

# THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A 'BAAL CHESSED' AND A WELFARE GIVER

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 523, Walking by a Person Who Is Davening Good Shabbos!

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## **The Difference Between a 'Baal Chessed' and a Welfare Giver**

At the start of this week's parsha, the Almighty appears to Avraham, who was sitting at the doorway of his tent "in the heat of the day" [Bereishis 18:1]. Rashi quotes a teaching of Chazal: "The Holy One, Blessed is He, brought the sun out of its sheath (i.e. He made it shine intensely), so as not to trouble Avraham (who at the age of 100 had just undergone circumcision), and because He saw that Avraham was pained that no visitors were coming, He brought the angels to him in the form of men."

The question must be asked, why was Avraham pained by the fact that he had no guests? We understand that Avraham was a Baal Chessed ['Master of kindness'] who would go out of his way -- even while suffering the pain of recovery from a major operation -- to help out wayfarers in need. But if there was not anyone on the road (because of extreme weather conditions), there would not be anyone in need of food or drink or a place to stay. Everyone would ostensibly be comfortably resting in their own homes.

We know what happens on the night of a big snowstorm. People are not on the streets. We do not need to worry if the streets are empty -- we know everyone is sitting at home, warm and cozy. Everyone is taken care of!

Avraham should have been thrilled by the hot weather. No one was on the road. Everyone was happy and taken care of. Why was he pained? What was his problem?

The premise of our question is that the 'tachlis' [purpose] of a 'Baal Chessed' is to provide for people's needs, and if no one is in need, the 'Baal Chessed' should not have anything to do.

However, our premise is incorrect. Avraham Avinu is indeed the personification of a 'Baal Chessed', but he is the personification of a 'Jewish Baal Chessed', not the personification of a welfare

dispenser. The Government gives welfare. It gives welfare because people need welfare, and would be very happy if no one was in need of welfare.

Agencies that help the poor or homeless ideally would prefer to have no business. They dream of a world where no one is homeless and everyone has food. It is ostensibly the goal of every helping agency to go out of business.

This is the case of someone interested in providing welfare. But the 'Baal Chessed' realizes that "more than the homeowner provides for the poor person, the poor person provides for the homeowner." [Vayikra Rabba 34] A Jew needs to perform Chessed -- "not for YOUR sake, but for MY sake!" To become a better human being, to become a human being in the image of the Almighty, emulating HIM in the most perfect way, I MUST do Chessed.

Therefore, it doesn't follow that if everyone is taken care of, then I can be happy and not have to worry about dispensing welfare. If Avraham Avinu is incapable of providing Chessed -- for whatever reason -- then he knows that he is not doing what he is supposed to be doing.

### **Sarah Should Have Send 'Amen'**

This week's Parsha contains a comment of the Ramba"n that is very novel.

Sarah overhears the news that the "guests" delivered to her husband that she would become pregnant and have a child. She laughed inwardly asking incredulously, "After I have withered shall I again have clear skin? And my husband is old!" [Bereishis 18:12]

The Almighty was apparently upset with her reaction. In the very next pasuk [verse], Hashem asks Avraham, "Why did Sarah laugh saying: 'Is it even true that I shall give birth though I have aged?' Is anything beyond Hashem? [Bereishis 18:13]

The Ramba"n asks why the Almighty was upset at Sarah's quite natural reaction. The "news" that she heard was not delivered (according to her perception) by great individuals or even by righteous people. As far as she knew, an idol-worshipping Arab delivered this message.

This would be as if we found ourselves walking on the street and some nut would approach us and announce to us that we will soon win the lottery. Would we be expected upon hearing such 'news' to bow down and express gratitude to the Master of the Universe? We would more than likely dismiss our "good tidings bearer" as some kind of lunatic!

Sarah had such characters coming through her house every day. Why should the Almighty have complaints against Sarah for not taking the news seriously? She did not know they were Angels. She thought they were crazy!

The Ramba"n teaches us an interesting lesson. He says that Sarah should have said "Amen! May this be G-d's Will!"

The implication is that the next time we walk on the streets of Baltimore and some panhandler asks for a quarter and we give him a quarter and the panhandler says "You should win the Maryland State Lottery" our answer should be "Amen!"

If we fail to respond "Amen" to such a situation, G-d may have complaints against us.

Someone quoted an amazing story from the Steipler Gaon, related to this exact point. A person came to the Steipler and told him that he needed a blessing for his daughter. She was 27 years old and in need of a shidduch [marriage partner].

The Steipler asked him if it was his first daughter. The man replied that it was actually his third daughter. The Steipler then asked if when this daughter was born, her father made a Kiddush to celebrate her birth. The man admitted that although he had made celebrations when his first two daughters were born, by the third daughter, he, in fact, did not make a Kiddush to celebrate her birth.

The Steipler then advised him to go make a Kiddush for this 27 year old daughter. He said, "When you make a Kiddush, people come and give you brachos [blessings] for you and your daughter. They wish you Mazal Tov. They express all sorts of good wishes. Today, it is appropriate to wish fathers of newborn daughters a blessing that the father should find a shidduch easily for his daughter. People express such sentiments on such occasions. Twenty-seven years ago, you prevented your daughter from receiving those good wishes from the well-wishers you could have invited to your Kiddush. You never know from whence comes the bracha that will be heard in Heaven. The Almighty has all sorts of conduits for His blessing to take effect."

The Steipler continued, "Who knows, there might have been some neighbor or someone you met in shul who you could have invited by saying 'come, I'm making a Kiddush, I had a new daughter born this week'. He would have come in and taken a piece of cake and a little kugle. He would have made a 'lechayim' and taken a shot of whiskey and then wished you: 'you should have an easy upbringing for her and you should find a good shidduch and be able to marry her off to a fine Talmid Chochom'. You could have responded "AMEN!" But you did not let that happen. You prevented your daughter from receiving all those blessings. Go now at age 27 and make a Kiddush for your daughter."

The end of the story is that the father did make the belated Kiddush and she soon thereafter became a Kallah.

This is exactly what the meaning of the Ramba"n. The complaint is not that Sarah did not BELIEVE the blessing of the Arab would come true. The complaint is that she did not HOPE that it would come true. The complaint is that she did not respond with the word "Amen".

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics

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