

R. Joseph Radinsky - 5774

What was Abraham's greatest test?

Almost everyone, when asked this question, would say that Abraham's greatest test was the binding of Isaac when Abraham thought he was called by G-d to sacrifice his son. In the end, an angel of G-d appeared and told him don't stretch out your hand against the boy, don't do anything against him. Almost all the commentators say this was the final, the tenth test of Abraham. It seems strange that Abraham would even harbor the thought that he was told to sacrifice his son. He had fought for the people of Sodom and here he didn't even make a peep to save his son. Perhaps we can understand this, because when Abraham argued with G-d about Sodom, the word for G-d that is used is Adoshem.

Throughout his conversation with G-d, the word for G-d Adoshem was used. Adoshem denotes G-d's compassionate nature. We are told to emulate G-d, to combine strict law with Hesed, so that we will come out with tzedek, true justice. True justice must always be a blend of strict law and mercy. We must always look at a person's situation as well as the law. When G-d appeared to Abraham and told him to lift up his son, which in Hebrew can also mean sacrifice, the word Elokim is used. Abraham forgot that Elokim must be combined with Adoshem, strict law with mercy. When the angel appears to Abraham, the word Adoshem is used, and Abraham understood his mistake. He was to elevate his son and teach him how to sacrifice his resources his time etc. but not to sacrifice him.

Rabbenu Yonah, who was a Talmudic commentator who died in 1263 and who wrote many ethical works, says Abraham's greatest test was not the akaida, but the death of his wife Sara right after the akaida. Here Abraham had just demonstrated his devotion to G-d. He had just established the principal that human sacrifice was wrong. Even though he had to relearn the principal that strict justice and mercy go hand in hand. What was his reward? His reward was that his wife, Sara died, who was his true partner in life. The rabbis say she had a higher level of ruach ha kodesh than Abraham. Abraham knew how to enunciate the principals of ethical monotheism, but Sara knew how to implement them in practice. In fact, even before he cried for Sara, the Torah says he eulogized her first. The whole world should know how important she was to him. The truth is, according to the Rabbi's that G-d never spoke to Abraham again after the death of Sara. He lived 37 more years and had six more children, and none of these stayed Jewish. Of his 8 children, only one remained Jewish, that was his son with Sara, Yitzchak. He needed Sara to present Judaism (ethical monotheism) to the world as both an intellectual and emotional experiences. If not our soul, which is, composed of both with seek out junk experiences. Abraham gave Yitzchak elevating intellectual experiences, and Sara gave him elevating emotional experiences.

That's why this era was actually known more as Sara's era than Abraham's era. This final test of Abraham, Sara's death was a great blow, but he knew that he had to continue. That is why he married again and still tried to influence the people around him. But he knew that he now he had to pass on the leadership of Judaism to his son Yitzchak, but first he had to make sure Yitzchak had a wife had a wife like Sara. And through the help of his

servant, Eliezer, he did manage to find such a woman in Rivkah. Abraham did pass the test that he knew no matter how much good you do, and how many people you help, you are eventually going to die He therefore, by his example, showed us how important it is, for Judaism to survive to give our children the best education that we can and to help them create loving Jewish homes like Yitzchak& Rivka and Abraham & Sara had.

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