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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

IT IS THE ULTIMATE!

PARSHAS LECH LECHA

Often a speaker at a bar mitzva will tell the bar mitzva boy that he is now obligated to do mitzvos. Most of us probably assumed that this meant that now that the young man has turned 13, he has a Torah obligation to do mitzvos. **Birkat Asher** quotes the **Rebbe of Stropkov** who explained this message to a boy at his bar mitzva. He told the bar mitzva boy that until this day, he performed mitzvos and good deeds because that was how he was brought up by his parents and grandparents. Now that he became bar mitzva, he is able to do mitzvos solely because that is what Hashem commanded.

Hashem tested our forefather Avraham 10 times. One test was when Hashem told Avraham to leave his country, his birthplace and his family. (Bereishis 12:1) **Rashi** says that Avraham's leaving would be for his pleasure and his benefit. Hashem

told Avraham that He would make him into a great nation, as well as giving him other blessings. **Sfas Emes** says (quoted in Iturei Torah by Aharon Yaakov Greenberg) that it is not difficult to follow Hashem's directive when Hashem promises great benefits for listening. So why was this considered one of Avraham's tests? **Sfas Emes** answers that the very fact that Avraham would benefit made the test difficult. How would Avraham respond? Would Avraham listen to Hashem, keeping in mind that this was also beneficial to him? Or would Avraham listen solely because he was following the will of Hashem? The **Torah** testifies, "Avram went as Hashem had told him..." (Bereishis 12:4). Avraham followed Hashem's command totally because Hashem had commanded him, without any thought whatsoever of the benefits that he would receive.

The **Talmud** (Kedushin 31A) brings Rabbi Chanina who says, "Greater is one who is commanded to do a mitzva and performs it than one who is not

"Hashem said to Avram, 'Go from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house, [and go] to the land that I will show you.'" (Bereishis 12:1)

commanded to do a mitzva and performs it." **Tosefos** explains that one who was commanded to do a mitzva will constantly be worried lest he not be able to perform the mitzva. Furthermore, since there was a specific command, the yetzer hara

will work harder to prevent him from performing the mitzva more so than had he not been commanded. Another explanation given by the **Tosefos HaRosh** is that one who is commanded to do a mitzva has the opportunity to perform it, solely because that is what Hashem decreed.

Rabbi Mordechai Gifter zt"l (Pirkei Torah) quotes **Rashi** in Pirkei Avos (5:3) who describes Avraham's first two tests from Hashem. The first was that he had to hide underground for 13 years from King Nimrod who wanted to kill him because of his belief in Hashem. The second test was when he was thrown into a burning furnace because of his beliefs. These were difficult tests. The Torah only tells us about Avraham's third test when Hashem told him to leave his home. Why doesn't the Torah mention Avraham's first two tests? **Rav Gifter** zt"l says that the ultimate level of mitzva performance is doing a mitzva solely because it is the will of Hashem, with no ulterior motive. As the pasuk says (Bereishis 26:5)

that Hashem offered Yitzchok a multitude of blessings “because Avraham listened to My voice, and minded My mandate, My commandments, My decrees and My teachings (see **Ohr HaChaim**).

A mitzva performed voluntarily displays a great desire to fulfill Hashem’s will. However, ultimately, it

is an act of self-motivation. Avraham’s first two tests did not involve fulfilling Hashem’s commands. Hashem did not tell him to be willing to sacrifice his life for his beliefs. Therefore, the Torah does not list them explicitly. The first test that was the fulfillment of a Divine directive was the one mentioned in our Parsha when Hashem told Avraham to leave home.

The ultimate level of mitzva performance is doing a mitzva solely because it is the will of Hashem, with no ulterior motive. Each of us has this ability within us.

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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