

"Is it to Hashem that you do this? O' vile and unwise nation! Is He not your Father, your Master; has He not created you and firmed you?" (32:6)

The word "*naval*" is a strong adjective used to describe a person who is vile, whose behavior is reprehensible. It is, therefore, noteworthy that both *Rashi* and the *Ramban* attribute this person's shameful behavior to a lack of *hakoras ha'tov*, gratitude. The *Ramban* writes that one who repays a kindness with evil is called a "*naval*." Indeed, what type of person would repay good with evil, if not one who is "*naval*" ?

The generation living prior to the destruction of the first *Bais Ha'Mikdash* is reproved by *Yeshayahu Ha'Navi* as being worse than animals. The prophet declares, "The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib, but Yisrael does not know, My People do not understand" (*Yeshayahu* 1:3). *Horav Yehudah Zev Segal, z.l.*, cites the *Radak* who explains that an animal recognizes the source of its sustenance, its owner. A natural instinct drives the ox to return to its owner's home. There is no coercion because it "understands" the place to which it must return. As a result of their lack of *hakoras ha'tov*, *Klal Yisrael* was delinquent in its recognition of Hashem as the source of their continued sustenance. This lack of character refinement led to alienation from Hashem.

With this idea in mind, we can understand why the *Torah* chooses *kcb*, vile, as a term analogous with *ofj tk*, unwise. What does a lack of wisdom have to do with ingratitude ? Apparently, one who is unwise, whose mind does not function at maximum capacity, is destined to be blind to those who help him. Only an individual with a constricted and obtuse mind is capable of ignoring the good that others do for him.

Hakoras ha'tov means the acknowledgment of the good one receives. The ability to discern the benefit and its source ostensibly requires a certain element of wisdom. If so, why should one be held accountable for his lack of gratitude ? Perhaps he simply is not very "astute". Apparently though, such wisdom is instinctual; even an animal knows to whom to return. We must, therefore, infer that this wisdom refers to the ability to rationally transcend people and ideas who would prevent us from recognizing the source of all our beneficence.

The *yetzer hara*, evil inclination, takes on many guises in its quest to alienate us from our Benefactor. It attempts to convince us by means of perverted logic that we do not really "owe" Hashem. Regrettably, we fall for the *yetzer hara*'s rationalization of what we deserve "by right". We take the gifts of good health and life, children who are well and a source of *nachas*, and easy *parnassah*, livelihood, for granted. After all, it is our due. Only when we are in danger of losing one of the many gifts do we wake up and notice, identify and acknowledge, all of the good and its source. We must learn to be ever mindful of Hashem's gifts and respond with the proper gratitude before we receive the inevitable wake-up call from Him!