

Midrash class 4

Midrashim on Genesis 22

Midrash Rabbah, Chapter LV

AFTER THESE THINGS, G-D TESTED (Nissah) ABRAHAM (Gen 22:1) It is written: YOU HAVE GIVEN A BANNER (Nes) TO THOSE THAT FEAR YOU, THAT IT MAY BE DISPLAYED (le-hitnos) BECAUSE OF THE TRUTH. (Psalms 60:6): this means, trial upon trial, greatness after greatness, in order to try them in the world and exalt them in the world like a ship's flag. And what is it's purpose? BECAUSE OF THE TRUTH- in order that the equity of G-d's justice may be verified in the world. Thus, if one says, "Whoever He wants to make rich, He makes rich. To make poor, He makes poor. Whoever he wants to, He makes a king; when He wanted to, he made Abraham wealthy, and when He wanted to, He made him a king." You can answer him, saying "Can you do what Abraham did? Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born unto him, and yet after all this pain it was said to him, TAKE NOW YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON. (Gen 22:2), yet he did not refuse. Therefore 'YOU HAVE GIVEN A BANNER TO THOSE THAT FEAR YOU, THAT IT MAY BE DISPLAYED;' so it is written, that GOD TESTED ABRAHAM.

THE LORD TESTS THE RIGHTEOUS etc. (Psalms 11:5). R. Jonathan said: A potter does not examine defective pots, because he cannot give them a single blow without breaking them. What does he examine? Only the strong vessels, for he will not break them even with many blows. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, doesn't test the wicked but rather the righteous, as it says THE LORD TESTS THE RIGHTEOUS...

AFTER (achar) THESE THINGS- misgivings (hirschur) were expressed on that occasion. Who had misgivings? Abraham. He said to himself 'I have rejoiced and made all others rejoice, yet I did not set aside a single bull or ram for the Holy One, blessed be He.' G-d said to him 'I know that even if you were commanded to offer your only son to Me, you would not refuse...

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Isaac and Ishmael were arguing. [Ishmael] argued 'I am more beloved than you, because I was circumcised at the age of thirteen.' [Isaac] answered 'I am more beloved than you, because I was circumcised at eight days.' Ishmael said to him 'I am more beloved because I could have protested, yet did not.' At that moment Isaac said 'O that G-d would appear to me and tell me to cut off one of my limbs! Then I would not refuse!' G-d said 'Even if I told you to sacrifice yourself, you will not refuse.'