

עֲשָׂרָה נִסְיוֹנוֹת נִתְּנָה אֲבֹרָהּ אֲבִינוּ עָלֵינוּ הַשָּׁלוֹם, וְעַמְד
בְּכֻלָּם, לְהוֹדִיעַ כְּמָה חֲבָתוֹ שֶׁל אֲבֹרָהּ אֲבִינוּ עָלֵינוּ הַשָּׁלוֹם.

עֲשָׂרָה נְסִים נַעֲשׂוּ לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם וְעֲשָׂרָה עַל הַיָּם. עֲשָׂר
מִכּוֹת הֵבִיא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַל הַמִּצְרַיִם בְּמִצְרַיִם וְעֲשָׂר
עַל הַיָּם. עֲשָׂרָה נִסְיוֹנוֹת נִסּוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֶת הַמָּקוֹם בְּרוּךְ הוּא
בַּמִּדְבָּר, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיִּנְסוּ אֹתִי זֶה עֲשָׂר פְּעָמִים וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי
(במדבר יד, כב).

MISHNAH 4

Consider the following questions:¹³

1. Why does the Mishnah juxtapose these diverse groupings of ten?
2. Hashem is omniscient: He knows everything that has happened in the past; He knows everything that is happening now; and He knows everything that will happen in the future. If so, why did Hashem have to challenge Avraham Avinu with ten trials when He already knew that Avraham would remain steadfast regardless of how many challenges he would have to face? Even one trial seems superfluous!
3. Of the three Avos [Patriarchs], why was only Avraham challenged with such trials?
4. After the Mishnah cited the phrase, *They have tested*

13. This section is adapted from the Alshich's commentary to *Bamidbar* 14:20–24.

Me these ten times, to support its statement, Our ancestors tested the Omnipresent with ten trials in the wilderness, why does the Mishnah continue with the next part of the verse, and they did not accept My word, which does not seem relevant to the Mishnah?

≡ Powers of Ten ≡

THE ANONYMOUS TANNA who authored this series of Mishnayos was addressing Question 2. His starting point is the obvious — and therefore unstated — axiom that “Hashem is omniscient.” It is clear that Hashem knew Avraham would overcome any trial challenging his loyalty to Him. Accordingly, Hashem did not devise those trials to prove Avraham’s allegiance. Rather, His purpose was to provide Avraham with merits that he would pass on to his offspring to stand them in good stead at a time when their own merits would not be sufficient to protect them from their enemies. Perhaps, the Tanna suggests, Hashem challenged Avraham ten times so that he would gain ten merits for his descendants in Egypt, merits that Hashem would turn into ten miracles for *Bnei Yisrael* and ten plagues against their Egyptian taskmasters.¹⁴

But the Tanna finds this premise flawed, because not only were there ten plagues in Egypt and ten concurrent miracles to protect Avraham’s offspring from them, there were also an additional ten plagues visited upon the Egyptians at the *Yam*

14. The ten miracles that Hashem wrought for *Bnei Yisrael* in Egypt and the ten plagues that He visited upon the Egyptians were the same events; for the Egyptians, the plagues were miraculous punishments, but, miracle upon miracle, those same plagues had no ill effects on *Bnei Yisrael*.

Suf and ten more protective miracles there for Avraham's children. Accordingly, if the plagues and miracles were manifestations of the merits Avraham earned for his progeny by overcoming ten challenges to his faith, the Patriarch should have been tested with twenty trials, in order to merit the twenty plagues and twenty miracles! The Tanna therefore seeks a different answer.

⚡ *Testing Hashem* ⚡

THE STATEMENT QUOTED in the Mishnah, *they have tested Me these ten times; and they did not accept My word*, appears in the narrative of the tenth test — the incident of the Spies. There, the Torah delineates the punishment for the national sin of believing the Spies' slanderous report about the *land flowing with milk and honey* that Hashem had promised His people: *For all these men who have seen My Glory and My miraculous signs that I have wrought in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet they have tested Me these ten times, and they did not accept¹⁵ My word, they shall not see the land that I have sworn [to give] their forefather, and all those who anger Me will not see it.*¹⁶ By placing the phrase, *they did not accept My word*, after the phrase, *they have tested Me these ten times*, the Torah indicates that neither the nation's acceptance of the Spies' report nor their testing of Hashem ten times was the cause of Hashem's anger. Rather, Hashem was angry because *they did not accept My word*, that is, they did not accept Hashem's de-

15. The phrase reads, וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי, literally, *they did not hear My voice*. The translation, *they did not accept My word*, follows Targum Onkelos.

16. Bamidbar 14:22–23.

scription of the land to which He was bringing them, but insisted on sending scouts to reconnoiter the Land of Canaan and bring back a report about the “realities” of that area.

Now this seems very strange, for rebelliously testing Hashem’s word even once is despicable enough; how much worse it must be to test Him ten times! Was this not the greater offense? The answer is that, being omniscient, Hashem knew that our ancestors would test Him in the wilderness with ten rebellious trials. Even had the people rebelled against the Creator only once, that incident would have been thoroughly despicable and the perpetrators of that rebellion would be deserving of eternal punishment. Therefore, Hashem challenged Avraham ten times so that the merits of his ten successes in overcoming those ten adversities would mitigate the punishments that his offspring would suffer as a consequence of their ten rebellious tests. [This answers Questions 1 and 2.]

Answer to
questions
1-2

And why did Hashem elicit those merits exclusively from Avraham, instead of spreading them among all three Patriarchs? The Tanna tells us that Hashem deemed it fitting that the merits of Avraham, about whom He had testified, שָׁמַע אַבְרָהָם בְּקוֹלִי, *Avraham accepted My word*,¹⁷ should mitigate the punishments of those who לֹא שָׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי, “did not accept My word.” [This answers Questions 3 and 4.]

Answer to
questions
3-4

17. *Bereishis* 26:5 (see footnote 15 above, concerning the translation). See also 22:18, which states, עָקַב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעָה בְּקוֹלִי. Both times, Hashem is referring to His promise to make Avraham into a great nation and that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through his descendants, because he “accepted God’s word” by doing the mitzvos. The fact that the Torah uses the same wording with respect to Avraham’s accepting God’s word as it does with respect to the Israelites who did not accept His word leads the Tanna to speak exclusively of Avraham.