Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the *drasha* sponsors:

- Herman and Sherry Berlin, in memory of Alexander Breuer, Alexander ben Aharon Eliezer, on his 43rd *Yahrtzeit*. May his *neshama* have an *aliya*. And in honor of Aryeh and Chana Boehm's recent wedding!
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May the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha, hatzlacha,* and good health.

The ***Mishnah* in *Avos*** (5:3) teaches:

עֲשָׂרָה נִסְיוֹנוֹת נִתְנַסָּה אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם וְעָמַד בְּכֻלָּם, לְהוֹדִיעַ כַּמָּה חִבָּתוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ

Avraham Avinu was tested with ten tests, and he withstood them all, to make known how great was the love of Avraham Avinu.

The *mishnah* does not tell us what the ten tests were. ***Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*** gives one list. **Rashi**, in his commentary on *Avos*, gives another. The **Rambam** gives a third. But they all agree on one thing: the tenth and final test was the *Akeidah*. It was only after the *Akeidah* that Hashem said: עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי יְרֵא אֱלֹקִים אַתָּה, "Now I know that you are a God-fearing man." The final exam had been passed.

Rabbeinu Yonah, in his commentary on *Avos*, disagrees. He agrees that the *Akeidah* was a test. But he counts it as the ninth. And the tenth?

פירוש רבינו יונה על אבות ה:ג: הָעֲשִׂירִי קְבוּרַת שָׂרָה. שְׁנֶּאֱמַר לוֹ קוּם הִתְהַלֵּךְ בָּאָרֶץ לְאָרְכָּהּ וּלְרָחְבָּהּ כִּי לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה, וּכְשֶׁמֵּתָה אִשְׁתּוֹ לֹא מָצָא מָקוֹם לְקָבְרָהּ עַד שֶׁקָּנָאוֹ, וְלֹא הִרְהֵר

The tenth: the burial of Sarah. He had been told, 'Arise, walk the length and breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.' Yet when his wife died, he could not find a place to bury her until he bought one, and he did not question.

Rabbeinu Yonah does not stand alone in identifying this as a great test of Avraham Avinu. The *Gemara* (***Bava Basra* 15b–16a**) describes the Satan coming before Hashem:

אָמַר לְפָנָיו: רִבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, שַׁטְתִּי בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם וְלֹא מָצָאתִי כְּעַבְדְּךָ אַבְרָהָם, שֶׁאָמַרְתָּ לוֹ קוּם הִתְהַלֵּךְ בָּאָרֶץ לְאָרְכָּהּ וּלְרָחְבָּהּ כִּי לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה, וּבְשָׁעָה שֶׁבִּקֵּשׁ לִקְבּוֹר אֶת שָׂרָה לֹא מָצָא מָקוֹם לְקָבְרָהּ, וְלֹא הִרְהֵר אַחַר מִדּוֹתֶיךָ

Master of the Universe, I have wandered the whole world and found no one like Your servant Avraham. You told him, 'Walk the land, for I will give it to you,' and when he sought to bury Sarah he found no place to bury her, and he did not question Your ways.

Of everything the Satan could have said about Avraham, he does not mention the furnace, he does not mention leaving home, he does not even mention the *Akeidah*. He mentions the search for a burial plot for Sarah.

This is very difficult to understand. Can the purchase of a grave, however frustrating, compare to being told to offer your son on a *mizbe'ach*? A command that went against every fatherly instinct, against Avraham's own sense of ethics, and against Hashem's own promise that through Yitzchak his future would be built כי ביצחק יקרא בך זרע? And after the *Akeidah*, after עתה ידעתי כי ירא אלקים אתה, what more was there to prove?

I would like to suggest that Rabbeinu Yonah is not saying the burial of Sarah was the <u>hardest</u> test. He is saying it was the final test. The *Akeidah* was the greatest test. The burial of Sarah was <u>the</u>" test **<u>after</u>** <u>the test</u>." And that may be the most important lesson the Torah teaches about what a test really is and what life is all about.

Let us begin with a surprising detail . The Rambam's list of the ten tests begins with *Lech Lecha*, not with the furnace of Ur Kasdim. Avraham was thrown into a fire rather than deny Hashem, and Rashi, Rabbeinu Yonah, and Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer count it. The Rambam does not.

Rav Simcha Zissel Broide, the late Rosh Yeshiva of Chevron, explains (*שם דרך בראשית עמ' נ"ז*):
וְהַנִּרְאֶה בְּבֵאוּר הַדְּבָרִים, שֶׁבְּמְצִיאוּת חַיֵּי הָאָדָם יֶשְׁנָם שְׁנֵי סוּגֵי נִסְיוֹנוֹת: הָאֶחָד, נִסְיוֹנוֹת מִקְרִיִּים שֶׁבָּאִים עַל הָאָדָם וְעָלָיו לְהַחְלִיט אִם לַעֲבֹר עֲבֵרָה אוֹ לְהָרֵג עַל קִדּוּשׁ ה'. בְּנִסָּיוֹן זֶה בְּדֶרֶךְ כְּלָל טָבַע הָאָדָם לְהִתְלַבֵּשׁ בְּרוּחַ עֹז וּגְבוּרָה... אוּלָם יֵשׁ סוּג נוֹסָף שֶׁל נִסְיוֹנוֹת, נִסְיוֹנוֹת מַהֲלַךְ הַחַיִּים הַיּוֹם יוֹמִיִּים, שֶׁבָּהֶם הָאָדָם נִתָּקָל בְּקֻשָׁיִים בַּעֲבוֹדַת ה' עַל כָּל צַעַד וָשַׁעַל, יוֹם יוֹם. וּבְנִסְיוֹנוֹת מִסּוּג זֶה קָשֶׁה הַרְבֵּה יוֹתֵר לַעֲמֹד
Rav Simcha Zissel distinguishes between two kinds of tests. There are extraordinary moments of crisis, when a person summons remarkable courage and even mesirus nefesh. And there are the tests of everyday life, when difficulties in avodas Hashem confront us day after day. These, he argues, are often harder to withstand.
The furnace was a single dramatic moment of mesirus nefesh. But the tests of everyday life demand something different: consistency, without drama, without an audience, and often without a clear ending.

Consider what follows the Akeidah, a passage we read on Rosh Hashanah. Avraham comes down from the mountain. The angel has stopped his hand. Hashem has sworn an oath of blessing. Imagine the relief and exhaustion. Surely, after the greatest test of his life, there will be some rest. And then the Torah tells us something strange:

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיֻּגַּד לְאַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה יָלְדָה מִלְכָּה גַּם הִוא בָּנִים לְנָחוֹר אָחִיךָ

It was after these things that Avraham was told: Behold, Milkah too has borne children to Nachor your brother. (*Bereishis* 22:20). And the Torah lists them, one by one. Why do we need a family tree here, at the climax of the *Akeidah*? And why do we read it on Rosh Hashanah along with the *Akeidah* itself?

Rav Dov Aryeh Berzon records the answer of his rebbe, **Rav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik**. The *Akeidah* did not end when the angel called out אַל תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל הַנַּעַר. Its continuation is hidden in these closing *pesukim.* Picture Avraham and Yitzchak coming down from the mountain after 3 days of fear. And then, after the greatest test of their lives, the Torah tells us that news arrives from back home in Charan, among the relatives who never left, who never built altars, who never heard the voice of Hashem, that everything is fine. Children are being born. Life is peaceful and prosperous. No tests. No *akeidos*.

From where Avraham stood, it must have seemed that the people far from Hashem live quietly, while those who are willing to give their lives to Him live with trials and heartache. And Avraham and Yitzchak accept it and say nothing against the *Ribbono shel Olam*. This, says the Rav, is זוֹהִי הָעֲקֵדָה שֶׁאַחַר הָעֲקֵדָה, the *Akeidah* after the *Akeidah*.

And then comes the next news. Sarah is gone.

We can imagine Avraham hurrying home, perhaps longing to tell Sarah everything, to share the burden and the relief. And he arrives to find that she has died. The Torah tells us: וַיָּבֹא אַבְרָהָם לִסְפֹּד לְשָׂרָה וְלִבְכֹּתָהּ, Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her. The Torah does not hide his grief. Avraham's faith did not make him numb. He cried.

And then, in the middle of his grief, the man to whom Hashem promised the entire land must stand before the people of Cheis and say: גֵּר וְתוֹשָׁב אָנֹכִי עִמָּכֶם, "I am a stranger and a resident among you. Give me a burial plot, so that I may bury my dead." He must bow to them. He must negotiate with Ephron, who offers the field "for free" in public and then names a price of 400 shekels of silver, an enormous sum. And Avraham pays it, וַיִּשְׁקֹל אַבְרָהָם לְעֶפְרֹן אֶת הַכֶּסֶף, in full, at the merchant's rate.

He could have said: Enough. How much more do I have to go through? I left my home. I survived famine. I gave up Yishmael. I climbed Har HaMoriah. Don't I deserve a little rest? You promised me this land, and I have to buy a grave for my wife? וְלֹא הִרְהֵר. He did not question.

This is the first meaning of the test after the test. We often assume that after a great difficulty, we have earned a reward, an explanation, or at least some rest. But the challenges sometimes keep coming, and we face the next one already depleted from the last. Avraham teaches us that there is no retirement from being an eved Hashem. As long as we live, we serve.

But there is a second, deeper dimension to Rabbeinu Yonah's tenth test. There are two ways a person can fail the "test after the test." He can lose his faith because the challenges keep coming. Or he can lose his humility, or fail to reintegrate into everyday life, because he has reached such heights that ordinary people and ordinary responsibilities now seem beneath him. The first is a test of endurance. The second is a test of integration. Avraham passed both. He did not let suffering diminish his *emunah*, and he did not let spiritual greatness diminish his humanity.

Rav Zechariah Tubi, Rosh Kollel of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, points out that after the Akeidah, Avraham faced another challenge: how does someone who stood on Har HaMoriah, who heard an angel call his name, return to negotiating with Ephron over the price of a field?

The *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 33b) tells the story of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar, who hid from the Romans in a cave for 12 years, learning Torah day and night. When they finally emerged, they saw people plowing and planting, and Rabbi Shimon exclaimed: מַנִּיחִין חַיֵּי עוֹלָם וְעוֹסְקִין בְּחַיֵּי שָׁעָה, "They abandon eternal life and busy themselves with temporary life!" Wherever they looked, the place was consumed by fire. And a *bas kol* rang out: לְהַחֲרִיב עוֹלָמִי יְצָאתֶם? "Have you come out to destroy My world? Go back to your cave!" They returned for another 12 months. And one might ask: If 12 years of pure Torah made them unable to live in the world, how would more Torah help? I heard an answer in the name of Rav Ruderman: The highest levels of Torah do not teach a person to flee the world. They teach him to understand it, to navigate it, and to elevate it. The first 12 years taught them how to rise. The last year taught them how to come back down.

Look at the *pasuk* right after the *Akeidah*: וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם אֶל נְעָרָיו וַיָּקֻמוּ וַיֵּלְכוּ יַחְדָּו אֶל בְּאֵר שָׁבַע
"Avraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Be'er Sheva." (*Bereishis* 22:19)

Rav Tubi suggests a beautiful reading: וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם אֶל נְעָרָיו, not that Avraham returned to his young men, but that Avraham returned to his youthfulness. After the greatest achievement of his life, he returned to the humility of a beginner. He did not walk down the mountain as someone who had arrived. He walked down as someone ready to start again.

That is true greatness. And that is why he could stand before the people of Cheis, in grief and frustration, and conduct himself so that they said to him: נָשִׂיא אֱלֹקִים אַתָּה בְּתוֹכֵנוּ, "You are a prince of God among us." The *kiddush Hashem* of the *Akeidah* happened on a mountain, with no one watching. The *kiddush Hashem* of the burial happened in the marketplace, in front of everyone.

Rav Tubi brings a remarkable story to illustrate this point. The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 18a) tells us that Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon, who defied Rome by publicly teaching Torah and would ultimately be burned alive with a Sefer Torah, visited the ailing Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma. And Rabbi Chanina asked his friend a question: מָה אֲנִי לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא? "What about me? Will I merit the World to Come?" Rabbi Yosi answered with a question of his own: כְּלוּם מַעֲשֶׂה בָּא לְיָדֶךָ? "Has any deed come into your hands?" Think about who is asking: a man risking his life every day to teach Torah, soon to die *al kiddush Hashem*. And when asked for a deed, he answers: מָעוֹת פּוּרִים נִתְחַלְּפוּ לִי בִּמְעוֹת צְדָקָה, וְחִלַּקְתִּים לַעֲנִיִּים. "My Purim money once got mixed up with *tzedakah* money, and I gave all of it to the poor." And Rabbi Yosi answered: אִם כֵּן, מֵחֶלְקִי יְהִי חֶלְקֵךְ. "If so, may my portion be like your portion."
Not the public Torah teaching. Not the defiance of Rome. A small mix-up of money, in which, rather than risk keeping a single coin of *tzedakah*, he quietly gave all of it, his own included, to the poor.

That is the test of the burial of Sarah. The great moments matter. But the small moments reveal whether that greatness has truly become part of who we are.

We find the same idea on the holiest day of the year. On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol performed the most demanding *avodah* in the Torah. Every movement was scripted. Every change of clothing, every immersion, every *korban*. He entered the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, the holiest place in the world, on the holiest day of the year. And then the ***Mishnah* (*Yoma* 7:4)** tells us how the day ended: וּמְלַוִּין אוֹתוֹ עַד בֵּיתוֹ, וְיוֹם טוֹב הָיָה עוֹשֶׂה לְאוֹהֲבָיו בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁיָּצָא בְשָׁלוֹם מִן הַקֹּדֶשׁ *"They accompany him to his home, and he would make a celebration for his friends when he emerged safely from the Sanctuary."*

Why does the *mishnah* need to tell us this? And why does the Rambam, in his strictly halachic account of the avodah of Yom Kippur, include it as the final step: וְיוֹצֵא לְבֵיתוֹ וְכָל הָעָם מְלַוִּין אוֹתוֹ עַד בֵּיתוֹ?

The **Lubavitcher Rebbe** suggests that going home was not merely the end of the *avodah*. It was part of the *avodah*. There is a time to separate from the world, to enter the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, to reach exalted heights. But the purpose of those heights is to bring them home. The *Kohen Gadol's* final service on Yom Kippur was to walk back into his house, into his family and his community, and carry the *kedushah* of the *Kodesh HaKodashim* with him.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook put the principle sharply in his *Ein Ayah* (*Berachos* 1:54):
יְסוֹד עֲבוֹדַת ה' עַל פִּי הַתּוֹרָה, הוּא לְהַשְׁרִישׁ שֶׁכָּל דַּרְכֵי הַחַיִּים צְרִיכִים לִהְיוֹת הוֹלְכִים עַל פִּי רְצוֹנוֹ יִתְבָּרַךְ. וּמִי שֶׁחוֹשֵׁב שֶׁעֲבוֹדַת ה' נִשְׁלֶמֶת בְּפָעֳלוֹת פְּרָטִיּוֹת, וּמַקְצֶה לָהֶן מֵעִתּוֹתָיו וְשׁוּב אֵין ה' בִּלְבָבוֹ, הוּא הוֹרֵס כָּל בִּנְיֵנֵי הַתּוֹרָה
"The foundation of avodas Hashem according to the Torah is to implant the understanding that all the ways of life must follow His will. Whoever thinks that avodas Hashem is completed through particular acts, to which he allots some of his time, and afterward Hashem is no longer in his heart, destroys the entire edifice of the Torah."

There is a particularly timely application of this idea in the month of Marcheshvan which we are completing. We come through Tishrei. For an entire month we lived, *figurativey*, on the mountain. We heard the *shofar.* We stood before Hashem on Yom Kippur, compared to *malachim*. We sat in the *sukkah*. We danced with the Torah.

And then Tishrei ended, and we entered Marcheshvan: a month with no Yom Tov, no special *mitzvah*, no built-in inspiration. We went back to work, back to school, back to traffic and deadlines and the ordinary frustrations of life. The *Akeidah* is Tishrei. The burial of Sarah is Marcheshvan. It is relatively easy to feel close to Hashem at *Neilah*, surrounded by a whole *kehillah*, with the gates of Heaven about to close. The question is: What happens on an ordinary Tuesday morning. When we are tired. When a colleague is difficult. When something in our lives goes wrong, and we feel we have already been through enough. When we are dealing with our own Ephron. A person can cry at *Neilah* and still be short with his family the next morning. A person can dance with the Torah on *Simchas Torah* and still struggle to find 20 minutes to learn on a Wednesday night. The question is never only whether we were inspired. The question is whether the inspiration changed us.

An inspiring experience makes us feel different for a moment. A transformed person lives differently afterward. This is what made Avraham the *av hamon goyim*. He was not a remote mystic on a mountaintop. He welcomed strangers, taught ordinary people about Hashem, and conducted himself with such dignity that even the people of Cheis called him a prince of God. Avraham Avinu climbed *Har HaMoriah* and showed how high a human being can rise. Then he came down, buried his wife, and showed how a human being must live. The *Akeidah* was his greatest test. But the burial of Sarah was his final test. Because the ultimate measure of spiritual greatness is not how high we climb. It is how much of the mountain experience we bring home. May we learn from Avraham Avinu to pass our own tests, the great ones and especially the small ones. May we find the strength to face the "test after the test," and may we merit to see the day when the world recognizes Hashem's Name, *bimheirah v'yameinu.*