

## Blessed is Hashem Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh. (18:10)

The *Talmud Sanhedrin* 94a makes a striking statement: “It was taught in the name of Rabbi Papyas, *g’nai hu l’Moshe*, it is a shame for Moshe and the 600,000 Jews that they had never uttered, *Baruch (Hashem)*, until Yisro came and said, *Baruch Hashem asher hitzil eschem.*” This is a strong statement which begs elucidation. Clearly, *Klal Yisrael* had praised Hashem when they sang the *Shirah* amid great joy, praising Hashem for the spectacular miracles and wonders which He had wrought. They did not say the words, “*Baruch Hashem.*” Does that warrant that their inaction be termed a *g’nai*, shame? In other words, *Klal Yisrael’s* gratitude in comparison to that of Yisro was shameful! How are we to understand this?

**Horav Mordechai Zuckerman, zl**, derives an important lesson concerning appreciation and gratitude from *Chazal*. Veritably, *Klal Yisrael* sang *Shirah*, praising Hashem’s lofty power, His outstanding miracles and His absolute control over all of the forces of nature. They forgot one thing: the personal relationship of those miracles to them. They never thanked Hashem for their personal salvation. Sure, they had offered boundless praise, but what about the simple fact that they were alive and well? This is the *g’nai*. They praised Hashem’s miracles, but forgot to say, “Thank you Hashem for saving me!”

Thus, *Chazal* use a cogent statement to underscore that each and every one of us must constantly introspect concerning what we owe Hashem. We regularly benefit from His favor; yet, we fail to acknowledge our gratitude. We either do not think, or we have gotten so accustomed to taking that we have lost track of Who is the Giver.

*L’sitcha Elyon* cites a letter penned by **Horav Chaim Stein, zl**, (who was a close friend of Rav Mordechai Zuckerman), and addressed to his son, *Rav Sholom Rafael Yehuda, zl*, who suffered greatly for years until his untimely passing at a young age. The *Rosh Yeshivah* lovingly tells him that man is obliged to bless Hashem for every *chesed*, kindness, which he receives from Him. He must sense this even during those difficult periods when he feels that he is in dire need, and he opens his heart to Hashem in prayer. Even then, when he pleads amid pain and deprivation, he must not lose sight of all of the good that Hashem has done for him.

All too often we remember the source of our good fortune – as long as we experience the good. What about when the tables are reversed, and we are no longer on the receiving end of Hashem’s kindness? What if the money stops flowing, the accolades are non-existent, and the pain that was supposed to stop – does not?

It is easy to feel grateful when life is good, but when pain sets in, when disaster strikes, we suddenly renege our responsibility to those from whom we have benefitted. This is not only a grave error; it is a deficiency in one’s understanding of the *middah*, character trait, of *hakoras hatov*,

gratitude. During difficult times, not only will gratitude be helpful, it is essential toward maintaining one's level of human decency. In fact, it is precisely during times of crisis that we have most to gain from a grateful perspective on life. In the face of brokenness, gratitude gives us strength. In the face of despair, gratitude imbues us with hope. Indeed, gratitude grants us the ability to cope with difficult situations and hard times.

We should really distinguish between feeling grateful and being grateful. The average person does not have total control over his emotions. Thus, it is difficult for us to will ourselves to feel grateful, less depressed, or happy. Feelings are emotions which are dependent on the way we view life, the world around us, the situation in which we find ourselves. They are: an expression of what we perceive; thoughts concerning the way we are, as opposed to the way we want to be. Therefore, since feelings are often not within our ability to control, we might not feel grateful – even though we know that we should.

Being grateful is an entirely different story. Acting appropriately, such as being grateful and acting with gratitude, reflects a prevailing attitude; it is a choice that is enduring and should be relatively immune to the gains and losses that are part of our lives. When disaster strikes, a grateful attitude can provide a perspective by which we view life in its entire context. In other words, things may not be going in our favor – now – but that can change. It was not always this way, so it is quite possible that it will change and become good once again. Acting in a grateful manner allows us to grow, to transcend the present crisis, to look toward the future with hope. Furthermore, by being grateful we will achieve a level in which we will feel grateful.