



Parsha Encounters

26 Cheshvan 5767/Nov. 17, 2006

Parshas Chayei Sora – Rabbi Yehoshua Goldstein

Passing the Test

Parshas Chayei Sora begins with the petira of Sora Imeinu. Rashi points out that this occurs directly after *akeidas Yitzchok*. Rashi explains that the reason she was *niftar* was because when she heard that her son Yitzchok was about to be offered as a sacrifice, her *neshama* left her body.

At first glance, this is extremely difficult to understand. It would seem that Sora's involvement in the test of *akeidas Yitzchok* was easier to overcome than that of Avrohom Avinu. Avrohom Avinu had to actually tie up his son and slaughter him, whereas Sora Imeinu was just hearing the story after it happened. Yet, Avrohom Avinu passed his test while Sora Imeinu could not withstand the pain of even hearing that Yitzchok was **almost** slaughtered. Furthermore, Chazal tell us that Sora Imeinu was on an even higher level of prophecy than Avrohom Avinu. She could not, however, bear the Soton's recounting of the *akeida*. How is this to be understood?

R' Chaim Shmuelevitz, zt"l, explains as follows. There is a big difference between the way the *akeida* was presented to both Avrohom Avinu and subsequently Sora Imeinu. Hashem told Avrohom to take his son, his only one, the one he loved, Yitzchok. Rashi explains that when Avrohom was commanded to take his son, he said "I have **two** sons." Hashem told him "your only one", to which Avrohom Avinu said that each one is an only son to his mother. Upon being further instructed to take the son he loved, he answered that he loves them both. Only then, was Yitzchok's name specified. Rashi says that this gradual revealing of the command to take Yitzchok was implemented so as not to shock him suddenly. This slow step-by-step

uncovering of the test of the *akeidah* gave Avrohom the chance to enter the test gradually, first accepting the fact of slaughtering his "son," then his "only son," then his "loved one," and finally Yitzchok. Avrohom Avinu was therefore able to overcome his feelings toward Yitzchok and fulfill the mitzvah requested of him. Sora Imeinu, on the other hand, heard the description of her son Yitzchok being tied up without breaks and pauses, and therefore passed away as a result of the pain.

R' Chaim further explains that when a person is given a test to pass from Hashem, he is given in addition, the *koach* to withstand the test presented to him. In the absence of this extra assistance, the difficulty of passing the test is greatly increased. The *nisayon* of the *akeida* was meant for Avrohom Avinu, and therefore he was given this special assistance to overcome the *Yetzer Hara*. However, this test was not meant for Sora Imeinu. She, therefore, was not given this special assistance which made it much more difficult to hear the recounting of the almost-to-be *akeida*. It is for this reason that we don't actively look or ask for tests, for they will lack this divine assistance.

The purpose of a test given to a person from Hashem is not that he should succumb and fail, but rather to acquire new levels of *avodas Hashem* by passing each trial. A trial is a time of spiritual growth and therefore a person is given all the tools necessary to be elevated through the test he is sent. And because every test is custom designed for that particular person's spiritual needs, there are no tests that are impossible to overcome. May we pass our tests with flying colors.

Rabbi Goldstein is the Rosh Chabura of second seder at the kollel.

Halacha Encounters

Tefilla in Other Languages

Rabbi Henoch Plotnik

The Talmud Yerushalmi in Sotah (7:2) states that whenever the word “aniyah” (respond) appears in any of its forms, it refers to an expression of Loshon Hakodesh specifically. In this week’s sedrah, when recording the response of Lavan and Besual to Eliezer’s suggestion of Rivkah as a wife for Yitzchak, it says “Vaya’an Lavan”. The Yerushalmi, therefore, suggests that the language spoken was Lashon Hakodesh. Rav Chagi (in the same passage in Yerushalmi) challenges that the language spoken by Lavan and Besual was more likely Aramis than Lashon Hakodesh which leads the Yerushalmi to conclude that since Aramis is similar to Lashon Hakodesh, the word “vaya’an” is still appropriate (see Peshachim 87b). In fact the gemora in the beginning of Megillah (3a) tells us that Aramis was actually given on Har Sinai. The prophecies of Ezra and Doniel were spoken in Aramis as well. (See Teshuvos Ramo #130 that when Rishonim refer to Aramis being written with ruach hakodesh it means one and the same as the gemara in Megillah). For this reason, the Ramo (Even Hoezer 125) holds that even the opinions that disqualify a “get” (divorce contract) written in two languages, agree that Aramis and Lashon hakodesh are considered one. (See Sefer Orach Yisrael ch.4 from Rabbi Y. Toplin of Lakewood for an exhaustive discussion of the status of Aramis and all its ramifications).

The mishna in Sotah (32a) teaches us that tefillah can be recited in any language. Despite that, Lashon Hakodesh is definitely preferred, as the depth of the language goes far beyond mere translation, and many hidden intentions lie behind every word and letter. Interestingly, the Aruch Hashulchan (101:9) maintains that the intention of Chazal to permit other language in tefillah was never intended as a substitute established for the nusach that has been set for us in our basic tefillos, but rather for selichos and yotzros exclusively. (As he succinctly puts it “Who would have the arrogance to change things that stand on the top of the universe... such an action is wicked and foolish”)

The Mishnah B’rurah (62:3 and 101:13), although not making the above distinction, requires that the language used be one that the mispallel understands and is spoken by the people of that land (Bi’ur Halacha CH.62). In fact, when it comes to krias shma, which can also be recited in any language, the Mishneh Brurah feels that a real translation into any language is impossible nowadays due to various disagreements, as well as our ignorance and the minutiae of the complexities of Lashon Hakodesh. Understanding Lashon Hakodesh is not a prerequisite for fulfilling a mitzvah recited in that lashon. However, one should understand the first possuk of Shema and the first brocho of Shmone Esrei. In Hilchos Tefilla (101:13), the Mishne

Brurah insists that the allowance for davening in another language was never meant to be utilized more than once in a while. Uncharacteristically, he quotes a contemporary sefer that was compiled by the gedolim of his era that emphatically denounced the innovative practices of those who were attempting to reconstruct the davening and purge loшон hakodesh altogether from our tefillos!

In a situation where someone cannot be m’chavein unless they daven in another language, and this is his sole intent, he may daven in that language. However, he may only do so as a translation of the established nusach and not a newfangled one of his own fancy. (Igros Moshe O.C. 4 #70.4) (See also Tiferes Yisroel in Sotah CH.7 who issues a scathing protest against shuls that were moving away from the traditional Loshon Hakodesh nusach).

Even if one finds Lashon Hakodesh challenging, with the introduction of transliterated siddurim, everyone can take advantage of the opportunity to daven in the language of the nevi’im and that with which Hashem created the world.

There is however, one notable exception to the above, and that is the insertion of private supplications at the end of Shemone Esrei, following Yihyu L’ratzon. The Chayei Adam encourages adding tefilos daily for one’s personal needs and livelihood as well as the success of his children in Torah. One who is not fluent in Lashon Hakodesh can daven any way he pleases so long as it is from the depths of his heart. Only Aramis is to be avoided when saying private tefillos or for that matter when one is davening at home (such as y’kum purkon). This is because the angels do not assist us in our tefillos when recited in Aramis and cannot intercede on our behalf. A number of reasons are suggested as to why Aramis specifically is abhorrent to the angels. Ironically, despite its resemblance to Lashon Hakodesh, the angels perceive it as a distortion of Lashon Hakodesh (or according to other interpretations it actually is distorted somewhat) and therefore choose to ignore it. (See the abovementioned Orach Yisrael).

In summation, despite someone’s pure intentions, beseeching Hashem and receiving His “ear” is a specialized art. It is one to be respected and properly observed. Although Hashem gives paramount attention to all heartfelt tefillos, maximizing their efficiency is the least we can aspire to do.

Rabbi Plotnik, an alumnus of the kollel, is rav of Beis Tefilla and R”M in Yeshivas Meor Hatorah.