



# Likkutei Sichos

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Everyone Wants to Bless

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## 1.

### AVRAHAM FORCING THE ISSUE

On the verse,<sup>1</sup> “There, he proclaimed {*va’yikra*} the name of Hashem, L-rd of the universe,” the Gemara comments:<sup>2</sup>

Do not read {this word as} “*va’yikra*” {he proclaimed}, but “*va’yakri*” {he caused others to proclaim}. This teaches that Avraham caused all passersby to proclaim the name of the Holy One. How so? After the guests ate and drank, they arose to bless Avraham. He said to them: “But did you eat from what is mine? Rather, you ate from the food of the L-rd of the universe. Therefore, thank, praise and bless the Creator.”<sup>3</sup>

The Midrash<sup>4</sup> adds that after eating, some people did **not** want to bless the Creator. Of these people, Avraham demanded that they pay a fortune for the food and drink (explaining that it was worth so much because, in a desert, food is so scarce). Once these guests realized what their refusal would cost, they relented and declared, “Blessed is the L-rd of the universe of whose bounty we have eaten.”

At first glance, when the people did eventually say, “Blessed is the L-rd of the universe...,” they did so because they had no choice (i.e., in order to avoid paying), and not because in their hearts, they had agreed to bless Hashem. This midrash is surprising:

We can appreciate that Avraham would encourage his guests to bless Hashem on their own volition, out of a sense of gratitude. And in doing so, we can also appreciate how he accomplished this: “Avraham caused... to proclaim the name of the Holy One...” But regarding those whom Avraham **forced** to bless — of what benefit was there of them **verbalizing** (only once — in Avraham’s presence), “Blessed is the L-rd of the universe...”? How can we say that in doing this, Avraham publicized Hashem’s name throughout the world? These people surely did not truly recognize Hashem’s existence!

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<sup>1</sup> *Bereishis* 21:33.

<sup>2</sup> *Sotah* 10a, ff.; quoted by Rashi on *Bereishis* 21:33; *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 54, end.

<sup>3</sup> {Lit., “The One who spoke — and the world was created.”}

<sup>4</sup> *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 49, sec. 4.

Were we talking about Jewish people, this question would not be valid because Rambam<sup>5</sup> famously rules that even if a Jew is coerced to do a mitzvah (or to “distance himself from a sin”), the Torah considers it as if he does so “of his own volition.” This is because “he wants to be part of the Jewish people, and he wants to perform all the mitzvos and distance himself from transgressions; it is only his evil inclination that compels him. Therefore, when a husband {is in a situation in which he is obligated by halachah to divorce his wife, but refuses to do so, the husband} is struck until his inclination has been subdued, and he says, ‘I want to divorce her,’ he is considered as having performed the divorce willingly.” Meaning, essentially and subconsciously,<sup>6</sup> every Jew wants to fulfill mitzvos. Any expressed desire not to do so is merely superficial. Thus, coercion causes the outward opposition of his {evil} inclination to fall away. So when the husband says, “I consent,” he does so from the (revelation of the) will inside every Jew.

This principle, however, is inapplicable to “all {non-Jewish} passersby.”<sup>7</sup>

## 2.

### YEFEH TOAR AND MORE QUESTIONS

#### *Yefeh Toar* comments:<sup>8</sup>

Although it is possible that they lied and said these words to him under duress, Avraham, nevertheless, did this to discharge his obligation to Hashem. Now, if they acted deceitfully, the sin lies on them, not on him.

We need to clarify:

(a) If “they acted deceitfully,” and “they lied to him,” what did Avraham accomplish? (b) The chief difficulty: It is difficult to say that Avraham did something merely to discharge his obligation; and, in fact, possibly, his guests

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<sup>5</sup> *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Geirushin*,” ch. 2, par. 20.

<sup>6</sup> {In the original, “בעצם ובפגמיות נפשו.”}

<sup>7</sup> {*Sotah* 10b, as quoted above: “Avraham caused all passersby to proclaim the name of the Holy One.”}

<sup>8</sup> *Yefeh Toar HaMekutzar* (in *Midrash Rabbah*, Vilna print); in *Yefeh Toar HaShalem*, his words imply something slightly different.

acted “deceitfully, because elsewhere, the Midrash<sup>9</sup> says that because of Avraham’s conduct (whereby Avraham had all his guests bless the “L-rd of the universe” for the food), Hashem declared, “I consider it as if you are a partner with Me in the world's creation,” and, “My name was not acknowledged among people, **and you caused people to recognize Me.**” This shows that by conducting himself in this way, Avraham succeeded in bringing about a **recognition** of the Creator of the world (for which reason, Avraham was considered a partner in Creation). We find no mention that the above was only stated regarding those whom Avraham caused to bless Hashem without his having pressured them, etc.

### 3.

#### THE VOICE

We will clarify this by prefacing with a discussion of another form in which a person’s true will can be manifest by striking him and weakening his evil inclination: His inner will expresses itself not merely by him declaring his consent, which, superficially and outwardly appears to be a forced, but it (a person’s inner will) affects his external will openly.<sup>10</sup>

We find an illustration of this other form in the narrative of the Spies. Originally, the spies had claimed,<sup>11</sup> “...for they are stronger *meemenu* {than us}.” The Talmud comments,<sup>12</sup> “Do not read, ‘stronger than us [*meemenu*]’ but... stronger than Hashem.” “The nation cried... and they said..., ‘Let us appoint a leader and let us return to Egypt.’” Then, “Moshe spoke” — **he berated them with harsh words**. Subsequently, “the people mourned exceedingly,” and then they said, “We are ready! We shall go up to the place that Hashem has spoken of.”

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<sup>9</sup> *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 43, sec. 7.

<sup>10</sup> With respect to the foregoing, note the Mittlerer Rebbe’s *Kuntres HaHispaalus*, p. 47b ff.

<sup>11</sup> *Bamidbar* 13:31 ff.

<sup>12</sup> *Sotah* 35a.

On this basis, we can also appreciate the teaching of the Mishnah:<sup>13</sup>

Every day, a Heavenly voice goes forth from Mount Chorev, proclaiming, “Woe to the creatures {i.e., people}, because of their affront to the Torah!” For whoever does not occupy himself with the Torah is called “censured,” etc.

Ostensibly, this is puzzling. The Heavenly voice is intended to inspire the Jewish people to learn Torah. Seemingly, the voice should (primarily) articulate the preciousness and virtues of Torah study, etc. Why does the voice only underscore the problem of those who are slack in their Torah study: “Woe to the creatures because of their affront to the Torah”?

[Furthermore, the Heavenly voice (also) seeks to motivate those Jewish people who are called “**creatures**” (“woe to the **creatures**”). The Alter Rebbe explains this to mean,<sup>14</sup> “those who are distant from Hashem’s Torah and His service, for which reason they are classified simply as ‘creatures.’” Namely, their single virtue is that Hashem created them. The Heavenly voice also seeks to motivate this class of Jews to learn. Thus, how could this Heavenly declaration, “Woe to the creatures because of their affront...” (without explaining the preciousness and virtues of Torah study) possibly motivate such Jews?]

The explanation: Every Jew possesses a divine soul (which wants to fulfill all the mitzvos). Furthermore, every Jew, deep down, has within him “precious treasures” (belief in Hashem, love of Hashem — the root of all 248 positive mitzvos).<sup>15</sup> Therefore, he needs no explanation regarding the greatness of the Torah. A person’s inner will need only to be elicited and brought to the surface, and **automatically**, the person will involve himself in the Torah.

Were he **not** at the level of “creatures,” we could reveal these “precious treasures” by “revealing light” (i.e., by emphasizing the preciousness of the Torah, and so forth). However, since he stands at the spiritual level of “creatures” — because of the materialistic and coarse nature of his external faculties — the light of his soul cannot shine. Therefore, we must remove —

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<sup>13</sup> *Pirkei Avos* 6:2.

<sup>14</sup> *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 32.

<sup>15</sup> See *Toras HaBesht* — addenda to *Kesser Shem Tov*, sec. 44 (and in the notes, loc. cit.); et al.

**shatter** — the materialism that covers the light of his soul. Removing this coarse outer layer is accomplished by the Heavenly voice and the reprimand, “**Woe** to the creatures... for whoever does not occupy himself with Torah is called ‘censured,’ etc.”<sup>16</sup>

#### 4.

##### IT GETS WORSE

However, this method of breaking, through the Heavenly voice, only works for the type of Jews who are capable of sensing that their lowly spiritual state results from causing “an affront to **Torah.**” Meaning, even in their current situation (in which materialism and coarseness conceal the light of their soul), they can still feel, and integrate a spiritual impetus coming from the soul. Thus, the “censure” and breaking of materialism is (not a form of **breaking**, but) an elicitation of the inwardness {and inner will of a Jew} from a hidden state to a revealed one.

However, an even lower condition exists in which a person has fallen to such a low state that nothing spiritual affects him. This is because his materialistic and coarse nature completely covers his inwardness and soul. Since it is not possible for this person (in his current condition) to feel how lowly he is, a manner of “censure” is called for whose entire purpose is to break — “a scream,” “You are bad, wicked, and abominable...”<sup>17</sup> This breaks his entire character, and thus, he becomes a vessel for holiness.

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<sup>16</sup> See *Or HaTorah*, “*VaEira*,” end of p. 122 ff.

<sup>17</sup> *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 29.

## 5.

UGLY MAN!

We find an illustration of this second way {and lower level} in a narrative in the Gemara:<sup>18</sup>

An incident occurred in which Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, came from.... He encountered a person who was exceedingly ugly. Rabbi Elazar said to him: “Worthless person! How ugly you are. The man replied: “Tell the Artisan who made me: ‘How ugly is the vessel You made....’”

A question (quoting the idiom of the Gemara): “At the outset, what was he thinking?” Did Rabbi Elazar not know (before the man had said to him, “Tell the Artisan”) that the appearance and shape of a human body is Hashem’s handiwork?

Additionally, we need to clarify: How could Rabbi Elazar say something like this (“Worthless person! How ugly you are”)?

The explanation: When Rabbi Elazar said, “Worthless person! How ugly you are,” he meant (**primarily**) true worthlessness and ugliness — in a spiritual sense. Rabbi Elazar could tell that this person’s spiritual standing was pitifully low and could discern no true — or spiritual — virtues in this person, etc.

Furthermore, even the singular redeeming “virtue” of people who are called “mere creatures” (as discussed) was not visible and evident in this fellow. Rabbi Elazar saw that because of this person’s lowly spiritual state, he could not draw him closer to Hashem diplomatically. Trying to do so would be futile. The only way to reach him was by crushing and nullifying {the wickedness in the person}: “Worthless person! How ugly you are” — this would break his materialistic and coarse character.

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<sup>18</sup> *Taanis* 20a ff.

This explains why immediately after the spiritual ugliness in the person was crushed and broken, the person retorted, “Tell the **Artisan who made me.**” Only then did it dawn on him that there was an “Artisan who made me,” and he recognized His existence. The man was transformed {by R. Elazar’s sharp rebuke] into a person with a discerning, perceptive mind, who understood that there was an “Artisan who made me.” He (at least) recognized the virtue of being **Hashem’s creation.** Furthermore, it was the “**Artisan who made me**” (not merely one of the “creatures”). Meaning, he recognized the purpose of his being created, just as an artisan acts with intent and purpose.

## 6.

### THE REBBE RASHAB AND HIS CHASSID

We can suggest a similar explanation for a story related by chassidim about the Rebbe Rashab (which took place at the beginning of the Rebbe Rashab’s leadership):

A Jew came for an audience with the Rebbe, asking the Rebbe for a blessing regarding a serious matter for which he required great Heavenly mercy. The Rebbe answered he could do nothing; he could not help.

Hearing this {dismissive} reply, the man withdrew from the Rebbe’s room and broke into bitter weeping. As he was crying, Reb Zalman Aharon (the Rebbe Rashab’s brother) met the man. Reb Zalman Aharon asked why he was crying so bitterly. The man recounted what had happened and what the Rebbe had told him.

Reb Zalman Aharon entered his brother’s — the Rebbe’s — room. (As mentioned, this incident occurred at the beginning of the Rebbe Rashab’s leadership.) Reb Zalman Aharon asked: “Is this proper? Someone comes to ask for a blessing, and you tell him you cannot help, such that he sheds copious tears from immense pain?!”



The Rebbe Rashab then put on his *gartel*,<sup>19</sup> and asked that the man be readmitted. When he again entered the Rebbe Rashab's room, the Rebbe Rashab gave him a blessing, which came to fruition.

We need to clarify: Why did the Rebbe Rashab refuse originally to help the man and in such a curt manner that broke him? (Even if, theoretically, the Rebbe Rashab could not actually help the man, he at least could have encouraged him and offered some words to inspire hope and trust in Hashem. As the Rabbis say,<sup>20</sup> “Even if a sharp sword rests upon a person's neck, the person should not refrain from praying for mercy.”)

## 7.

### BEING A VESSEL

The explanation (possibly) is like what we proposed in our discussion earlier:<sup>21</sup>

**At that moment**, the particular Jewish man who had requested the Rebbe's blessing was not worthy, on account of his spiritual state, to receive the great blessing that his circumstance warranted. He was not a vessel for the blessing. This explains why the Rebbe told the man that he could not help him.

However, once the man heard the Rebbe speaking so bluntly, he was broken because of his plight. He then went and poured out his broken heart to Hashem. By doing this, he turned into a new person, and into a fitting vessel for the blessing.

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<sup>19</sup> {A black silk sash belt worn during prayer or when performing religious acts, etc.}

<sup>20</sup> *Berachos* 10a.

<sup>21</sup> See also *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 24, p. 227.

## 8.

AND FOR A GENTILE

**This** method of crushing and censure where the intention is [not to awaken and reveal the **light** of the soul — because in his current situation, the person {in need of help} is not a vessel for the light of holiness — but] to invest energy in breaking down their materialistic and coarse nature, also applies analogously to a Gentile.

The difference, however, is that a Jew, regardless of the situation in which he finds himself, still has his soul — his G-dly soul. Therefore, even when a Jew sins, “he **wants** to be part of the Jewish people, and he **wants** to perform all the mitzvos....” Therefore, only the person’s **persona** is shattered, because deep down, the person was good even **before** his external layer was peeled away. Consequently, the purpose of breaking the person’s materialistic nature is to reveal his inner character, which is **already present** within him.

By contrast, a Gentile doesn’t have a G-dly soul. So breaking him can **enable** him only to reach the highest spiritual standing a Gentile can attain.<sup>22</sup>

## 9.

BACK TO AVRAHAM

This also explains why Avraham pressured passersby who ate in his home to say, “Blessed is the L-rd of the universe of whose bounty we have eaten.”

Even a Gentile (especially one who lived after the Flood) could recognize that “this castle has a Master.” Therefore, Avraham busied himself spreading G-dliness “in the mouths of all passersby,” by having them understand G-dly matters through his many explanations.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The level of “the righteous of the nations of the world.”

<sup>23</sup> See *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 1, par. 3.

However, Avraham saw some people were not persuaded because of their strong materialistic nature (more so than other ordinary Gentiles — similar to the difference between Cham {who had a baser character than his brothers}, and Shem and Yefes).

In order to break the extreme coarseness and materialism, Avraham placed them into a pressing circumstance, “distress.”<sup>24</sup> This distress (along with the many rational arguments that Avraham had previously offered them, which had resonated with them to some degree, and consequently) caused them to recognize Hashem and declare: “Blessed is the L-rd of the universe of whose bounty we have eaten.”

## 10.

### THE LESSON

The straightforward lesson we can learn:

“The actions of our Patriarchs serve as a sign {model and empowerment} for their descendants.”<sup>25</sup> We need to act as Avraham did and spread G-dliness throughout the world the way Avraham did. (Even this **way** that Avraham behaved [and the way the Patriarchs usually conducted themselves] serves as a template for their descendants).

We should not influence only the Jews who are in our homes. We need to go out into the street and engage with Jewish passersby; and, in fact, with all passersby.

We must make this effort to whatever extent possible, even if it involves giving passersby food and drink. Furthermore, this applies even when the way to influence them involves **pressure** (obviously, in line with the ways of the Torah, which are peaceful and pleasant).

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<sup>24</sup> *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 49, sec. 4.

<sup>25</sup> {*Eitz Yosef on Vayikra Rabbah*, ch. 32, sec. 5, sub-sec. 8.}

If someone comes along and claims: “What have you accomplished? The person whom you have influenced to recite a blessing, read *Shema*, or pray, does so without desire, without heart. Another person dons *tefillin* just to relieve himself of the pressure placed on him. And what will be tomorrow? We have no idea,” and similar arguments.

We respond using this **Torah** narrative — Torah, being etymologically related to the word *horaah* {instruction} — mentioned above, because how much more so does the same principle apply to us. Avraham interacted with **Gentiles** even before *Matan Torah* and his efforts bore fruit: “**You caused My creations to recognize Me.**”

All the more after *Matan Torah*, when speaking of a Jew who “wants to be part of the Jewish people, and wants to perform all the mitzvos...” — when he performs a mitzvah, he certainly wants to do so. Furthermore, we can assume that the compulsion and pressure exerted will cause the desire to fulfill the mitzvos to become his **revealed** will. Eventually, since one mitzvah leads to the next,<sup>26</sup> he will fully fulfill all the mitzvos.

This *avodah*<sup>27</sup> of publicizing Hashem’s name in the world, in consequence of which, “**you caused My creations to recognize Me,**” will hasten, measure for measure, the promise “for the **world** will be **filled** with knowledge....”<sup>28</sup> This era will be ushered in by “a king {who} will arise from the house of David... and he **will compel all** the Jewish people to follow in its ways {i.e., the ways of the Torah}, and to strengthen its observance”<sup>29</sup> (the observance of the Oral and Written Torah). All this will come about with the true and complete redemption by our righteous Moshiach.

— Based on a talk delivered on *Shabbos parshas Bamidbar* 5730 (1970)

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<sup>26</sup> *Avos* 4:2.

<sup>27</sup> {Divine service.}

<sup>28</sup> *Yeshayahu* 11:9.

<sup>29</sup> *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 11, end.