

# The Pure Act

Adapted by Chaim Miller; From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

He said, "Please take your son, your only one, whom you love, Yitzchak, and go away to the land of Moriah [Jerusalem] and bring him up there for a burnt offering on one of the mountains, of which I will tell you."

-- Breshis 22:2

## Classic Questions

### What was the uniqueness of Avraham's tenth test? (v. 2)

**Rashi:** "Please take" (תִּבְּרָא) is a request. G-d said to him, "I beg of you! Pass this test for Me, so that people will not say that the first [nine] tests were totally insignificant."

**Ran:** G-d only *requested* that Avraham offer up his son; He did not *command* him to do so. Therefore, if Avraham would have ignored G-d, he would not have been punished at all. This makes the test of the Akeida unique (Drashos HaRan ch. 6).

**Ikarim:** In future generations, all those that gave up their lives to sanctify G-d's Name were obligated to do so by the force of Jewish Law. Avraham, however, had no halachic obligation to sacrifice Yitzchak, since the event occurred before the giving of the Torah at Sinai (3:36).

**Radak:** What was the point of G-d's testing of Avraham, if G-d already knew that Avraham would pass the test?

It was certainly not a demonstration of Avraham's faith to others, since not even the two lads who accompanied Avraham were present at the time.

Rather, the purpose of the test was to inspire the later generations of Jewish people who would follow in Avraham's footsteps.

## The Rebbe's Teachings

### The Tenth Test (v.2)

Ran and Ikarim write that the Akeida, Avraham's tenth test, was unique because G-d presented the challenge to Avraham not as an obligation, but as an option.

However, this is difficult to accept, because:

1. If G-d visits a person personally, and asks him to do something, it could hardly be considered optional! If the Creator of the Universe says "please" do something, it clearly *has* to be done.
2. Even if one would accept that Avraham was not actually obligated to sacrifice his son, it would still not render the test of the Akeida unique, since there were many Jewish people in history who sacrificed their lives for Judaism even though they were not obligated to do so. In Jewish law, a person is only required to sacrifice his life if he is being forced to a.) commit murder, b.) worship idols, or c.) commit an act of forbidden relations (See Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah, ch. 5). Nevertheless, we find that many Jews gave up their lives rather than transgress commandments other than these, an act of self-sacrifice which goes beyond the requirements of Jewish Law. So even if Avraham was not obligated to sacrifice his son, this would not render the Akeida unique.

An additional problem concerns Rashi's statement that Avraham was given this final test "so that people will not say that the first [nine] tests were totally insignificant":

Prior to this date, Avraham had passed a series of extremely challenging tests, including an act of remarkable self-sacrifice when he allowed himself to be thrown into a fiery furnace rather than bow down once in idol worship (Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer ch. 26). So even if Avraham was not given the test of the Akeida, how could it possibly be said that "the first [nine] tests were totally insignificant"? Surely, such acts of outstanding courage and trust in G-d are eternally valid in their own right?

### **The Explanation**

When a person observes a mitzvah, there is always the possibility that he is partly (or wholly) guilty of having an ulterior motive. Perhaps he wishes to appear pious and righteous; or maybe he is motivated by the prospect of earning a reward rather than the desire to carry out G-d's Will.

Even if a person has a totally pure motive—that he wishes to sanctify the world through the observance of a mitzvah—though noble, it is still a *motive*. This is not a problem per se, but there is always the possibility that this "holy motive" veils a kernel of insubordination which the person is harboring, wittingly or unwittingly. Perhaps, subconsciously, that person's true agenda is not to perform mitzvos *for G-d*, but the idea of making the world holy is simply pleasing *to him*.

The only way of proving that such a person is observing G-d's Will out of pure and unquestioning submission to a higher authority is if he were asked to perform an act which would compromise his career of charity and sanctity. Only then would it become apparent whether the person's observance of G-d's commands had been calculated until now in terms of personal gain.

Thus, the Akeida was the ultimate test. Avraham, who had devoted his life to promote awareness of the One G-d in the world, was asked to put to death the only person who could continue this cause after him. This test would prove whether Avraham had promoted the awareness of G-d in the world for G-d's sake, or for his own.

Avraham's earlier tests did not fully clarify this point, since it could be argued that even allowing himself to be burned in the fiery furnace at Ur Kasdim was ultimately an act which would have furthered his life's mission. Avraham knew that giving up his life in public would have made a tremendous impression on all those present, and would possibly be recorded as an act of true martyrdom for all time. While it appeared to be an act of total self-sacrifice, one could not rule out the possibility that Avraham desired to be a martyr, and he entered the furnace because it suited him to do so, at least in part.

Only with the Akeida, when Avraham was asked to perform an act which was a.) contrary to everything that he desired, and b.) acted out in total privacy, could it be proven without doubt that all Avraham's earlier trials were done out of an unquestioning submission to G-d's Will.

(Based on Likutei Sichos vol. 20, p. 73ff.)

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Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson of righteous memory; adapted by Chaim Miller.

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The Chumash incorporates a flowing English translation of the Torah which is loyal to the commentary of Rashi and includes 'Classic questions' that are drawn from a range of commentators and are then ingeniously brought together by the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory.

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