

STEP ONE OF CHESSED: SEEING THE NEED

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayera

Step One of Chessed: Seeing The Need

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 567, Asking and Giving Mechila. Good Shabbos!

At the beginning of the Parsha, Avram was sitting in his tent, disappointed at not having any guests. *"He lifted his eyes and behold he saw three people standing upon him. And he saw them and he ran to greet them from the opening of the tent and bowed toward the ground."* [Bereishis 18:2]

There is one word in this pasuk [verse] that jumps out at us as being totally superfluous. The repetition of the word *"and he saw"* (va'yar) seems totally out of place. What does it add?

Rav Meir Bergman, in his sefer, Sha'arei Orah, makes a very astute observation. One of the key components in being a giving person (ba'al chessed) is not merely having a kind and open heart. It requires the ability to perceive people's needs. To qualify as a "ba'al chessed," it is not enough to merely say "Okay. I'll do a guy a favor." The factor separating regular people from true "masters of kindness" is the ability to perceive that the other person needs something. There are so many times when we would be willing to do the favor, but the opportunity just passes us by.

Chessed is built on two things: One must perceive the need and then one must have the willingness to fulfill the need. The first step is the "va'yar" [and he saw]. The Gemara uses the expression "one who shuts his eyes from charity" [Kesuvos 68a]. It does not say "one who shuts his wallet or his pocket from charity". The insight is that charity does not begin with one's wallet but with one's eyes. A person must first perceive the need and only then can he perform chessed.

Let me share a story about Rav Yakov Weinberg, ZTL, Rosh Hayeshiva of Yeshivas Ner Yisroel: A divorced mother with young children called the Rosh Yeshiva before Succos and asked him a shaylah [halachic query]. She said that she did not have much money and that it would be a financial burden to put up a Succah. She reasoned that she was a woman and women are not obligated to sit

in a Succah. Her young sons were also not obligated in the mitzvah of Succah because they were below the age of Bar Mitzvah. In addition, they were only going to be with her for 3 days of Succos, the rest of the time they would be with their father. She asked for Rav Weinberg's concurrence to her conclusion that it was not necessary for her to build a Succah that year.

Rav Weinberg told her that based on the strict law, she was 100 percent correct. But he told her that she was a "distinguished woman" (isha chashuva) and her children should be aware of the fact that their mother was an "isha chashuva". For that reason alone, it would be worthwhile for her to build a Succah. "A Jewish house," he told her "should have a Succah".

The next day, a pre-paid, pre-fabricated Succah was delivered to the woman's door. The package did not say who paid for it but she did not need to be a genius to figure that out. Rav Weinberg "saw" the need.

This is also reminiscent of a famous story with the Beis HaLevi. A Jew came to the Beis HaLevi before Pessach and asked whether milk has the status of "a national beverage" (chamar medinah). He couldn't afford the 4 cups of wine for the Seder and asked if he could use milk as a substitute. The Beis HaLevi not only sent him money for wine, but for meat as well. The Beis HaLevi understood that a Jew would not ask the question about drinking milk at his Seder if he were having chicken or meat with his meal. This is not only indicative of an open heart. It indicates eyes that are open as well. It is the same attribute of "va'yar" that we find mentioned by Avram in the opening pasukim of the parsha.

The Lesson of the Akeidah: How To Pray

At the end of Selichos, there is a paragraph in which we say "May the One who answered our Patriarch Avraham on Mt. Moriah, answer us. May the One who answered our Patriarch Yitzchak on Mt. Moriah, answer us." Rav Matisyahu Solomon once asked: Where do we see that Hashem answered Avraham on Mt. Moriah? G-d commanded Avraham to go with his son to Mt. Moriah and offer him on the altar. Avraham went faithfully as commanded. He never asked G-d any questions. He never prayed that the command should be rescinded. What then is the meaning of the phrase "May the One who ANSWERED Avraham"? Where and what did he ask?

The same question can be raised regarding Yitzchak. Yitzchak was willing to be sacrificed. He never asked G-d to save him.

Rav Solomon explains that the chapter of the Akeidah [Sacrifice of Yitzchak] not only teaches us a lesson in mesiras nefesh [martyrdom], it teaches us also a lesson in what and how we should daven to the Almighty.

The pasuk reads: *"And Avraham said, 'G-d will seek out for Himself the lamb for the offering, my son.'"* [Bereishis 22:8] Rashi interprets: "He will show us and chose the proper sheep, and if there is no sheep found then 'for a burnt offering, my son'."

The Shalo"n explains that when Avraham ascended Mt. Moriah he was praying "Master of the World, please provide for me a sheep. I want to be able to bring a sheep. But in the event that I can't find a sheep, then I am prepared to sacrifice my son to you with love and devotion."

The Shalo"n gives us the following analogy: A Gentile tells a Jew that he must worship an idol or he will be killed. The Jew refuses. The Gentile takes the Jew out to kill him. What is the legal requirement at this point? If the Jew has the opportunity to escape, should he try to escape or should he die a martyr's death? The law is that one should try to escape. "You shall live by them, not die by them" [Yoma 85b].

If the Gentile does not give an opportunity for escape, the Jew must say "Master of the world, this is the positive Biblical command of Sanctifying Your Name in the midst of Israel, I am doing it with great love."

However, as a person is being led to execution, what should he be praying for? Should he pray for an opportunity to escape or for the opportunity to sanctify G-d's Name? Here too, a person should pray to be able to escape. But the person should also append to this prayer the afterthought "G-d, if it is Your Will that I shouldn't escape, then I accept with full love martyrdom in Your behalf."

This is what happened by the Akeidah. Avraham was promised that his seed was going to be numerous like the stars in Heaven. He was promised that through Yitzchak, he was destined to have seed. But on the other hand, G-d commanded him to sacrifice Yitzchak. What was his prayer? "May G-d show us a sheep." The prayer was "Please provide an alternate sacrifice, but if not, then I am willing to sacrifice my son to You with love."

This is the interpretation of the words "the One who answered our Patriarch Avraham on Mt. Moriah, He should answer us; the One who answered our Patriarch Yitzchak on Mt. Moriah, He should answer us." Both of them prayed: "Let's see the sheep." G-d answered their prayers.

This insight explains the Medrash that Avraham had tears rolling down his cheeks, as he was about to slaughter his son. Why was he crying if he was so anxious to perform G-d's commandment? The answer is that he was ready to slaughter his son (and Yitzchak was ready to die), but he was hoping and praying for an alternate resolution.

When we pray to the Almighty for monetary sustenance (parnassah), our intent should be: "G-d, I think I can be a better Servant to You if I have additional financial resources. The way I perceive things is that if I have more money I will be able to be a better servant to You. Therefore please give me more money. But if You, Master of the World, think that this is not what is good for me then I am fully prepared to keep on living the way I am living, to fulfill Your desire for me."

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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