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# PARSHA

# ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Vayeira  Rabbi Daniel Yarmush

## The Tests of Life

“And it was after these happenings that Hashem tested Avrohom...” (Bereishis 22:1)

In this week's parsha, we read about the great test of the Akeida. Avrohom Avienu is told to sacrifice his only son, Yitzchok. Many commentators are bothered by the concept of Hashem “testing” a person. Hashem is all-knowing. He sees our thoughts and knows our abilities and strengths. What need is there for a test?

The Alshich Hakadosh answers this question with the following medrash. The Medrash (Midrash Rabba Ch. 54) quotes the passuk (Tehillim 11,5- see Radak) “Hashem Tzadik Yivchan- Hashem will test the righteous,” and he brings three parables to explain it. Reb Yonasan says, a flax refiner will find the strong flax and beat it to make it better and smoother, but the weak flax, he cannot beat- lest it will break. So too, Hashem does not test the wicked, for they cannot withstand; rather, He tests the righteous, as it says “Hashem Tzadik Yivchan.” When a potter wants to show the strength of his pots, he cannot bang on the weak pots, for they will break. He can only bang on the strong ones. So too, Hashem Tzadik Yivchan. Reb Elazar says a person who has two cows, one weak and one strong, will place the yoke on the strong one; so too, Hashem will test the righteous.

The Alshich HaKadosh explains the medrash further. The three meshalim come to give three possible reasons for the purpose of a test from Hashem. The first reason is that when Hashem sees that a tzadik is very strong, stronger than his Yetzer Hora, Hashem will give the tzadik a battle to fight. The example the Medrash brings for this is Yosef. Hashem foresaw that Yosef would be able to withstand the test of the wife of Potiphar, so He gave Yosef the opportunity to fight. Through the successful victory in the battle with the Yetzer Hara, new strengths will be developed, enabling even greater

successes in bigger battles. These victories will create extra closeness with Hashem. These tests strengthen us and mold us into the strongest and choicest of flax.

A second reason for a “test” that Hashem may give us could be to demonstrate our strength, thereby glorifying the name of Hashem in others' eyes. This was the test given to Avraham. The nations were saying that Hashem favors Avrohom, so Hashem “tested” him in an amazing way, bringing out his devotion to Hashem for all the world to see. This is the parable of the potter who bangs only on his strong pots to prove their strength. So too, Hashem will publicize the devotion of those who serve Him.

The third type of test is like the test Hashem gave to Noach. Noach's experience in the teiva was burdensome and filled with hardships and difficulties. This is the parable for the two cows. Hashem saw that the generation of Noach wasn't strong enough to carry the blows it deserved, so He put it on Noach. (The Alshich explains this at length in Parshas Noach.)

In any event, all tests given to us by Hashem are really opportunities for us. Be it for our personal growth, or for the glory of Hashem's name, or, at times, for the benefit of the generation, we should realize that they are given only to those who can withstand them.

Though it is proper to daven to Hashem that He not test us, for we fear failing, when we are tested, we should accept our lot with pride. May we all merit siyata dishmaya in passing all of the tests that Hashem sends our way.

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# HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

## Makom Kavua

*Rabbi Hensch Plotnik*

The Gemarah teaches us that (Brochos 60) “whoever establishes a set place for davening will be assisted by the G-d of Avrohom.” This is derived from the Pasuk in this week’s parsha “and Avrohom got up (to daven) to the place where he (had previously) stood. (Breishis, Chapter 19, Possuk 27) This institution of a makom kavua is so significant that the Gemarah tells us that upon one’s death, if he was meticulous in this matter, it will be declared in Heaven “such a humble and righteous person (has arrived)”. Rabbeinu Yonah suggests on that passage in the Gemarah that kviyus makom alone cannot merit the person such accolades, rather it is indicative of how careful this person must be in all areas of tefilah up to and including this concept as well. Only if one truly loves the avodah of tefilah does he merit the Gemarah’s honorary title of anav-humble, for if one is not humble he cannot possibly daven with proper kavanah. This humility will subsequently lead one to be labeled a “chassid” as the Gemarah teaches us in Ms’ Avodah Zarah.

This interpretation of the Gemarah is very significant because it dispels the notion that makom kavua is a virtue in and of itself. Unfortunately, many a machlokes has erupted over “my makom kavua” when other basic ideals of tefilah and derech erez may be trampled upon in the process.

Say, for example someone walks into shul and finds a guest in his seat. Does one ask him to move, risking his embarrassment and disgrace, or does the importance of makom kavua take precedence? In Aleinu Lishabeach (Shmos, teshuvah #8), the author quotes a Sefer Chassidim that brings an episode where someone wanted to sit close to the aron kodesh because he felt his kavana would be enhanced there. A wise man suggested to him that since those places were generally occupied by the more prominent members of the congregation, a machlokes would ensue if he sat there and his tefila would be answered better if he avoided creating a stir. The advice was ignored, and tragedy befell that individual. The tragedy was perceived as retribution for causing unnecessary dissent. Thus being said, the virtue of makom kavua should not outweigh the discomfort and dignity of the guest. (It is worth noting that the area within 4 amos is considered the same place anyway).

Interestingly enough, Rabbeinu Yonah writes that the main concept of makom kavua is to always daven in the same venue. As an “extra”, he also advises one to pick a particular spot at home to daven in if he needs to daven from time to time at home. (This is mentioned in Mishna Berurah as well.) As a slight consolation for those who find themselves davening at weddings and thereby

sacrificing their makom kavua, the Rosh Yosef (author of Pri Megadim) writes that even davening twice in the same year at the same place is considered a fulfillment of makom kavua. It is debatable if one is accustomed to davening in a shteibel with many small shuls and makes the rounds from room to room, if that is considered as davening in a makom kavua.

Due to practical considerations, it is not always possible to daven every tefila in the same shul. The Aishel Avrohom (Butchach) writes that having one place to daven in the winter and another in the summer is still considered makom kavua. Indeed, the Gemara tells us in the beginning of Bava Basra that communities would have summer shuls and winter shuls, built with the climate conditions in mind. In Halichos Shlomo, Hagoan R’ Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l is quoted as saying that having one shul for Shabbos and another for weekday, or even one for shacharis and another for mincha is considered kviyus makom. If an avel r’l needs an amud and his makom kavua is unavailable to him, Hagoan R’ Yaakov Kaminetzky zt”l ruled that one should daven in his makom kavua (i.e. his own shul) rather than daven for the amud at a different shul. (Emes L’Yaakov p.394 note 224) Hagoan R’ Elyashiv Shlita, however, paskens that his obligation of honoring his deceased parent allows him to daven in a different shul.

(It is reported that Rav Dovid Povarsky zt”l, the late Ponovezher Rosh Yeshiva, became aware that he would not be able to daven in the yeshiva for a particular shacharis, a rare event. He requested that he be taken to daven in a shul outside the B’nei Brak city limits so as to have a pristine record that whenever he is home he always davened in the yeshiva exclusively!)

Despite various heterim, those who commit themselves to always davening in the same place merit great reward for their efforts. According to the Arizal, one saves himself from decrees of exile and will succeed in his business ventures, as well as gaining siyata d’shmaya in his ability to daven with superior kavana.

In these perilous times, we want to do all we can to tap in to the brochos and segulos of tefilla, tefilla b’tzibbur, and the help of Elokei Avrohom. The Chofetz Chaim, in a well publicized letter penned in 1914, wrote that we cannot imagine how many thousands of decrees we can wipe out with our genuine commitment to this mitzvah done in its proper form. Kein Y’he Ratzon.

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