



Parashat Vayera



English version

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THE FEAR OF G-D BAROMETER

When the Torah introduces the test of Akeidat Yitzhak, it tells us וַתִּבְחָן אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אַבְרָהָם *And Elokim tested Avraham*. Wait a second! Wasn't this just as much a test for Yitzhak as it was for Avraham? After all, Yitzhak was 37 years old, not a helpless, little child! And another question. We find that the words Lech Lecha, go for your own sake, by the last test of Akeidat Yitzhak, parallel the term Lech Lecha used in the first test. וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־לְךָ אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלֵךְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמִּרְיָה: אֲשֶׁר־אָמַרְתָּ אֶת־יְצָחָק וְלֵךְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמִּרְיָה: What was the connection, what was the parallel, between the test when Avraham was told to leave home, to the test of when he was told to sacrifice his son?

When G-d asked Avraham to offer up his son Yitzhak, G-d was asking Avraham to give up his whole future, the future of the entire Jewish Nation. וְיִצְחָק יְחִידְךָ *Your only son*, Avraham prophesied that he would not have any more sons, if Yitzhak would be sacrificed. Yishmael was disqualified from being Avraham's continuation, עם הדומה לחמור. This is the parallel between the last Lech Lecha and the first Lech Lecha. In the first command to Go, Avraham was tested to let go of his past. To leave behind all the people that he made an impact on. Now, Avraham was being tested, to let go of his future. His eternity. His namesake.

The Rambam does not count the test of Avraham Avinu being thrown into the fire at Ur Kasdim as one of the ten tests. Why not? R' Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zt"l, explains that there are two types of Mesirut Nefesh, of self-sacrifice. There is the self-sacrifice of giving up your life for G-d, for your religion. For the BIG things. And there is the self-sacrifice for the small things, the everyday. Yitzhak's test to give up his life and Avraham's test at Ur Kasdim, and even the test of Avraham being told to sacrifice Yitzhak itself, were not considered, by G-d, to be indications of Fear of G-d. As we mention in Selichot, Yitzhak said to his father, אם תמנעני סוף – רוחי ונשמתי אליו *Don't have mercy on me when you fulfill your prophecy to sacrifice me; for, after all, if you prevent me from meeting my end, if you don't slaughter me, my spirit and my soul, He will gather to Himself*. The test of the Akeidah was to see if Avraham could do the Mitzvah with happiness, with alacrity and enthusiasm. It was in the how they self-sacrificed, not in the sacrifice itself. As the way the Piyut describes Avraham's emotions, עין במר בוכה ולב שמח *Eye crying bitterly and with a happy heart*. It is evident that Avraham was happy at heart, for if he was sad, he would not be able to prophesize. (Shabbat 30b) He would not have seen the Cloud on top of Mt. Moriah. And



even worse. He would not be able to hear the angel telling him not to slaughter his son!

The Fear of G-d barometer is not a one-time display of spiritual strength, but it is a constant; it is displayed in your everyday living. The barometer of your spiritual connection measures not if you pray, recite the appropriate blessings, or do Mitzvot. The fear of G-d barometer measures how you pray, how you wake up and how you go to sleep. How you speak, how you bless before and after eating and after going to the restroom. It measures if your behavior reflects your constant awareness of standing before G-d, and if you demonstrate, in your actions, that **כל זמן** שהנשמה בקרבי מודה אני לפניך יקוק אלקי ואלקי אבותי אתה הוא רבון כל המעשים אדון כל הנשמות *As long as my soul is within me, I confess in front of You and praise You, YKVK my G-d, and the G-d of my fathers, Master of all actions, Boss of all the souls.* The barometer is a constant one, **כל זמן**. This is what we mean when we say **וקדושים בכל יום יהללוך סלה**. *And the holy ones* (the ones who are separated from the regular and mundane) *every day, praise You, Selah.* What does the word Selah, mean? Selah means every moment, forever. Constant and consistent. Only those who serve G-d with consistency can fathom how **קדוש**, separate and holy, G-d is.

For Avraham to sacrifice Yitzhak would mean to *live* with the pain, the constant pain, that he had given up his entire future, hundreds of millions of Jews, throughout the generations! Sarah might never believe him, that he received a prophecy to sacrifice her son. After all, unless G-d prevents it, when one prophet receives prophesy, the other prophets also know about it. (Sanhedrin 89b) Being that Sarah was a greater prophet than Avraham, (Rashi 21:12) how could it be that Avraham would be commanded to sacrifice her Yitzhak and she did not know about it? Maybe Avraham made a mistake in his

prophesy, especially, because **G-d never wants people sacrificing people!** Avraham would have needed to face all this doubt, all this insecurity, constantly, for the rest of his life, alone! He would have needed go to sleep with this pain each night, and wake up with it, each morning.

Why does G-d only want animal sacrifices and not human sacrifices? We say in Hallel **לא המתים יהללו י-ה**. *The dead will not praise G-d...* Of course, the dead will not praise G-d!?! But the meaning of these words is that when someone dies for a great purpose, it is over. Although he died for a purpose, and the memory lives on with impact on the living, the person's connection with G-d as a human is over. But when someone lives a life of purpose, a life of transcendence, a life of overcoming natural tendencies and everyday life adversities - that is the greatest praise to G-d. This is why the tests counted as part of the ten were only the constant tests and not the BIG, one-timers. Because the everyday tests are the ones in which you need to go against your nature and change it. The fear of G-d barometer measures the constant. It is harder to live like a servant of G-d, than it is to die like one.

To me, this has so many powerful messages. Every time I go for a walk in the Jerusalem forest near my house, I pass the holy cemetery of the IDF soldiers who gave up their lives for Israel and the Jewish Nation. Whenever I think about it, I cry, as I am awe-inspired by people who gave up their lives **Al Kiddush Hashem**, and made an eternal impact on Jewish History and the Jewish Nation. But then, I realize that I have to respect no less the Yeshiva students, the Torah scholars, the orthodox Jews, the Jews who are willing to be a walking and talking, who fight the everyday struggles, for their Fear of G-d and Love of G-d. They are the living Kidush Hashem, constantly, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day.

On Erev Yom Kippur, I went to cry to my Rabbi, saying how I wish I were holier, more connected to prayer, more connected to learning. If only people would know who I really am, that I am not on the level of my own writings, they might not want to read what I write! My Rabbi said that the holy people, the ones who are connected to learning and to praying, who have a connection, are the ones who cry for it, who are in the constant battle to Selfie Steps to constantly implement spiritual connection:

achieve it. Those who pray for spiritual success each day. As long as you are fighting for it, it means you are spiritually alive and kicking. People teach best and write best what they are presently working on. The spiritual danger begins when you become complacent, either when you feel you have already achieved that special connection or feel that you have no chance of achieving it.

1. To be connecting spiritually, constantly, you need to master being present. To get in the Now, you need to leave your past behind, and to forget about your future. Let go!
2. The secret to implementing anything consistently is by getting into the routine of learning about it. And the secret to connecting to G-d while doing Mitzvot is the habit of learning Torah. שתרגילני בתורתך *That You get me into the routine of learning Your Torah.* ותדביקני במצותיך. *And (by being in the habit of learning,) You will connect me with your mitzvot.*
3. Learn the balance of fast and slow thinking to keep your mind focused both on the general, overall idea, and on the details and specifics as well. Yaakov referred to prayer, to piercing the Heavens, as בַּחֶרֶב־וּבַקֶּשֶׁתִּי. *With my sword and with my bow (and arrow).* On the one hand, the faster you move a blade or sword, the more power it has. To stay focused on the general *idea* of what you are praying, you need to keep moving in your prayers. But to focus on the word, you need to slow down. As America's top sniper once revealed his sharpshooting secret. "You have to slow your heart rate, stay calm. You have to shoot in between your heartbeats."
4. Although the world is fast-paced and you need to speed up in your outside world performance, slow down in your inside world. Haste makes waste. Pray, bless, learn, and live right the first time around. As Abraham Lincoln said, "I am a slow walker, but I never walk back."

SAVE THE MOMENT

In 1974, Cat's in the Hat was the hit song of the day, a song that hit the cords of the hearts of many dads. Here are the lyrics - a real tear jerker. If you know the words, sing them again, so you won't forget them!

My child arrived just the other day
He came to the world in the usual way
But there were planes to catch, and bills to pay
He learned to walk while I was away
And he was talking before I knew it and as he grew

He said, "I'm gonna be like you, Dad,
You know I'm gonna be like you"...
When you comin home, Dad? I don't know
when,
But we'll get together then,
You know we'll have a good time then.

My son turned ten just the other day
He said "Thanks for the ball, Dad, come on
let's play
Can you teach me to throw?" I said, "Not
today,

I got a lot to do" He said "that's okay"
And he walked away but his smile never
dimmed
And said "I'm gonna be like him, yeah
You know I'm going to be like him"

Well, he came from college just the other day
So much like a man, I just had to say,
"Son, I'm proud of you, can you sit for a
while?"
He shook his head, and he said with a smile
"What I'd really like, Dad, is to borrow the car
keys
See you later, can I have them please? "
When you comin' home, Son? I don't know
when,
But we'll get together then, Dad
You know we'll have a good time then.

Now I've long since retired, my son's moved
away
I called him up just the other day
I said "I'd like to see you, if you don't mind"
He said "I'd love to Dad, if I could find the
time.
You see my new job's a hassle, and the kids
have the flu.
But It's sure nice talking to you, Dad,
It's been sure nice talking to you.."
And as I hung up the phone it had occurred to
me
He'd grown up just like me, My boy was just
like me...

Shame that we dads haven't changed much, since. Why do so many dads forget this song of the generations?!

Many people are ready to "save the day". But not so many people are ready to "save the moment". To be a hero when things are haywire and for the big things in life - for that, we are ready, we have the energy. But for that everyday smile, nice gesture... to hear someone out, to feel someone's awkwardness, that is not

on our radar. Fathers like to say, "Contact me for the BIG things, when you need a hero to "put out the fire". Like helping marry off the child, paying their tuition and getting them a job. Otherwise, I am unavailable! I can't waste my time for the little things! If I do, how do you expect me to be able to be the hero when I am most needed?"

It is so ironic, though. I keep learning in life, the hard way, that NO ONE *really* wants you be their hero. No one *wants* you to SAVE them. People, deep down would rather be their own hero, of their own life stories. All they really want from you, NEED from you, is for you to be a nice person, and share their special moments with them, and to experience with them what they are going through. To feel what they feel. Teachers, Coaches, Dads, Moms - ask those who are dependent on you the real truth; they will tell you. They need you more to save the moment, than they need you to save the day. And for the big things, they would rather depend on G-d. But it is you whom they need to be with them through their everyday emotions...

Everyone knows that giving is the key to happiness, but not everyone realizes that there are two ways to give: חסד, kindness, and רחמים, mercy. We see in the beginning of Birkat Hamazon, in the end of the Amidah, in Nishmat, in Tahanun, that kindness and mercy are two different words, two different behaviors. What is the difference? Also, we know that Avraham Avinu was the pillar of kindness. תָּמַן אֶמֶת לִישָׁלֵב חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם. What is kindness? And how does it differ from mercy?

Mercy is to fill a need, to solve a problem, to heal a pain. Kindness is that even if there is no call for mercy, but there is אהבת חסד, a love and a desire to give.

Avraham's tent was situated to the side of the road that people traveled to and from Sedom and Amorah. After Sedom and Amorah were

destroyed, no more traffic would pass near Avraham's house. So, Avraham moved his tent to a place where there was more traffic, so that he could continue to do kindness. (See Rashi 20;1) But Avraham! Finally, you can go on vacation! Why look for more people? For more problems? No one ASKED you to open another chessed organization?!?!

That is Kindness! Kindness is even when no one is asking, no one is crying, there is no fire to put out, there is no saving the day,... there is just a desire to give, to love, to be a nice person and be there for people on their journey through life. Avraham believed that G-d brings the rain, even without anyone asking! G-d supports people, even without them asking. Not out of pity, but just to be nice! And if G-d acts in this way, we are to emulate His behavior.

It is easier to get people to be Merciful than it is to get them to be Kind. It is so ironic, though, how people forget what you *do* for them, and remember only how you make them feel. People forget the heroes that saved them. But people do not forget the someone who put his arm over their shoulder, when they felt lonely.

All during my youth, my parents assured me that before my wedding, they would see to it that I would have a beautiful smile. Braces, if needed; bite plate, whitening, etc. But B'H, I got engaged to the first girl I met, while learning in Israel, before coming back to New Jersey for Pesach. Although I wore a plate that helped my teeth straighten up, I still had a gap between my two front teeth. My wedding was going to be in Israel, and I had only 2 weeks in USA to do "bonding", a procedure in which the orthodontist would need to add to each

tooth, to close up the gap for that perfect smile. But when I showed up at the family orthodontist, I was informed that he had taken an early leave for Passover. The secretary, instead, referred us all to another orthodontist, Dr. Levy, a fifteen-minute drive away. Someone my family had never heard of.

When Dr. Levy saw my teeth, he said that first, I needed to whiten them to match the color of the bonding. I did not have enough time for whitening strips. Dr. Levy said that, with the latest technology, for 1,200 dollars, he could make my teeth as white as my shirt, in an hour and a half. But my mother was not ready to pay that kind of money for whitening.

As I got up from the chair, frustrated, Dr. Levy sat me down. "I want your teeth to be perfect for the wedding. I will whiten your teeth at a loss; it will cost you only 450 dollars." My mother was on board. After my smile was perfect, I asked Mr. Levy why he was so kind to me.

"20 years ago, in Hillel yeshiva, your father was my son's Rabbi in second grade. Hillel Yeshiva, at the time, had a majority of Sephardic students. All the boys were getting a Tallit for Shacharit prayers, but my Ashkenazi son was the only child in the class who would not be wearing a Tallit. Your father called me up, asking me if it would be okay to get my son a Sephardic Tallit, so that he would not feel out of place in the Sefardic class. This has helped my son feel mainstream, which, ultimately, helped him excel in all of his studies! All because of your father's thoughtfulness! When you said you were a Farhi, I thought that it would be my privilege to pay back Rabbi Farhi's son, white teeth for a white Tallit!

Mercy is a must in our relationships. But kindness is the glue. Here are the Selfie Steps, the self-help steps to becoming a kind person.

1- Get Your Smile On

- 2- Make People Feel At Home
- 3- Give Off Confident and Optimistic Vibes
- 4- Dish out the Compliments.
- 5- Show That You're Actually Listening.

PREPARED FOR LIFE

Rav Abahu said, why do we blow a Shofar made of a ram's horn (on Rosh Hashana)? G-d said, blow Shofar of a ram before Me on Rosh Hashana, so that I will remember the Akeidah of Yitzhak, son of Abraham for you, and I will consider it as if you performed your own Akeidah before Me. (Rosh Hashana 16a) I always wondered how G-d could consider that we sacrificed ourselves on the Altar to Him? How can anything we do be considered in any way like Yitzhak's self-sacrifice, even in the wildest stretch of imagination? And why does Rav Abahu mention Yitzhak son of Abraham?

It's quite interesting. Out of the whole episode, it is the Akeida, of all things, that G-d remembers. Because that is all that a human being, even one as great as Yitzhak, can do. Prepare. Maybe your Akeida will not be considered as being exactly like the Akeidah of Yitzhak, but by preparing the way he did, that preparation will be considered a sacrifice, just as it was for Yitzhak.

You see, Yitzhak did not just jump onto the Altar and ask to get it over with. Yitzhak was very prepared. He asked to be tied. The Akeidah is the binding that Yitzhak asked of his father, so that he would not make any movement, causing himself to be *pasul*, unfit as a sacrifice. Yitzhak was also concerned about the possibility that he could involuntarily hurt his father, out of a reflex action. Even in that fateful moment, his thoughts were concentrated on not causing his father to bleed. (Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer) He was totally calm

about the situation and prepared for it, so he was able to think about doing the job in the best possible way. Yitzhak asked to be bound, so that he could be totally prepared. For that is all that G-d wants from us. To be prepared to serve Him.

The Noam Elimelech derives the secret of Chassidut from here: if you want to *daven* well, prepare yourself to die *Al Kidush Hashem*. Vision yourself ready to die for the sake of G-d's Name, and your *kavvana* will soar. Each morning before prayer, visualize your very own Akeidah.

Your life is about how well you perform. There is a rule in performance. The 6 P rule. Prior Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance. If you made a parenting mistake, don't blame yourself. Just be more prepared next time. If you schmoozed through your learning Seder, don't feel bad. Just be more prepared next time. If you spaced out through *Shemoneh Esrei*, don't feel like a loser. Just be more prepared next time.

You see, your performance will be as great as your preparation. As a rebbi, I have learned this the hard way. When I am not prepared enough, even if the boys in *Shiur* don't know the Gemara well, they feel that I am unprepared. And they are insulted.

When your Shabbat table is not a Shabbat table – no singing, no connection with the kids, no *divrei Torah*, most of the time – it's because



you, the father, are not prepared. You did not prepare what to say, you did not prepare what to sing, or you did not prepare a topic your kids are interested in. Your Shabbat Table can make the family reach a much higher spiritual level, if you just prepare. It's amazing what a bag of treats can do.

I am not blaming myself, or anybody else. I am trying to understand life. All we do, our whole life, is prepare. Think about what we do most of our productive hours in life. You prepare your house for better living. Prepare for work. Prepare for eating. Prepare for a good sleep. Of course, what ends up happening is always only in G-d's Hands. But He leaves preparation up to us and expects us to prepare.

THE METHOD TO GREATNESS

The most confusing thing about humility is the misconception that humility means to be submissive, passive, shattered emotionally, bashful...But it's the exact opposite! The Jews who made the most notable changes to our nation were those who were most noted for their humility. Avraham Avinu. Moshe Rabenu. David Hamelech.

In this week's *parasha*, Avraham said about himself, – וְאֶנֶּכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר *And I am like dirt and ashes* (Bereshit 18; 27). What?!? The Father of Nations? The man who won the first world war, solo? He is nothing? The man who was thrown into the furnace of Ur Kasdim and came out alive! He is nothing?? Also, truly humble people don't call themselves humble, if only because they're too humble to ever say it. What did Avraham mean, then, when he said, "I am like dust and ashes"?

Avraham told G-d, "I owe You everything!!! If not for you, G-d, I would have been burnt to ashes in Nimrod's furnace. And without You, G-d, I would have died at war in the hands of King Amrafel and deteriorated into the dust of the desert" (Yalkut Shimoni). These words are the key to Avraham's humility, and the key for

Scary things happen when we forget to prepare for the important things in life. Preparation leads to making the right choices in life. You can prepare to bring up children, or just happen to have them grow up in your home. You can prepare the necessary attitudes and behaviors that make a tranquil home, or just happen to live there. You can prepare your children for leading a life of serving G-d, or just wait and see what happens.

The greatest things that human beings accomplish are usually the rewards G-d grants for the great efforts that were expended.

us to access humility. Avraham wasn't saying, "I am nothing." That is false. He was saying, "I am nothing without You."

This reminds me of a joke my Rabbi told me a few times.

A non-religious driver in Tel Aviv has difficulty finding a parking spot. He goes around the block a few times but every space is taken, even the parking on the sidewalk. He is late for his meeting. He turns to G-d and says, "Master of the world! If you find me a parking spot, I swear to You that I will put on Tefillin today!" As he turns the corner for the fifth time, there it is! An open parking spot! He turns to G-d and says, "Thank you G-d, but no need to find me a parking spot. I managed without You."

This is an awesome thing to meditate on. Think of all the great things that you have done, all the strengths that you have, all that you own. And then think how the worst things *could* have happened to you and all that you call yours, and how everything, *somehow*, is fine. Then, you will be humble (See *Orchot Tzaddikim*).

The next humble person was Moshe Rabbeinu. At the height of his “career” in *Parashat Beshalach*, after he took the Jews out of Egypt, split the sea, and brought the *mannah*, Moshe said, וְגַבְהֵנוּ מְאֹד, – *and we are nothing* (16;7). But that was after a lot of working on himself to achieve humility.

When Moshe wanted to become great, like his great grandfather Avraham, he knew that the only way was to first become small. But G-d told Moshe that he was far from reaching Avraham’s humility. For when I asked Avraham to bring up his son on the altar, he said the word, הִנְנִי. Here I am. I am ready to do anything you ask of me, even if I will never understand Your reasons (See Midrash Sechel Tov, Vayera 22:1).

Rashi comments that this word, *Hineni*, refers to being humble. What? How does being ready to give up his son mean that Avraham was humble? *Because when you really, truly feel that all you have has been given to you by G-d, you are ready to give everything back.* If you are not *constantly* working on being ready to give back to G-d, you are not humble. Humility, in its greatest form, is about being ready to give all you’ve got. Hashem was telling Moshe, *If you’re trying hard to be humble, you’re not being humble.* Humility is not something that you do. Humility is something that you are.

Avraham was the king of humility, for he was the most ready to do whatever G-d hinted that He wanted. וַיְהִי אֶחָד הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַהֲאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת-אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי – *And it was after these things, and G-d tested Avraham and He said, Avraham. And he said, Here I am (Bereshit 22;1). After what things? After the Ministering Angels said in front of G-d, “Master of the world, this Elder, you granted him a child at the age of 100, and from all of the feasts that he made, he did not bring before You even one turtledove sacrifice?” G-d answered them, “All that he has done, didn’t*

he do everything for his son? If I would ask him to offer his son as a sacrifice, he would do it immediately!” (Pesikta). R Yisrael Salanter asked: What exactly was the big test of the *Akeidat Yitzhak*? If G-d told Avraham to do something, Avraham had better do it, or else G-d, the Big Boss, could take Yitzhak and Avraham if He wanted to!? What was Avraham’s alternative?

The test was to see how *ready* Avraham was to do the will of G-d. So, G-d did not tell Avraham to slaughter Yitzhak; He asked Avraham only to bring Yitzhak up to the Altar. The test was to see if Avraham was really ready to do G-d’s will, on his own, even if that means being ready to slaughter, if that is what G-d *maybe* meant. This is why the Torah emphasizes, וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת-יָדוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת-הַמַּאֲכָלָת, לְשַׁחֵט אֶת-בְּנֵן – *And Avraham sent his hand, and he took the knife to slaughter his son.* Of course he sent his hand! How else could he slaughter his son? When G-d told Avraham that he passed the test, He said, אַל-תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ, – *Do not send your hand to the lad...* Why? Because the whole test was to see how *ready* Avraham was to do G-d’s will. The sign of your humility, the gauge of your humility, is not what you say. It is not even what you do. It is how ready you are to give back because of a recognition of how much you owe. The magic is in the word הִנְנִי. Here I am, G-d. I am all Yours.

We all want a better relationship with G-d. And we all want to make our homes into a better place, a place that G-d calls home. But the only way G-d will enter our homes, the only way G-d feels comfortable in our homes, is if we are humble. As we see in the words, וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְקֹנָן בְּאֲלָנֵי מַמְרֵא – *And G-d appeared to him (to Avraham) in the planes of Mamre.* The commentators ask: Why didn’t the Torah just say that G-d appeared to Avraham? Why say, to “him”? The Kli Yakar answers that Avraham received this amazing

prophecy in the merit of his being humble, and not taking credit for his greatness.

To become the greatest father, you need humility. To become the greatest teacher, you need to be humble. And to be the greatest king, you need to be the most humble. Avraham, The Father of All Nations, was able to be the patriarch because of his great humility. Moshe was able to be the great leader and teacher of the Torah of our nation because of his great humility. And King David was the greatest King, for he was the most humble king. וְאֶנֶּכִי תוֹלַעַת וְלֹא אִישׁ *And I am a worm, and not a man (Tehillim 22:7).*

The humility in these men brought about such a change in humanity, and caused such great ripple effects. How so? *It has been said, that every action that is real and holy causes a chain reaction* (Shlomo Carlebach). To be a leader, to cause a ripple effect, you need to be real. The only way to be real is to be humble. Because the real you is the humble you. Why?

To be humble is to accept being human, and to accept that we are powerless in so many areas. We make mistakes. We are dependent. And all we have is solely what G-d has given us. And all that we do not have is all that G-d has decided is not good for us to have. Being human is accepting that there are so many things that we just don't know the answers to.

HOW TO PUT ON YOUR THINKING CAPS

What did you do when your teacher or Rabbi asked you, in grade school, to “put on your thinking caps?” What does a thinking cap look like, anyway? After reading this, you will know the dimensions of the thinking cap and will be familiar with its instruction manual.

The first person to have a thinking cap was none other than your great grandfather, Avraham Avinu. The Sefer Yetzirah (6;7) writes that when Avraham came into the world, וְרָאָה וְחָקַר וְהָבִין וְחָצַב וְחָקַק וְעִלְתָּה בִּידּוֹ

Haughtiness is like a mask that conceals one's being “human” and real, and being human is something that the haughty one can't accept. This mask of haughtiness fits so well that the haughty one forgets how beautiful being human actually is.

This being said, we can better appreciate the words of the Orchos Tzaddikim. *Most problems in life are solved with humility. The greatness of a mitzvah is as great as the humility of the one performing it. Just as a small mitzvah done with humility is worth a thousand times more than a mitzvah done with haughtiness, a mitzvah done with haughtiness is despicable to G-d; it is an abomination in His eyes and He doesn't want it. G-d rips up the prayers of those who are haughty. The humble one gets all the good in life, for grace is G-d's present to the humble. Once one has humility, G-d answers his prayers immediately. G-d has such pleasure and happiness when the humble person does a mitzvah; this is what G-d desires...*

Let us not forget our great grandfather Avraham Avinu and what made him so great. And let us not forget the Jewish Greatness Method. Humility makes you Ready, and Humility makes you Real. And when you are Ready, and when you are Real, you cause great Reaction.

וְלֵהָבִין הַבְּרִיאָה וְכוּ' *He gazed , and saw, and examined, and he understood , ... and he grasped the Creation.* Born to Terah, who was an idol manufacturer and a top-ranking officer in Nimrod's pagan kingdom, there was no way that Avraham could have known that G-d exists. He would have to draw that conclusion and recognize His existence on his own. He needed to “invent” a religion. There was no Aish website, Chabbad, outreach, birthright fellowship, or Shabbaton. Avraham had to figure it all out himself. He needed to think.

And the Sefer Yetzirah tells us exactly how he did that. Six elements to the thinking cap:

הביט means *to gaze*. You cannot make any observations until you choose a subject to focus on, and then study it. If you need to think about something, make sure that you can “gaze”, or focus, at its properties, to the best of your ability. If you have a riddle you need to crack, if you need a solution to a life problem, put it all down on paper, in its finest detail, in its rawest detail. If you need to focus on what someone is saying and give him carefully considered feedback, write down notes on the conversation. Only then can you gaze at the matter or concept and an intelligent remark may just occur to you. Only if you put down the questions on paper, can you begin to think. The motor that gets thought moving, that brings about focus, is the art of asking the right question. Avraham asked a few questions, Who created the world? Who was first in the world? Who is the strongest in the world? Why is there a world? That’s how he arrived at the first step of the thinking process, enabling him to come up with the true answer.

וראה and *he saw*. You can understand something only when you translate it into your own words. “In other words, ...”. We all share the same world, but each person has a different perspective from which he views it. Avraham did not just ask a question or look deeply into something. He came up with an explanation of Creation, the only one that can be true. Part of the thinking process is noticing what is important and significant to you, and how you see and interpret things. One needs to be ready to fail in his first perception, in order to go on to step three...

והקיר and *he examined*. After you take your stand, forming your view and perspective, you need to examine it. Is there another way to

look at this? Which explanation do I feel is the truest?

והבין and *he understood, he comprehended*. He was able to understand it at a level from which he could make deductions. מבין דבר מתוך דבר. Allow me to explain, with an example.

Let us take flight, for instance. One of my favorite museums is the Smithsonian Air and Space museum in Washington, D.C. Aviation pioneers pondered for generations how to make the first form of flight. Birds fly, but till the Wright brothers came around, people believed that the unique element necessary for aviary flight was *flapping wings*. Once humans discovered that the decisive element of flight is air pressure, the gentle curve of the top of the wing that matters – that the air traveling faster over that curved top creates lift- they revealed the real essence of flight. Now, all we need is a propeller and wings, and up we go! We can leave the flapping to the birds, who never discovered engines. It took us humans many years till we comprehended the essence of flight, i.e. aerodynamics, and disregarded the flapping of the wings.

So, וראה would mean – *How can we fly?* וראה would mean – *I see that birds can fly. I assume that it is because they can flap wings, and I can't.* והקיר - would mean to examine the essence of flight- *Is it the flapping wings or the aerodynamics?* והבין – would mean to *try the aerodynamics without the flapping wings and see what happens.*

Whenever we come across a “blank wall” in life, in any area, life issues, learning blocks, lack of creativity, it is because we are not going through these steps properly. We are either not asking the right question, not taking a perspective but just saying “I have no idea”, not examining our perspective and beliefs, or



not understanding the essence of what is bothering us. Once we figure out the essence of what we need to think about and discover, once we have one part of the solution, we are ready for stages five and six...

כחצב - similar to the word stonecutting, and חקק to inscribe in stone. There is no better way for you to comprehend something than by writing it down. Arranging your thoughts, your conclusions, provides you with a deeper understanding than you have when your ideas are in disarray, floating around in your head. Writing is also a form of passing on the information to others. If you want to know something well, teach it.

What does it matter if we use our thinking caps or not? One of the proofs brought in the Hovot Halevavot that we are the Chosen Nation is that the average Jew is always more successful than the average gentile. The percentage of Jews who won the Nobel Peace Prize is much higher than the percentage of Jews in the world. Gentiles wonder why such a small

percentage of Jews, out of the world's population, have been responsible for a disproportionately large number of inventions. I believe that G-d allows His People to be more successful within the laws of nature, in line with the aforementioned elements of the thinking caps.

Have you ever noticed that a Jew always answers a question with a question? Jews love questions, and questions are the springboard for thinking. It could be that Jews adapted this style of thinking from the way of the Talmud, which is in question-answer format. South Koreans teach Talmud to their students to demonstrate this way of thinking, for they believe that this method is our secret to making inventions and thinking effectively, our secret to success. עדות ה' נאמנה מחכימת פתי. The Torah is *truthful, enlightening the simpleton*. In fact, the six elements of the Jewish thinking caps forms the essence of Talmudic back and forth discussion. What could be a better inheritance than a great grandfather's thinking cap?

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A"H

Leiluy Nishmas Hagaon HaRav Yaakov Busel zt"l

Refuah Shelema

AVRAHAM BEN MAZAL

