

RCA Chomer Lidrush Lech Lecha 5787

Content through Every Test (Guest Post – R. Steven Pruzansky)

The Mishna in Avos (5:4) teaches that Avraham Avinu was tested ten times and withstood each one. R. Pruzansky, in a guest piece this week, asks how that life fits the Torah's description of Avraham as "blessed with everything" (24:1) and dying "old and content" (25:8). He was childless for almost a century, lived through war and famine, had trouble with Yishmael, faced the *Akeidah*, and had a wife who was abducted twice and then died suddenly. He was certainly old, but how could he have been content?

His answer starts with what a *nisayon* is. None of Avraham's trials had a ready answer, and each one could be argued either way. Should he follow *lech lecha* if it meant leaving his elderly father, which Rashi implies was a moral question? Should he starve in Canaan or go down to Egypt and risk his life? Should he go to war against four kings to rescue Lot, plead for Sodom, or send Hagar away, and if he sends her away, what does he still owe Yishmael? At the *Akeidah*, should he obey, argue that the command contradicts the promise that Yitzchak would be his heir, or protest that child sacrifice is abhorrent? We have no way of measuring which choice was right, so how can the Mishna say he passed them all? R. Pruzansky's answer is that a *nisayon* isn't graded on right or wrong. It is graded on the decision-making process, the motivation and the ultimate goal. Every choice Avraham made turned on one question: which path would spread Hashem's name further and better serve His purposes for mankind?

That also explains Avraham's contentment. Each trial gave him an opening to complain: "You send me to Canaan and I find famine. You promise me descendants and leave me childless. What do You want from me?" Modern man airs his grievances to anyone who will listen, and to many who will not, and R. Pruzansky calls this a weakness of the soul. The Avos had no grievances. Avraham had one purpose, to call out in the name of Hashem (12:8), so the hardships never reached his contentment. Most of us, R. Pruzansky notes, have little to complain about, and real trials come to us rarely. If we strip away ego, greed, jealousy and frustration, we can share the contentment of Avraham. [Read the full piece here.](#)