

CREATED TO CHANGE THE MATERIAL INTO THE SPIRITUAL

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

In this week's parsha, which deals with the sacrifice of Isaac, we read: "Abraham lifted his eyes and looked – and behold, a ram.... He offered it up as an offering instead of his son" (Genesis 22:13). Our Sages say that this ram was created at twilight, and that no part of it was lost. The ashes of the ram formed the foundation of the outer altar, its tendons were used for the ten strings of King David's harp, and its hide covered the loins of Elijah the prophet. From its left horn, the shofar was sounded on Mount Sinai, and from its right horn, the larger of the two, the shofar will be sounded in the future.

We may explain this Aggadah by citing the words of the Ramban in his Iggeret HaKodesh. There he writes, "The holy Patriarchs, in everything regarding the body, acted only for the sake of Heaven. Not even for a single instant were their thoughts separated from the supernal light. Even when eating, drinking, and seeing to the body's other needs, their thoughts never strayed from the supernal light." The gaon Rabbi Meir Simcha HaCohen Zatzal wrote something similar in his book Meshech Chochma: "The desire to eat and other physical desires are easy to overcome for a Jew, due to Hashem's will and His Torah. This is the greatest connection that one can have with Hashem, and even physical matter can merit a guiding light in this way."

This is why nothing was lost from Isaac's ram, for it was sacrificed in his place, as it is written: "He offered it up as an offering instead of his son." The Sages explained: "Abraham said, 'Sovereign of the worlds, consider this act as though the blood of Isaac were being sprinkled before You!' He took the ram and flayed it, saying: 'Consider this act as though I had flayed the skin of Isaac before You.' He took the ram and dried its blood with salt, saying: 'Consider this act as though Isaac's blood were being dried before You.' He burnt the ram and said: 'Consider this act as though Isaac's ashes were being heaped upon the altar'" (Bamidbar Rabba 17:2). The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to show Jews in every generation that everyone must sanctify himself like an offering before Hashem, such that no part of his body is without use.

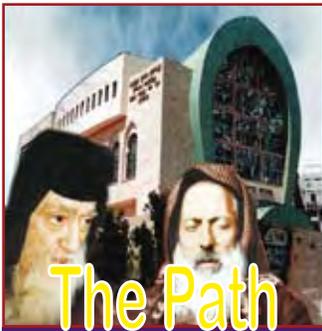
This means that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave man 248 limbs and 365 sinews, corresponding to the 248 positive and 365 negative mitzvot of the Torah. A person must fulfill them all, without missing a single one, just as nothing was missing from the ram, for it was offered in place of Isaac. We must learn from it and its body – created to be an offering before Hashem – not to possess anything in ourselves that is without use.

Each person must draw a lesson from Abraham's conduct. When he heard the angel saying, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad" (Genesis 22:12),

the Sages tell us that he wanted to extract a drop of blood from Isaac, which is why the angel added: "Nor do anything to him" (see Bereshith Rabba 56:7). From here we see the greatness of Abraham. We would certainly expect that when someone is commanded to take his only son and kill him – yet at the last minute he is told to refrain from doing so – he would be very happy. Such was not the case with Abraham, for when the angel told him not to harm his son, he did not rejoice. In fact it was the very opposite, for the angel was forced to tell him again not to harm his son in any way.

When Abraham saw that he was not going to kill his son before G-d, he took the ram in his place and began to slaughter and skin it. He regretted not having had the merit of sacrificing his son as an offering before Hashem, Whom he asked to regard the offering of the ram as that of his own son. Everything that Abraham did to the ram, he asked Hashem to accept it in place of his son Isaac. Why did Abraham take things so far? It was because he knew that a person comes into this world only to be an offering brought upon the altar. Although he was prevented from actually offering his son Isaac on the altar, and also from spilling a drop of his blood, this constituted a prayer that Abraham made for all his descendants over the course of the centuries, namely for them to have the possibility of being offered as a whole burnt-offering to Hashem, for that is man's goal in this world. From the passage on the offerings, we learn that man was created to be an offering brought upon the altar. In fact the Ramban states that when bringing an offering, a person must realize that were it not for the Creator's compassion in having accepted a substitute for him, his own blood should really be spilled and his own body should really be burned. The blood of a person's offering serves in place of his own blood, its limbs in place of his own limbs, and its life in place of his own life. When fasting, Rav Sheshet would say: "When the Temple was standing, if a man sinned he used to bring a sacrifice, and although all that was offered of it was its fat and blood, it procured atonement for him. Now I have kept a fast and my fat and blood have diminished. May it be Your will to account my fat and blood, which have been diminished, as if I had offered them before You on the altar" (Berachot 17a). Since man was created to emulate an offering, his entire life should be occupied with mitzvot, without missing a single one, nor a single day, in order to transform the material into the spiritual.

Along the same line of thought, it is said of Sarah: "The years of the life of Sarah" (Genesis 23:1). Here Rashi explains that all her years were equally good, meaning that there was not a single wasted day in her life. They were all the same, which is what the Midrash tells us, namely that all the years of Sarah's life were complete, since not a single day in her life was wasted.



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Who's Guilty?

If something improper has been done and Reuven asks Shimon who was responsible for it, then even if Shimon feels that Reuven suspects him, he is forbidden to name the guilty person in order to exonerate himself. Shimon is only allowed to say, "I didn't do it." However if only Shimon and another person are suspected of doing something improper, and by Shimon declaring his innocence he will automatically shift the blame to the other person, Shimon is allowed to respond in one of two ways, depending on the situation: If the act in question is truly bad, it would be better for him to declare his innocence, even if doing so will shift the blame to the other person. However if the act in question is not really serious, but only appears that way to Reuben, it is not clear whether Shimon is allowed to say, "I didn't do it," in which case the blame will fall on the other person. All this is according to the viewpoint of the din. However it is appropriate to conduct oneself beyond the requirements of the din, and not to reply in such a way that the listener will realize who is responsible, since this will lead to someone's humiliation.

– Chafetz Chaim

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Spreading Faith in the World

In our time, each person must ensure that the tradition of faith is not interrupted during his lifetime. He should proclaim to those he knows, and to his students who listen to him, the glorious splendor of Hashem's kingdom, as we say each day in our prayers: "To make known to men His mighty deeds and the glorious splendor of His kingdom." We should likewise proclaim the glory of His Torah. Since we also recite, "You shall teach them to your children," this refers to our students. Thus when they possess the fear of G-d, they will also proclaim to their students, as well as to those they know, the glory of Hashem and His Torah in the world, and so on until the coming of Mashiach. In this way the verse, "The glory of the L-RD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (Isaiah 40:5) will be fulfilled.

This is precisely what Abraham did, for throughout his life he cleaved to G-d in love, whereas Nimrod pursued him in all kinds of ways and threw him into a fiery furnace. What happened in the end? The Holy One, blessed be He, saved Abraham from the fiery furnace, just as He saved him from Pharaoh, from Abimelech, and from the four kings whom he fought. In fact Abraham became so famous during his lifetime that the descendants of Heth accorded him tremendous respect, even calling him "a prince of G-d among us." Abraham also reprimanded kings in his time, as it is written: "Abraham reprimanded Abimelech" (Genesis 21:25). The same occurred with Isaac and Abimelech, for although he initially chased Isaac from Gerar, the king himself later approached Isaac in order to make a pact with him. The same thing also happened with Jacob and Laban, for although Laban initially pursued him, in the end Jacob produced 12 tribes that Hashem made fruitful and multiplied to such an extent that an entire people emerged from them. The names of the Patriarchs have remained praiseworthy for the entire world up to the present day, something that cannot be said for Nimrod, Laban, or those like them. No one praises them, and nowhere are they remembered as having produced any people or tribe. They disappeared, they and their descendants together.

– Chafetz Chaim, Chomat HaDa'at

A Pearl From the Rav:

The Honor of Hashem

It is written, "He lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, three men were standing over him. He saw and ran to them from the entrance of the tent and bowed toward the ground. He said, 'My L-rd, if I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not pass away from Your servant' " (Genesis 18:2-3).

From here the Sages learn that "hospitality to wayfarers is greater than welcoming the Shechinah" (Shabbat 127a). This is difficult to understand, for how did Abraham know that demonstrating hospitality was greater than welcoming the Shechinah? How could he leave G-d in order to go and welcome these Arab wayfarers, whom he believed were carrying idols into his home, since Arabs worshipped the dust of their feet? The situation can be compared to a king who loved to eat fish. One day the king was walking with his servant along the river bank, when the servant saw a large fish swimming near the surface of the water. The servant was told, "Leave the king and go catch that fish!" If he leaves the king to catch the fish, the king would be grateful to him, since he is only acting for the king's sake. Similarly, Abraham converted people and distanced them from idolatry. He did so by presenting his guests with food and drink, and once they finished eating and began to thank him, he would say: "Did you eat what was mine? No, you ate what belonged to G-d! Thank and bless the One through

Whom the world was created!" Hence Abraham was not afraid to leave the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He, in order to run and greet wayfarers. Abraham knew that leading them closer to the Shechinah brought great satisfaction to G-d, and the apparent disregard that he showed was in fact an expression of respect.

Nothing is Lost When Helping Others

It is written, "The L-RD said: 'Shall I conceal from Abraham what I do...for I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him and they shall keep the way of the L-RD... that the L-RD may bring upon Abraham that which He has spoken of him' " (Genesis 18:17-19).

We need to understand this statement, for among the prophets we find that Hashem never verified whether one was worthy of receiving prophesy or not. It is only with Abraham that we see Hashem verifying, as it were, whether He should hide something from him or not. This apparent hesitation to reveal prophecy to Abraham is puzzling.

In the introduction to his book of responsa, the son of the Chatam Sofer cites his father as saying: "Naturally, if Abraham was at a level of prophesy, it would not have been denied to him. However he was not really at such a level, since he had no time to be alone and mediate. In fact he was constantly occupied with teaching his disciples, and he was very involved with trying to bring people under the wings of the Shechinah. Since he was constantly in the presence of people of lesser caliber, he had no time to be alone with his thoughts and reach the level of prophesy. Yet Hashem, Who probes the heart and soul, said: Is this not My servant Abraham? I cannot hide anything from him, for the only reason that he is not prepared for prophesy is because he is acting for My sake. He is neglecting his soul for Me, which prevents him from attaining the level of prophesy. It is impossible for this tzaddik to be deprived on account of his efforts, and therefore I will reward him – despite his lack of preparation for prophesy – by revealing all My secrets to him and hiding nothing from him."

The Chatam Sofer concludes: "We must draw a lesson from here. If someone says, 'My soul yearns for Hashem and I want to draw closer to Him, but how can I do this? How can I decrease the amount of Torah that I study and the effort that I put into perfecting my soul in order to perfect the souls of others?' The answer is that things do not work like this. Nothing is impossible for Hashem, and you must do what He commanded you to do, namely to teach others. For His part, Hashem will fill your soul with perfect understanding, and He will lift you to even greater heights in no time, heights that you would not have reached through your own intelligence." On this and similar subjects, the Sages have said: "Although it [prophesy] has been taken from the prophets, it has not been taken from the wise" (Bava Batra 12a). By this they meant that Hashem reveals His secrets to those who fear Him. The mysteries of His Torah are revealed to them according to their desires and aspirations.

The Resurrection of the Dead

It is written, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad" (Genesis 22:12).

This event in our parsha serves as the basis for the blessing, "Who revives the dead" found in the Amidah. The Sages say that Isaac's soul left him as he was lying on the altar. When the angel made his voice heard from between the two cherubim and said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad," his soul returned to his body. He was then untied and stood upon his feet, and he knew that the dead are called upon to live again. At that point he said, "Blessed are You Hashem, Who revives the dead."

– Beit Elokim

The Danger of a Derisive Student

It is written, “Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, whom she had born to Abraham, making merry” (Genesis 21:9).

Rashi states, “Making merry. An expression of idolatry, as it is said: ‘And they rose up to make merry’ [Exodus 32:6].”

The question arises as to why Sarah saw Ishmael’s games in such a serious light. Why did she give up on the boy so quickly, to the point of telling Abraham to “drive out this slavewoman with her son”? Did she have so little confidence in the effectiveness of Abraham’s reprimands, such that she was certain they would have no effect on the boy? Concerning the verse, “The souls they made in Haran” (Genesis 12:5), the Sages said: “Abraham converted the men and Sarah the women” (Bereshith Rabba 39:14). Therefore if they could convert idol-worshippers – if they could bring an actual idolater under the wings of the Shechinah – how difficult could it have been for Abraham and Sarah to change the behavior of Ishmael, who was simply amusing himself and engaging in a little levity?

The answer is that it is definitely possible to influence thousands of people who have been immersed in the error of idolatry for many years, and to put them on the right path. However if a single student who is already in a good spiritual environment has a tendency to mock and scorn, his situation is far worse, for it means that no amount of admonition can influence him. In fact the Sages have said, “A single mocking remark pushes away a hundred reprimands.” In *Messilat Yesharim* we read, “Like a shield smeared with oil – which wards off arrows and causes them to fall to the ground, not permitting them to reach the bearer’s body – is levity in the face of reproof and rebuke.” In fact just a little mockery and laughter will cause a person to brush off a tremendous amount of spiritual enlightenment. It will prevent him from asking questions and listening to his heartfelt doubts when he sees and hears things that prompt him to reflect upon his deeds. The power of derision throws all these things to the ground, preventing them from making any impression on him. It is not because these arguments lack strength or because his heart lacks understanding, but because the power of derision is so great that it destroys every trace of morality and the fear of Heaven.

– Nachalat Eliezer

Overview of the Parsha

Our parsha covers the main events in the story of Abram once he becomes “Abraham” by means of circumcision, which is mentioned in the previous parsha. Hashem reveals Himself to him in the plains of Mamre as he is sitting by the entrance of his tent. Three visitors come to him, one of whom announces the birth of a son to Sarah “at this time next year.” After they leave, two angels come and destroy Sodom and its surroundings while saving Lot, who initially flees to Zoar. He later takes his daughters and seeks refuge in a cave. From the plains of Mamre, Abraham travels toward the Negev and settles in Gerar, where Sarah is taken to Abimelech’s house and later released. Abraham prays for Abimelech’s household, since Hashem had made them all barren. Hashem also gives a son to Sarah, who tells Abraham to separate her son from the son of her servant Hagar, and to drive both Hagar and her son away. Abimelech enters into a pact with Abraham at Beersheba, where Abraham plants a tamarisk, calls upon the Name of Hashem, and lives for a long time among the Philistines. Hashem commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, after which he returns to Beersheba and learns that his brother Nahor has fathered children, including Bethuel the father of Rebecca.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Hospitality

When organizing a mitzvah meal (such as for a circumcision, engagement, marriage, or Bar Mitzvah), a person should make sure to invite the poor and needy. He should ensure that they are well taken care of, since a person who organizes a celebration for his son or daughter, yet does not invite the poor to the meal, awakens accusations from the wicked Lilith and the Satan, which will result in misfortune and hardship for him. This is what happened during the festivity organized by Abraham, as the Sages tell us concerning the verse: “It happened after these things” (Genesis 22:1). This refers to the accusations that the Satan raised against Abraham on the day he weaned Isaac. Abraham had made a large feast and invited all the great men of the generation, but he did not invite the poor. As a result, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: “Take your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac” (v.2). Something similar happened to Job as well, for he organized a feast for his children but neglected to invite the poor. Hence the Satan began accusing him, and eventually Job’s sons and daughters were killed, and his money and livestock were destroyed. Even at that, the Satan was not content until Job himself was physically harmed. Hence a person who organizes a mitzvah meal should be careful to invite the poor, thereby preventing accusations from being raised against him. In fact by inviting the poor to a meal, his would-be accuser will become a defender. – Kav HaYashar, ch. 7

Fulfilling the mitzvah of hospitality to perfection consists of providing a person who arrives as a guest with something to eat and drink, as well as a place to rest and sleep. This is indicated by the term *mishkan*, which is formed by the first letters of the words *mitah* (“bed”), *shulchan* (“table”), *kisei* (“chair”), and *ner* (“lamp”). If a person has neither the means nor the space to welcome a guest, he should go to the city gate and look for someone who has arrived in town. He should then escort him to the home of someone who gladly welcomes guests. In fact we should run before guests in order to find them a place to stay. We should bring them to where they want to go, speak to the person in charge, and ensure that they have everything they need. Doing this is considered as if we had welcomed them into our home and they had eaten at our table. Being careful in fulfilling the mitzvah of hospitality leads to a good life, bestowing success upon a person in this world and ensuring that his righteousness will accompany him in the World to Come.

– Sefer HaBrit, part 2, article 12

ESHET HAYIL

Modesty

Where do people keep their gems? Deep inside a safe. Where do they keep their most valuable possessions? In a secret location, far from prying eyes.

It is written, “The daughter of the king is all glorious within” (Psalms 45:14) and, “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine in the inner chambers of your home” (ibid. 128:3). The name of Queen Esther – who charmed all who saw her – testifies on her behalf, since the name Esther comes from *haster* (“to conceal”). As Rabbi Yehuda said, “Hadassah was her name. Why then was she called Esther? Because she concealed [masteret] the facts about herself” (Megillah 13a).

The Talmud recounts a shocking story about the holy Amora Rabbi Yossi, who had a beautiful daughter. One day he saw a man boring a hole in a fence so he could catch a glimpse of her. Rabbi Yossi said, “My daughter, you are a source of trouble to mankind. Return to the dust so that men may not sin because of you” (Taanith 24a).

Rabbi Yossi saw that the pinnacle of his daughter’s role in this world consisted of remaining concealed in the home. As soon as he felt that she was not fulfilling the task for which she had been created (even though it was unconscious and completely inadvertent on her part), he thought it would be best if she died.

– Bein Adam LeKono

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Haim Pinto “Hakatan”

One day two people traveled to Mogador by truck. The road was very dangerous, for there was a steep drop on each side. Before leaving, they vowed that if they made it to Mogador safely, they would give Rabbi Haim Pinto all that was in the truck. In the middle of their journey, the driver lost control and the truck went off the road. However a miracle occurred, for the truck did not overturn and they emerged unhurt. The Arabs living nearby came running to the scene, and they were so surprised by this miracle that they began kissing their hands and saying, “You must be angels for such a miracle to have happened to you!” Continuing their journey, they eventually arrived in Mogador. However they regretted having made a vow to give all that was in the truck. So they decided to give a much smaller amount, telling themselves that if the Rav didn’t possess Divine inspiration, he wouldn’t know that they were trying to deceive him.

When they arrived at the home of Rabbi Haim, he welcomed them inside. They said hello and gave him a small gift, saying to one another: “Thank G-d, Rabbi Haim didn’t realize that we vowed to give him a lot more!” They were about to leave when Rabbi Haim suddenly turned to them and said, “Aren’t you ashamed of yourselves? You disturbed my grandfather, making him come from the World to Truth in order to save you, and instead of saying a blessing and thanking G-d, you didn’t fulfill the vow that you made in a moment of distress! Did you forget that you drove off a precipice and yet were unharmed?” When they heard these words, they began to tremble and asked the Rav for forgiveness. The Rav replied, “My grandfather Rabbi Haim told me everything.”

Rabbi Haim Pinto’s Hilloula is Heshvan 15. May his merit protect us all. Amen.

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

An Elixir of Life

A certain wealthy man had a daughter. He married her off three times to important men, but each time the husband was found dead on the morning following the wedding. The widow said, “People shouldn’t die because of me. I’ll remain a widow until Hashem takes pity on me.” The wealthy man had a very poor brother who lived in another country. Each day this poor man and his oldest son took wood from town and sold it, and they lived off the money they earned in this way. One day they were unable to sell their wood, and so they were left with no money to buy bread. Since they were forced to spend the entire night without food, the young man thought things over and asked his father for permission to travel to his wealthy relative’s country. When the young man arrived, he said to his uncle: “I would like to take your widowed daughter as my wife.” When the wealthy man heard that, he replied that her last husband had died on the honeymoon night. Nevertheless, the young man said that he still wanted to marry her. When the man’s daughter heard this, she began to scream and weep bitterly, saying: “Master of the universe, let Your hand come down on me rather than killing this young man!” The two got engaged some time later, and on the day of their wedding the groom encountered an old man, none other than the prophet Elijah. He said to him: “My son, let me give you some advice, something you must not ignore. Today, during the wedding meal, you will encounter a poor man, the likes of which the world has never seen. Once you meet him, you must get up from your place and give him a seat, and you must provide him with food and drink and accommodate him as best you can.” On the evening of the wedding, as the groom was sitting at the head table, the poor man arrived. As soon as he saw him, the groom arose and gave him a place to sit, doing everything he had been told to do. After the meal, when the newlyweds wanted to leave for their room, the poor man followed the groom and said, “My son, I am an emissary sent from Hashem to take your soul.” The bride began to cry out and pray to Hashem. She said to the angel, “Is it not written in the Torah: ‘When a man takes a new wife...he shall be free at home one year and gladden his wife’?” Hearing this, the angel replied: “Because your husband treated me with kindness, the Holy One, blessed be He, has decided to spare his life.” – From Kav HaYashar

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Only Because of Hospitality

It is written, “Elisha came into the house and behold, the lad was dead, laid out on his bed. He entered and shut the door behind them both, and he prayed to the L-RD. Then he went up and lay upon the boy, placing his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his palms upon his palms. He stretched himself over him and warmed the flesh of the boy. He withdrew and walked through the house, once this way and once that way, then he went up and stretched himself over him. The lad sneezed seven times, and the lad opened his eyes” (II Kings 4:32-35).

Every Jew must cleave to the mitzvah of hospitality, which is extremely important in Hashem’s eyes. Not only is there no limit to the reward of this mitzvah in the World to Come, but all of one’s success in this world usually comes through its fulfillment. Abraham and Sarah received the news that they would have a son only through the mitzvah of hospitality, as it is written: “I will surely return to you at this time next year, and behold Sarah your wife will have a son” (Genesis 18:10). Lot was saved from the destruction of Sodom only because of hospitality, as it is written: “Lot saw and stood up to meet them, and he bowed, face to the ground, and said: ‘Behold now, my lords, turn about, please, to your servant’s house and spend the night’” (ibid. 19:1-2). The Shunamite woman was given a son – and he was brought back to life after dying – only through hospitality, as it is written: “The lad was dead.... [Elisha] entered and shut the door behind them both and prayed to the L-RD...and the lad opened his eyes.” In the time of Elijah, a widow and her son in Zarephath survived a famine for an entire year only because of hospitality, and her son was also restored to life after dying, as Scripture states (I Kings 17:17-23). The Sages say that man enjoys the fruits of this mitzvah in this world, while the principle remains in the World to Come. The prophet Elijah usually comes to people in this world to wish them success and prosperity in business only because of hospitality.

– Sefer HaBrit

A TRUE STORY

Fewer by the Minute

It is written, “What if ten would be found there” (Genesis 18:32).

Soon after the start of World War II, when Russian forces took control of Lithuania, serious transgressions of Jewish law began to occur in the city of Kovno. Many Jews abandoned their religious way of life and joined the ranks of the communists, who had taken over the region.

The Rav of Kovno, the gaon Rabbi Avraham Dov Kahana Shapira Zatzal, said: “Our father Abraham asked the Holy One, blessed be He, to spare Sodom from destruction, and he began by asking, ‘What if there should be 50 righteous people in the midst of the city?’ When he didn’t receive an answer, he asked: ‘What if the 50 people should lack five?’ Again he asked, for perhaps 40, 30, or even 20 might be found there. However not even 10 could be found at that point. The city of Kovno is headed for a terrible upheaval, and a spiritual earthquake is about to strike it. If yesterday we could still see a person going to synagogue as usual, today he wouldn’t even step foot inside. His friend no longer observes Shabbat, and so on. Everyone is abandoning the camp, and no one is coming to save it.” – MiShulchan Gavoha