

“I declare today to Hashem, your G-d...” (26:3)

The parsha of Bikurim teaches us the significance of hakoras ha'tov, gratitude. We must learn to recognize the good that others do for us and remember the overriding importance of showing appreciation to our benefactors. This will serve as a vehicle for understanding the overwhelming debt of gratitude that we owe to our primary Benefactor, Hashem, without whose beneficence we would be, and have, nothing. We may fail to recognize another element of hakoras ha'tov. We know we must be grateful to Hashem for the good that He has sent our way. What about the evil about which we are not even cognizant that He has removed from our path? There is the accident that did not occur, the illness that we did not contract, and the financial loss that could have happened, but did not. Our gratitude to Hashem should be boundless.

This idea came to the Chasam Sofer as a result of his awareness of the following incident, cited by Rabbi Paysach Krohn: There was a very wealthy man in Pressburg who, although blind, lived alone and somehow was able to take care of himself. One day a group of hooligans, envious of the blind man's wealth, conceived an amateurish plan to enter his home and rob him of his possessions. They were well-aware of this person's daily ritual. Every morning shortly after breakfast, he would go out for a stroll. Indeed, he would leave his house at just about the same time every day and follow the same route.

The hoodlums calculated that if they would prepare the road before he came, by digging a hole and covering it, he would inevitably fall into their trap. They would then rush to his aid like good Samaritans and offer to take him home. Once they had access to the inside of his house, his possessions would be accessible to them. So, the next morning they arose early, dug the hole, and camouflaged it with leaves, so that no one else would notice and steer him clear of danger. The hoodlums took up their positions as the blind man began his daily stroll. They waited and waited, watching as he came within ten feet of the trap – stopped – and, suddenly, did an about-face. They were shocked. How could he do this? He never changed his ritual. It seemed that on that particular day, the blind man was exhausted and did not want to go farther. He decided to return home, thereby foiling their plans.

When the Chasam Sofer heard this story, he said that he now had a better understanding of Chazal's words in the Talmud Pesachim 118b. They point out two seemingly contradictory statements in Tehillim. In Tehillim 117 it is stated, “Praise Hashem, all you People. Laud Him, all you nations. For His kindness to us was overwhelming.” Why, ask Chazal, would nations praise Hashem because good things are happening to Jews? If anything, they want to celebrate our downfall!

The Chasam Sofer explains that the nations of the world are acutely aware of the evil they seek to propagate against us, only to be foiled by Hashem. David Ha'melech observes how so many nations of the world have truly attempted to hurt us, only to be thwarted by Hashem. The Jews are not aware of this – but the nations are. They should praise Hashem, because they know what could

have occurred had Hashem not been protecting us.