



PARSHAS NASO

SHALOSH SEUDOS TORAH

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The Downfall of Yishmael

Twelve Rams and Twelve Tribes

Parshas Naso concludes with the inauguration sacrifices of the leaders of the twelve tribes. The Targum Yonoson states that the offering of the twelve rams has the power to destroy the twelve princes of the Ishmaelite tribes. The Zohar states that if the leaders of the tribes would not have sacrificed the twelve rams, the world would not be able to exist in the face of the twelve leaders of Yishmael¹.

"נשיאי ישראל", 'the leaders of [the tribes of] Yisrael' is gematria (numerically equals) "נשיאם" 'The leaders of the tribes [of Yishmael],' (they both equal 912). The twelve leaders of the Jewish tribes oppose the twelve leaders of the Ishmaelite tribes.

However, what remains to be clarified is what quality did the rams - as opposed to the other components of the sacrifices - represent, that they have the power of destroying Yishmael?

Hashem promised Avraham that Yishmael would father twelve leaders of tribes. Why was Avraham not promised that Yaakov would also merit fathering twelve tribes?

Difficulties Understanding the Test of the Akeida

Hashem prefaced His request of Avraham to bring Yitzchak upon the altar with the word, "Please." Rashi explains that Hashem was beseeching Avraham, "Please withstand this test! If not, they will say that the first [nine] tests were of no significance²."

Why would Avraham Avinu's failing of the test of the Akeida invalidate the first nine very challenging trials he overcame successfully?

The ten trials of Avraham were of ascending difficulty. Each purified and elevated him to a higher level. The last test, the Akeida, was much more difficult than the first, that of 'Ur Kasdim' - Avraham allowing himself to be hurled into a fiery furnace for destroying his father's idols.

However, on a superficial glance, it seems not to be so. At the Akeida, Hashem revealed Himself to Avraham and asked him to sacrifice his son. By the first trial, Avraham had not yet seen the G-d he was giving his life for. He nevertheless surrendered his life, even though he was only intellectually convinced of the truths of monotheism. By the Akeida, Avraham was already an experienced prophet. Is it not much easier to fulfill the dictates of a G-d one is already acquainted with, than One which you are only intellectually convinced of?

Furthermore, throughout the generations, tens of thousands of Jews sacrificed their and their children's lives on the altar of loyalty to Hashem. How was Avraham's achievement so singularly significant?

Some answer that, indeed, the ability of the Jewish people to sacrifice themselves for the name of Hashem is entirely derived from the spiritual energy of Avraham Avinu's sacrifice at the Akeida.

The Self-Sacrifice of Non-Jews

However, what still must be understood is how this self-sacrifice is different from that displayed by the gentiles. Today, the descendants of Yishmael offer themselves in droves to be exploded for the 'sacred' cause of spilling Jewish blood. How is the self-sacrifice of the Jewish people different?

Non-Jews are incapable of doing a good deed completely for the sake of Hashem. A selfish motive will always underlie even their most altruistic act.

A gentile could sacrifice his life for the goal of having his name immortalized in the books of history. Or, it can be, that after a lifetime of preaching about the truth of a principle, he would not be able

to live with himself if he violates it. An example of this would be the self-sacrifice of the Communists for their cause.

Soldiers also give their lives on the battlefield to protect their country. However, this is because their motherland is part of their identity and pride, i.e., they are really sacrificing themselves for themselves.

[Instances where non-Jews have endangered themselves to help others occur because a biological empathy for the pain of another being exists in an emotionally-balanced person (and even in some animal species). Although it is courageous to sacrifice oneself for the pain of another, this cannot be considered a completely altruistic act, because the doer does it in order to be able to live with himself.

Additionally, as a result of Adam's sin of eating from the forbidden fruit, sparks of Jewish souls are contained in gentiles. Gentiles containing these sparks constitute the righteous gentiles of every generation and can display a level of self-sacrifice above that of the ordinary gentile.]

The self-sacrifice displayed by the modern suicide bomber can hardly be termed as self-sacrifice. They are brainwashed by their superiors that in exchange for a moment of pain they will receive an eternity of indulging in the basest urges. They kill themselves for depravity. The Gemara tells us that of the ten measures of immorality that descended to the world, nine were appropriated by the Arabs.

The Uniqueness of the Self-Sacrifice of the Jewish People

The self-sacrifice of the Jewish people for the sake of not denying their Judaism is completely different from the self-sacrifice that is displayed by non-Jews.

A Jew sacrifices life and limb for Hashem, because Hashem is his life. "לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמְעַ" בְּקוּלוֹ וּלְדַבְרָהּ בּוֹ כִּי הוּא חַיֵּיךָ וְאֶרְךָ יָמֶיךָ³" 'To love Hashem your G-d, to hearken to His voice and to cleave to Him because He is your life and the length of your days.' It is impossible for a Jew to detach himself from his beloved G-d.

At the deepest level of the subconscious of a Jew is the innate desire to fulfill the will of his Creator. At his most core level, he wants no benefit in this world and not even a blissful afterlife; a Jew only wants to perform the will of Hashem. In the greatest of Jews, this is plainly revealed; in smaller Jews, this comes to the fore in moments of truth.

This was most eloquently proven by the self-sacrifice of ignorant Jews throughout the ages. These people were simpletons, who lived an earthly life of self-gratification. However, when they were given the option of conversion, or facing a horrible death, they inexplicably chose to renounce their lives on the altar of the will of Hashem.

Why? They were not brainwashed; they had spent their entire lives violating many of the commandments of Hashem! However, when they were faced with the option of renouncing their faith in Hashem and living a prestigious life or being butchered, they chose to give up their lives!

This is because, to a Jewish soul, severing his - no matter how seemingly tenuous - ties with his Creator was impossible. He was tied up in a bond of indissoluble love with his Maker.

The Toldos Yaakov Yosef quotes a wise woman who said, "The Jewish people did not err by choosing Hashem, but Hashem likewise did not err by choosing the Jewish people. Even Feivish the boor sacrificed his life in order not to betray his belief in Hashem."

By tradition, we know that the wise woman referred to by the Toldos Yaakov Yosef is Adel, the daughter of the Baal Shem Tov. Feivel was a thief by profession who stole from the church and was apprehended. He was given the option to either convert to Christianity or be tortured to death. He happily chose the latter.

They ignited his body starting, with his hands, all the while offering him the option of healing him if only he would convert. As he was being tortured to death, he clapped his burning hands in delight exclaiming, "A thief I am, but a Jew I am!"

[The exceptions to this rule are Jews who immerse themselves in non-Jewish culture, or commit sins that are of the nature of linking them to non-Jews. By these Jews, their natural desire to sacrifice themselves for the sake of Hashem is corrupted. However, a spark of their Jewishness nevertheless remains, although it does not come to the fore in this world⁴.]

The Difficulty of the Akeida

Avraham Avinu spent his entire life promoting the idea of a loving, all-powerful one and only G-d. His withstanding of the other trials could be misconstrued as the ordinary self-sacrifice of a man for his ideal. However, the Akeida was exactly the opposite.

The entire aspiration of Avraham's life work was that a nation would emerge from him who would carry forth his legacy of monotheism. This hope was to be realized with Yitzchak, as Hashem had promised him. The Akeida seemed to be the doom of the eternity of the ideology of Avraham.

In addition, Avraham was never told that he *must* sacrifice Yitzchak⁵. Hashem merely requested of him to forego His promise that Yitzchak would be the progenitor of the nation of believers in one G-d. Avraham was given the option to defer.

However, Avraham's desire was only to fulfill the will of his Creator, so he gladly and willingly offered Yitzchak on the altar. By displaying complete lack of self-interest during the Akeida – he was ready to give up his precious, lifelong ideology if it was the will of Hashem - Avraham marked his previous trials with a stamp of authenticity.

Therefore, Hashem told Avraham after the Akeida, "Now I know that you are a ירא אלוקים, one who fears G-d." Only after the Akeida - when Avraham willingly relinquished his life's work before the will of Hashem - was he revealed as a true ירא אלוקים; he had no other interest but to hearken to G-d.

[This is in stark contrast to Bilam. When Hashem told him not to go to curse the Jews, he begged and pleaded until Hashem reluctantly told him that he could go.]

Seeing Hashem from a Distance

The clause describing the essence of the difficulty of the Akeida is, "וירא את המקום מרחוק"⁶, 'He saw Hashem (Who is also referred to as המקום, the Place) from afar.'

Avraham Avinu had spent a lifetime growing in love, awareness, and faith in Hashem and had acquired a lofty level of spiritual awareness. During the Akeida he was stripped bare of all his greatness and was left with the same level of spiritual awareness as that of a simple Jew. Despite the dullness of his spirit, he simplemindedly did as instructed by Hashem.

The greatness of this achievement of Avraham feeds the spiritual resources of his descendants for all of time to withstand difficulties.

The Shulchan Aruch advises that one recite the chapter of the Akeida during the daily morning prayers as an aid in achieving fear of Heaven.

On Rosh Hashana we read the narrative of the Akeida. The Haftora – which always corresponds to the portion read from the Torah - contains the verse, "מרחוק ה' נראה לי ואהבת עולם אהבתיך", 'From the distance Hashem appeared to me [and told me] I love you with an everlasting love.' When a Jew is in a situation of distance from Hashem and yet remains loyal to Him, an extra measure of Divine love is aroused for him.

The Twelve Tribes Correspond to the Twelve Months

Yaakov Avinu corresponds to the Shabbos. Of the three patriarchs, Yaakov is the only one by which Shabbos is mentioned.⁷ We are taught that one who guards Shabbos is rewarded with the limitless

heritage of Yaakov⁸. The twelve sons of Yaakov, the tribes of the Jewish nation, correspond to the twelve Roshei Chodoshim (first days of the months)⁹.

The twelve Roshei Chodoshim are weekdays. Although women customarily refrain from doing certain types of work and we recite Hallel and Yaaleh V'Yavoh, they are otherwise ordinary days. The thirty-nine Melachos - forms of work forbidden on Shabbos - are permitted on the twelve Roshei Chodoshim.

The gematria (numerical value) of twelve times שדח equals thirty-nine times the gematria of the word מלאכה (they both equal 3744). The thirty-nine Melachos forbidden on Shabbos are permitted on Rosh Chodesh.

Yaakov – the Shabbos - corresponds to the trunk of the tree that is the Jewish nation. The twelve tribes – the Roshei Chodoshim - are the twelve limbs that branch out of the trunk.

Avraham was not promised that he would be blessed with a Jewish nation that would consist of twelve tribes because they would merit something even greater. The Jewish people are descendants of Yaakov, we have the Shabbos.

Shabbos, Eretz Yisrael and Bris Milah

Shabbos is the seventh day of the week. There are seven lands, and the seventh is Eretz Yisrael¹⁰. Eretz Yisrael is the Shabbos in the context of the lands.

There are seven attributes through which Hashem created the world and of which the human personality is comprised. The seventh is the attribute of 'Malchus', recognizing that everything is under the kingship of Hashem. 'Malchus' is the attribute of Shabbos, the day in which we celebrate the kingship of Hashem. On this day we cease from productive work in order to symbolize that we in essence produce nothing and that everything is Hashem's doing.

The sixth of the attributes is 'Yesod', procreation. Milah is a covenant of the Jewish people with Hashem that they will maintain holiness in this area.

Through acquiring perfection in the sixth attribute – Yesod - one merits the seventh, the gift of Shabbos. Avraham Avinu was promised Eretz Yisrael through the merit of keeping Bris Milah.

The Fallacy of the Milah of Yishmael

Yishmael demands a part in Eretz Yisrael claiming, "I also circumcise myself!" However, his Milah is an illusion; it is merely a procedure. He commits to no standard of holiness with the Milah; to the contrary, the Ishmaelite nations are the least moral of the nations.

However, Yishmael demands his due! So Hashem did give him Eretz Yisrael - but only during the Jewish exile, when Eretz Yisrael is empty. (That is why the efforts of Christian crusaders to wrench control of Eretz Yisrael from the Muslims failed.) Indeed, throughout the years that Yishmael occupied Eretz Yisrael, it yielded him nothing. The barren desolate hills of Eretz Yisrael were Yishmael's lot for a Milah devoid of spiritual content.

Only for the Jews does Eretz Yisrael yield its bounty. Today Eretz Yisrael is blossoming with greenery in contrast to as little as forty years ago. (Fascinatingly, as soon as any piece of land is returned to the Arabs, they themselves destroy it!) There is no sign as promising for the redemption as the renewed flowering of Eretz Yisrael.

When Mashiach will come, Hashem will shake Eretz Yisrael like one who shakes out linen and all of those who don't belong in Eretz Yisrael will fall out.

Yishmael cannot merit Eretz Yisrael, which is the Shabbos, because he does not acquire the attribute of Yesod through the Bris Milah. The apex of his greatness is his twelve tribes, because he has no Shabbos.

The Self-Sacrifice of Yehuda Annuls the Phony Self-Sacrifice of Yishmael

The twelve leaders of the Jewish tribes nullify the evil effect of the twelve leaders of Yishmael. The leader of the twelve tribes is Yehuda and the offering of the leader of his tribe, Nachshon ben Aminadav, was sacrificed first. As the leader, he represents the rest of the tribes.

The tribe of Yehuda has a legacy of self-sacrifice, even at the expense of a personal spiritual goal. The goal of their matriarch, Tamar, was to bring Mashiach. She succeeded in her endeavor and became pregnant with the seed of Mashiach. However, she was suspected of immorality and her verdict was to be burned.

Her entire goal and aspiration - to give birth to the tribe from which Mashiach would descend - seemed as if it were about to go up in smoke. However, she refused to divulge that Yehuda was the father of the children in order not to embarrass him. She merely offered Yehuda an opportunity to admit that it was he who was the father of the unborn children. A tremendous amount of self-sacrifice was also demanded on Yehuda's part to admit that he was the father of the unborn children.

Nachshon, in the spirit of his tribe of Yehuda, also displayed self-sacrifice by jumping into the Sea of Reeds upon the command of Hashem even before it split.

As the leader of the first of the Jewish tribes, he represents all of them and therefore nullifies all of the tribes of Yishmael. The altruistic self-sacrifice that is the legacy of his tribe annuls the façade of self-sacrifice displayed by Yishmael

Yitzchak Stands in Opposition to Yishmael

The offerings of the twelve leaders of the tribes consisted of three types of livestock: bulls, rams and sheep. Rashi explains that the bulls corresponded to Avraham, the rams to Yitzchak and the sheep to Yaakov.

Yitzchak corresponds to the rams, because he offered himself up on the altar at the Akeida like a ram, and afterwards a ram was sacrificed in his place. His self-sacrifice nullifies the threat of Yishmael, who displays a false veneer of self-sacrifice. Through Yitzchak offering himself at the Akeida, Yishmael's spiritual deficiencies are made glaringly obvious and his power is annulled.

Indeed, it is specifically the twelve *rams* that the leaders of the Jewish tribes sacrificed, that nullify the power of the twelve princes of Yishmael.

The Two Opposing Sides of Yesod

Yishmael is the evil side of Yesod; he knows no holiness in the area of procreation. In contrast, Yosef excelled in Yesod of holiness by remaining pure throughout his trial with the wife of Potifar. As mentioned, Yesod brings to Malchus. In reward for his excellence in the attribute of Yesod, Yosef merited that the leader of the tribe of Yosef, אלישמע, offered his sacrifice on Shabbos, the day of Malchus.

Fascinatingly, אלישמע contains the same letters as ישמעאל. These two represent the opposite aspects of the attribute of Yesod.

Avraham's Prayer on Behalf of Yishmael

There was no day as dreary for the Jewish people as the one in which Avraham prayed, "May Yishmael live before You¹¹," states the Zohar.

However, we can understand Avraham's prayer from a different perspective.

There is a Yishmael in holiness; He is the Tanah who lists the thirteen methods by which we can deduce laws from the verses in the Torah. These thirteen methods correspond to the thirteen covenants of Milah which Yishmael disregards. (In the chapter discussing Bris Milah, the word מילה is repeated thirteen times to correspond to these thirteen covenants.)

Perhaps Avraham's prayer was on behalf of the Tanah Yishmael who taught these thirteen attributes. He prayed that the merit of the thirteen covenants of Milah – which correspond to the thirteen methods by which one can deduce laws in the Torah - should protect the Jewish people from the dangers of Yishmael.

The thirteen covenants of Milah also correspond to the thirteen attributes of Divine mercy. There had been an earlier R' Yishmael, R' Yishmael Kohen Gadol, who had prayed that Hashem should utilize His thirteen attributes of mercy when dealing with His children, the Jewish people¹². Avraham's prayer may have been directed at his success, as well.

This particular Shalosh Seudos, being also a Seudah celebrating the third day after a Bris Milah, has a tremendous power to vanquish Yishmael - those that sacrifice their lives for the very opposite of what the Bris Milah stands for.

Yishmael is Falling

For the last year and a half we are witnessing a new phenomenon; the leaders of Yishmael, one by one, are falling. Masses, which have lived under oppression for all time, are now protesting and overthrowing their rulers, the princes of Yishmael.

The Baal Haturim comments on the juxtaposition of the last clause in Parshas Chayei Sara, על "He (Yishmael) will fall in the face of all his brothers,' with the opening of Parshas Toldos, "אלה תולדות יצחק", 'These are the children of Yitzchak.' He says, when the leaders of Yishmael fall, await Mashiach who descends from the children of Yitzchak.

**ונזכה לביטול שעיר וחותנו, ולנער רשעים מן הארץ, ולמתנת השבת ולמתנת ארץ ישראל, נחלה בלי מצרים.
בשוב ה' שבות עמו לשמח ציון בבניה**

May we merit the downfall of Sair (Eisav) and his father-in-law (Yishmael), the shaking out of reshaim from Eretz Yisrael, the gift of Shabbos and the gift of Eretz Yisrael - a boundless heritage. When Hashem will return the captured ones of His people He will gladden Tzion together with her children.

¹ סוף פ' נשא

² בראשית כב: רש"י שם

³ דברים ל:כ

⁴ צמח צדק בהג"ה לספר התניא

⁵ דרשת הר"ן

⁶ בראשית כב:ד

⁷ בראשית לג:יה, עיין רש"י שם

⁸ ישעי' נח:יד

⁹ טור ה' ר"ה

¹⁰ פרקי דר"א

¹¹ בראשית יז:יה

¹² ברכות דף ה' ע"ב