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Torah Tidbits Contributor

Holiness

An angel of G-d called to him from heaven, and said: “Avraham, Avraham” and he replied: “Hear I am”. He said: “Do not harm the young man; do nothing to him. For now I know that you are a G-d fearing person; you did not withhold your son... from Me” (22:11-12).

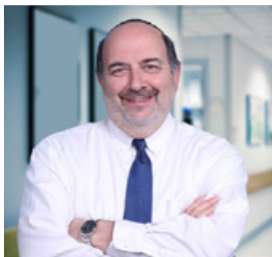
The Ramchal explains the ultimate midda – virtue – that a person can aspire to reach in a lifetime is the midda of kedusha, holiness. He places kedusha above tahara – purity. Tahara, explains the Ramchal is selecting what is good and worthy from what is bad and worthless. Kedusha involves deveikut: unswerving loyalty and commitment to serving the Almighty, including positively activating that tahara. Kedusha may be observed in the ways such the way an individual eats at the table, spends his or her money, or deals with provoking situations and people. Those with developed kedusha also interact with worldly activities in such a way

that spiritually raises them as though they “were walking before G-d in the World-to-Come” while still in this world (Mesilat Yesharim, 26).

The Ramchal explains that G-d helps the genuine striver to kedusha to attain higher levels of kedusha: G-d leads that individual along the path he or she wants to travel. In walking on the way by engaging with life, He makes the way appear. Sometimes the way appears as nisanot: as frightening, unpleasant, and awkward situations. But it is the pro-actively coping with such challenging situations that can help the individual achieve the ultimate level of shleimut: being a complete, balanced person, individuality and potential being developed to the full.

Let’s look things that can frighten in traveling on the way. One of them is the optical illusion. You have probably walked along a mountainous footpath, suddenly gripped with fear as ahead plunges to certain death over the cliff. Or you have driven along a road that is going to smash the car with you in it into the oncoming brick wall. Scary, yes. But you reason: I’ve been walking all my life. Footpaths lead on interesting and enjoyable walks that yield safety and civilization. They are not designed as trails of death. Roads get you from A to B and are designed by civil engineers. They are not there to slam you into the wall of death.

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(And whilst putting this piece together, I looked through my Jerusalem window westwards towards Moshav Aminadav, on the side of the Refaim Valley. The early morning mists gave it the appearance of a very wide blue river bound by two sets of mountains, getting to the sea. Can't be, I thought. Long way from the sea, Jerusalem is.)

Yes, all three views are clear. But what you see does not exist. All are optical illusions. The footpath and the road both change direction, but the turning and route continuation are invisible from where you're standing. And as the morning mist reflecting the sun-illuminated blue sky begins to lift, the sea of Jerusalem starts to fade

This is the experience of Avraham Avinu. He knew G-d loved humanity: as the Sforno repeatedly emphasizes in his commentary Yismach HaShem BeMa'asav, G-d takes great pleasure in His Creation (Tehillim 104:31). He does not want to cause harm to people, least of all to Avraham, His friend (Yehshayahu 41:8). Avraham, G-d's friend, knows that. He does not lead them on paths to their death or to the death of their children. Understanding that is bitachon, trust in G-d. We trust footpaths. We trust roads. There are made to lead us, not to kill us. We do not trust because the path-makers and roadbuilders force us to sign a contract of engineering infallibility. We trust because we have a lifetime of experience, and we allow that understanding of experience to emerge from it: namely footpaths and roads are there to effectively get us to where we want to get to.

This principle gives us background to understanding the Akeida. Avraham

Avinu knew G-d. G-d tells him to take his son Yitzchak to the Land of Moria, and sacrifice hu, meaning either him or it, as burnt offering. Avraham complied. As G-d commanded him. He asked no questions, but like the walker and the driver went forward along the way; nearer and nearer to over the cliff, nearer and nearer the brick wall. As G-d commanded him. His lifetime of experience taught him that G-d was committed to his interests and to his son's interests. He had no idea in detail how the Akeida would turn out, just like the walker didn't know what the footpath would do. But his experience of G-d, unique to him, told him that He was watching out for him. And as the story tells us, He did. The hu that he sacrificed, meant 'it', the ram, the stand-in for Yitzchak. And G-d, it turned out, was not just looking out for him, but for all his descendants and through them, looking out for the the whole of humanity: "Through your descendants, all nations shall be blessed, for you listened to My voice" (22:18).

We all have our nisyanot. We all have our challenges. So perhaps the Akeida gives an insight into living today. At times we have approached despair. Yet in contrast to our carefully laid plans, we have experienced



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unexpected outcomes. We have our own stories. It is those that build up our life's experience of Hashgacha Peratit, in this case that G-d gives us our nisanot for a reason. Like the Avraham Avinu's Akeida, we at our own level have our own Akeidot. That is opportunity to follow his example that as long as act in ways compatible with the Torah teaching, G-d is looking out for our ultimate interests.

(And on writing this, I look out of the window and behold, the blue sea occupying the Refaim Valley is no more. It was an optical illusion. The mist has lifted. It returns to its green wooded slopes.) ■

I write this piece in honour of the Chatona of my eldest child, Yehonatan to Elisheva Gur, this Thursday. A Bayit Ne'eman Be-Yisrael!

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