

“Is it to Hashem that you do this, o' vile and unwise people?” (32:6)

In the list of *middos*, character traits, that can possibly define one's personality, the *middah* of *hakoras ha'tov*, appreciation and expression of gratitude, is of pivotal significance. Relationships, our attitude toward Hashem and our fellowman, indicate our true character. Our Sages were meticulous in their "observance" of this *middah*. They made every effort to "recognize" every bit of benefit they received – directly or inadvertently, from another person – and return the favor, always cognizant of their "debt" of gratitude. Elisha *Ha'navi* was the beneficiary of a simple favor from the Shunamis. His appreciation of her gift compelled him to pray that she be blessed with a child. His sense of gratitude motivated him to pray for this child's return to life. In the *Midrash*, *Chazal* question Elisha's choice of beneficiaries. If Eliyahu *Ha'navi* had guaranteed him the ability to be *mechayeh meisim*, bring people back from the dead, why did he not pray for his own father and mother? Why did he not seek to have them resurrected? *Horav Moshe Reis, Shlita*, derives from here the incredible debt of gratitude that Elisha carried. While we are not on Elisha's spiritual plane, we can learn something about fulfilling the obligation of *hakoras ha' tov* from him.

In his commentary to *Sefer Bereishis* 2:5, *Rashi* presents an inkling of what *hakoras ha'tov* means to Hashem. The Torah teaches us that Hashem did not cause rain to descend on the land until man had been created. *Rashi* explains that only after the creation of man, who would appreciate the effect of rain, did Hashem bestow rain on the earth. Certainly, Hashem could have had the vegetation grow without rain. Yet, Hashem created the world in such a manner that the earth needed the rain to produce man's crops, so that man would be thankful for all that he has. Indeed, the world was created incomplete. The fact that the earth cannot produce without rain establishes the need for *hakoras ha'tov*, with man maintaining the main obligation. Moreover, based upon *Rashi's pshat*, exposition, *Maharal m'Prague* posits that it is forbidden to perform a favor for one who does not possess the *middah* of *hakoras ha'tov*.

According to the *Ramban*, the Revelation, the awesome experience that accompanied the Giving of the Torah, occurred so that *Klal Yisrael* would realize that Hashem was doing this only for them – and not for any other nation. This knowledge was to imbue them with an impulse of reciprocity, to learn to return a favor, to show gratitude where it is due.

In his commentary on the *pasuk*, "*Am naval v'lo chacham*," "*O vile and unwise people*," *Ramban* comments that one who is not *makir tov*, who does not appreciate what others do for him, is a "*naval*," an abomination. Furthermore, he explains that in the Hebrew language the letter "*bais*" and "*fay*" are interchangeable. In other words, the word "*novel*" is the same as the word "*nofel*." Consequently, a leaf that "*falls*," "*nofel*," to the ground is called "*novel*." An animal that falls to the ground and dies is called a "*neveilah*."

Hence, a person who does not appreciate what others do for him is considered a "*naval*," because

he is "nofel," falls from humanity. He is no longer a human being. A kafui tov (ingrate) does not deserve to be counted as a person. He lacks the mentchlechkeit that would render him a mentch.

Sefer Ha'Chinuch also uses the word "naval" to describe an individual who is unappreciative of what others do for him. In *mitzvah* 33, he opines that the *shoresh*, root/origin, of the *mitzvah* of *Kibud Av v'Eim*, honoring one's father and mother, is *hakoras ha'tov*. One must recognize who has brought him into the world and who has cared for him throughout his life. One who does not accept the imperative to love and respect parents for what they have done for him is considered a *naval* and *kafui tov*. The respect one manifests for parents engenders respect for the One Who is responsible for all the good from which he has benefited in his life. We do not know the real reason for *mitzvos*. The rationale that we determine only serves as a motivation so that some might relate more easily to *mitzvos*. The lesson, however, is apparent: *Kibud Av v'Eim* teaches one *hakoras ha'tov*. Indeed, as *Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita*, puts it, "Hashem has given us a *mitzvah* through which one can educate and refine his *middah* of *hakoras ha'tov*." *Hakoras ha'tov* is the ability to recognize and appreciate the benefits we reap from others. One who does not demonstrate this sensitivity is not a complete human being.