

## Shalom Bayis Newsletter Issue 26

### Marrying was Yitzchak's Akeidah?

By Rabbi Yehoshua Berman

Was getting married the great, life's test of Yitzchak Avinu?



After all, Avraham had his great test of overcoming his middah of chessed at the akeidah, and Yaakov had his great test of overcoming his middah of emes when he had to pretend to his father that he is Eisav.

Yitzchak's middah of gevurah is the ultimate of control.

Not forced control of others, which is actually an expression of lack of control, but control of self.

The akeidah was a massive test for Avraham avinu because it went against everything he stood and lived for, but for Yitzchak avinu it was the most natural thing in the world.

One of the great baalei mussar pointed out that most people, when they think about mesiras nefesh in the most literal sense of the term, they conjure up in their minds an image of "jumping into the fire".

Why jumping?

"Because," said this great baal mussar, "if you had to walk into the fire in a measured, deliberate manner, you know that you would not be able to do it."

But for Yitzchak, who was the quintessential embodiment of gevurah, that was no problem. He could calmly walk together with his father to Har HaMoriyah knowing full well that he is going to be slaughtered. And it was he who specifically asked to be tightly bound lest he move even the slightest bit and risk invalidating the sacrifice by causing a premature blemish on his body.

So then what was the great test of a lifetime for Yitzchak avinu? What was his akeidah?

I would like to suggest that it was getting married. Or, more specifically, being married and functioning in the manner that marriage demands.

The Gemara in Brachos tells us that Rav Kahana once hid himself under the bed of Rav so he could hear exactly how Rav conducted himself during intimacy. Rav would engage his wife in pleasant, romantic conversation that included humor and laughter.

Realizing that Rav was doing this to achieve a maximal degree of sexual desire and passion, Rav Kahana exclaimed, “It seems that the mouth of Rav has never before tasted a sumptuous dish!”

This was a euphemism, of course, for sexual intimacy. Put more bluntly, Rav Kahana was saying, “Your degree of excitement makes you seem like a fresh new chassan who is entirely new to the experience of sexual intimacy!”

This Gemara serves as one of the primary sources for the halacha that marital intimacy is meant to take place within a context of mutual desire, excitement, and joy.

We may ask, though, what was Rav’s source for this behavior? The answer, of course, is to be found in a pasuk in this week’s parsha. Clear and straightforward as can be.

“And he saw Yitzchak being metzachek with his wife Rivkah.”

What does it mean to be metzachek?

The mefarshim explain that it means to engage in arousing foreplay. Pleasant, romantic conversation. Utilizing humor in a mutually passion-awakening way. Hugging, kissing, and so on.

What in the vernacular is often referred to as fooling around.

Some may be inclined to argue that “fooling around” is an inappropriate expression for foreplay in the context of a Torah-based marriage. But I believe that is an incorrect assertion. After all, Chazal make it abundantly clear that engaging in sexual intimacy demands a mind-frame of *kalus rosh* and *zachus ha'daas* (see Rashi in Brachos 22a d'h mi'kan).

Accordingly, fooling around seems like quite an apt description of foreplay through the lens of Chazal.

Now, think of the most self-disciplined person you can possibly imagine. A degree of self-control which is just off the charts. As serious about life as one could humanly be.

Now, try to imagine that personality type times 100.

I believe that we still won't be anywhere near an understanding of the middah of gevurah of Yitzchak avinu.

And such a person can engage in fooling around!?! Such a person can engage in romantic, passion-arousing banter?! He can put himself in a decidedly letting-loose frame of mind of *kalus ha'daas* and *zachus ha'daas*?!

Yet it is precisely from Yitzchak avinu that we learn about the necessity of this type of foreplay!

This, I believe, was the test of a lifetime for Yitzchak avinu.

In fact, there are sources that indicate that, inherently, Yitzchak avinu was not able to get married and he only acquired the ability to do so at the akeidah.

There is more to be said on this topic as to how the akeidah imbued Yitzchak avinu with the capacity to rise to the test and be able to be metzachek es ishto, but for now I would like to emphasize one point.

It can be difficult for many men to engage in foreplay properly. The truth is that this can be a challenge for many women as well, perhaps for different reasons.

We need to remember, though, that maaseh avos siman l'banim. The great accomplishments of the avos and the imahos implanted those capacities within every single one of their progeny for all generations, each individual on his or her own unique level.

Practically speaking, if you are the spouse that has difficulty with executing the fooling around component of marriage properly, don't give up on yourself.

You can learn how to do it.

It may require availing yourself of the services of those who are adept at teaching others the skills needed to make the shift, but, for the overwhelming majority of people, it is well within grasp as long as there is an investment of sufficient effort.

If you are the spouse of someone who has difficulty engaging in foreplay properly, don't lose heart. Try not to be angry or resentful. On the contrary, try to help your spouse ease into the role. In a respectful compassionate tone - a tone that radiates a clear sense of shared work and shared process - tell your spouse, in a fully clearcut and direct manner, what types of things he or she could do to enhance the mutual experience.

It seems that women tend to intuit things far more often than men, and it's important for women to be cognizant of the fact

that, as much as they may wish for their husbands to intuit their needs and desires, they may just not be able to do so. Of course, this can go the other way around as well. No spouse is a navi, and if you feel that your spouse is just not getting it, instead of letting the issue fester and metastasize into resentment and anger, deal with it head on.

Have a conversation with clearcut, forthright language. Be direct. Be loving, respectful, and compassionate, but be direct.

It can be difficult to have such conversations, let alone in a fully forthright manner; but the truth is that not having these conversations will only cause far more pain and suffering in the long run.

Finally, if you suspect that you or your spouse may have difficulty in this area because of some sort of traumatic history or other mental health struggle, please know that there is help available. Baruch Hashem, today there are many, many therapists who are fully trained in addressing trauma and a very broad spectrum of challenges.

Have the conversation, and, if need be, reach out for help.

**Did this hit a deep chord for you? It will for others as well. Don't wait. Pass this on to a friend or family member right now. It could be a game-changer for them, and it will be you who helped them!**



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