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The Impossible Math: Sarah's Unshakable Secret of Survival

Parshat Vayeira is packed with iconic narratives, from the angels visiting Avraham to the destruction of Sodom, the birth of Yitzchak, and the *Akeidah*. Yet, hidden inside the episode where Hagar and Yishmael are sent away lies a fascinating textual problem, and a revolutionary insight that reveals the secret superpower of the Jewish people.

THE IMPOSSIBLE MATH

When Sarah sees Yishmael acting inappropriately, she demands that Avraham send him away. Avraham complies, placing a flask of water and young Yishmael on Hagar's shoulders. When the water runs out in the desert, Hagar throws the boy under a bush in despair.

Throughout the passage, Yishmael is called a *yeled* (toddler/child), carried on a

shoulder, and tossed under a bush. But do the math:

- **Avraham was 75** when he arrived in Canaan.
- **Yishmael was born 11 years later**, when Avraham was 86.
- **Avraham was 100** when Yitzchak was born (making Yishmael 14).
- **Yitzchak was weaned at age 2.**

This means Yishmael was **16 years old** when he was sent away! How could Hagar possibly carry a 16-year-old on her back and toss him under a bush?

This brings us to a second question: What was the true *nisayon* (test) of the *Akeidah*? When Hashem explicitly commands a person directly, refusal isn't an option. Where was Avraham's test?

SARAH'S RADICAL FAITH

Rabbeinu Bachya answers the first question with four revolutionary words: "*Ein mukdam u'meuchar baTorah*", there is no chronological order in the Torah.

This episode of Yishmael being thrown out of the house actually occurred when Yishmael was a toddler and able to be carried by Hagar, years before Yitzchak was even conceived!

Re-read the story through this lens: Sarah wakes up and tells Avraham to banish



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Yishmael because he will be a bad influence on "my son". Avraham looks around bewildered, they don't even have a child yet! Sarah responds with absolute *Emunah*: "Hashem promised us a child, so we will have one! I am preparing our home for that reality right now."

This answers the Akeidah question as well. Hashem gave Avraham two completely contradictory statements: "*Through Yitzchak your seed will continue*" versus "*Offer him as a sacrifice*." The test wasn't simply to listen to the commandment of "*Aleihu L'olah*" ("עלוהו לעולה"); it was to hold both divine truths simultaneously with pure, perfect *Emunah*.

BIRTHED BEYOND DESPAIR

Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin explains why our nation was birthed through such humanly impossible circumstances, a 100-year-old father and a 90-year-old mother. Hashem intentionally built the Jewish nation "*acharei ha-yeush ha-gamur*" (after total natural despair) to embed a permanent spiritual truth into our DNA: A Jew never despairs, because Hashem's salvation is unlimited.

On January 1st, 2000, *The New York Times* published a mock cover page for January 1st, 2100, filled with futuristic guesses

like flying brooms and robot rights. Yet, tucked in the corner was a tiny ad listing the exact Shabbat candle-lighting time for New York in 2100. When asked why, the editor explained that among all the fiction, he needed one absolute certainty: "*In 100 years, Jewish women will still be lighting Shabbat candles.*"

THE SEGULA OF EIN OD MILVADO

In *Nefesh HaChaim*, **Rav Chaim Volozhin** reveals the ultimate *segula* for overcoming any trial: firmly internalizing that Hashem is the only true power in existence, *Ein Od Milvado*. When a person anchors their mind on this absolute truth, all opposing forces in the world naturally dissolve. As the hijacked Flydubai plane began to plummet, a young Jewish woman recorded herself repeating "Ein Od Milvado" over and over, with unwavering *Emunah*.

Our Matriarch Sarah taught us that *Emunah* is not just reacting to reality, it is creating space for Hashem's promises before they even materialize. Whatever challenges we face, let us lock into that eternal DNA, live with unshakable faith, and remember: *Ein Od Milvado!* ■

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