

An Ammoni or Moavi shall not enter the congregation of Hashem... because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water... You shall not reject an Egyptian for you were a sojourner in their land. (23:4, 5, 8)

Gratitude plays an important role in Judaism. The Torah does not countenance ingratitude. It is considered an indication of selfishness and mean-spiritedness – character deficiencies which do not integrate well into the Jewish nation. Thus, members of the nations of Ammon and Moav, both descendants of Lot, whose lives were spared as a result of our Patriarch's actions, are not accepted by members of the Jewish nation for marriage. They may convert, but their genes are unacceptable, due to their character flaw of ingratitude. The Egyptian, however, upon conversion, is accepted. Although we suffered greatly at the hands of the Egyptians, we may not ignore their hospitality. As a sign of appreciation, we allow them to convert and marry into the Jewish faith.

Chazal derive from the masculine use of the word Moavi/Amoni that the prohibition against marrying into the Jewish congregation applies only to males, but an Amonis/ Moavis, female, is acceptable for marriage after sincere conversion. The classic example of this dispensation is Rus, who originally had been a Moavis. She subsequently, married Boaz, and became the progenitress of the Davidic dynasty. *Chazal* explain that it was the role of men to go out on the treacherous desert paths – not women. If so, how do we know that the Moavite women are not also carriers of the “gene of ingratitude,” just as men are? The women never went out to the desert. Perhaps, had they been confronted with the same opportunity as the men, they, too, would have gone out. How do we determine that Moavite women are any different than the men?

We might suggest that everyone is born with an innate proclivity towards *hakoras hatov*, gratitude. We are created by Hashem, raised by parents. Our origins are based on the support of others. Our ability to function in society, to get along with others, is all gratitude-based. For one to be ungrateful goes against his basic human nature. When the Moavite men refused to greet the Jews, they indicated more than a simple character flaw. They demonstrated a break with their natural character by challenging their base tendency to appreciate and show gratitude. This is a character flaw at its nadir.

Society is based on the give and take of people. Those who only take, but refuse to give, are social misfits and not productive members of society. The *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, recognizes the significance of human interaction and the destructive force of ingratitude. Thus, it will do everything in its power to convince us not to be grateful. It offers us a plethora of excuses for ingratitude: “I did not ask for the favor;” “The favor was not performed exclusively for me;” “The benefactor had personal gain from the favor.” The list goes on. Indeed, one who looks for excuses to feed his mean-spiritedness will find support.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita, relates a classic story of ingratitude to which many of us might personally be able to relate. The lottery is an easy way to make money – only if one wins. It has become a big business, due to the many gullible people who jump at every opportunity to get rich quick. The story is told about a fellow by the name of Yossel, who lived a life of abject poverty. Yossel could ill afford even his daily staple of bread. His clothes were threadbare and dirty because he could not afford to wash them.

One day a vendor, who was selling lottery tickets, approached Yossel and made his pitch. “Why not buy a few tickets? This could be your lucky day. It will turn your entire life around,” the vendor said.

“How can I buy even one ticket?” Yossel asked. “I do not have a penny to my name! Now leave me alone and allow me to continue begging. I have ‘work’ to do.”

“Yossel, this could be the avenue for wealth and an end to your misery. At least buy one ticket,” the fellow countered.

“Buy a lottery ticket when I cannot even buy a piece of bread? Are you out of your mind? I have no money. A lottery ticket is the last thing I would buy” was Yossel’s answer.

The dialogue between the vendor and Yossel went on for hours. Yossel vehemently demurred. Finally, Yossel asked the vendor, “What do you want from me? Why will you not leave me alone?”

The conversation continued until the next day when the vendor, out of great compassion for Yossel’s plight, offered to lend him the money to buy a ticket.

Yossel looked at the vendor and asked, “Do you think I am a fool? So what if you will lend me the money? Have you ever heard that a loan must be paid back? How will I pay up the loan?” Yossel asked.

“I will lend you the money on a two-year payment plan,” the vendor replied. He seriously wanted to help Yossel, and he thought this would be a wonderful way.

“I do not borrow,” Yossel said. “If one cannot repay a loan, he should not borrow the money in the first place.” This is a wonderful custom. Perhaps more of us should adhere to it.

“Last chance, Yossel,” the vendor said. “I will lend you the money. If you win, you will pay me back. If you do not win, the loan will be my gift to you. You cannot lose.”

Yossel relented and took the loan. He filled out his lottery ticket, thanked the vendor, said goodbye, and thought nothing more of it.

Two weeks later, the vendor who sold Yossel the ticket received a telegram that one of his tickets had come in a winner. He checked through the numbers, and, lo and behold, Yossel was a millionaire! It was late at night, brutally cold and snowy, but the vendor figured that he had to share the good news with Yossel. Such wonderful news could not wait until morning.

The vendor put on his coat and trudged outside. Yossel lived at the other end of town, in the low-rent district. It would be a long, cold walk, but well worth it, he thought. When he arrived at Yossel's "house," the vendor was covered from head to toe with a layer of snow. He knocked on the door many times, until Yossel finally responded, somewhat angrily, "Who has the gall to come knocking on my door so late at night?"

"It is I, the vendor, with some good news for you."

"What could be so important at this time of the night?" Yossel asked.

"I will tell you, but first, you must let me in out of the cold," the vendor replied.

"No," Yossel countered. "I will let you in when you tell me what is so important that you woke me for it."

Since Yossel was adamant and acting quite stubbornly, the vendor decided to share the good news with him – regardless of his implacable behavior. "Your lottery ticket came in a winner! You are a millionaire. No more begging for alms. For the first time in your life, you are your own man, beholden to no one."

Yossel waited a moment before responding: "If this is the case, your arrival at my home in the middle of the night is even more offensive. I would not be upset with anyone else, since my recent financial developments are not yet well-known. To them, I am still a poor man, but you know better. How could you be so insolent to wake a millionaire in the middle of the night?"

What a powerful story. Suddenly, the fellow who had gone out of his way to help him achieve this incredible good fortune is the "bad" guy. How quickly we forget when our fortune changes. Perhaps, we should sit back for a moment and think: How would I have been had my fortune not changed? Where would I be today, without that *rebbe*, *morah*, parent, friend? If we could only view life through the perspective of *hakoras hatov*, we would be much better and happier people and, then, we might even show our gratitude to the One Who orchestrated it all: Hashem.