

## Take vengeance for Bnei Yisrael against the Midyanim... Moshe sent them a thousand from each tribe. (31:2,6)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* was the paradigm of a *baal ha'koras ha'tov*, one who acknowledges his debt of gratitude and repays it at his earliest convenience. This is the definition that applies to everyone. Moshe is not everyone. He lived by a bar whose standards were much higher. When Hashem instructed Moshe to initiate the ten plagues that debilitated Egyptian life, he respectfully bowed out from being the vehicle to strike both the water (Nile River, to transform it into blood and to bring up the frogs) and the ground (to bring about the plague of lice). For both he had a valid reason, albeit one that only touched upon his subconscious, since water and earth are inanimate and have no feelings. The water had protected him when, as a newborn, he was placed there in a reed basket. The earth concealed the Egyptian whom he killed to protect a fellow Jew. Obviously, taking *ha'koras ha'tov* to the level which assuages the subconscious is extreme, but Moshe's bar was unusually high. It did, however, go even higher. In this *parsha*, Hashem instructed him to mete out vengeance against the Midyanim for their role in provoking the Jews to sin. The *Midrash Rabbah* (*Bamidbar* 2:4) comments, "Hashem instructs Moshe to take action. Yet, he instead sends others. He did this due to an overriding sense of *ha'koras ha'tov*. He had spent much time in Midyan, following his escape from Egypt and his marriage to Tzipporah, the daughter of Yisro, who was the priest of Midyan. He felt that having benefitted from this country, he had no right to raise his hand in battle against them." Moshe applied a rationale, *Bor she'shassia mimenu al tizrok bo even*; "Do not throw a stone into a well from which you have drunk." While this rationale may serve as a basis for most *ha'koras ha'tov* demands, it does not overrule Hashem's command. The Almighty instructed Moshe to avenge His honor and that of the Jewish people. Yet, Moshe applied a mere ethical aphorism to "overrule" the Heavenly command. How are we to understand this?

*Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl*, explains that the requisite for *ha'koras ha'tov* was so plausible that Hashem expected Moshe to understand that, if the apparent sense of His command that Moshe personally exact revenge runs counter to His own standards of *ha'koras ha'tov*, then the true meaning of His command must be that Moshe send others. In other words, Moshe was to make a decision based upon what was ethically correct. Hashem wanted this! Moshe's *mahus*, essence, could not possibly be ungrateful. If Moshe were to be anything that had even a remote vestige of *kafui tov*, ingratitude, it would impair the depths of his soul. Thus, when Hashem said, "Avenge" – He meant – "Do what must be done in a manner that will be consistent with the Torah meridian of ethical behavior." Thus, Moshe became the consummate *eved*, servant, of Hashem. One who develops a strong sense of *ha'koras ha'tov* will understand to Whom we owe our greatest debt of gratitude: Hashem. By acknowledging that our every breath, our every action, is a unique gift from Hashem, we develop a greater sense of subjugation to Hashem for all that He does for us.

Many stories have been written which detail the various levels and practices involved in *hakaras ha'tov*. They all have a common denominator: a living person expresses his gratitude to another living person. The following powerful story, quoted in *L'Ha'ir* (*Horav Yechiel Meir Tzucker, Shlita*),

reflects a different form of *hakoras ha'tov*. *Horav Yosef Glick, zl*, was attached to a number of *Chasidische Rebbes*. Among whom he was particularly close to was the *Belzer Rebbe, Horav Aharon Rokeach, zl*. The *Rebbe* was meticulous to use *schach kainus* for his *succah*, and he replaced the *schach* annually. When the *Rebbe* immigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* after escaping from the European holocaust, during some years appropriating *kainus schach* was difficult to impossible. *Rav Yosef* worked very hard to provide the *Rebbe* with *kainus schach*. He succeeded in locating and delivering the *schach* to the *Rebbe*. The *Rebbe* was known for his *hakoras ha'tov*. He did everything within his power to repay the favor, to show his gratitude. One cannot show gratitude unless one is physically alive to do so. The *Rebbe* did not live long in *Eretz Yisrael* and, as a result, never had the opportunity to repay *Rav Yosef*.

*Rav Yosef* related that he dreamt that the *Rebbe* had visited the *chareidi* Moshav Yesodos. The entire community, including him, went out to greet and pay homage to this venerable Torah giant. When he shook hands with the *Rebbe*, the *Rebbe* said to him, "Do not worry. I remember what you did for me. I will pay you back and protect you from this world." He suddenly woke up drenched in sweat. He wondered what the *Rebbe* had meant when he said that he would protect him. He was healthy; why should he worry? Veritably, he said, "As a devoted *chasid* who believed in the *Rebbe's* powers, I should have immediately made a doctor's appointment to check myself out – just in case. Things being the way they are, we tend to procrastinate and not go to the doctor until something is urgent."

A few weeks passed, and *Rav Yosef* began to experience serious back pain. He finally went to the doctor who, after reviewing the MRI that he had taken, delivered the bad news. He had a large tumor on his spine. It was too dangerous to operate and, at best, the surgery would only give him a few extra weeks. He was encouraged to put his affairs in order and prepare for the inevitable. *Rav Yosef* was not concerned, so sure was he concerning the *Rebbe's* promise to him. Years passed from the day that the doctor read the results of his scan. *Baruch Hashem*, he lived many more years and was able to dance at his grandchildren's weddings. The *Belzer Rebbe* made sure to pay his debts.