

May Hashem lift His countenance to you and establish peace for you. (6:26)

Simply, this means that Hashem will suppress His disappointment with us when we sin. He will continue to show us special consideration and not punish us. *Chazal* (*Berachos* 20b, *Bamidbar Rabbah* 11:4) question why G-d would show special consideration to *Klal Yisrael* when they do not deserve it. Indeed, Hashem cannot be bribed, as it says (*Devarim* 10:17): *Asher lo yissa panim v'lo yikach shochad*, "Who does not lift a countenance (does not overlook a sin if the sinner is undeserving of favor) and does not accept bribery." They explain that the Jewish people are worthy of Hashem's favor and special treatment. "Just as they are partial to Me, so am I partial to them. I have written in My Torah (*Devarim* 8:10), *V'achalta v'savata*, 'When you eat and are satisfied,' *U'beirachta*, 'You are to bless' (*bentch*, say grace, to thank Hashem for providing you with sustenance). But, even when a Jew lacks sufficient food to satiate himself, he nonetheless recites a blessing even for only the minimum volume of *zayis*, olive, or *beitzah*, egg. Just as they favor Me, so, too, I favor them."

Chazal say a Jew can sit with his family and eat whatever he is able to scrounge together; yet, the family *bentches* after their "meal," which might consist of an amount not larger than an olive or an egg. Such devotion to the Almighty, such contentment to *mitzvos*, earns Hashem's reciprocity.

Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl, asks an insightful question. If, in fact, Hashem enjoins us to *bentch* when we are satisfied, it indicates that one who blesses after eating a volume of an olive or egg is demonstrating extreme stringency, he is being *machmir* on himself. Perhaps he is acting inappropriately and is otherwise not accustomed under other circumstances to acting in such a demanding manner. If so, he is making a *brachah l'vatalah*, a blessing in vain. Furthermore, a host of *mitzvos d'Rabbanan*, Rabbinic ordinances, and various customs which are the result of *chumra*, stringent adherence to the Torah. Why is *Bircas HaMazon*, *bentching*, when one eats only the minimum volume of food, singled out? The fact that the Jewish people are *machmir*, stringent, is, if anything, counter-intuitive. It implies that *shochad*, a bribe, is, so to speak, being rendered by their accepting the stringency upon themselves.

Rav Weinberg renders *Chazal* homiletically. Meticulous observance of *k'zayis* and *k'beitzah* applies to what the Jewish man will keep for himself after he has given everything else away to the needy. They opine that they have sufficient food for their needs. The poor man comes first. The *Rosh Yeshivah* remembers that, in the village in which he grew up, some Jews would go hungry, sustaining themselves on the bare minimum, so that they could share with others less fortunate than themselves. These same people were the first ones to invite a traveler to their home for a meal. What did they personally eat? A *kazayis*. This was a sufficient volume to satisfy their hunger and *bentch* afterwards. Such people counteract any claims of bribery or arrogance, because they neither kept anything for themselves nor garnered attention for their behavior. Their sincerity and devotion to others earned Hashem's favor.

Jews are *baalei chesed*. Indeed, it is one of the three traits: *baishanim*, embarrass easily; *rachamanim*, compassionate; *gomlei chassadim*, perform acts of loving kindness, by which a Jew is identified. *Tzedakah* of all sorts and to all destinations is probably at the top of the list. Every act of *chesed* is in some way an act of *tzedakah*, since one is doing what is right and just, which is the root of the word *tzedakah* – *tzedek*. As such, we have a multitude of *tzedakah* stories. I was looking for something unique, something that would stand out, something that imparts a lesson that goes beyond the standard “do good and help others” motif.

A distinguished rabbi in a New England community was invited by one of his wealthy congregants to a *chanukas ha'bayis* (housewarming). When he entered the home, he and the many guests who were present by invitation only were bowled over by its beauty and splendor. While the architecture was impressive, it was the décor that caught everyone's eye. The host and hostess made a point to explain the origin of every unusual piece of furniture, rug, painting, even the golden, hand-carved door handles.

During dinner, which was a five-course catered affair, the hostess related to the guests that they had been fortunate to obtain the services of an outstanding interior decorator whose artistic brilliance and experience were the keys to the home's unusual beauty. They reiterated a number of times that the decorator's prices were unusually high, but well worth it. Otherwise, they would not have had such a beautiful home. Their home was an interior decorator's dream.

Following dessert, the guests mulled around admiring the unique pieces of furniture from all corners of the globe. At that time, an elderly woman – the mother of the hostess, who lived with them – motioned to the rabbi that she would like to show him her room. The woman and rabbi left the lavishly appointed dining/living room and walked upstairs to her room. She opened the door to a large bedroom suite which was tastefully decorated. “Rabbi, please look at my window sill. This is how I decorated my room, and this is how a Jewish home should be decorated.” She pointed to the windowsill where, just about every *pushke*, *tzedakah* box, one could find was lined up. Every type of organization was represented: hospitals, schools, *yeshivos*, Bais Yaakovs, seminaries, shelters, orphanages. Whatever one could ask for was represented on that window sill. “Rabbi, this is what I consider important, and this is what I look at with pride when I come up to my room.” Before the modern-day fundraising devices, the *pushke* was the primary means of fundraising. Everyone's kitchen counter was lined with these colorful boxes, which lent an artistic character of its own to a Jewish home. It reminded us that we do not live for ourselves, but to help others.