

RABBI BINYAMIN TEITELBAUM

From Gratefulness to Full of Greatness

A 24 YEAR OLD BOY, LOOKING OUT THE window as he rode the train, exclaimed, "Dad, look! The trees are flying by!"

Dad smiled, while a young couple sitting nearby looked at the young man's childish behavior with pity.

Suddenly, he again shouted, "Dad, look—the clouds are running with us!"

The couple couldn't resist, and they said to the father, "Why don't you take your son to a good doctor?"

The dad grinned and said, "I did, and we are just coming home from the hospital. My son was blind from birth; he just got his vision miraculously restored today."

When Hashem was ready to redeem the Children of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, He struck the Egyptians with the Ten Plagues, in demonstration of His mastery of the world. Before each Plague, He instructed Moshe on how to bring it about.

Famously, Moshe himself did not initiate the first three Plagues—he had to rely on his brother Aharon, instead, since the Nile River and the sand of the earth had both been helpful to Moshe earlier in his life. While the inanimate sand and water were unable to appreciate whether Moshe had struck them himself or Aharon had in his place, nonetheless it was important for Moshe himself to recognize the source of his benefit, and his own sense of *hakkaras hatov* (gratitude) required that he not perform such an act.

As the *Chinuch* writes, on the mitzvah of respecting one's parents, ingratitude is "an extremely bad, loathsome trait," so a person has to have *hakkaras hatov* toward *anything* that has brought him benefit. He should not show disdain for even an inanimate object that once benefited him, because that will accustom him to ingratitude—which might then spill over into his relationships both with other people and with Hashem.

After being instructed by Hashem to go to Egypt and liberate the enslaved Jewish People, Moshe went first to take leave of his father-in-law, Yisro, who had been hospitable to him when he had been a homeless fugitive.

Think of it! Several hundred thousand of his brethren were being subjected to unspeakable torture at the hands of the Egyptians, yet Moshe, who had been empowered to bring their suffering to an end—who had been specifically commanded by Almighty G-d Himself to liberate them—said that he must first take leave of Yisro! One might think that Moshe wouldn't delay his mission for even a fraction of a second. But no! "I must first ask permission from Yisro, because he was kind to me."

Was this not a blatant defiance of G-d? Why was Moshe not reprimanded for this?

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz points out (*Sichos Mussar*, 5732, no. 32) that Moshe had a profound understanding of what Hashem expects of man, and he knew

that it would indeed please Him if he showed his gratitude to Yisro first, by not undertaking his mission without taking proper leave of him.

In fact, one of the fundamental reasons for the creation of mankind in the first place is the character trait of *hakkaras hatov*.

The Midrash teaches us that the Hebrew word *B'reishis* ("In the beginning") can be explained to mean that Hashem created the world for the sake of the mitzvah of *bikkurim*, which are referred to as *reishis* ("first"), for it involves bringing one's first fruits to the Beis Hamikdash.

What's so significant about the mitzvah of *bikkurim* that the world was created for its sake?

The *Alshich Hakadosh* writes that the purpose of the world, the purpose of all of the mitzvos, is found in this mitzvah. The Holy One, blessed be He, grants us life, health, and sustenance, every day and every moment, and He wants us—and the whole world—to recognize where those gifts come from. That recognition, that *hakkaras hatov*, is actually what draws Hashem's goodness into the world.

We find another fascinating illustration of *hakkaras hatov* in the Jews' departure from Egypt.

The Torah says that, as they left, the Children of Israel were armed. The Chasam Sofer asks: Why was it necessary for Hashem to split the Red Sea and to

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Sunday–Thursday: 8–9:45

Minyanim for Standard Time

Shacharis

Sunday8:15 AM
Monday–Friday7:20 AM

Mincha

Sunday *thru January*1:15 PM
Mon.–Thurs. *thru January*2:35 PM
Sunday–Thurs., *Feb.–Mar.*5:45 PM
Shabbos2:45 PM

Ma'ariv

In the Beis Midrash:

Sunday–Wednesday9:45 PM
Thursday10 PM

From Gratefulness... CONTINUED

drown the Egyptians, in a spectacular, miraculous manner, when Hashem could have made the Jews victorious through more natural means, by allowing them to use the weapons at their disposal?

He responds that it would not be proper for the Jews to confront the Egyptians directly, in a head-on conflict, to wage war against them with sword in hand.

The Torah commands us, “Do not hate an Egyptian, because you were a sojourner in his land.” The Rabbis explain the underlying rationale for this commandment by saying, “Do not cast a stone into a cistern from which you drank water.” Although the Jewish people had suffered greatly at the hands of the Egyptians, they had also derived benefit from living as guests in their land, and we are therefore prohibited from hating them.

The Egyptians had to be punished by Hashem, in an indirect manner, rather than being forced to succumb directly to an assault by the Jewish people.

Chovos Halevavos writes (in *Sha'ar Avodas haElokim*) that every kindness a person receives from the Holy One, blessed be He, obligates him to increase the quality and quantity of his service of Hashem. In proportion to the goodness one receives is the amount of service one has to do, reflecting his increased *hakkaras hatov*. Hashem gives and gives to us; if we recognize this proportionally with our avodas Hashem, then He continues to give us more goodness.


Regarding mitzvos, as well, *Chovos Halevavos* explains that the obligation is proportional.

For example, person who has never been blessed with a child doesn't have an obligation to perform a circumcision

or to teach his child Torah.

The way we usually look at this is that if a person is physically unable to perform a certain mitzvah, he or she is an “oneis” (affected by circumstances outside of one's control), and therefore exempt.

However, *Chovos Halevavos* is taking the opposite approach. Someone who has a son is obligated in circumcision *because* he received kindness from Hashem, which obligates him to do more mitzvos. Similarly, a person who owns a house has to put up a *ma'akeh* (a barrier to prevent people from falling off ledges) and mezuzos, again demonstrating that one's performance of mitzvos must be proportional to the gifts he has received from Hashem.

Etiquette and proper manners are taught to us by our parents from our youngest age. Remembering to say “please” and “thank you” are important, but as children we don't yet recognize exactly why. While to most people it may be based on societal expectations of how we interact with each other, we know from the Torah just how important the attribute of *hakkaras hatov* truly is. 

Every Day

“Dirshu” Gemara Shiur

(Maseches B'choros)
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....
Sunday 7:15–8:15 AM
Monday–Friday 5:50–6:45 AM

Kollel Yisgaber K'ari

(amud-a-day of Mishnah B'rurah)
Rabbi Chaim Heinemann
Monday–Friday 6:55–7:20 AM

Kitzur Shuchan Aruch

Live video conference!
Rabbi Dani Schon.....
Monday–Friday 12:05–12:20 PM

Daf Yomi

Rabbi Meir Minster.....
Sunday–Thursday 8–8:45 PM
Shabbos (at CZE) 1:00 pre-mincha

Nightly Halacha Chabura

Rabbi Dani Schon
& Binyamin Teitelbaum
Monday–Thursday 9–9:45 PM

Sunday *Free brunch!*

America Runs on Torah

(Jewish Law & Parasha)
Rabbi Dani Schon
and Yisroel Kaufman..... 10 AM
Grand Deluxe breakfast served

Shivti

(Self-contained learning, geared
toward practical halacha) 10–noon A

Tuesday

Partners in Torah at the Mayerson JCC

Rabbi Binyamin Teitelbaum.....8 PM

Wednesday

Torah Treasures for Seniors at the Mayerson JCC

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 10:30–11:15 AM

Downtown Lunch-n- Learn at Strauss & Troy


Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 12–1 PM


Thursday


Halacha based on the parasha


Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....9:10–10 PM
Homemade refreshments served.

KEY:

 Beginners

 Intermediate

 Advanced

 for men and women