

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Vayeira

“AND AVRAHAM WENT AND TOOK THE RAM AND BROUGHT IT AS A SACRIFICE IN PLACE OF HIS SON.” (BEREISHIS 22:13)

“And he speaks truth in his heart.”

HASHEM STOPPED Avraham from sacrificing Yitzchak at the very last moment. Avraham then lifted his eyes and saw a ram – a ram that had been waiting from the time of creation for this very moment – that he sacrificed to Hashem in the place of his son. In reference to this exchange, the S’forno quotes Dovid HaMelech (Tehillim 15:2), “And he speaks truth in his heart.” The S’forno is explaining that Avraham felt that he needed to bring the ram as an offering in order to remain faithful to his word. He had decided that he would bring his son as a sacrifice, even though this was now impossible, he needed to, “speak truth in his heart,” and offer the ram instead. This is similar to the story of Rav Safra (see Mesilas Yesharim, Chap. 11) who was in the middle of reciting *Shema* when a man offered to buy some of Rav Safra’s wares for a set price. Seeing that Rav Safra was not responding, the merchant continued to increase his offer. When Rav Safra concluded his prayers, he told the merchant that since he had already decided in his heart to sell at the first offering price, he would forgo the profit from the later, higher offer and sell the merchandise at the original price.

The later offer of more money was a new factor

The issue of, “speaking truth in one’s heart” is a very fine detail, a high level of perfection in the *midda*, or character trait, of *emes* – truth. In Avraham’s situation, it would appear that the issue of *emes* involved here was even more minute – a mere shadow of an issue of *emes*. In Rav Safra’s classic case, whatever factors that had motivated his earlier decision to sell at the lower price were still true – but the later offer of more money was a new factor that tugged at his heart to change his mind. Avraham, however, had now been told by Hashem not to sacrifice Yitzchak. Furthermore, Hashem clarified that He had never intended that Avraham sacrifice Yitzchak, just bring him up on the altar (see Rashi on 22:12). Avraham was surely now exempt from his original commitment. Apparently, there was nevertheless some tiny aspect of *emes* to be dealt with since Avraham could, in some way, fulfill his original resolve.

Genuine greatness often is determined by the consistency of refined behavior

After passing the most difficult test ever, and after receiving the ultimate praise from Hashem, the accolade of, “you are G-d fearing,” did Avraham need to concern himself with fulfilling an infinitesimal, almost incomprehensible detail of *emes*? Immediately after nearly killing his only son, would Avraham be in the mind-frame to even notice that he can fulfill this tiny obligation?

Avraham’s actions teach us that there is a continuous need for awareness of the finest nuances of *middos* improvement. The big events and dramatic climaxes of our lives can never be allowed to obscure the fine details of Torah observance. Genuine greatness often is determined by the consistency of refined behavior under the most emotional or difficult circumstances. Whether one is on the peaks of achievement or in the throes of defeat, he must never lose sight of being a *mentch*, and an exalted personality as well.

With regular *mussar* study, we can develop these sensitivities and make them such an integral part of selves that our ethical and moral excellence will shine through under any circumstance. We will be walking examples of Hashem’s lofty attributes, of His exalted *middos* and how Torah can polish the diamond of a human personality until it radiates the exquisite brilliance of Torah perfection in any setting.