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Righteousness Revealed

In a stunning vision, Hashem shows Avraham Avinu the expanse of stars in the heavens and tells him that his descendants will be as vast and as bright. The Torah then relates, “*Ve’he’emin ba’Hashem vayachsheveha lo tzedakah*— And [Avraham] believed in Hashem, and He accounted it to him as righteousness.” (Bereisheet 15:6) Rashi understands that Hashem considered Avraham’s emunah that He would fulfill His promise without asking for a sign to be a special merit and as righteousness. Ramban questions this interpretation.

Isn’t it obvious that one who speaks with Hashem, one who is ready to sacrifice his only son, will believe in Hashem and His prophecy?! What then is the novelty that Rashi is referring to, that was to Avraham Avinu’s credit that he believed?

Rav Pincus zt”l offers a beautiful approach. In the blessings of the *Haftorah* every Shabbat we say, “*ki beshem kadshecha nishbata lo shelo yichbeh neuro le’olam va’ed*—for by Your Holy Name You swore to him that his candle [heir] will not be extinguished forever and

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ever...” This is the promise of Jewish eternity. Likewise, included in the promise, “*Koh yehiyeh zar’acha*—so will be your children” (*Bereisheet* 15:5) is the guarantee that the Jewish people will survive throughout the exiles and merit the coming of Mashiach. Avraham Avinu understood that ultimately, we all have free choice, and justly may not deserve the fulfillment of these promises. Yet, despite this, Avraham Avinu believed. His emunah was believing something beyond the realm of the natural or rational course and this was regarded by Hashem as an act of extraordinary righteousness.

It is interesting to note, that although the *Chasid Ya’avetz* also understands this verse to be a promise that the Jews will be a nation of eternal believers, he maintains that Avraham Avinu attributed this great assurance as a “*tzedakah*,” an act of righteousness from Hashem.

An additional approach to understanding Rashi is found in the writings of Rav Elya Lopian *zt”l*. Avraham Avinu endured a tremendous amount of confrontation, contention and hostility in his campaign to introduce monotheism to the world. He battled Nimrod on more than one occasion and put his life in danger numerous times. Our verse teaches us that Hashem credited Avraham Avinu every time he exhibited aspects of emunah with the same reward as when he first demonstrated his *mesirut nefesh* for his belief. Although Avraham Avinu’s emunah became stronger and stronger until he reached a level of prophecy, his reward never diminished. Hashem does not diminish one’s reward even when something becomes his natural attitude, rather, he is continuously rewarded based on his initial struggle to integrate his beliefs and connection. This is indeed a great righteousness from Hashem. ■

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