



THE IMPORTANCE OF FEELING INDEBTED



HEALED, NOW A KALLAH

I want to express my *hoda'ah*, my gratitude to Hashem, for allowing me to be a catalyst to be *meshadech* a young lady who captured my heart. When she was eleven and a half years old, she experienced a major physical challenge and my heart *mamash* became *gekvetcht* from her story. She was in the hospital for many months. Her family expected her to undergo major surgery.

Hashem exposed me to her story and I undertook the challenge as a mission. I wanted to ask *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to heal her without her having to undergo the surgery and to give her a *refuah sheleimah* - which naturally was not *shayach*. According to her medical prognosis, the condition was not treatable and the doctors were saying it was all over. And then I got involved. I got people in *Eretz Yisrael* to *daven* for this child. I hadn't known the family at all beforehand. I got some big *talmidei chachamim* to *daven* for her.

I then suggested to her that she make a *kabbalah*, to undertake something special related to her challenge. The parents undertook that *kabbalah* too and the family began to *shteig* and change. The doctors were upset. They said if you're not going to do the surgery, we're going to discharge her from the hospital. One doctor told me that it's *mamash* a *sakanas nefashos*, because her life is hanging by a string.

So I decided to reach out to a very, very big doctor who I knew also had a challenge similar to that girl. Her challenge wasn't as bad, though. I asked her how dangerous it would be if the girl would be discharged from the hospital. She said it would be life-threatening. I said to her, "What if they were *mekabel kabbalos* and I got people to *daven* for them? Do you think that would change the equation?" The doctor said, "I've heard so many stories about you and what you've been involved in. If you say they can go home, it's possible. I don't know for how long, but it's possible." I said, "Thank you for giving me that vote of confidence. I appreciate it very much."

She was discharged from the hospital and she began to get better and better and better. She hadn't been in school for over eight months, and she was a very bright child. It was an amazing story, because the family started to *shteig*. Every member of the family undertook steps to improve themselves and become the type of *Yidden* that would bring *kavod* to Hashem. And they became the type of family that Hashem glorifies Himself with.

Three years later, we made a *seudas hoda'ah*. And recently, the young lady was *zocheh* to become engaged. She is still young, maybe eighteen or nineteen. She's got a *chashuve chosson*. He is a big *ben Torah* and *ehrliche ben Torah*. And my heart is filled with happiness for this young lady, who developed into a very special young lady. We wish her to be healthy and strong and that Hashem should watch over her for many years. She should bring great *nachas* to her family, לאורך ימים ושנים טובים.

BIKURIM IS FOR HAKARAS HATOV

The *mitzvah* of *bikurim* is a *mitzvah* of *hakaras hatov*. There are two parts to this *mitzvah* of *hakaras hatov*. Part one is bringing your first fruits to the *Beis Hamikdash*. The second part of the *mitzvah* is called *Mikra bikurim*, reading the *pessukim*.

The one who brings the *bikurim* has to make "announcements" in the form of *pessukim*. Rashi says that the whole purpose of these *pessukim* is that a person has to express to Hashem, "I'm not an ingrate. I'm not ungrateful." All the *pessukim* that you read by the *bikurim* are to express this point: I'm not a *kafui tova* (Devarim 26:3).¹

That's easier said than done. Most people think they're not *kafui tova*, but they are. Most people not only don't have gratitude, but they're ungrateful.

We have to go back in time and express to Hashem where we come from, and recognize the earlier kindnesses that we enjoyed from Hashem. After you go back in history and say the whole history of *Klal Yisroel* and all the *chassadim* of Hashem, then you say, "Hashem, I'm bringing You the first fruits and I'm thanking You for it. This is just a token to represent my full thanks. You have to say it out loud.

I have seen people be the recipients of *chessed* from others. I told them, "Do you appreciate what that person has done for you?" And they say, "Yes." I said, "How have you expressed your *hakaras hatov*?" They say, "I sent them a

¹ ובאת אל הפנה אשר יהיה בימים ההם ואמרת אליו הגדתי היום לה' אלקיך כי באתי אל הארץ אשר נשבע ה' לאבותינו לתת לנו. (רש"י: ואמרת אליו. שאיך קפוי טובה)

bottle of wine for *Shabbos*.” I asked them, ‘Do you think that is a true expression of *hakaras hatov*? Have you ever sat down with that family and told them how grateful you are for their kindness? Did you ever specifically say, ‘I appreciate the kindness you showed me,’ or did you just say, ‘thank you very much?’ Rashi says that you have to say it *b’kol ram*, aloud.²

LEARNING HOW TO BE GRATEFUL

Do we express our gratitude to Hashem? Of course, people say they’re thankful, but how many people say it *b’kol ram* to Hashem for all the *chessed* that Hashem gives us? Hashem gives each and every one of us boatloads of *chessed*. Not *stam chessed*. The amount of *chessed* that Hashem gives me and He gives you, you can’t begin to imagine.

Every time we *bench*, we thank Hashem. You know what for? We thank Hashem first for Eretz Yisrael, *eretz chemdah tovah*. Then we go back and we say, “Thank you, Hashem, for taking me out of *Mitzrayim*.” And that’s not enough.

We say, “Thank you, Hashem, for the mitzvah of *bris milah*. Thank you, Hashem, for *Mattan Torah*. Thank you, Hashem, for *chukecha shehodatanu*.” And then we thank Hashem for *chayim v’chessed shechonantanu*.

You know what kind of thanks you have to give Hashem? You know how indebted to Hashem you have to be? Finally you say, “*Al achilas mazon sheAttah zan* thank You, Hashem, for the food that You gave.” You hear that? It is a *hakdamah*, an introduction. From here, we learn how a Jew has to say thank you to somebody, not only to Hashem.

When you come to say thank you, the Torah teaches us a tremendous *yesod*: You have to arouse within yourself feelings of *hoda’ah* to Hashem *Yisborach*. Did a child ever express his thanks to his parents? Did he ever say thank you to Hashem? Very few children say thank you to Hashem. And parents “pour” *chessed* on their kids.

I’ve seen parents do so much for their children. They give to their kids who don’t deserve anything. If the parents would ask me, I would say, “You’re wasting your money.” They’re not getting anything back for their investment. But, as a rule, you have to know that whenever you want to be *makir tov*, you have to learn how to be *makir tov* from the *parsha* of *bikurim*.

LESSON FROM A LETTER

I once had a *talmid* who, amazingly, sent me a letter. In the letter he delineated the *chassadim* that I had done for him. I never even thought about that. He wrote out so many things that I had played a role in. He recognized that I had played a vital role in his life, in major and in minor things.

I remember reading that, I said, “You know, I had better learn a lesson from this. I have to express *hakaras hatov* like this to Hashem.” It was *m’orer* me to express and feel that same *hakaras hatov* towards my *rebbe* (Rav Meir Halevi Soloveichik, z”l). It is not easy to express your *hakaras hatov* to your *rebbe* sufficiently. Even towards their own parents people can’t express it sufficiently.

We know how to ask parents for what we need. We demand things. Give me this, give me that, give me, give me, give me, give me. That we know very well. But how should we go about thanking them?

AWAKEN YOUR FEELINGS

Now this is very interesting. *Chazal* tell us that when Yosef Ha-Tzaddik traveled back to Eretz Yisroel with his father, *Yaakov Avinu*, to bring him to the *Ma’aras Ha-Machpelah* for *keverah*, they had to pass by the pit into which Yosef was thrown by his brothers, from which Yosef was taken to *Mitzrayim*. Seeing the pit must have been an emotional experience for Yosef, and one that had potential for a confrontation. But Yosef walked over to the pit, *Chazal* tell us, and he said: “ברוך שעשה לי נס במקום הזה. *Baruch Hashem*, for He made me a miracle in this place.” When the brothers heard Yosef saying this *brachah* you know what they thought? Maybe now, he will take revenge. Maybe he will be inclined to take revenge against us. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, the great Mirrer *rosh reshivah* (he was an amazing person) said: I don’t understand. It was clear to them that Yosef Ha-Tzaddik would make this *brachah*. That is *halachah*. So why did the brothers become afraid that perhaps his *ka’as*, his anger, would be aroused? Why did they think that Yosef would pay them back if, for years, he had lived with them *b’shalom*, *b’achva*, *uv’re’ut*? Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz explained, the answer is that Yosef said: “I’m not a *posek*, but here it says that in order to make a *brachah b’Schem umalchus* there’s a condition. The *ba’al hanes* has to feel and relive the *nes* and relive the situation that he experienced at the time of the *nes*. He has to feel himself right now that I’m a *ba’al hanes*, I’m a man who experienced miracles. You have to re-live the salvation.” So when the brothers saw Yosef making that *brachah*, they understood that right now, he’s being *me’orer*, he’s awakening in his heart all of the feelings that he felt at that time when he was thrown into this *bor* that was full of snakes and scorpions. (We also have an obligation to do that, to arouse ourselves when we wish to thank Hashem for *chessed* or a *nes* He did for us.)

² וענית ואמרת לפני ה' אלקיך ארמי אבד אבי ויָרַד מִצְרָיִמָּה וַיְגֵר שָׁם בְּמִתָּה מֵעַם וַיְהִי שָׁם לְגֹי גְדוֹל עֲצוּם וְרַב (רש"י ד"ה וענית: לשון הרמת קול)

OFF THE DERECH...OF APPRECIATION

Hakaras ha-tov is the basis for all of our obligations to serve Hashem. When I see somebody going off the *derech*, I'm amazed. My anger is aroused. I am in pain.

How could a person do that to Hashem? I understand you have a *yetzer hara* and I understand you can't control yourself. I understand people fall. But to throw Hashem "under the bus"? To ditch your whole representation of being a loyal Yehudi, of a Jew who acknowledges, "I am a Jew who serves Hashem" and say, "Bam!" (i.e. That is it, I am not interested.) To say to Hashem, "Leave me alone"? That, to me, is in bad taste. What has Hashem done to you? Do you lack anything you need? Most of your needs, if not all your needs, He provides. How could you be such a *behemah*? (Like an animal who has no intellect.) Now, I understand again, people fall. There is the *yetzer hara*. But no one has to throw their whole *Yiddishkeit* out the door.

Reaching that level often means doing things that you do not even have a *yetzer hara* for. It is as if you're *stam* telling Hashem, "I don't care anything about what You have to say." That's gonna come back to bite them. (An attitude like that will certainly bear repercussions.)

Sometimes, when I hear of people who suffer terribly, I wonder what came before it. I once knew a *chashuve* person who called me up and said, "I'm suffering terribly from my child." He described all the terrible things that the child did. And I asked him, "Did you ever do such a thing to your parents? Did you ever threaten them that you're gonna run away from them because they were on your case? Did you ever threaten them you were gonna go off the *derech*? A lot of children make stupid threats. Did you ever make threats to your parents?" And he was quiet. He thought about it. "Maybe." He said, "It was many years ago." I said, "If you did it, I know it was many years ago. And I know you've gone past that, but Hashem never forgets. There's no statute of limitations with Hashem. So if you're experiencing this now, maybe Hashem is trying to remind you of what happened." When I read about and I hear about children who are isolating their parents or rejecting their parents, I know, ooh, further down the line, that is going to be so painful that you can't imagine.

COMMUNICATE IT IN SPEECH

Now, there are many people who don't know how to express their thanks. So, they try. They come to somebody and they say, "*Gut Shabbos*," or they say, "*Sholom aleichem*." You ask, "What did you mean with that *gut Shabbos*?" They answer, "I was trying to express my *hakoras hatov*. I wanted to express it to them." I said, "You didn't express your *hakoras hatov*." Can you imagine if a guy would come to the *Beis Hamikdash* with *bikurim* and say, "*Sholom aleichem. Gut Shabbos*?" What's that? He would get a smack over the head. The *Kohein* would say, "Get out of the *Beis Hamikdash*, you *meshugene*." Imagine if he says, "I was trying to express myself." That doesn't work. You have to open your mouth and you have to say, "I am *makir tovah*."

BEING IN DEBT CREATES A BOND

Do you know what else *hakoras hatov* means? It means, "I owe you." I'm indebted to you. You have a stake in me. And if a person feels that Hashem has a stake in him, it means, "*Tzu ersht*," (You, Hashem, come first). Then the person feels, "I have got to serve Hashem. I have got to ask myself, is Hashem happy with me?" If that is the condition, do you even want to have *shaychus* to Hashem? No.

So, you have to say your thanks out loud. Now, *Rav Yeruchem* explains that whenever a person gets a *tovah*, a benefit, no matter what it is, it brings him joy. *Nu*, a person, when he has joy, he has to express it: You brought me joy, you brought me happiness.

You may not even have asked for the person to bring you happiness. You may not have expected it or demanded it. But you got that *tovah*, and when a person thinks about it, do you know what that creates? A strong bond. It creates a bond, a bond of *ahavah*.

"I LOVE YOU, HASHEM"

When I think of what Hashem has done for me - and I don't even know how to think of the full amount of what Hashem has done for me - so the little bit that I do think, at this stage in my life, I feel overwhelmed with love for Hashem! But I remember asking my grandfather about that. "*Zeide*, you say that one should say, 'I love You, Hashem,' but honestly, I don't know if I feel like I love Hashem." He said, "Start by saying it. Eventually, you'll feel it."

How do I love somebody? What makes me love somebody? When somebody "pours" *tovos* on me, I love that person. Is Hashem not pouring *tovos* and *brachos* on me? It's not embarrassing, and it's not shameful to say to somebody, "Thank you." And "Thank you" is not an exemption. In America, they say, "Thank you." You know what "Thank you" means? "I'm paid up."

My bill is paid. I said thank you. But it is really not true. You should know, if you accepted a *tovah* from somebody, you're indebted to that person *l'oilam va'ed*, forever. My grandfather didn't take *tovos* from people. He told me he never borrowed more than a quarter from somebody, and he was desperate at times.

He didn't want to be indebted because he knew what being indebted means. He would owe that person for the rest of his life. If people gave him money, as is custom for a *rav* to receive presents and gifts on occasions like on Purim, like when you sell *chametz*, that has become a time where you give the *rav parnassa*. Instead of giving him a handout, you give it in a *b'kavodik* way to help him with *yom tov*.

My grandfather never would take a dime. I'm not like my grandfather. But my grandfather had that *starkheit*. Do you know why? Because he appreciated what indebtedness means.

And I think about how much joy Hashem brings me. I think about how much sorrow, and how much *tzaros* there are in the world, even in the Jewish world. There is mayhem. People are going crazy. But in my little corner, Hashem is watching me; Hashem is protecting me.

Do you know, whether you're poor, whether you're rich, whether you're healthy, whether you're sick, every single person, says Ramchal, experiences *niflaos* - amazing *things* - *v'tovos rabos*, many *tovos*, *b'matzavo*. That's what the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes.

הנה אין לך אדם - there is no person who doesn't have these *tovos*. This is a very important *perek*, *perek ches*. The whole concept of *avodas Hashem* is predicated, is built upon, having *hakoras hatov* to Hashem. Hashem chose to create the world, to make everybody *b'simcha*, to provide everybody with all their needs. That's something for which we have to be eternally indebted to Him for.

THANK YOU TO THE REBBETZIN

I saw an amazing story about Rav Shach. When Rav Shach was a hundred years old - that's very old. He was quite elderly - at that age he heard about a woman, a *rebbetzin* in *Teveria*, the wife of a *rav* who died. He told his *mashbak*, "I want to go be *menachem avel this person*." They said, "What? Now? You're unmoveable. You're not mobile." But he said, "I want to go." Then he said, "Call them up and tell them I'm coming." He called them and told them that he was coming. They tried to tell him not to come. "Please. Don't come. We accept your words over the phone. We feel for you. It's not that important. You're *patur*. Don't come, please. You're too old. You're too sick. You're infirm." But he said, "I'm coming." They told him, "We live on the third floor, and we don't have an elevator."

But Rav Shach said, "I'm coming, regardless." And he went. It took him between fifteen minutes and a half hour to get up the three flights of stairs. That's with people on both sides helping him.

When he got upstairs, he had to sit down and rest and catch his breath for a few minutes. And when he finally recovered, he said, "I want to explain to you why I came. You're probably wondering why I came here. You never heard that I had a *shaichus* to your mother, the *Rebbetzin*. I didn't. You never heard of me being involved with your family. But I'll tell you why I came. Many years ago, the Brisker Rav was living in Eretz Yisroel after having lost his wife and three of his children in the Holocaust. He was raising the children who had survived with him. One day, one of his sons became ill.

And he got sicker, he got sicker. And the child needed a lot of care, a lot of attention. And life in the family became turned over because everybody was involved with the health of this child. And then it came to a point that they couldn't handle it. So somebody said, "There's a *Rebbetzin* in *Tiveria*, a *chashuve Rebbetzin*. Let's reach out to her and ask her if she's willing to take the child into her home. Where she lives, it's near the water, and the air is better. Hopefully, the child can regain his health over there more quickly." They asked her if she'd be willing to care for the child. And she said, "Yes." And the equilibrium in the house was restored. He said the Brisker Rav wrote her a letter after that.

In his letter, he said to her: 'I want you to know that you have a portion in my Torah. You have a *chelek* in my Torah. While my child was with me, my whole life became disturbed. Everything was *varmisht*. I couldn't think. I couldn't focus. I couldn't concentrate on my Torah learning. And when you took my child into your home, my mind became clear, my life became better. Therefore, you have a *chelek* in my Torah.'

And Rav Shach said, "So what does that have to do with me?" He explained, "At that time, I was a *talmid* of the Brisker Rav. We learned *moiradike zachen* in *Torah* from him. He opened for us unbelievable windows into the depths of the *Torah*. When he was preoccupied and distracted caring for his sick son, his *talmidim* were at a loss. But when he was able to return to his learning, we once again had the privilege of benefiting from his *Torah*. I benefited from that *Torah*. I therefore owe your mother a debt of gratitude. And that is why I came."

Do you hear that? It is *Moiradik*!

Hashem should help us, Hashem should *mechazek* us, we should be *mechazek* ourselves to be *makir tov* to all the people we have to be *makir tov* to, and not to turn our backs, not to be *kafui tovah*, *chas v'shalom*, and be *zocheh* to a *gut din* and a *k'siva v'chasima tova*. Amen.