

Parsha Ponders

Tazria / HaChodesh | March 30, 2022 | 27 Adar II 5782

The mixed blessing of familiarization¹

ובבא עם-הארץ לפני יקוק במועדים הבא דרך-שער צפון להשתחות יצא דרך-שער נגב והבא דרך-שער נגב יצא דרך-שער צפונה לא ישוב דרך השער אשר-בא בו כי נכחו יצא

When the people would come before Hashem for the Festivals, one who came through the North Gate to prostrate should exit through the South Gate, and one who came through the South Gate should exit through the North gate. A person shouldn't return through the gate that they had come through, but should exit through the opposite one²

Similar to last week, *parshas Parah*, where we read a special Torah reading and *haftarah*, the same is true for this week, known as *parshas HaChodesh*. On it we recite verses connected to the Passover offering, in anticipation for the upcoming Festival of Pesach. The special *haftarah* follows a similar theme, and addresses various laws and customs associated with the Temple. One of the practices described is that visitors to the Temple were instructed to enter through one gate, and to leave through a different one. They were not to leave through the same gate they had entered from. Why should this be? What can we learn from this practice?

Regarding the famous episode known as “The *Akeidah*”, or the Binding of Isaac, we find a tremendous difference between Avraham and Sarah. Avraham overcame his compassionate nature and submitted his will to that of Hashem's, and proceeded to try to bring his son Yitzchak as an offering. Although Hashem ended up stopping Avraham from completing the task, he had successfully passed the test. Sarah, on the other hand, who we are told³ was greater in prophecy than Avraham, when she heard that her son had almost been slaughtered, suddenly perished. She died from shock⁴. Why couldn't she handle this test? Why was it only Avraham who passed with flying colors?

Rashi gives us a clue⁵. When Hashem first told Avraham to bring Yitzchak as an offering, he didn't cut to the chase. He was very wordy. He told Avraham to take his son, his only son, the one he loves, Yitzchak. Why didn't he just say, “take Yitzchak”? Rashi tells us that it was to avoid Avraham becoming overcome with shock. Imagine, out of nowhere, Hashem tells Avraham to kill his beloved son? By easing him into the idea, Avraham became used to the concept. Once it became more familiar, he was able to accept the challenge. Sarah unfortunately wasn't given this treatment. She was informed right away about what happened, and the shock killed her. We see the power of familiarization, and the difference it makes⁶.

¹ Based on [Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz's Sichos Mussar § 11](#)

² [Ezekiel 46:9](#)

³ [Shemos Rabbah 1:1](#), brought by [Rashi](#) to [Genesis 21:12](#)

⁴ [Rashi](#) to [Genesis 23:2](#). He says that she heard through an announcement of some sort, and died. [Bereishis Rabbah](#) says 58:5 just says that she died from “the pain of the *Akeidah*”. It doesn't specify how she found out, or what she even heard. [Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer](#) Chapter 32 says that the Angel Samael (and in the Zichron Aharon ed. it says some versions say the Satan) told Sarah that her husband had actually brought Yitzchak as an offering, and she died. [Midrash Tanchuma Vayeira § 23](#) says that the Satan, appearing as Yitzchak, was describing the *Akeidah* to Sarah, and before he finished explaining how Hashem stopped Avraham from going through with it, she died. [Targum “Yonasan” to Genesis 22:20](#) simply says the Satan told Sarah that Avraham brought Yitzchak as an offering and she died. [Vayikra Rabbah 20:2](#) says that Yitzchak told her what happened and she died, although perhaps it's the same intent as [Midrash Tanchuma](#)

⁵ [Rashi](#) to [Genesis 22:2](#), quoting [Bereishis Rabbah 55:7](#)

⁶ [Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz](#) brings a similar example of this from a story that appears in [Kesubos 62b](#)

The ability to adapt, to acclimatize, is deeply ingrained into the human psyche. It gives us the ability to withstand the most terrible situations. We see so many Holocaust survivors, and we're astounded at the trials and tribulations they went through. The horrible suffering. We can't fathom how they had the strength to overcome these challenges. The only explanation is that Hashem gave them the inner strength by making everything in the Holocaust happen in stages. Each stage, as things got worse and worse, allowed them the chance to adapt. Even though things became seemingly too hard to bear, against all odds, they survived.

The problem is the ability to familiarize can be dangerous as well. A person could receive an instant dose of tremendous inspiration. They made a decision to change their life for the better, and improve their ways. However, over time, little by little, that inspiration fades away. Life goes back to normal, and they get used to the way they've been all this time⁷. If a person feels inspired, they shouldn't let those feelings go to waste. If they right away commit to take action, Hashem will bless them that they'll bring this inspiration into fruition⁸.

This danger is alluded to in our verse in this week's *haftarah*⁹. Hashem was particular that we not pass through the same Temple gate twice. Why is that? If we were to see the same gate twice, it might become too familiar. It might start appearing to us like no different than a gate to our house. The walls of the Temple might become in our eyes like the walls of our house. When a person would first come to the Temple, they would become filled with a tremendous sense of awe and inspiration. Hashem didn't want that to fade in any way, so He commanded we leave through a different gate, lest the structure become too familiar.

According to this, every servant of Hashem has to be on guard at all times. Inspiration comes and goes. It's very easy for it to fade away. We have to resist the natural tendency to become acclimatized. Things that were once special very quickly become the norm. At the very least, an awareness of the issue should be the first step towards a successful resistance to nature. May Hashem give us the strength we need to maintain our inspiration, and give us the opportunity to bring it into fruition.

Good Shabbos

⁷ See the rest of Sichos Mussar, where he uses this idea to explain why Palti ben Laish stuck a sword between him and Dovid's wife Michal (Sanhedrin 19b). He knew the marriage that King Shaul had arranged between himself and her was invalid, as she was still married to Dovid. Since they had to live together in the same house, he stuck a sword between them, as a constant reminder not to become overly familiar with her

⁸ See Tzav VeZiruz § 6 by the Piasetzna Rebbe, Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira yk"d, who says something similar

⁹ HaChossid Ya'avetz to Avos 1:4