

וּיְרָא

FROM THOUGHT TO DEED

Throughout the generations, the *Akeidas Yitzchak* has been a benchmark for special supplication to Hashem. It has even been instituted as an integral part of the *Rosh Hashanah* prayers (*Ta'anis* 15•, *Rosh Hashanah* 16•). The ram's horn is specifically used as a *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah* so that Hashem can consider it as if each of us personally participated in the *Akeidah* (*Rosh Hashanah* 16•). It was established as part of the *Rosh Hashanah* Torah reading, so that *Klal Yisrael* be favorably remembered on the Day of Judgment (Rashi, *Haga'os Habach*, *Megillah* 31•).

When Hashem contemplated destroying all of *Klal Yisrael* as punishment for the *eigel* (the golden calf), Moshe *Rabbeinu* invoked Hashem's memory of the *Akeidah* in order to provide dispensation for *Klal Yisrael* (*Shemos Rabbah* 44:5). When David *Hamelech* sought to establish the location of the *mizbei'ach* (altar) for the *Beis Hamikdash*, he searched for the spot where the ashes of the ram of the *Akeidah* were deposited (*Zevachim* 62•) and understood that this was the designated area. The importance of Yitzchak as one who placates Hashem's anger is also indicated by the parallel use of the word “*vayetar*” — “and he prayed” with which Yitzchak is identified. In the episode in which Yitzchak's wife has difficulty in conceiving, the Torah informs us that

ויעתר יצחק לה'

Yitzchak prayed to Hashem (*Bereishis* 25:21).

Similarly, when David sought to establish the location of the *mizbei'ach*, whose purpose was to assuage Hashem's anger, the identical phrase is employed:

ויעתר ה' לארץ

Hashem accepted the prayers of the residents of the land (*Shemuel* II 24:25).

The special significance of the unusual Torah usage of the term “*vayetar*” is explained in the *Gemara* (*Sukkah* 14•; *Yevamos* 64•): the word “*eiter*” from the root עתר refers to a “pitchfork.” “As a pitchfork turns the grain from place to place, so the prayer of the righteous turns the dispensations of Hashem from anger to mercy.”

Rashi (*Shemos* 19:13) comments that the *shofar* used to herald the giving of the Torah (*Kabalas Hatorah*) was from the ram of *akeidas Yitzchak*. The *shofar* which will be used to proclaim the coming of *Mashiach* will be the right sided horn of the ram of the *Akeidah* (*Ta'anis Yerushalmi* 10•; *Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* 31). *Kabalas Hatorah* and the coming of *Mashiach*, the two most glorious events in world history, are inextricably bound up with the *Akeidah*.

After testing the resolve of Avraham and Yitzchak in determining that they would actually go through with the *Akeidah*, Hashem decided to halt the proceedings. The angel of Hashem proclaimed:

אל תשלח ירך אל הנער ואל תעש לו מאומה

Do not lay your hand on the child, neither shall you do any harm to him
(*Bereishis* 22:12).

Rashi reveals that Avraham then complained to the angel:

אם כן לחנם באתי לכאן, אעשה חבלה ואוציא ממנו מעט דם, אמר לו : אל תעש לו מאומה -
אל תעש בו מום

“If so, I came here for naught; I shall make in him a wound and draw from him a small amount of blood.” [The angel] said to him, “[Avraham,] do not do anything (מאומה) to him [Yitzchak], “Do not make even a defect in him” (Rashi, *ibid.*).

Hashem was satisfied that Avraham was willing to sacrifice his son, Yitzchak, and Avraham knew that he had passed the test. What did Avraham have to gain by insisting on “drawing blood” from his son? Any rational human being should have been satisfied that he had proven himself to Hashem. In addition to that, he even had his beloved son alive and intact. Avraham did not come in vain — he had proven his loyalty to Hashem. Why, then, did Avraham continue asserting that his mission was futile unless he actually drew the blood of his beloved son?

Moreover, what is Rashi’s motive in describing the slaughter of the ram in such gory detail? Rashi itemizes each minute aspect of Avraham’s prayer:

יהי רצון שתהא זו כאילו היא עשויה בבני, כאילו בני שחוט, כאילו דמו זרוק, כאלו בני מופשט, כאלו הוא נקטר ונעשה דשן

May it be [Hashem’s] will that this be as though it were done to my son, as though my son were slaughtered, as though his blood were sprinkled, as though he were flayed, as though he were consumed and became ashes (Rashi, *Bereishis* 22:13).

Why must Rashi itemize every blood-soaked detail? Would it not be sufficient just to state that the ram was a substitute sacrifice for Yitzchak?

Furthermore, why was it even necessary to have a substitute sacrifice? After all, this whole affair was only a test — Avraham should have been content to go home after the Heavenly reprieve. Why did Hashem now intervene with a ram which had been created for this very purpose on *Shabbos* eve of the Six Days of Creation (*Targum Yonasan*, *ibid.* 13)?

It is understood that every human action consists of two steps: the initial thought and the physical act. Man must first visualize what he wants to do, by picturing it in his brain, then man may put it into effect. This is the human condition — it is not thus with Hashem. Hashem’s actions are not processes of *ko’ach* — potential — and *po’al* — achievement; Hashem’s initial thought is, in effect, the accomplishment of the act. Hashem’s *ko’ach* is, in effect, the *po’al* at the same instant (*Yedid Nefesh* 1:4). There are, however, ten instances where this rule does not hold true: the ten items which were created on the eve of the *Shabbos* of Creation. These items, the ram of Avraham included, were created in the *ko’ach* state and were not transformed into the

po'al state until a specific human action mandated their existence (Maharsha, *Pesachim* 54•). Avraham's desire to offer a sacrifice at the *Akeidah* effected the existence of this ram. Hence the *ko'ach* aspect of the ram's creation took place during the Six Days of Creation, but the actual *po'al* existence of the ram occurred only when Avraham expressed the need to offer a sacrifice.

The Ramban (*Ha'emunah Vehabitachon* 19) explains the unusual use of the phrase "*ad shetechpatz*" — "until it pleases" in *Shir Hashirim* (2:7) in a revolutionary sense. A thought at first exists in the "idea" phase, and then it is articulated into an "action" phase. In the "idea" phase it is still abstract, it is not yet reality. In the "action" phase the thought is no longer abstract, it becomes reality. "*Ad shetechpatz*" refers to when the thought leaves the domain of "idea" and becomes reality by being instituted into action. The Ramban emphasizes that a good thought should not be imagined unless the good thought can actually be brought to fruition. Moreover, the Ramban explains that an imagined good thought which is not translated into action is an "empty thought" unworthy of blessing, and even, G-d forbid, the opposite.

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת שֵׁם ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוּא

You shall not take the name of Hashem your G-d in vain... (*Shemos* 20:7)

means, according to the Ramban, that you shall not intellectually entertain the "name of Hashem or His great works," unless you can effect that thought into an action. A good thought must achieve "*ad shetechpatz*" or else the thought is "in vain." The root of the word "*shetechpatz*" (שִׁתְּחַפֵּץ) is "*cheifetz*" (חִפֵּץ), connoting both "desire" and "object." "Desire" represents the *ko'ach* stage while "object" represents the *po'al* stage. A good thought requires the implementation of the intellectual stage of "desire" into the physical stage of "object."

When Avraham cried out that "he came here for naught," he was expressing his frustration at his inability with the *ma'aseh Akeidah*, to accomplish the "*ad shetechpatz*." He experienced a noble thought: sacrificing his son to Hashem; once he was commanded by Hashem not to fulfill the 'desire,' he wanted to at least accomplish some sort of physical act which would serve as an expression of the original intention. Hence, Avraham was not malicious in wanting to draw blood from Yitzchak; he simply sought some method of preventing the original good intention from being in vain. For once Avraham intellectually initiated a *mitzvah*, he had to find some physical expression for it, even if it meant just drawing blood from his intended sacrifice (Yitzchak).

The *Akeidah* itself was a magnificent act of love for Hashem; but the crying out of "I came here for naught" is an even greater act of love and devotion. Avraham was dissatisfied with the reprieve because his meritorious thought was transformed into an insult to Hashem, a thought in vain. The miraculous appearance of an animal which substituted for Yitzchak was a response to Avraham's cry. The sacrificing of the ram became the actual *po'al* realization of the *ko'ach*. Hence, Avraham's recitation (according to Rashi) of every little sacrificial detail is not an adventure in gore; it is an intrinsic part of effecting the *ko'ach* to *po'al*. It was imperative that Avraham accomplish, in some way, the meritorious thought that expressed his love for Hashem.

Chazal have a saying:

שֶׁהַתְּחִיל בַּמִּצְוָה אוֹמֵר לוֹ גְּמוּר

He who initiates a good deed is instructed to complete it (*Yerushalmi Pesachim* 70:)

for the initiation of a *mitzvah* is an incomplete entity. It must be carried out to its completion.

The Abarbanel (*Devarim* 20:5-7) expresses a similar sentiment regarding the exemption of a soldier during wartime. A man who has built a house and not yet dedicated it; or a man who has planted a vineyard and not yet enjoyed its fruits; or a man who has betrothed a woman, but not yet consummated the marriage, are all exempt from military service (*Devarim* 20:5-7). The Abarbanel explains that the Torah wishes to allow these individuals to finish the *mitzvah* which they had begun. A person who builds a house, for example, is required to put a *ma'akeh* — railing — around the roof (*ibid.* 22:8). An individual who plants a vineyard may redeem it in the fourth year, thus only then actually completing the vineyard. Finally, an individual who is newly wed must fulfill the *mitzvah* of *piryah verivyah* (“Be fruitful and multiply”) (*Bereishis* 1:28). In sum, the Torah wants to assure that he who commences a *mitzvah* should have an opportunity to complete it.

The significance of the *Akeidah* for all generations is in the effort exerted by Avraham to turn his good thought into actual deed, to achieve “*ad shetechpatz.*”

Every human being is born with the promise of the *ko'ach*. Every one of us is invested with this potential. The measure of a man is the degree to which that *ko'ach* is transformed into the *po'al*. True human accomplishment is the articulation of the idea into fact. The yardstick of achievement is not only the quantity of his accomplishments, but it is the degree to which he has reached his very limits in achieving his potential. The capacity for converting potential to action calibrates the greatness of man. He who is invested with little potential at birth, but succeeds in realizing that small potential is infinitely greater than the man who may have accomplished much, but did not truly realize his full capacity. Man must seek to emulate Hashem, Who has no discrepancy between the *ko'ach* and the *po'al*, but Whose very thought is the actual deed. At the *Akeidah* Avraham taught this valuable lesson to the generations; this is a most significant method in achieving one's spiritual potential.

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