LEKH LEKHA: How does God reward righteous people?

Our sages have indicated that Abraham, our first patriarch, underwent 10 “nisiyonot,” trials or life experiences. Each of these experiences should be seen as a life lesson or learning that teaches Abraham how to relate to God. The learning is cumulative and progressive: What is learned in the previous trial is necessary to move on to the next level and overcome the next test. Let’s remember how we got here. In his childhood, Abraham discovers the existence of a Creator on his own. After many years, the Creator reveals Himself to Abraham. Abraham identifies God’s voice, validates it, and obeys the difficult command: to leave everything behind, go to a distant land, and start anew. Abraham passes the first test of loyalty and begins his journey. Abraham learns that God created the world, cares about human beings, and guides them.

WHEN THE DIVINE PROMISE IS NOT FULFILLED

The life of a man of faith, who believes in God and follows His voice, is not necessarily easier than that of a man without faith; it is full of challenges and difficulties! Let’s remember that when HaShem commands Abraham to go to the land of Canaan, He promises to bless him with prosperity and abundance. Abraham might have imagined that this promise would be fulfilled immediately. Perhaps he thought that upon arriving in Canaan, dozens of camels laden with wealth and treasures would be waiting for him, like a story from the “One Thousand and One Nights.” But to his surprise, Abraham did not find any riches in Canaan. On the contrary, shortly after his arrival, when autumn came, rain did not appear, and a national drought was declared.

NEITHER LOGIC NOR EXPLANATIONS

We should realize the nature of the problematic “trial” to which Abraham is subjected: God ordered Abraham to leave his prosperous land and promised him blessings and riches in the

new land. But when Abraham arrives in Canaan, a drought is declared, and now he has to leave. What must have gone through Abraham's mind at that moment? Didn't he have doubts about God's powers and might or credibility?

And something even more complicated: what went through the mind of Sara , his wife? Perhaps they argued, and Sara blamed Abraham for taking her from her comfort zone with promises of greatness only to lead her to poverty… Or perhaps it was the other way around: maybe Sara encouraged Abraham to continue and not give up. The text does not reveal these details. But we always see them together.

To make this situation even more challenging, when Abraham needed it most, the Divine Voice did not reveal itself again to explain what was happening or what he should do. In these circumstances, any other individual, I imagine, would have ended his adventure and returned home to his hometown Ur or to Haran, where his family now lives.

But instead of giving up, Abraham clings to his conviction that God knows what He is doing. This is a very high level of "Emuna," trust between man and his Creator. Abraham puts into practice one of the essential elements of the Jewish faith: patience and decides to continue trusting in the Divine Promise despite adversity. With this in mind, Abraham decides to go down to Egypt and get food until the drought ends and then return to the promised land. It's as if Abraham decides to fulfill his part even though, for now, God is not fulfilling His part… (this idea, the unconditional and unilateral loyalty of the Jewish people to God, is developed with all its depth and beauty in the beautiful Psalm 44 of Tehilim).

THE REVOLUTION OF ABRAHAM

From the Divine perspective, "Abraham is under observation."

Keep in mind that this is the first time such an event is recorded in the Tora. That is, a man faithfully follows the Divine command – in this case, to abandon his past and settle in the land of Israel – and persists in his loyalty to God despite suffering for doing what God asked him to do. We, the

readers, know that the story will have a happy ending and that the promise God made to Abraham will eventually be fulfilled. But Abraham doesn't know that! And no one had instructed him on how to react when bad things happen to good people. Abraham's situation challenges logic and common sense: God is Almighty. Why doesn't He immediately reward those who obey Him? Abraham, in a way, gives up Divine reward. In the idolatrous world, when a "god" does not grant the individual who serves it the expected results, they simply replace it with another god more powerful and effective. Within that cultural context, it is impressive and absolutely revolutionary that Abraham decides not to abandon God, to trust His word, and to proceed.

Abraham's behavior teaches his descendants that the rewards God grants to a righteous man are neither guaranteed nor immediate. Abraham is learning that the relationship with God must be different. If I only obey God to be rewarded, then I must abandon God when I don't get what I expect. The key to the survival of the Jewish people is their unconditional loyalty to God, both collectively and individually.

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Three thousand years later, Maimonides will explain that from Abraham, we learn to serve God unconditionally: neither out of fear of punishment nor for convenience but out of love for God. We learned from Abraham to follow God even when we suffer for being Jews: that is, for being loyal to Him and His commandments. Abraham's loyalty—love— toward God is unconditional. His relationship with God does not depend on material reward. For Abraham, the greatest reward is his relationship with God, in good times and bad times.