

TEACHING AKEIDAS YITZCHAK

QUESTION

My seven year old son came home a few days ago and had learned about Akeidas Yitzchak. In middle of supper he piped up and asked, "if Hashem told you to kill me, would you do it?"

When a child asks any question, it must be answered. If you don't answer it, he will get the answer elsewhere, and we cannot be sure that the answer will be appropriate. However, we are sometimes unable to answer questions coming from a young child, because the discussion may not be age-appropriate, understandable, or may cause embarrassment. I was taught that an answer should be given which has enough information to satisfy the curiosity of the child, without giving more information than necessary. I always found this to be practical and acceptable in my dealings with youngsters.

I would discuss with the 7 year old that *nisyonos* are given to us all. However, never do we receive a *nisoyon* from *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* which we are unable to withstand. The same *nisoyon* that was given to *Avrohom Aveinu* will never be given to us. It is presumptuous of us to even think that we are able to withstand *nisyonos* that the *Avos* were tested on. Therefore, since the *nisoyon* would never be given to us and we would never be put in such a position, it is then a moot point. I would explain to the child that his question is completely hypothetical, inapplicable and the parent will never be given such a test. I am sure a 7 year old will be satisfied with this answer.

Furthermore, I also don't know how it is possible to answer such a question truthfully, and we must always be truthful in our answers, as one would never know what one would do if given any *nisoyon*. That is really the meaning of a *nisoyon*. Which way would you choose?

When discussing this question with Rebbitzin S. Glustein, the *mechanechet* and Jewish Studies coordinator of our Sem., she informed me that most schools in Eretz Yisroel do not teach "the *Akeida*" in the formative years of their students, when *Parsha* is being taught as it cannot be understood by such young children and maybe, by extension, by ourselves as well.

I once heard a *moshel* from Rabbi Nachman Rottenstreich, a *Talmid Chochom* in Montreal. The Kotske Rebbe presented the following dilemma to three of his *Chassidim*. If one happened to be walking on *Shabbos* and chanced upon a great fortune, would he take the *muktza* and carry it in *rishus harabim* or keep the *Kedusha* of *Shabbos* and walk away? The first *Chassid* responded that he would take the money as he could not withstand that *nisoyon*. The Kotske's response was one of astonishment at the *Chassid's* desecration of the *Shabbos* for any amount of money. The second *Chassid*, witnessing the tongue-lashing received by the first *Chassid*, responded that he would walk away from the fortune. The Kotske's response to him was that he was lying, he was a big *baal gayva*

and was only trying to impress him with his righteousness. The third *Chassid* responded that it is not possible to know how one would act until the situation arises because so many thoughts come into play at the time. The Kotske agreed with the third response.

This *moshel* can be applied to our case as the father really does not know how he would respond to the *nisoyon* and that would truly be the correct reaction to any *nisoyon*.

Rabbi Meyer Schwab, Dean of Bais Yaakov of Denver, once related the following personal vignette heard from his father Harav Shimon Schwab ZT”L when his father was a young boy at his father’s table. One *Seder* night, the children were a bit unruly. The elder Rav Schwab, with a stern face and tone of voice, strongly reprimanded his children by saying that he loved them very much, and in a trembling voice added that they should all know that he loved *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* more than anything else in this world, even more than his children. There was never any kind of unruliness at the *Seder* ever again.

The idea that we should have love for *Hashem* and His *mitzvos* above all else, should be implanted into the child without equating it to this question because this question is not relevant to us. I would see to it that the seven year old should start receiving *hadrocho* in love of *Hashem*. As an example, I saw one of Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky ZT”L’s sons who, when he met his father in a *Beis Medrash*, wanted to give him a kiss. His father politely backed off saying “*nisht in Shul*”. Rav Aryeh Posen, a *Dayan* in our community, related that Rav Shneur Kotler ZT”L would ask the *Avi HaBen* at a *Bris* to step out into the hall of the *Beis Medrash* so he may give him a kiss. This was to show the predominant love for the *Sefer Torah* and *Mokom Kodosh*. The child’s education should continue with loftier concepts of *bechol l’vovcho uve’chol nafshecho uve’chol m’odecho*.