Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי״ד
Shagalov
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ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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Dedicated by
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by
Rabbi Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann, Ph.D

Vayeira

Mesirus Nefesh Brings Moshiach

What is mesirus nefesh – self-sacrifice? How does the Akeidah, the binding of Isaac, enable all Jews to have mesirus nefesh? As the Akeidah revealed G-dliness, so the mesirus nefesh of the Jewish people reveals Moshiach.

Of the many events in the Torah that have a clear connection to Moshiach, surely the *Akeidah*, the binding of Isaac, is one of the most powerful. Indeed, the Sages mention several aspects of the *Akeidah* that foreshadow the Redemption. For example, the Great Shofar that signals the coming of Moshiach will be from the ram that was sacrificed in Isaac's stead.

The binding of Isaac was also the tenth and final test of Abraham. Since these days are also the "final test" before the coming of Moshiach, the practical lessons of the *Akeidah* become even more important. Let's look at one such lesson, concerning *mesirus nefesh* – self-sacrifice. According to the Rebbe, our generation will greet Moshiach because this generation has exhibited the greatest *mesirus nefesh* of any generation. That being the case, it's important to understand what defines true *mesirus nefesh*, and how, through the *Akeidah*, Abraham bequeathed it to his descendants, the Jewish people.

When G-d commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, He uses the unusual phrase, "*Koch na*," "Take now." The word "na" literally means a request, equivalent in many ways to "please." "*Koch na*" is a Divine imperative, but it is also an appeal, a solicitation. The Talmud reconciles the apparent contradiction by explaining the intent of the phrase. G-d tells Abraham, in effect, that "you

withstood many trials; endure for Me this test so that they will not say there was no reality in the former ones."

This itself requires explanation. If Abraham had not reached the level of *mesirus nefesh* – self-sacrifice – required by the *Akeidah*, would that mean his successful triumph over the first nine tests had no substance or value? How can the rabbis claim that an inability to overcome the final and most difficult trial proves the effort expended and self-sacrifice exhibited in the first nine have neither effect nor endurance? Actually, we can ask an even stronger question: Why is the sacrifice of Isaac considered the paradigm of self-sacrifice when we have the example of many righteous and holy people throughout the ages who willingly gave up their lives to sanctify the name of G-d? Not only that, but G-d spoke to Abraham directly, an "advantage" that the martyrs throughout the ages did not have.

Of course, there is a critical difference between Abraham and all the righteous martyrs who followed him: Abraham was the first person to have *mesirus nefesh*. He was the first Jew to accept upon himself the trials and hardships – whether physical, emotional or spiritual – necessary to sanctify G-d's name. "All beginnings are difficult." Starting is the hardest part of any endeavor. Being able to put aside one's wants, needs, desires, feelings – being able to give up one's very self to bring G-dliness into the world – this was impossible before Abraham. By withstanding the test and fulfilling G-d's request to "*koch na*" – "take now Isaac," Abraham opened the channel of *mesirus nefesh*, thereby drawing into this world the capacity for self-sacrifice for G-dliness. The righteous and the martyrs who followed Abraham's footsteps had the comparatively easier task of "simply" bringing the potential into the actual.

This being the case, we have to look at the first test of Abraham as well. For then he also exhibited *mesirus nefesh*. In Ur Kasdim, the city of his birth, Abraham was thrown into a fiery furnace for

attempting to annihilate idolatry and publicize the existence of G-d. In fact, the first test seems to be the harder of the two, since at the *Akeidah* G-d spoke directly to Abraham and told him to sacrifice Isaac, while Abraham had received no such Divine imperative at Ur Kasdim. In Ur Kasdim, Abraham had come to the realization of G-d's existence on his own; he had become aware of G-d through reason. Only later did he have a direct experience of G-d, when the Almighty told him to leave his home and go to the land of Israel. Why, then, is there an emphasis on the self-sacrifice at the time of the *Akeidah* – so much so that without it, everything Abraham endured previously would not be real?

The answer lies in the uniqueness of *mesirus nefesh*, simply defined as nullification of one's ego and one's existence. One's actions, one's very being is directed not toward self-gratification or self-satisfaction, but toward fulfilling the Divine directive. However, human beings are created such that they inherently possess an ego and sense of their own existence. Even generous actions, altruistic deeds, Acts of Lovingkindness or dedication need to be justified. There must be a reason, even if that reason is no more than the feeling of having done what's right, good or noble. True *mesirus nefesh* cannot be attained on one's own. Hence the need for Abraham to "open the channel" and bring real self-sacrifice into the world.

Not every "self-sacrifice" is a true *mesirus nefesh*, a nullification of one's ego, of one's self-importance, of one's very sense of being. There is a level of self-sacrifice available to anyone, regardless of who they are. One can calculate, as it were, the result of the sacrifice and come to the logical conclusion that one benefits more, at least spiritually, by sacrificing one's life. This rational approach to self-sacrifice, this sense that there is at least some compensation, is expressed by the phrase, "without x, life is not worth living." X in this case may be anything which outweighs life; but determining exactly what is worth more requires some analysis and reason.

A true *mesirus nefesh* occurs without any calculation. One's self, the very being and essence, is dedicated to G-d, without any prior evaluation or sudden inspiration. The only consideration, the only thought, is what does G-d want and demand of me at this moment.

In this way, the *Akeidah* was the first instance of true *mesirus nefesh*. Only Abraham and Isaac were involved. The sacrifice and test involved no public declaration of G-d's rulership or open demonstration of G-d's presence. G-d's request and desire had no logical purpose; indeed, in many ways it contradicted common sense and reason, apparently negating Abraham's life mission. By "passing the test," so to speak, Abraham nullified his self-awareness and ego. All that existed was G-d's Will.

What is the practical effect and lesson for our times? Since Abraham "opened the channel," every Jew is capable of *mesirus nefesh*. (Indeed, as the Rebbe has remarked, our generation has seen the greatest examples of it.) Every Jew can conquer his inclinations, nullify his desires and dedicate himself or herself to fulfilling G-d's Will. Every Jew can reach the stage and level of "knowing G-d" – not on an intellectual or rational basis, but as an overwhelming experience, as the prophet says, "the whole world will be filled with knowledge of G-d, as the waters cover the ocean bed." Just as Abraham reached a level where the sum total of his existence was awareness of G-dliness and fulfillment of G-d's Will, so too, every Jew is capable of this level of self-sacrifice. And this is the "Moshiach" level of existence. And just as Abraham gave a retroactive reality to his previous tests through his self-sacrifice at the *Akeidah*, so we, by following in Abraham's path, can reveal the reality of Moshiach.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 20, pp. 73-78)

BESURAS HAGEULO
The Announcement Of The Redemption

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The accomplishment of the Rebbe Rashab[1] in founding the Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim is explained in the well-known discourse[2] "All Who Go Out to the Wars of House of David." The students of the Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim are the "soldiers of the House of David" who fight the wars of the House of David against those "who revile the footsteps of your anointed."[3] In the words of the Rambam in his *Laws of Kings and their Wars and the King Moshiach*:[4] "He [Moshiach] will fight the wars of G-d" until he is "victorious."[5] [That Moshiach will be victorious] is also indicated by what follows after "who revile the footsteps of your anointed," in the words "Blessed is the L-rd forever **Amen and Amen**."[6] For "Amen" (and all the more so when Amen is repeated) testifies to victory in war,[7] through which the coming and revelation of Dovid, Melech HaMoshiach will be accomplished in actual reality.

Our generation, the third generation from the Rebbe Rashab and his students, the soldiers of the House of David, will be witnesses to the **conclusion and completion** of their Divine service to bring the

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1. *[The founder of the Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim was the Rebbe Rashab, father of the Previous Rebbe and the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe. Translator's note.]*

2. The discourse of Simchas Torah 5661 - *Likkutei Dibburim* vol. 4, 787b and following. *Sefer HaSichos* 5702 end of p. 141 and following.

3. *Tehillim* 89:52. *[The word for "anointed" in Hebrew is "Moshiach." Thus this verse is seen as a reference to the king Moshiach, descendent of King David, who will bring Redemption. Translator's note.]*

4. End of chapter 11.

5. *[Clearly Moshiach will not fight the wars all by himself. Rather, as the king, he will direct his soldiers, the students of the Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim, in battle. This is the connection between the passage from the Rambam and the directive given at the founding of the yeshiva. Translator's note.]*

6. Ibid, 53.

7. See *Nazir* at the end. See there for cross references.

Redemption in actual reality through Dovid, Melech HaMoshiach. In the words of my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation, while he was alive in this world, all the Divine service **has already been concluded and completed**, and we stand prepared to greet Dovid, Melech HaMoshiach. This is all the more so the case, since the Divine service has continued in a manner of "the L-rd has give you a heart to understand and eyes to see and ears to hear."[8]

We now find ourselves in the 90th year[9] - which follows the conclusion of the 89th year, which is connected with the 89th Psalm that concludes "who revile the footsteps of your anointed" and "Blessed is the L-rd forever amen and amen." This refers to a complete victory in the wars of the House of Dovid. [This puts us] at the beginning of the period connected with the 90th Psalm, which concludes and ends with "May the pleasantness of the L-rd our G-d be upon us... and the work of our hands **establish it**." This refers to the future Beis HaMikdash[10] , "The sanctuary, O L-rd, which Your hands have established."[11]

* * *

Furthermore, and this is the main point:

It was explained above, that Moshiach exists in the spark of Moshiach (the aspect of Yechida[12]) within each and every Jew. In addition Moshiach also exists in the literal sense (the general Yechida). For it is known that "in every generation an individual from the descendants of Yehudah is born who is qualified to be the

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8. Tavo 29:3.

9. *[The letter equivalent for the number 90 is "Tzadik." The word "Tzadik" has two meanings: the name of a letter and a righteous person. This discourse was delivered in the Rebbe's 90th year. Translator's note.]*

10. *Midrash Tehillim* on the verse.

11. *Beshallach* 15:17.

12. *[Yechida literally means singular or singularity. It is the part of the soul that is directly connected with and thus an actual part of G-d above. Translator's note.]*

Moshiach for Israel,"[13] and that "one who is worthy because of his righteousness to be the Redeemer, and when the time arrives, G-d will reveal it to him and will send him, etc."[14] And if it were not for the undesirable things that got mixed in, which delayed and obstructed, he would have been revealed and come in actual reality.

And according to the pronouncement of my sainted father-in-law , the leader of our generation, the Moshiach[15] of our generation, all matters of Divine service have already been concluded and completed, and we stand ready to greet our righteous Moshiach. We are therefore at a time when all obstacles and hindrances have been nullified. Since this is so, there is now not just **the existence** of Moshiach, but also **the revelation** of Moshiach. Now we need only **greet** our righteous Moshiach in actual reality!

…With this in mind, every activity must be penetrated with the subject of Moshiach and Redemption, including one's eating and drinking. For the longing for the meal of Livyason, Shor HaBor and Yayin Meshumar[16] is so great that even **after** the meal one remains hungry for it. Consequently, he will complain to G-d that he cannot fulfill the commandment of "And you shall eat **and you shall be satisfied** and you shall bless"[17] **in earnest** until G-d seats us at His table for the feast of the world to come.

(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Vayeira, 18 Mar-Chesvhan 5752)

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13. The commentary of the Bartenura on Megillas Rus.

14. See *Sha'alos v'Teshuvos Chasam Sofer Choshen Mishpat* (vol. 6) at the end (section 98). And see *S'dei Chemed*, Peas HaSadeh, entry Aleph, klal 70. And in other places.

15. The general Yechida, which shines through and is revealed in the soul of the leader of the generation and therefore includes all the souls of the Jewish people in that generation (See the discourse title "Padeh V'Shalom" in Shaarei Teshuva of the Mitteler Rebbe, chapter 12).

16. *[Levyaton is the great fish, Shor HaBor the great ox and Yayin Meshumar the aged wine that will feed the righteous in the era of Moshiach. Translator's note.]*

17. *Eikev* 8:10.

In loving memory of a dear freind
Reb **Yosef Yisroel** ben Reb **Sholom** ע״ה **Rosner**
Passed away on 7 Menachem-Av, 5777
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

*

Dedicated by his friends
Mr. & Mrs. **Gershon** and **Leah** שיחיו **Wolf**
Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחיו **Shagalov**

* * *

In loving memory of a dear freind
Reb **Pesach Betzalel** ben Reb **Leib** ע״ה **Fleischman**
Passed away on 3 Elul, 5784
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

*

Dedicated by his friend
Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחיו **Shagalov**

In loving memory of our dear parents
Mr. **Tzvi Hirsh** ben Reb **Yitzchok** ע"ה **Greenberg**
Passed away on 19 Elul, 5771
Mrs. **Chava** bas Reb **Chaim** ע"ה **Greenberg**
Passed away on 25 Mar-Cheshvan, 5771
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.
*
Dedicated by their children שיחיו
* * *
In loving memory of our dear mother in law & mother
Mrs. **Rivkah (Rozanne)** bas Reb **Chaim** ע"ה **Stekler**
Passed away on 13 Kislev, 5786
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.
*
Dedicated by her son-in-law and daughter
Mr. & Mrs. **Yehuda (Jerry)** and **Avigail (Allison)** שיחיו **Elfassy**

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