

You shall come to whomever will be the Kohen... and you shall say to him, “I declare today to Hashem, your G-d.” (26:3)

The individual who brings the *Bikurim* makes a declaration: “I have come to the land that Hashem swore to our forefathers to give to us.” *Rashi* comments concerning the necessity of making a declaration which underscores our gratitude to the Almighty for giving us the land, *She’eincha kafui tovah*, “That you are not an ingrate.” It is a requirement for the landowner to express his gratitude. As a result of human nature, people do not want to be beholden to anyone. They look for any and every opportunity or excuse not to express their gratitude. The *mitzvah* of *Bikurim* serves one primary purpose. All of the pomp and publicity, the whole to-do is for one reason: to show that one is not a *kafui tov*. The Torah reiterates a number of times, “The land that You gave us,” in order to emphasize that whatever we have is due to Hashem’s beneficence.

Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, zl, explains that, exclusive of the fact that *hakoras hatov*, appreciation and gratitude, is an exemplary character trait to possess, it also brings one closer to *deveikus b’Hashem*, clinging/closeness to Hashem. He supports this idea with a *pasuk* from the end of the *parsha*, “But Hashem did not give you a heart to know, or eyes to see, or ears to hear until this day” (28:3). It was only after we had experienced all of the wonderful favors and good fortune that we were able to come close to Him. By acknowledging our good fortune, we realize how much we really owe Him, thereby clinging to Him.

Hakoras hatov saves one from falling into the abyss of sin. Sin is a crude and vulgar payback for the good fortune we receive from Hashem. Is there anything more contemptible than a guest who acts miserably towards his host, who has gone out of his way to provide him with a place to eat and sleep in comfort? We respond that we would never do this, but when we stop to consider the way we act, the manner in which we *daven*, learn, perform *mitzvos*, we will be forced to concede that, in effect, we are *kefuyei tov*.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* posits that one who is *makir tov*, lives a life of constant gratitude to Hashem, is a much more refined person, a person who is distant from sin and failure, since G-d is so much a part of his life. He supports this idea from Yaakov *Avinu*, who, upon being questioned by Eisav, *Mi eilah?* “Who are these (children)?” the Patriarch replied, *ha’yiladim asher chanan Elokim es avdecha*, “The children whom G-d has graciously given your servant” (*Bereishis* 33:5). Yaakov acknowledged that everything which he possessed was a gift. If he had children, it was a blessing from Hashem. It was not a “natural occurrence.”

In his *Aderes Eliyahu*, the **Gaon, zl, m’Vilna**, writes that the path to achieve gratitude to Hashem is attained by referring to everything in the Name of Hashem. When someone asks about your family, you should respond, “I have been blessed by Hashem;” “I *Baruch Hashem* earn a living;” “Thank G-d, everyone is healthy;” “Life is good – *Baruch Hashem*.”

What does “thank you” consist of? What must be taken into consideration upon saying, “Thank you”? The Torah answers this question in six *pesukim*. The *Bikurim* were brought to the *Bais Hamikdash* amid great pomp and as an expression of our gratitude to the Almighty for the Land, the produce, the successful yield. The presentation of the *Bikurim* is accompanied with a six-sentence homily recalling our history: Lavan tried to do us in; we descended to Egypt where we spent a few centuries as slaves to Pharaoh; we cried out to Hashem, Who redeemed us from Egypt; we were not a large nation; after traveling through the wilderness for forty years, we entered the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now, “I am here with my first fruits!”

The verbosity of this expression of gratitude is evident. The question is: Why? What is wrong with a simple, “Thank you”? Or, even a not-so-simple, “Thank you”? Does one have to recite an entire *megillah* in order to express his gratitude? Yes! The Torah is teaching us that saying, “Thank you,” should never be a simple line in a card or a few practiced words. Expressing gratitude articulates one’s realization and acknowledgment that, if not for the favor he received, he would be a different person. His feelings of gratitude should reflect the entire history of the kindness received with an appreciation of all that went into it. We must acquiesce and attest to every aspect of gratitude, regardless of how inconsequential it might have been for the benefactor. It is not about him; it is about us.

I recently came across an article about one man’s pilgrimage of gratitude: A year-long journey spent thanking people, face to face, who had a major impact on his life. When asked from where he got the idea of spending a year thanking people who had contributed to his life, he replied, “My father passed away when I was a teenager. The idea that life is short, precious and quite unpredictable suddenly hit home. I realized that “time was awasting,” and, if I were going to express my feelings of gratitude, I had better do it while I was able – and they were still around.”

“Why did you make a whole year-long journey out of what could have been achieved with a phone call?” he was asked. “I wanted the pleasure of being with them in person and to have the benefit of a dialogue. I wanted to convey my feelings personally,” he replied.

In his *Michtav Mei’Eliyahu*, **Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl**, explains that true gratitude is derived from the power of *nesinah*, “giving,” while ingratitude is spawned by the power of taking. One who wants to give feels compelled to express his gratitude from his heart. The individual who is a “taker” expresses gratitude at times, but usually it is only lip service. It is not an expression that comes from the inner recesses of his heart.

Horav Eliezer Silver, zl, legendary head of the *Agudas HaRabbanim*, also served as the *Rav* of Cincinnati, Ohio. When he saw a notice in the paper of the upcoming marriage in Cleveland, Ohio, of *Rav* Nochum Zev, son of *Rav* Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, he was intent on participating in the event. *Rav* Dessler was the nephew of his *Rebbe muvhak*, primary mentor, *Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl*. How could he miss the wedding of his *Rebbe*’s nephew? This was *Rav* Leizer Silver’s understanding of *hakoras hatov*.

Three years later, *Rav* Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler visited America to see his son and new daughter-in-law, whose wedding he had missed due to World War II. It was not easy for the elder *Rav* Dessler to travel to the states, but he yearned to see his children.

While he was in Cleveland, *Rav* Dessler informed his son that he would like to thank *Rav* Silver for attending his son's wedding. The younger *Rav* Dessler obtained the phone number and brought it to his father. "No, no," his father immediately said. "I want to express my gratitude in person." Apparently, there was no room for discussion; the two would be taking a trip to Cincinnati. Together, father and son took the overnight train trip, arriving in Cincinnati in the pre-dawn hours.

They could not expect *Rav* Silver to be up so early in the morning, so they waited patiently on the *Rav's* porch until he left for *Shacharis*. They accompanied him to *shul*. Following *davening*, the *Rav* invited them for breakfast. "What brings you to Cincinnati, and how can I help you?" he asked. The senior *Rav* Dessler replied that he had come to thank him for attending his son's wedding. "No, really, why did you come?" *Rav* Silver asked once again. *Rav* Dessler reiterated that he had come to express his gratitude. "You could have made a simple phone call," *Rav* Silver countered. "A phone call is not the same as coming in person," *Rav* Dessler answered. "You took the time and expended the effort to come to my son's wedding. The least I could do is come to thank you personally."