



The Attribute of Alacrity Adorns the Mitzvot

"Then Avraham ran to the cattle" (Bereishit 18:7)

What lies behind the fact that Avraham ran to the cattle? Could he not have walked leisurely to take the young calf? Especially since he was unwell due to his circumcision and Hashem, in all His glory, had come to visit him.

Serving Hashem requires a fundamental condition – the trait of 'zerizut', alacrity. (The Hebrew word 'zerizut' also includes both eagerness and quickness within its meaning.) Avraham Avinu was the one who taught us this concept for when Hashem commanded him to bring up his son as an offering on the Mizbeach, he arose early in the morning in order to fulfill the command of his Creator, as it says (Bereishit 22:3): "So Avraham woke up early in the morning". Chazal explain (Pesachim 4a): "We learn from this that those that are alacritous are eager and quick to carry out Mitzvot". We see from these words that it was not necessary to force Avraham to rise early in the morning in order to fulfil the mitzvah and even though Hashem did not command him to offer up his son immediately and he could have delayed, nevertheless Avraham hastened to fulfill his Creator's command.

This is also how Avraham behaved towards his visitors. Despite being unwell, the verse says (ibid 18:1): "He was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day". Rashi expounds on these words, "It was the third day after his circumcision and Hashem came to seek his welfare." Due to his circumstances, Avraham was exempt from this mitzvah of hachnasat orchim. In addition, Hashem Himself had come to visit him so why was he seeking visitors at this time?

Let us imagine a sick person lying in bed who is treated to a visit by the king. Sudden knocking on the door announces the arrival of a visitor. The sick person turns his attention to the visitor and carries on a conversation with him while ignoring the king... This is certainly not appropriate behavior. Yet Avraham, despite the fact that Hashem had come to visit him and was standing by his side, had his mind on the fact that maybe visitors will arrive or maybe there is a passerby whom he can invite into his home. Avraham's behavior was undoubtedly appropriate since even when he was occupied with his guests he did not disconnect his thoughts from the Holy Shechina, he clung to Hashem and remained with Him throughout since all his deeds were performed for the sake of Heaven. This is why Hashem approved of Avraham's conduct and even waited for him, not considering it as a flaw.

Avraham merited this because he performed mitzvot with alacrity. He reasoned that although it is true that one who is occupied with a mitzvah is exempt from performing a different mitzvah, but if nevertheless, he is able to perform both mitzvot at once, why should he give up one of them? On the contrary, he will be considered as 'one who is swift and gains'. Therefore, even though he was in pain and it was hard for him to receive visitors and Hashem was present in his house, he nevertheless searched for another mitzvah that he could fulfill.

Why is such significance attached to the way in which one performs a mitzvah, with alacrity or without? What is special about this quality? The 'Orchot Tzaddikim' commends the trait of alacrity with the following words: "Alacrity is a great merit when fulfilling Torah and mitzvot and it is the way in which tzaddikim serve Hashem Yitbarach. The trait of alacrity is an ornament for all traits and brings them to perfection. Performing one's deeds with alacrity is a proof of one's love for his Creator, just like a servant who loves his master fulfills his will with haste, and like Avraham Avinu who removed his love for his son from his heart and seized the will of his Creator. He relinquished his fatherly love in exchange for his love of his Creator and hurried to rise early in the morning to perform His will wholeheartedly. His mind was connected with great desire to his love of the Creator Yitbarach."

This is also how Avraham Avinu behaved when the visitors arrived. He was unwell, lying in bed undoubtedly in great pain since he was one hundred years old and it was the third day after his circumcision (which is known to be the most painful day). But Avraham Avinu was unable to remain passive and calm when being presented with a mitzvah. His attribute of alacrity was a powerful force that made him forget and ignore his physical pains. He stood up with joy and alacrity like a young lad and went to great trouble in order to honor his visitors, acting with love and devotion. This follows the description of the 'Orchot Tzaddikim', that alacrity in performing a mitzvah proves one's great love for Hashem who commanded this mitzvah and that this quality adorns and beautifies the mitzvah, giving it additional splendor.

Chazal tell us, "Do not ignore a mitzvah opportunity that comes your way". One should hurry to perform the mitzvah for it is a person's obligation to feel that the mitzvah is an inseparable part of him and his life is dependent on it. In this way, he will hasten to fulfill it, with love and special affection.

Avraham did not pay attention to the physical challenge and discomfort since he fulfilled mitzvot with exceptional alacrity. Since he also educated his children and servants in this manner, even though Eliezer was circumcised on the same day and was probably also in pain, nevertheless Avraham urged him to go out and search for visitors so as to instill this trait in him. He wished to teach Eliezer that mitzvot must be performed with alacrity and joy and it is this that proves one's great love for Hashem and His Torah.

Similarly, Avraham behaved in the same manner with his son Yishmael, who also helped with the preparation of the food. Even though he too underwent circumcision and was also in pain, it seems that Avraham, as if, did not have pity on him. His goal was to teach him the significance of alacrity in performing mitzvot, since this trait is the crown of the mitzvah, adorning it like a jewel.

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Walking in their Ways

Tidbits of faith and trust penned by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagoan Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita

The Yissachar and Zevulun Partnership

I was acquainted with someone who found it very hard to understand why talmidei chachamim and yeshiva students do not go to work and why they devote all their time and energy on Torah study. Despite repeatedly explaining to him the idea that the world exists in the merit of studying the Holy Torah and in the merit of those very scholars who diligently study Torah, he did not change his view and therefore used to constantly show his contempt for Torah and those who study it and claimed that they were wasting their time.

One day I turned to him and said: "The world exists for the sake of Am Yisrael and in their merit. Within Am Yisrael there are two groups. One group is made up of those who study Torah and the second group comprises those who work for their income. And just like Yissachar and Zevulun, the holy tribes, made an agreement between themselves that the tribe of Yissachar will study Torah without the burden of parnasah while the tribe of Zevulun will exert themselves on behalf of them both and in exchange, the merits of Yissachar's Torah study are divided between them, so too this is the way that the world runs today.

Today too there are Jews who sit and occupy themselves solely with Torah study and at the same time there are Jews who work hard for their income and support those who study Torah. In exchange they receive a share of the merits of those who study Torah.

In addition, this partnership of Yissachar and Zevulun was also undertaken by Menashe and Efraim: Efraim learnt Torah with his grandfather Ya'akov while Menashe supported him and thus merited a share of the merits of Efraim's Torah study."

This is how I explained the concept to my acquaintance.

However, my words fell on deaf ears. He continued showing disdain for Torah scholars until finally I warned him that as a result of his words, the day will come when he will need these Torah scholars to pray for him and beg for mercy on his behalf.

To my great distress this warning too had no effect and did not serve to discourage him from speaking negatively about Torah scholars.

Indeed, he was eventually punished by Heaven and lo aleinu became very ill. It seemed that even the prayers of tzaddikim and supplications of Torah scholars on his behalf, did not have the power of saving him from his difficult illness.

The Haftarah

"One woman from among the wives of the prophets' disciples"

(Melachim II, 4)

The connection to the Parsha: The Haftara tells us how Elisha the Navi blessed the Shunamit that she would have a child and about the fulfillment of that promise when she gave birth to a son at the exact time that he prophesied. In the Parsha the angels announced to Avraham that at this time next year a son will be born to him.



Guard Your Tongue

What Did He Say About Me?

How foolish is the custom that people approach others wanting to know what so and so said about them, even though this knowledge brings them no benefit. If the one approached does not oblige, they beg him insistently until he reveals what was said about them. They then accept these negative words as the truth and this causes them to become enemies.



Words of our Sages

Did You Help Your Wife? This is an Act of Kindness!

"Please take your son, your only one" (Bereishit 22:2)

"About twenty years ago", Rabbi Shalom Schwadron zt"l told over, "one of my young children became sick. Since I was afraid that he would infect my other children, I decided to send them to my mother's house for a day or two. After the morning prayers, I took my children and set out for my mother's house. On the way, I met Rabbi Izsak Sher zt"l. With the utmost derech erez I nodded my head in greeting, and he replied, "Good morning, Rabbi Shalom". I returned his greeting.

"Where are you headed?" Rabbi Izsak asked.

I told him about my sick child and explained that I was on the way to my mother's house with the rest of the children.

He was quiet for a minute after which he broke the silence:

"Nu, so what?" I did not understand what he meant by the words 'so what?' and did not know what to reply. He actually intended to ask me what lay behind my actions, what inner factor lay behind the idea of taking the children to my mother's house. I awkwardly replied, "I am taking them out of concern that they will catch the disease."

"Why and for what?" he asked once again, using different words. I repeated my answer, slightly indignant: "I have a sick child at home so I am taking the other children to their Savta."

Rabbi Izsak remained quiet for a moment and then looked straight at me, saying: "This means that the big animal is taking and leading the little animal..."

I was shocked and did not reply. He understood my feelings and hurried to explain himself: "What in fact is the difference?! You are performing kindness with a Jewish child, who by chance is also your son!"

We parted ways and after a moment I was overcome by powerful feelings. "Oh, what precious words I just heard." I was greatly stirred. Do you understand what gift he gave me with this short message "You are performing kindness"?

Later that morning, I noticed my wife walking in my direction, carrying two buckets of water from the well (in those days we still drew water from a well). I hurried over to her whispering to myself, "I am prepared and ready to perform an act of kindness with a Jewish woman who by chance is also my wife"... and I took the buckets from her hands.

For the next half year this phrase that I heard from Rabbi Izsak followed me all over, to the extent that I repeated sincerely tens of times, "I am prepared and ready to perform an act of kindness"... Whether it was concerning my wife, my children or any other act. All my deeds were influenced by these words.

A wise person can transform dust into gold! These are our giants of Torah and mussar! The truth is that every action that one performs in the home can be illuminated in this manner.

Some people think that they are doing 'nothing', they are just raising their children. What a shame it is that they mislead themselves and even complain when every step in the home that is undertaken with the right intention can become a goldmine! Raising children so that they should have strength and good health, nourishing them with food and drink, educating them in Torah and yirah, this is pure chessed and Torah combined!



Pearls of the Parsha

Learning Not to Trouble Others

"Then Avraham ran to the cattle, took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the youth" (Bereisit 18:7)

Who was this lad?

Rashi explains: "'To the youth' refers to Yishmael, in order to educate him in mitzvot."

The sefer 'Zecher Chaim' points out the following difficulty: If Avraham Avinu wished to educate Yishmael, why did he first run to the cattle himself and only afterwards gave it to the lad?

There are many answers to this, one of which we find in the sefer 'Bamid-bar Yehuda'. He brings the incident that occurred with the Imrei Emet of Gur zt"l, who was once sitting at a seuda with his grandchild. When it came time to recite birkat hamazon, the Imrei Emet himself got up to fetch the cup for washing mayim acharonim.

His Rabbanit turned to him and asked: "Why did you not ask our grandchild to bring you the mayim acharonim, so as to educate him in performing mitzvot?"

The Imrei Emet replied: "I wished to instill in him the following trait: Whatever one can do oneself without bothering someone else, one should do oneself."

Using this idea one can explain that here too Avraham wished to educate his son with both these concepts. He first ran himself and in this manner, educated him not to trouble others. After that, he gave it to the lad so that he could finish the mitzvah, in order to educate him in this mitzvah of hachnassat orchim. In this manner Avraham was able to educate his son in two respects.

Looking at an Angel or Tzaddik Heals

"He lifted his eyes and saw: And behold! three men were standing over him. He perceived, so he ran toward them from the entrance of the tent, and bowed toward the ground" (Bereishit 18:2)

The holy Ohr Hachaim zya"l offers a wonderful, novel insight: Avraham was healed from his pains just by seeing the face of the angel. This was despite the fact that the angel was still far away since this healing is of a spiritual nature.

These are the holy words of the Ohr Hachaim: "By saying 'and (he) saw', the verse is pointing out that through seeing them he was healed from his pains and he was able to get up and run towards them, for an angel can be seen from afar and [the distance] is of no difference to prevent the healing when it is of a spiritual nature. Immediately Rafael performed his mission and healed him and with this feeling [Avraham] bowed toward the ground to the angels."

The Ohr Hachaim also explains this idea in Parshat Re'eh, on the words "See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. "See, I" implies "look at me and be righteous and have the wisdom to see the truth in my words."

The words "See, I" hint that the actual looking at Moshe's face will cause them to choose the path of blessing and salvation.

Sara was Modest Even Within her Home

"They said to him, "Where is Sara your wife?" And he said, "Behold! – in the tent!" (Bereishit 18:9)

"Behold! – in the tent!" Rashi: "She was modest." Rashi uses these words to point out Sarah's trait of modesty.

The Pardes Yosef asks, why is the fact that she was in the tent proof of her modesty? We are told that on that day Hashem took the sun out of its cover. Would anyone think of stepping outside on such a boiling hot day?

The 'Yechi Reuven' points out that the very fact that even with the angels being inside the same tent as Sara they did not see her, is a proof of her modesty for even within her home she kept herself out of sight when there were foreign people around.

Treasures

Based on the teachings of
Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon
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We Recognize the Creator Even Before Our Birth

The tzaddik Rabbi Yisrael of Ruzhin zya"l once said to his students: "The Gemarah tells us (Nedarim 32a) that Avraham was three years old when he recognized His Creator, yet I recognized Hashem Yitbarach already in my mother's womb..."

The explanation is that every child who is born to G-d fearing and upright parents who recognize Hashem and fulfill His Torah, merits recognizing Hashem through his parents while still in his mother's womb, for every act of holiness and proper conduct of his parents has a direct effect on the unborn child.

When a mother, for example, lights the Shabbat candles, the fetus in her womb also merits that the light of Shabbat lights up his neshama. And when his mother eats kosher food and recites the appropriate blessing with concentration, this too adds to his knowledge and concept of Hashem Yitbarach.

This being the case, Rabbi Yisrael of Ruzhin zya"l was correct in saying that he already recognized Hashem before he was born, for the holiness and righteousness of his parents had a positive effect on him. An example of this idea is David Hamelech a"l who sang shira to Hashem Yitbarach while still in his mother's womb since he was surrounded by an atmosphere of spiritual holiness which had an effect on the purity of his soul and enabled him to recognize Hashem and serve him wholeheartedly.

On the other hand, Avraham Avinu a"l did not merit this advantage. He did not merit recognizing his Creator already in the womb since his environment was full of heretics who were devout in their foolish faith in idolatry. Only once Avraham Avinu toiled and exerted much effort to clarify Who indeed created the world, did he merit arriving at this knowledge at three years of age and from then on he clung to Hashem Yitbarach with his entire heart and soul and fulfilled His will with immense sacrifice.

A NOVEL LOOK AT THE PARSHA



The Mishna in the beginning of Avot says, "The world depends on three things – on Torah study, on the service [of G-d], and on kind deeds." Chazal explain that these three pillars correspond to the three Avot: 'On Torah' corresponds to Yaakov, 'on the service [of G-d] corresponds to Yitzchak and 'on kind deeds' corresponds to Avraham.

As is known, Avraham Avinu is called 'the pillar of kindness'. Avraham Avinu was not the first 'baal chessed' in the world. From the beginning of creation, there were twenty generations until Avraham Avinu. During these twenty generations, the world endured through acts of kindness, until the arrival of the generation of the flood who uprooted the trait of kindness by stealing from each other.

If the world stood on kindness, there is an obvious question. Why was no one until now considered 'the pillar of kindness'?

The Maggid Rabbi Baruch Rosenblum shlita addresses this question and lays down a wonderful foundation in understanding the concept of kindness, according to the sefer 'Siach Yitzchak': There is an attribute called 'chessed' (kindness) and another attribute, which is a branch of chessed, that is called 'rachamim' (mercy).

In the supplications after reciting the 'Akeidat Yitzchak' in the morning prayers, we say "and deal with us – O Hashem, our G-d – with the attribute of kindness and the attribute of mercy." Similarly, in the Tachanun prayer we say, "May you remember today and every day the greatness of Your mercy and Your kindness to the offspring of Your beloved Ones". In birkat hamazon we say, "Who nourishes the entire world, with grace, with kindness, with

abundance and with great mercy". In nishmat we say, "Who guides His world with kindness and His creatures with mercy".

So we see that there is a concept of chessed and a concept of rachamim. What is defined as chessed and what is considered rachamim? The Rabbeinu Bachaya explains the difference clearly in his sefer 'Chovat Halevavot'.

We will begin by presenting the following mashal:

A father enters the Beit Knesset after the evening prayer and announces, "Rabbotai, I have a sick child and I am unable to endure the enormous medical expenses!" The congregation hears his plea and each person offers something, maybe fifty or one hundred shekels. Is this an act of kindness or an act of mercy?

The Malbim says that this is called rachamim. When a person requires something and you give it to him, it is an offshoot of chessed. Chessed is when the person does not ask and on your own initiative you come and give.

Avraham did not behave like the people in the mashal! He went and searched for visitors, he didn't wait for them to come. When someone comes to the beit Knesset and asks for charity, you give him what you can. Why? Your trait of mercy has been aroused. When you hear a baby crying, you place his pacifier in his mouth. But if you don't hear him crying, you won't go and put the pacifier in his mouth on your own initiative. This shows us that we are aroused by mercy. The Chovat Halevavot says that sometimes what we perceive as chessed is really only rachamim, an act that serves to quieten one's conscience.

When someone requests charity, your conscience tells you, don't be cruel, donate something. So in order to quiet your conscience you give. But if you give charity without being asked this is considered as chessed, it is not something performed out of mercy.

With due respect to all of Noach's efforts, when did he perform chessed? When he was asked. Noach was told, "Our master, there are animals here in the teivah, they need to be taken care of." And he indeed took care of them. When the dove returned to the teivah after a week of flying around with no place to rest, Noach immediately stretched out his hand towards it. Since he did not do anything out of his own initiative, he is not considered as a 'baal chessed', he is called a 'baal rachamim'.

Avraham Avinu was different. He went and performed on his own initiative. He set up soup kitchens without being asked to do this. He ran to search for visitors without being asked to do this. On the third day after his circumcision, he looked for visitors and sent Eliezer his servant. When Eliezer returned and said that he didn't find anyone, Avraham told him, you are not faithful! Why did Eliezer not find anyone? Avraham Avinu said to him, you are looking for visitors so that they will ask you for bread, I am looking for visitors because I need bread! For me, chessed is like air to breathe.

Now we can understand why Avraham Avinu corresponds to the pillar of kindness. Chazal tell us that this is how Avraham Avinu fulfilled the command of "and you go in His ways". Avraham Avinu said, does Hashem give us rain only when we ask? No. He gives even when we don't ask. Hashem provides sustenance even when we don't ask. This is the explanation of the praise, "Who guides His world with kindness and His creatures with mercy". Hashem helps people when they ask for help and He helps also when they don't ask.

We have now understood a wonderful concept. Since Avraham Avinu's foundation was the attribute of chessed (and not the attribute of rachamim), he was therefore considered the first one to have acquired this quality. For Avraham Avinu, doing favors for other people was the essence of his entire life.