only must we ponder, we must also pray that YHVH will send a malach (messenger, angel) to help guide us in the proper direction. (end of quote)

Killing his son made no sense to Avraham, but he must have reasoned that it did make sense to יהוה. Avraham trusted יהוה to make the impossible possible. We know from the book of **Hebrews** that Avraham believed that if Yitzchak died, he would be raised up. יהוה would have to bring him back from the dead in order to be faithful to His covenant word:

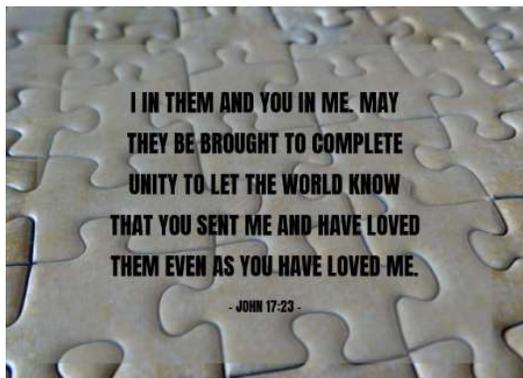


Hebrews 11:17 By faith Avraham, when he was tested, offered up Yitzchak, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, "In Yitzchak your seed shall be called," ¹⁹ concluding that Yah was able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

And so, Avraham sets the example for his children. He believed in the “**power of resurrection**”!

Philippians 3:8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Messiah Yeshua my Adonai, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Messiah ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Messiah, the righteousness which is from Yah by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the **power of His resurrection**, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death

And one last point. We have been speaking of the “**trials**” of the individual. Collectively, Israel will go through similar trials in the time of the tribulation for the purpose of revelation, refining, and strengthening as a body. This will fulfil Yeshua's prayer:



Shabbat Shalom! *Ardelle*