

## The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

### *Lech L'cha*

In Pirkei Avot (5:3), we read how Avraham had to endure 10 tests (nis'yonot) and stood up to them all. The reason: "to tell us how great was the love of Avraham Avinu for Gd." The obvious question, of course, is why HaShem subjected Avraham to these trials in the first place?

Rambam, in fascinating and arresting detail (Hilchot Avoda Zara 1:1), narrates how Avraham, at age 40, recognized and accepted the reality of one Gd. He then struggled and fought to teach and disseminate this belief throughout the then civilized world. He was mocked and ridiculed, scorned and threatened, but persevered nonetheless until, at age 75, HaShem finally speaks to him, commanding him to leave his homeland (12:1). Clearly, Avraham had already proven himself to be an intrepid defender of the faith and a courageous heroic figure. Why, then, did he need to be tested again and again?

To this difficulty, there have been two classic responses. Rambam, in his Moreh Nevuchim (3:24) opines that the purpose of the tests was to demonstrate to the world why HaShem chose Avraham to be the father of a special and unique People. In other words, the 10 ordeals were not meant so much for Avraham's sake, but rather to attest and

substantiate for all of posterity Avraham's unquestioning faith and absolute loyalty to Gd.

Ramban takes a different approach (B'reishit 22:1). He concludes that "all the trials in the Torah are for the benefit of the person tried." Put differently, HaShem knew of Avraham's profound reverence and awe of the Divine Master of the cosmos only as a potential, latent quality. With each hardship he overcame, Avraham's actualized that great potential and advanced in his singularly chosen stature as Gd's beloved - Avraham O'havi (Yishayahu 41:8).

Both of these explanations of nisayon, the reality of the ordeal, have something very important to teach us. In every life, there is nisayon. Everyone is challenged by adversity, by unforeseen troubling events. Why? True, at times, as the Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 101a), these sufferings come to purge us of our sins in This World so that we may enjoy a greater measure of reward in the World to Come. But that may not at all be the only explanation.

When we encounter difficult times, when we are thrown into a sea of painful experiences and cannot fathom the reason behind them, could it be that - as per Rambam - we are being tested so that others - loved ones and friends - may learn from how we respond to the ordeal something vital about courage and grit, about human dignity and faith?

Or, could it be - as per Ramban - that HaShem is simply not through with us yet and persists in afflicting us with nisayon to address the untapped potential of goodness and righteousness that we have yet to realize?

I'm sure we know of people who went through a contentious divorce and emerged the better for it, a person who in the wake of a menacing illness experienced a life transformation. Or the bereaved parents of a child who then went on to establish a charitable institution to benefit those less fortunate. When we read ("Emunah with Love") how a Henny Machlis a"h, reacted when she discovered she had terminal cancer, her story becomes a veritable inspiration for all those who struggle with life's sudden and bewildering tragic downturns.

We all pray for a life of good health and happiness, one free of distress and agony, but we also know that the sun doesn't always shine and into every life "some rain must fall". And when those times - may they be few and far between - do come, may HaShem give us the strength and fortitude not only to endure but to grow and teach by example what it means to be an eved HaShem, a beloved servant of Gd.