



A PROJECT OF CHICAGO COMMUNITY KOLLEL

PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

12 Cheshvan 5770 / Oct. 30, 2009

Parshas Lech Lecha ✍️ Rabbi Moshe Kaufman

The Ultimate Test

It's well known that Avraham Avinu underwent ten tests/*nisyonos* from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. These tests culminated (according to most commentators) in the *nisayon* of the *Akaidah*, in which Avraham Avinu was asked to offer his son Yitzchok as a *korban* to Hashem. By overcoming this tremendous challenge, Avraham Avinu accrued merit which remains as a *zechus* for us even today. Yet we find in the *Midrash* (BR 12:9) the following startling statement:

Reb Levi said: "It is written "Lech Lecha" two times (once commanding Avraham to go to Eretz Yisroel, the second time to perform the *Akaidah*) and it is not known which one is more precious, the first one or the second one...." The *Midrash* concludes that the *Akaidah* was in fact more precious.

How can Reb Levi question which *nisayon* was greater? How could leaving his father's home and going to Eretz Yisroel have been a more difficult challenge for Avraham Avinu than sacrificing his own son?

Perhaps we can suggest the following idea. The *Mishnah* in *Avos* (5:20) states: "Yehuda ben Taima says: Be bold as a leopard, be light as an eagle, be as swift as a deer, and as strong as a lion to do the will of your Father in heaven." It would seem that these animals are mentioned for they are the benchmarks of their corresponding *middos*. Therefore, a reference in *Av Harachamim* (said before *mussaf* on Shabbos) to the martyrs who died *Al Kiddush Hashem*, is puzzling. They were "lighter than eagles and stronger than lions" (based on the *pasuk* in Shmuel Bais 1:23). If so, why would Yehudah ben Taima tell us to merely imitate the characteristics of the animals, when a person can achieve an even higher level? The answer is that while it's possible for a person to achieve a tremendously high level, where he is even willing to give up his life for Hashem, that *madreiga* is one of a temporary nature. He can gather supernatural strength for a short period of time.

Remaining at a level one has already reached, however, is very difficult. Dovid Hamelech tells us (Tehillim 24:3) "*mi yakum bemakom kodesho*," "who can remain in the holy spot he has already acquired?" Doing so involves a consistent strengthening of one's self against the *yetzer hora*. Yehuda ben Teima is telling us the manner in which a person should seek to grow in his *ruchniyus*. His goal need not be to achieve the highest possible level in one shot, for such *gevurah* won't last; rather he should seek to attain a level which he can maintain in his daily life. So while those martyrs achieved a level of spiritual strength which was supernatural, it was a momentary accomplishment. As the *ba'alei mussar* say: "It is one thing to die as a *yid*, but it's an entirely different matter to live as a *yid*."

While the *Akaidah* was certainly the most formidable challenge that Avraham Avinu faced, the *nisayon* of leaving his father's home was unique. It involved a complete break, physically, spiritually, and emotionally from everything he had previously known. His every step would now be guided by the word of Hashem. That tremendous change involved *gevurah* so great that the *Midrash* is uncertain as to which *nisayon* was more cherished.

This idea can serve as a guide for our own spiritual *aliya*. We should strive to make small, subtle yet consistent changes to our daily lives to bring ourselves to a higher plateau.

Rabbi Kaufman is a full-time member of the kollel.

Mark your calendars!

~SHABBOS~

With

HaRav Ephraim Wachsmann

Parshas Chayei Sarah

November 13-14, 2009

Reciting Berachos on People

Rabbi Hensch Plotnik

The Gemara (Berachos 58b) relates the following incident:

Rav Papa and Rav Huna the son of Rav Yehoshua were walking when they happened upon Rav Chanina the son of Rav Eka. As an expression of their joy at seeing this great personality, they told him that two berachos needed to be recited on him: the beracha of “*asher cholak michochmoso...*” (which is said upon seeing an outstanding talmid chacham) and “*shehechyanu,*” (which the Gemara previously teaches is said upon seeing a friend for the first time in 30 days). Rav Chanina in return told his colleagues that it is fitting to make the beracha of “*chacham harazim*” on them, which is usually reserved for seeing 600,000 Jews at one time. Their prominence in his eyes warranted recitation of this beracha even though they were only a group of two. (According to the Tzlach, he felt they possessed the same variety of intellect as the entire Jewish nation.)

Although we learn from this Gemara that these berachos were recited then, it is uncommon to say the beracha of “*asher cholak*” nowadays, and practically unheard of to recite the “*shehechyanu*” upon seeing an acquaintance after a 30 day lapse. (See Piskei T’shuvos 224 note 17 which quotes various incidents of Gedolei Yisroel who made the beracha of “*asher cholak michochmoso*” upon seeing such luminaries as Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin and the Chazon Ish, *zichronom tzadikim livracha*. As a general rule, the Chazon Ish writes in *Emunah U’Bitachon* that a talmid chacham is defined as someone who comprehends the depth of the give and take of halacha transmitted from generation to generation, and has also learned through most of the Talmud.)

Our discussion here will focus on the beracha of “*shehechyanu.*” The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 225:1) paskens, based on Tosfos in Berachos, that “*shehechyanu*” can only be recited upon seeing some one who is very beloved to the *m’varech* and causes him to experience especially great happiness. This includes close relatives if one hasn’t seen them for 30 days. If, however, one is aware of their welfare, either through personal correspondence or through other people who have seen them, it is better not to recite the beracha (Mishnah Berurah #2). Because the halacha requires that extra measure of joy to justify the beracha, the Sefer Nimukei Orach Chaim (Munkacz) writes that it is difficult to ascertain who falls into that category. Similarly, the Ta’amei Minhagim says that these types of friends are very rare and therefore the beracha has fallen into disuse. Interestingly, Rav Shmuel Vosner Shlita (Shu’t Shevet HaLevi VOL 5 #24) feels that if a soldier corresponds within the 30 days, but was in danger during this time, one could make the “*shehechyanu*” after 30 days have elapsed since their last meeting. Even though Poskim

disagree in a similar case where one has received a letter in the interim, in this situation a beracha could be justified because the soldier was in constant peril. Of course the basic conditions mentioned above would still have to be met.

If someone has never seen the object of his beracha, the Shulchan Aruch paskens, based on a Shu”t HoRashbo, that the beracha is not said. Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank (Har Zvi O.C. #115) was asked his opinion concerning the rumors that the Minchas Elazar made a “*shehechyanu*” upon seeing the Saba Kadisha, Rav Shmuel Eliezer Alefandri for the first time. In a lengthy teshuva, Rav Frank justifies the practice even in light of the Rashba. Similarly, it is reported that the Netziv made a “*shehechyanu*” upon seeing the Aderes (Rav Eliyohu Dov Rabinowitz Thumim) of Yerushalayim. Furthermore, the Sefer Minchas Hazman (from a contemporary author) quotes that the Aderes himself dreamed of seeing the author of Sho’el V’Maishiv and made a beracha on him! In the dream, the Aderes asked the Sho’el V’Maishiv if he was justified in doing so, but he didn’t receive a response.

Upon the birth of a son, the Gemara instructs us to make the beracha of “*Hatov V’Hameitiv.*” Generally, this absolves one from saying a “*shehechyanu.*” Concerning the birth of a daughter, the Mishnah Berurah holds that the beracha is said, for it is no worse than seeing a friend after 30 days. (This requires clarification in light of the fact that we pasken that one does not make a beracha on a friend he never saw). It is reported that the Steipler zt”l conducted himself in this manner. The Aruch Hashulchon, however, is of the opinion that one shouldn’t make a beracha, as is the Ben Ish Chai. (For further research, the reader is referred to Minchas Shlomo VOL. 2 #80 and Igros Moshe VOL. 5 #43.5.)

Interestingly, the Sefer Chassidim (#843) holds that a grandfather makes a “*shehechyanu*” when his son or daughter has a child. Since this is not brought l’halachah in the Poskim, it would be advisable for the grandparents to be *yotzei* with the beracha of the parents, if they indeed will be reciting the “*shehechyanu*” (See Bi’ur Halachah 223 for a discussion of this matter.) There are those that generally shy away from “*shehechyanu*” whenever there is a doubt involved because it is not obligatory in nature. One should consult his own Rav for guidance.

As is generally the case with the beracha of “*shehechyanu*” (e.g. on new clothing), as long as the simcha is still strongly felt by the *m’varech*, the beracha can still be made. How this translates exactly in our discussion is debatable, although Rav Shternbuch (Teshuvos V’Hanhogos vol. 1 #200) suggests that as long as the parents are still notifying family and friends, the simcha is still intense. Once again, guidance is always recommended.

Rabbi Plotnik, an alumnus of the kollel, is rav of Bais Tefilah and a maggid shiur at Yeshivas Meor HaTorah.