

Rosh Hashanah 5782  
2<sup>nd</sup> Day Torah Study

### Teaching to the Test:

*What does “the test” teach us about Abraham, God and Ourselves?*

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*Genesis 22:1*

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַהֲאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם  
וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי׃

Now after these events,  
it was that God tested Abraham  
and said to him: 'Abraham!'  
He said. 'Here I am.'

### PART I: Who's Testing Whom?

#### Text 1

*Rashi on Gen 22:1 (based on Sanhedrin 89b)*

**אֶחָר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה** AFTER THESE THINGS

Some of our Rabbis say that it means “after the words of Satan” who denounced Abraham saying, “Of all the banquets which Abraham prepared not a single bullock nor a single ram did he bring as a sacrifice to You” God replied to him, “Does he do anything at all except for his son’s sake? Yet if I were to bid him, ‘Sacrifice him to Me,’ he would not refuse.”

#### Text 2

*Sanhedrin 89b:14*

The Gemara cites an alternative explanation of the verse: “And it came to pass after these matters that God tried Abraham” Rabbi Levi says: This means after the statement of Ishmael to Isaac, during an exchange between them described in the verse: “And Sarah saw the son of Hagar...mocking” (Genesis 21:9). Ishmael said to Isaac: I am greater than you in the fulfillment of mitzvot, as you were circumcised at the age of eight days, without your knowledge and without your consent, and I was circumcised at the age of thirteen years, with both my knowledge and my consent. Isaac said to Ishmael: And do you provoke me with one body part? If the Holy One, Blessed be He, were to say to me: Sacrifice yourself before Me, I would sacrifice myself. Immediately, God tried Abraham, to confirm that Isaac was sincere in his offer to give his life.

## Part 2: SPOILER ALERT!

### Text 3:

*Ramban on Gen 22:1*

Know further that God trieth the righteous *Psalms 11:5*. “*The Holy One, blessed be He, trieth only the righteous.*” for knowing that the righteous will do His will, He desires to make him even more upright, and so He commands him to undertake a test, but He does not try the wicked, who would not obey. Thus all trials in the Torah are for the good of the one who is being tried.

### Text 4

*Pirkei Avot 5:3*

With ten tests Abraham, our father, was tested - and he withstood them all; in order to show how great was the love of Abraham, our father - peace be upon him.

### Text 5

*Kav HaYashar 10:2*

The midrash tells us, for example, that this is what happened to Avraham because he did not invite any poor people to the feast that he made upon Yitzchok’s weaning. Commenting on the verse, “And after these matters” (Bereishis 22:1), the midrash explains that it was in response to the Satan’s indictment that the Holy One Blessed is He subsequently commanded Avraham, “Take, now, your son, your only one,

## Part 3 – God has Faith in Abraham

### Text 6

*Ramban on Gen 22:1*

(1) **And God tested Avraham:** The issue of this test is, in my opinion, shows that a person has the absolute authority to perform an action; one can do what they want, and not do what one doesn't want. It is called a "nissayon" [test] for the individual being tested [e.g., Avraham], but the blessed Tester will command him to bring out the thing from ability to actuality, giving a reward for a good action and not just a reward for a good heart. Know that "Hashem trieth the righteous" (Psalms 11:5): when He knows that a righteous person will act according to His will, but still seeks [that person to act with] their righteousness, He will command him to a test. But He does not test the wicked, since they would anyways not hear. And behold, every test in the Torah is for the good of the one being tested.

### Text 7

*Sforno on Genesis 22:1*

נסה את אברהם, to demonstrate that Avraham’s love for G’d as well as his fear of G’d was not merely potential but actual, much as G’d goodness is not merely potential but actual. The purpose of man’s existence is to emulate the virtues of G’d, and by means of this “test” Avraham had an opportunity to demonstrate this. When G’d created man He had set Himself the objective of “let us make man in Our image etc.,” i.e. as much like Divine beings as is it possible for a creature to be.

### **Text 8**

*Midrash Tehillim 18:25*

The nations of the earth asked: “Why does the Holy One, blessed be He, love Abraham and deliver him from the fiery furnace, from the nine kings, from armed hosts, and from all the troubles which came upon him?” The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: I shall bring you close and show you that even if I tell Abraham to take his son and offer him up as a burnt-offering for My name’s sake, he will obey Me.

### **Text 9**

*Chizkuni on Gen 22:1*

Another interpretation, one which places the emphasis on the words **וְנִסָּה אֶת אַבְרָהָם**, “He tested Avraham.” Avraham was not tested in order for G-d to convince Himself of his willingness to offer up his beloved son, seeing that such matters are known to Him, Who is omniscient; he was tested by the attribute of Justice which had dared question the degree of loyalty he could summon when so tested. Passing this test successfully would convince the people around him of the absolute obedience to any command G-d would issue to him. There was no way the nations of the world could challenge his faith thereafter.

## **PART 4 – Abraham has Faith in God**

### **Text 10**

*Rambam: Guide for the Perplexed 34:4*

[The binding of Isaac] shows us the extent and limit of the fear of God. Abraham is commanded to perform a certain act, which is not equaled by any surrender of property or by any sacrifice of life, for it surpasses everything that can be done, and belongs to the class of actions which are believed to be contrary to human feelings... If the act by which he showed his readiness to kill his son had taken place immediately when he received the commandment, it might have been the result of confusion and not of consideration. But the fact that he performed it three days after he had received the commandment proves the presence of thought, proper consideration, and careful examination of what is due to the Divine command and what is in accordance with the love and fear of God. ...For Abraham did not hasten to kill Isaac out of fear that God might slay him or make him poor, but solely because it is man's duty to love and to fear God, even without hope of reward or fear of punishment.

### **Text 11** (thanks to “The Good Place”)

*Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, p. 54*

Abraham's story contains a teleological suspension of the ethical.

Why then did Abraham do it? For God's sake, and (in complete identity with this) for his own sake. He did it for God's sake because God required this proof of his faith; for his own sake he did it in order that he might furnish the proof. The unity of these two points of view is perfectly expressed by the word which has always been used to characterize this situation: it is a trial, a temptation. A temptation - but what does that mean? What ordinarily tempts a man is that which would keep him from doing his duty, but in this case the temptation is itself the ethical, which would keep him from fulfilling his duty and doing God's will.

Faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off.

## Text 12

*Jonathan Sacks, Covenant & Conversation, Vayera 5780*

Abraham was learning that there is a long and winding road between promise and fulfilment. Not because God does not keep His word, but because Abraham and his descendants were charged with bringing something new into the world.... A more intimate relationship with God than any people has ever known.... And God was teaching Abraham from the very beginning that this demands extraordinary strengths of character, because nothing great and transformative happens overnight in the human world. You have to keep going, even if you are tired and lost, exhausted and despondent.... The trial was to see whether Abraham could live with what seemed to be a clear contradiction between God's word now, and God's word on previous occasions, promising him children and a covenant that would be continued by Isaac....

The trial of the binding of Isaac was not about sacrifice but about uncertainty.... [A]braham taught us that faith is not certainty; it is the courage to live with uncertainty. He knew the promises would come true; he could live with the uncertainty of not knowing how or when.



Torah in Haiku

*Vayera* by *Ed Nickow*

G-d says: Abraham. Abraham says: Hineini I'm here, I'm ready

Isaac says: Father. Abraham says: Hineini I'm here, I'm ready

Angel: Abraham. Abraham says: Hineini I'm here, I'm ready