

# TORAT HAR SHMUEL

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## IS CREDIT ON OUR ACCOUNT ETERNAL?

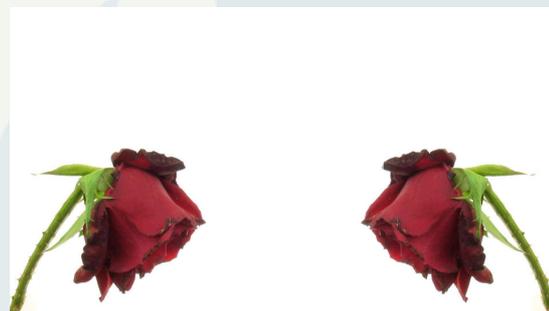
There is a custom observed by many to recite “Akeydas Yitzchok” (Bereshis 22) every day. This theme is emphasized greatly on Rosh Hashana, our day of judgment, in the hope that Hashem Yisborach will look upon this sacred moment in time and judge Yitzchak’s offspring, the Jewish people, favorably. Consider the following scenario. A couple marries and on Friday afternoon, the new husband brings home a beautiful bouquet of long stem, elegant roses. They are the best of the best, and needless to say, his new bride flips over her husband’s gift. A week later, the roses are still thriving, so the choson writes a note reminding his kallah how beautiful the roses are. The same process of writing a note goes on not for weeks or months but for years. “Do you remember those beautiful roses I bought you the first Shabbos we were married??” How long do you think any wife would be willing to put up with this? At what point does her husband’s credit for the roses expire?

If you think about it, this is exactly what we do every day and especially on Rosh Hashana when we remind Avinu She’ba’Shamayim of an event that took place thousands of years ago. How long can we draw upon the merits that deservedly belong to Avrohom Avinu and Yitzchak Avinu? At what point do we become responsible for our own personal credit rating, based on our own merits? What does Akeydas Yitzchak do for us today that legitimizes our ability to recall this event on behalf of our-

selves?

There are two answers to this that I would like to share with you: One in my own name and one in the name of HaRav Noach Peled of Kehillas Ahavas Shalom in North Miami Beach, Florida. My answer is founded on the reality of spiritual genetics and the history of our people. Long before suicide bombings became ‘fashionable’ within the radical Moslem world, giving one’s life for the sake of glorifying Hashem’s Holy Name was part and parcel of the history of our people. Where did we get the strength, the spiritual fortitude to do this? It should be noted that throughout our history, this practice was not limited to those who were Torah observant. Often times, Jews who were totally removed from our Torah lifestyle made the ultimate sacrifice. There are events recorded in the Talmud, during the Holocaust and every era in between where our brethren chose to die rather than violate the Torah. If it happened once, twice, three times during our history, we would look upon those events with amazement. The reality is that thousands of Jews died throughout the centuries at the hands of our persecutors with the words of the Shema on their lips as they took their last breath – for some, those words being uttered for the first time in many, many years.

To discover an answer we have to go back to our roots, the very beginnings of our people. Rashi (Bereshis 11:28) quotes the Midrash Tanchuma regarding the famous “kivshan ha’aish” episode. Avrohom was 52 years old and destroyed the idols in his father’s store. When Terach returned and found all of the idols broken, he asked his son what happened. Avrohom explained that they got into a fight and destroyed each other. Terach knew his explanation was ridiculous and turned his son over to Nimrod, the ruling authority. Nimrod gave Avrohom an ultimatum: Either acknowledge that he was a god or die by fire. This was a critical mo-



ment in Avrohom's life, as it was 23 years before Hashem ever came to Avrohom to advise him that the life philosophy he dedicated himself to was correct. So does he permit himself to be incinerated or give in to the demands of a lunatic? Avrohom recognized that within every person there is a soul, an eternal "Nishmas Elokim" that lives beyond the physical human body. If he enters the furnace, Avrohom sanctifies Hashem's name and his soul remains alive and well in Hashem's Heavenly Abode. If he bows to Nimrod's demands, he may be physically alive but will have died a spiritual death. All that he professed will have been for naught. No contest – Avrohom chooses the furnace.

Hundreds of thousands of people came to witness the spectacle. What they saw forever changed life on earth. The ropes around Avrohom's hands and feet were burned off while the rest of the furnace was transformed into a garden from which he fed for three days. Hashem's Name was publically sanctified, and Avrohom is the focal point of that sanctification – forever. What many don't realize is what was going on inside Avrohom's mind. **HE WAS FULLY PREPARED TO DIE!!** To experience this life saving miracle in front of hundreds of thousands of witnesses was something he never counted on or expected. Avrohom left the furnace a different person. What transformation took place?

What changed was the very spiritual DNA – genetics – of our Father!! The Ari ZT'L quotes the Zohar that as much as a child inherits from his/her parents their physical genetics, so too do they inherit their spiritual genetics. Even if those genetics were hidden, subdued for many generations, that 'pintele Yid', that Divine Spark remains within the spiritual bloodline of every one of us. When Avrohom exited the furnace, his DNA contained a new strand imbuing within us, his descendants, the spiritually genetic ability to be "moser Nefesh", to give our lives to sanctify Hashem's Name if called upon to do so.

Decades later, we see a similar scenario. After numerous prophecies promising that through Yitzchak, Avrohom will be the father of Hashem's chosen nation, Avrohom is called upon to sacrifice his son – and his promised future. Hope and logic are cast aside. As per HaRav Yosef Soloveichik ZT'L, the moment Hashem requested this of Avrohom, he considered his son dead and gone. ("Abraham's Journey", pages 10-11). Yitzchak was 37 years old and an active, willing participant in this test. The Chesed – the kindness of Avrohom came together with the Gevurah – the spiritual fortitude of Yitzchak to guarantee that this genetic quality of

mesiras Nefesh, self-sacrifice remain a dominant gene within our people. We are all made up of genes that are dominant and recessive. Avrohom and the furnace established this new spiritually genetic character. By joining with Yitzchak in the Akayda, said genetics were transformed from recessive to dominant status. What's the proof?? It's in the number of irreligious Jews that sacrificed themselves throughout the ages, thereby sanctifying Hashem's Name, the same Hashem Yisborach they were disconnected from throughout their lives. Only dominant spiritual genetics can provide this type of result.

How are we to understand the DNA strand going from a recessive to a dominant trait? With Jewish law and philosophy, the number three is associated with the concept of "chazoko". When something happens three times, there is a general presumption that the behavior pattern will continue. Where are the three times that boost the genetics to dominant status? Avrohom participation in both the furnace episode and the sacrifice of Yitzchak count as two and Yitzchak's active participation in the Akeyda serves as the third. Avrohom's physical life may not have been on the line during the Akeyda, but the future of his lineage and life philosophy were lying alongside his son, ready to die.

That's the reason we call upon Akeydas Yitzchak every year on Rosh Hashana while we are being judged. We all have what to improve on and have many reasons to "klop al chayt" for the sins we committed. But at the end of the day we ask Hashem to take a look at how many of His children have made the ultimate sacrifice to glorify His Holy Name. There is a wild Gemara in Meseches Shabbos (89b) that talks about Hashem needing a merit for the children of Israel before the Geulah, the coming of the Mashiach. (This event may be taking place NOW!!) Hashem comes to Avrohom and says, "Your children have sinned against Me". Avrohom responds, "Let them be obliterated for the sake of Your Name". Somewhat surprised by the harshness of Avrohom's response, Hashem goes to Yaakov. He had challenges raising his children so maybe he'll be more sensitive to the situation. Nonetheless, Hashem receives the same response. Wipe them out!! So he goes to Yitzchak and accepts his answer. (Yitzchak's response and why Hashem found Avrohom and Yitzchak's answers unacceptable are not for this chapter.) The question is what's up with Avrohom and Yaakov? How can they say this? Have they no compassion for the children? I heard a great answer from HaRav Yaakov Yagen. He explained that we're misunderstanding the words



of our forefathers and the Gemara. Avrohom and Yakov are not saying wipe them out. What they're saying is that yes, "Your children have sinned and they need to do Teshuva and come back to You properly. But when push comes to shove and they're called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice in Your Name, simply because they're Jewish, "Yeemachu al Kidushat Shemaycha" – they succumb to death to sanctify Your Name". The "pintele Yid" shines even though he's being physically annihilated.

There's another point we need to understand to really appreciate this philosophy. At the end of Akeydas Yitzchok (Bereshis 22:17) part of the blessing Hashem bestows on Avrohom is, "your offspring will inherit the gates of its enemy". The language is very strange for enemies are conquered, not inherited. Does this statement apply to the past, the future or both? Although many interpret this to mean it has application in the future, I opine we have seen this throughout our history. It's no secret that sociologists are baffled by the reality that our nation still exists. Every nation that has dominated the Jewish people, be it in Israel or the diaspora, has been relegated to the history books, while we continue to not just exist, but flourish! There were the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Crusades of the Catholic Church, the pogroms, the blood libels, Czarist and communist Russia and the Nazis – and this is only a partial list!! They're all in the history books while we continue to thrive and influence the world both from Israel and the diaspora. We didn't "conquer" any of them in the classic sense of the word, but we did inherit them by living as an identifiable nation with a dedicated lifestyle devoted to Hashem Yisborach after our oppressors disappeared from society. Our Jewish "genetics" are here not just to stay, but to continue to influence and be the light the world so desperately needs.

I think what validates this are the many Jewish communities that developed and flourished. Babylonia – today's Iraq – had a thriving Jewish community in Baghdad. The Iranian Jewish community was both influential and successful, thriving for centuries until the overthrow of the Shah. Nonetheless, even today, the burial place of Mordechai and Esther, a three hour drive from Tehran, is kept in beautiful condition and constantly under guard in honor of the contribution Esther and Mordechai made to the overall Persian community. Italy has always had a thriving Jewish community. We didn't conquer any of these places, but after the most difficult times, we did resettle them, "inherit them".

As mentioned above, there is another answer to this ques-

tion, compliments of HaRav Noach Peled. The fact that Hashem Yisborach spared Avrohom and Yitzchak the anguish of completing the Akeyda conveys a powerful message to us as a nation and individuals. Hashem wants us in this world!! He has a national agenda for us, including Yetzias Mitzrayim, Ma'amad Har Sinai, receiving the Torah, the Bais Ha'Mikdash. All of these are the "kayleem", the accoutrements for us in our role as His Chosen Nation and as the "Ohr l'Goyim" the light and living example of how humanity should live and relate to their Heavenly Father. When we come before Hashem Yisborach, the message we're conveying is that our presence in Shul, within our homes and communities, is a consequence of what Hashem desired when His angel told Avrohom to stop. We're not perfect!! We need to examine our ways, do Teshuva and be the proper example that Hashem wants us to be. Nonetheless, when we call upon the merits of our forefathers, specifically Yitzchak and the Akeyda on Rosh Hashana, we're expressing to Hashem that our presence in the here and now is a consequence of the desire He expressed, His eternal agendy when His messenger stopped Avrohom.

How do we respond to this concept today, in the here and now? It begins by realizing that the philosophy expressed above can be viewed as passive or actively positive. Hashem saying 'stop' means to refrain, hold back. It's what Hashem wanted at that moment, but not what He wants from us now. Our response to Hashem's 'stop' is to 'go' – move forward full throttle. If there is anything our history has taught us, it's that as a people we have been blessed with some very special gifts – most importantly Hashem's Torah – that should inspire us to better the world in which we live. Many look at that concept and recoil in fear. How can I as one person change the world? It comes with the recognition that what has often times started with one person draws others in to the point that, indeed, **the world changes!!**

Here's a classic example. Back in the 1970s there was a young Rabbi who decided to make Aliyah and work in the world of Kiruv. He was devoted, inspirational, and had a burning love for Jews, especially those unaware of how to make sense of the 'pintele yid' within. Nothing could stop him! He went into bars and dragged out perfect strangers, engaged them in conversation, helping them discover themselves – their real selves. He was known for going to the Kotel on Friday nights and locating those people who looked like fish out of water and bringing them home for a Friday night meal. He touched one person, then two. As he



continued, the two touched four, which soon became forty, than a thousand and eventually myriads.

It wasn't easy!! I'm certain he had his fair share of spiritual rejection along the way. Raising the funds necessary to grow the organization into what it is today was a grandiose challenge. I'm certain there were times the pressure became unbearable and he was tempted to fold and move on – but he didn't. What started out as one man – HaRav Noach Weinberg, ZT'L – pulling confused young adults out of bars, eventually grew into a Yeshiva and world-wide Kiruv organization known as Aish HaTorah. Hashem told Avrohom to stop, which provided the inspiration for Reb Noach to go – and not stop!!

It's one thing to understand the thought that HaRav Peled provides. It's another to know what to do with it: To accept upon ourselves the responsibility of **being** Jewish actively, not passively. How much we can rely on Yitzchak's credit as a merit for us is proportional with what we do in the here and now to validate it. Hashem is not asking us to physically sacrifice ourselves on the altar. Nonetheless, we need to demonstrate to Hashem that carrying on the legacy of our forefathers, especially if we're going to look to them to provide us with merit, is validated in our desire to invest in the holy value system they established. It's ours to perpetuate! We have the history and the tools to make the world a better place in which to live.

What makes this work is the understanding that all of us are unique and therefore bring our own set of strengths to the community. Our differences define our special strength and build in conjunction with others in a manner that, without us, the end product will not just look different but will be missing something very special. Not everyone has the wisdom and strength of character to first build individually as did Reb Noach. As a team, though, the sky is the limit, primarily because the sum of the whole is far greater in every way than the total of the individual strengths.

There is one last question that needs to be answered. Chazal teach that the ashes of Yitzchak Avinu rest in front of the Kisay HaKovod, Hashem's Divine throne. If Yitzchak returned alive from the Akeyda, shouldn't his image be there, as is the image of Yaa-kov Avinu? Why are ashes there? There are two answers I can offer for this query. The first relates directly to how we refer to the holiday of Passover. When the Torah speaks of the Jewish people referring to the holiday, we call it "Chag HaPesach" recalling the kindness of Hashem when he "passed over" our

homes, sparing our firstborn.

When Hashem is speaking of the holiday in the Torah, He calls it "Chag HaMatzos", eluding to the fact that we packed our belongings and headed into a desert incapable of supporting human life. We followed blindly, confident that our Heavenly Father would take care of us. Similarly here, Avrohom's determination to complete the request asked of him by Hashem Yisborach was so strong that Hashem considered it as if he completed the act. Therefore, it's not Yitzchak's picture but his ashes that rest before Hashem's Throne.

The second answer is founded on a famous Midrash. If we calculate the years of Yitzchak's life as laid out in the Torah, there are two years missing. The Midrash brings down that in fact, Avrohom sacrificed his son, Yitzchak died and was immediately resurrected and spent the next two years healing from the wounds associated with the Akeyda. The fact that he died, even if but for a moment, provides license to Hashem to treat the event as if it were carried through to the very end, the burning of the Korbon Olah that Yitzchak was.

For years, indeed centuries, Jews have been called upon to give their lives to sanctify Hashem's Holy Name. Boruch Hashem Yisborach, that threat does not hang over our heads today. The **only** way to respond is to live in a manner that is a real-time Kiddush Hashem, and that's an opportunity we have the ability to achieve, each one of us in our own special way. How big an impact your personal Kiddush Hashem has is not near as relevant as the fact that it's **your** personal and unique Kiddush Hashem!! By achieving this goal, we earn the right to call upon Hashem to associate what we're doing today with the sacrifices so many have made before us, especially those of Avrohom Avinu and Yitzchak Avinu. May all of our Kiddush Hashem achievements, as individuals, families, communities and as the singularity that is "Kneset Yisroel" provide Avinu She'ba'shamayim with the desire to reveal the Mashiach and bring the Geulah with all of the wonders that our forefathers witnessed before leaving Egypt. Please Hashem, **hurriedly in our days.**