



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

Religious Court of Elad * Batei Hora'ah * Religious Services * Marriage Licensing * Kashrut * Mikvaot * Eiruvim

TORAT

Parashat Va'eira

HAMELECH

Don't Hit Me!

Who was sent to bring plagues upon Egypt? Moshe, of course. Aharon was sent along to be a spokesman. So why do we find that the first three plagues were brought about by Aharon striking with his staff? Why didn't Moshe do the job?

The answer is that the first two *makot* began when the staff smote the water and the third *makah* began when the *matteh* hit the land. Now Moshe could not bring himself to strike neither the river nor the land of Egypt. Why not?

Because he was too overwhelmed with a debt of gratitude! To the inanimate! Moshe felt that the water had protected him when he was a tiny baby. True, his mother had put him in a basket and his sister watched him from afar. And the daughter of Pharaoh came and rescued him from there. The water seemed to be more of a threat to his existence than an agent of salvation. Nonetheless, his mother placed him there because she felt that he was safer there than anywhere else, and as it happened, from there he was saved. So Moshe felt indebted to the river and could not bring himself to strike it.

And the land? It had helped him as well. When? When he smote the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. Had he left the dead Egyptian out in the open, word would have gotten out quickly of the killing and Moshe's life would have been in danger. The land, so to speak, opened up for him and allowed him to hide the *Mitzri* inside.

Notably, this salvation was rather short-lived, as Datan and Aviram squealed on him the very next day and Pharaoh sought to kill Moshe. Nonetheless, that did not minimize Moshe's feeling of gratitude to the land for covering up for him at the time.

Can I go, Yitro?

As stated, Moshe Rabbeinu excelled in the trait of *hakarat hatov*. When he was given the historic task of taking *Bnei Yisrael* out of *Mitzrayim*. He felt that he could not go right away. He received his mission from On High, but his conscience did not allow him to go until he first asked permission from Yitro, his father-in-law. Why? Why did he feel that he had to ask for permission, if the King of all Kings told him to go? Moshe knew that Yitro had been there for him in his time of need. Moshe escaped the sword of Pharaoh and fled to Midyan. There, he was a stranger. He had nowhere to turn. And Yitro invited him in. He was hospitable to him. He gave him a place to stay, and eventually, he gave him one of his daughters for a wife.

Moshe felt a debt of gratitude to Yitro for all that he had done for him. No, he could not just get up and go without asking Yitro first.

Let Me Introduce Myself

In *Parashat Yitro*, Hashem introduced Himself to *Bnei Yisrael* at *Matan Torah* as, "I am Hashem, your Almighty, Who took you out of *Mitzrayim*."



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Why did he identify Himself as our personal redeemer instead of calling Himself, "the One who Created the world"?

One answer is that Hashem was about to give us commandments. What obligates us to fulfill them? *Hakarat Hatov* (gratitude) for having taken us out of Mitzrayim, the house of bondage.

Doggie, Want a Bone?

How far does *hakarat hatov* go? In *Parashat Mishpatim*, we are told to give certain types of non-kosher meat to dogs, for them to consume. It is speaking of meat from kosher species but was not ritually slaughtered (*shechita*). We know that we are not allowed to eat such meat. Why does the Torah make a point of saying that we should give it to dogs more than to other creatures? Because the dogs helped us on the night of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* (Shemot 11:7). As the firstborn Egyptians were being slain, not a single dog barked at nor bit a single Jew, contrary to their nature.

This was not a decision that the dogs made. There was no official canine meeting with an announcement to be compassionate to the Jews. This was obviously a Heaven-sent sign of affection to Hashem's beloved People. Nonetheless, we are to acknowledge the part that this particular species of animal played in the grand scheme of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, and for generations, give them a token of our appreciation.

Hostile Hospitality

It goes even further. Not only do we show appreciation to the dogs, we even show appreciation to the Egyptians themselves! After all, weren't they hospitable for 210 years?!

The Torah tells us that if an Egyptian converts to Judaism, we may not reject him. We are not to label him as abominable and avoid marrying his descendants forever. Rather, we are only to avoid marrying the convert himself and his child. (They may marry other converts.) Once there is a third generation, let him marry in. (Devarim 23:8) The *pasuk* explains: Do not detest an Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land. Rashi expounds: Even though they threw your young babies into the river, nonetheless, they provided you with a place to stay in your time of need.

In Bava Kama 92b, the Talmudic Sage Rava sought after a source for the common expression: Do not throw a stone into a pit from which you drank. Raba bar Mari responded with the aforementioned verse: Do not detest an Egyptian, for you were a foreigner in his land.

From here we learn that *hakarat hatov* does not have to do with taking stock of the overall picture: how nice you were to me. In the general scheme of things, the Egyptians were awful to us. They cruelly persecuted us in most demeaning and atrocious conditions. No Egyptian "deserves" any credit for hospitality, after taking into account what they did to us.



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Nonetheless, the trait of *hakarat hatov* is a virtue and a refinement of the personality. A polished soul will value each ounce and speck of goodness he received, and will show due recognition to all agents of that goodness, certainly not neglecting HaKadosh Baruch Hu, the True Source of all goodness.

Another mind-boggling lesson in *hakarat hatov* which we learn from this mitzvah is the long-lasting effect. The "hospitality" of the Egyptians in that era is the reason which the Torah demands of us to tolerate their offspring and include them in our ranks, for all generations.

I Can't Judge This One

A case came before the Rif (Rabbi Yitshak el-Fasi) and he deferred it to other Rabbis. He did not want to get involved. Why not?

The Rif had once been ill. As a therapeutic treatment, he visited someone's bathhouse. The bathhouse owner was kind and gracious and invited the Rabbi to stay by him until he returned to his health. The host was very kind and treated him well.

Some time later, the wealthy benefactor lost his riches and fell into debt. It got to a point that he had to sell the bathhouse in order to pay up some of his loans. The price of the bathhouse was to be assessed by experts and reported in a Beit Din, since it was an expensive enterprise. The Rif refused to participate in the Beit Din which would convene for that purpose. He knew that it had to be done, but he wanted no active part in

detaching that bathhouse from its owner after he had personally benefitted therefrom. He could not bring himself to do it.

The Sefer Shitah Mikubetset, Bava Kama 92b brings this story and comments: If this is how the Rif felt towards an inanimate bathhouse, all the much more so must we be careful regarding people who are full of sensitivities. And if this is how we must be careful regarding people from whom we benefitted, all the much more so in regards to Hashem *Yisbarach Shemo*, who constantly bestows upon us kindness. We must be forever thankful and be careful to avoid doing anything which He would rather we not do. It's basic *hakarat hatov*.

Fifty Shekels for Minchah

Rabbi Ben Zion Abba-Shaul was once travelling with some *talmidim* (students). It was time for *minchah*. They found a *shul* which just barely had a *minyán*. Rabbi Abba-Shaul took out a fifty shekel bill and put it into the collection box of the *shul*. His students asked him why he gave such a sizable donation. He answered that he had *hakarat hatov* that the *shul* was there so that he could *daven* with a *minyán* in a *shul*.

Taken for a Ride

A certain taxi driver would often be the one called upon to take Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach to wherever he needed to go. After Reb Shlomo Zalman's passing, the driver related, "He always greeted me in a friendly manner



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when he entered the taxi. He would ask me how I am doing and what's with my family. When we reached the destination, he would always thank me for the ride."

The driver was paid for his services, yet Reb Shlomo Zalman had the courtesy and *hakarot hatov* to greet him warmly and thank him, each time.

The Shirt Off His Back

Rav Barzel had a *yeshivah* in Bnei Brak. Rav Shach contacted him and verified that a certain young man learned in that *yeshivah*. Rav Shach asked Rav Barzel to find an *avreich* (*kollel* fellow) who would learn with the *bochur* daily and Rav Shach would personally pay for this private tutoring.

Rav Barzel asked why Rav Shach had such an interest in helping this particular *bachur* succeed. Rav Shach related that in his youth in Europe, he came to *Yeshivah* with only one shirt. Each Friday he went to wash his shirt by the river so he could have a clean shirt for Shabbos. A kind-hearted woman noticed and she presented him with an additional shirt so he didn't have to wait shirtless for his clothing to dry.

"I owe that woman *hakarot hatov*," said Rav Shach. "For years, I have been trying to track her down, or any members of her family. Finally, I heard that she had a grandson learning in your *yeshivah*. How can I not help him?"

Not for Granted

We say in the *Nishmat* prayer on *Shabbat* and *Hagim*: If only our mouths would be full of song as the sea [is full of water] and our tongues full of exultant song as the sea is full of waves and our lips full of praise like the wide expanse of Heaven, and our arms spread out like the wings of eagles, and our feet light as stags; we still would not be able to thank You, Hashem our Almighty and to bless Your Name, our King, for even one of many thousands, myriads of kindnesses, miracles, and wonders You wrought for us and our forefathers etc.

In our times, we are aware of people whose lives have been taken at all ages. Life itself cannot be taken for granted.

Yaakov Avinu taught us well. As he prepared to greet his bloodthirsty brother, he uttered a prayer and said to Hashem, "My merits have been diminished due to all the kindnesses, deserved and undeserved, which You have done for Your servant. With only a staff I crossed this Yarden River [twenty years ago]. And now [you blessed me with such a large family and many flocks of livestock such that now] I am two camps."

And what did Yaakov ask for in the previous *parashah*? "Bread to eat and clothing to wear," the bare basics. If we have a family and somehow come up with what to feed them, how thankful must we be.

Honoring Parents

In *Parashat Yitro*, we are told of the *Aseret Hadibrot*, the ten Commandments, five on each



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tablet. Basically, the first five are *mitzvot* between man and Hashem. The second group of five are *mitzvot* between man and his fellow. So why is *kibud av v'eim*, honoring one's parents, on the first list? Are parents not human?

One answer could be that the foundation of the *mitzva* of *kibud av v'eim* is *hakarat hatov*, which, as said, is the founding principle in the whole presentation of *Aseret Hadibrot*, "Anochi Hashem Elokecha asher hotseiticha me'erez Mitsrayim."

Hakarat Hatov – recognizing kindness – is something we must do; on the highest level – in respect to Hashem, and additionally – in respect to people. There are three partners in the formation of a person: Hashem, his father and his mother. Of all the people in the world, parents are quite high on the list of people for whom one must have *hakarat hatov*.

The *Sefer HaHinuch* says that the root of *mitsvat kibud av v'eim* is acknowledging kindness done for him by others and attempting to reciprocate to some degree. Being ungrateful is most disdainful. Realize that you are only here because of your father and mother. That itself should be ample reason for a person to do all he could to honor his parents and help them out. Also think about all they did for you, especially in your early years.

Then think about all Hashem has done for you, constantly re-endowing you with life and all that is needed for continuity. Basic needs and extras. Health and living quarters, etc. A *neshamah* and

the ability to do *mitzvot*. These thoughts should encourage us to do *mitzvot* just right.

The Writing on the Wall

A woman was rushed to the hospital. She had a hole in her intestines. She had emergency surgery, but she still was in a great deal of pain. Her family stayed by her side, rotationally. One of her sons was particularly disturbed how after three weeks of hospitalization, there were no signs of improvement. He felt that the hospital staff was not investing enough efforts in her case. He approached Professor Yinon, head of Infectious Disease Department, and began complaining. Due to his agony at seeing his mother suffering, his speech was not so inquisitive as it was blaming for incompetence and insensitivity.

The professor calmly listened to the tirade and barrage of insults and accusations. When the man finished getting everything off his chest, the professor smiled and said, "Come with me."

The young man did not know what the professor wanted, but he followed him down a hospital corridor.

The doctor stopped just outside the washroom and pointed to a sign on the wall. "What does it say here?" he asked.

The religious man looked at the non-observant Jewish doctor and began explaining the *bracha* of "Asher Yatzar."



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"It says here," he began, "that Hashem, King of the world, created man with wisdom. He created him with numerous cavities and orifices. It is obvious and evident that if a certain body part which is to remain sealed shut were to be open or vice versa, a person could not continue to remain alive for even a very short time."

The doctor looked at the young man in the eye and declared, "You just told me that if a body part which is to remain sealed would be open, a person could not remain alive. So what is your mother doing here? She has a hole in her intestines. It makes no sense that she is alive. Nonetheless, she has been here three weeks and she is still breathing. True, you have not seen improvement. But just realize that each day of her life now is a miracle and the hospital staff is doing all they can to save her!"

"As far as I'm concerned," the doctor continued, "every moment any person continues to breathe and live is a miracle. We should all be very thankful to be alive."

The son was speechless. Here he was, he thought he was a Ben Torah, and he just received the most potent mussar lesson in his lifetime, from an irreligious professor.

Practically Speaking

In day-to-day living, there are so many areas in which to implement *hakarat hatov*, at all ages and stages of life. If you are a young adult, still living at home, think of all your parents have done and are doing for you. If you are married, focus more

on what your spouse does for you, daily and weekly. If you are a parent, appreciate what your children do for you. Take nothing for granted. Teacher-pupil, boss-employee, each is doing for the other. Instead of building up your complaint pile, work on *hakarat hatov*. Surely the other is doing so much for you, whether providing for you financially or providing you with satisfaction of getting a job done etc.

It makes no difference if someone is doing a paid job or gratis; if he or she is doing something for you, appreciate and express your appreciation. You owe it to the other person and you owe it to yourself, for by doing so, you will make your world a better place, a more pleasant place to be.

Shower compliments and thank-yous wherever you may be: at home, at school, at work, on the way, at the office, in the store. You will see that others (for the most part) will return in kind. With this attitude, so much will go all the more smoothly, and you will be well-liked. No one likes a complainer. Everyone likes someone exuberant with appreciation (so long as it is not overdone).

And don't forget to thank the One Who really deserves all the credit; your loving Father in Heaven. Constantly look for His benevolence. You'll find it, because it's always there. Serve Hashem with joy.

Thank you for taking the time to read this,

Fondly,

Mordechai Malka