

If he shall offer it for a Thanksgiving-offering. (7:12)

a Korban Todah, Thanksgiving-offering, to express his gratitude to Hashem and as a manner of declaration that he acknowledges that no one other than Hashem saved him. Hakoras hatov, recognizing the benefits/good that we receive from others, is a critical mitzvah, quality, which defines a human being. One who is a kafui tov, denies the good that he receives, is deficient in humanness. It is a never-ending mitzvah which one cannot completely repay, because we do not know the complete extent of the benefit and consequences that we have received. Indeed, Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, explains that it is called hakoras hatov, recognition of the good, rather than hashlomas hatov, paying back the good, because it is impossible to reimburse his benefactor fully. We remain beholden to our benefactor.

Praying to Hashem is a form of hakoras hatov, because it is an indication that we realize and acknowledge that whatever we need, comes from Him. One who does not pray, in effect is saying, "I do not need anything from Hashem," or, "Whatever I needed I have received from 'other' sources." One must acknowledge that Hashem is the only source of everything that he has. Prayer is that form of acknowledgment. How ironic it is that the fellow who is about to close a major financial deal has little time for passionate prayer. What he fails to realize is that without prayer, his deal might not achieve efficacy.

We never know the effect of an act of gratitude. The Kadmonim, early commentators, relate an insightful parable which, when we think about it, can be expressed in different terms under varied circumstances. The ending, however, is always the same: hakoras hatov has a long-range and a far-reaching effect.

A lion returned from his hunt for food, filled and satiated. He was tired and lay down beneath a large tree's shade to sleep in comfort. While he slept, a family of mice came by and began to play in the area that he slept. Before long, they began to crawl and jump all over him. After all, it was fun. Suddenly, the lion woke up, startled. He stretched out his large paw and grabbed hold of the first mouse within his reach – and began to squeeze. A bit more pressure, and the little mouse would be history.

"Please, Mr. Lion, do not choke me. Let me live. I had no intention of harming you. We were just having some fun. If you set me free, I will owe you. One day, I will do the same for you," the mouse pleaded.

"What can a little mouse do for the king of beasts?" the lion scoffed. "You are a puny little thing; what could you ever do for me?" The lion was not very hungry, and he was in a benevolent mood, so he let the mouse go.

A few days passed and the lion was sauntering through the forest, his head held high in the air, when he did not notice a trap that was set in the ground. Too late. By the time the lion looked down, he was trapped in the pit dug in the ground. Entangled in ropes, he was unable to climb up. In a few hours, the hunters would return to inspect their traps and the prize would be discovered. As hard as he tried to maneuver himself, he could not extricate himself from the tight ropes. Afraid for his life, the lion began to scream. He screamed and roared, but, since no one was around, it did not make a difference.

I should not say "nobody," because actually the lion's screams were heard by his new and very

grateful friend: the mouse. He came scampering over to see what he could do to help the lion who weeks earlier had so kindly allowed him to live. "I am here to help you," the mouse called out to the lion." "What can a puny little thing like you do for me?" the lion asked. "Just wait and see," the mouse answered, as he began to bite and chew his way through the ropes that bound the lion. It was not easy, but, in one hour's time, the lion was liberated. One never knows how the favor he has granted his fellow can become the source of his own salvation.

Two classics of hakoras hatov convey to us the far-reaching effect of this wonderful character trait. Horav Shmuel Yitzchak Andron, zl, was known as the Illui of Denenberg. He was one of the seven signatories who signed the certificate appointing Horav Meir Simchah as Rav of Dvinsk. He was also the founder of America's first yeshivah, Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yaakov Yosef or RJJ. How did this yeshivah begin? What role did Rav Shmuel Yitzchak play as its founder?

One day, one of Rav Shmuel Yitzchak's sons came home singing a non-Jewish song. His son explained that since the Christian's holiday season was in full force, everybody was singing these songs. Rav Shmuel Yitzchak gathered together his entire family and told them, "Tomorrow, no one is going to school. We are finished with the non-Jewish public school system."

He hired a private rebbe for his children, and they studied at home. Public school exists to serve the general community. Officials from the school visited the Andron home to find out the reason that their children were missing from school. When Rav Shmuel explained his reasoning to them, they said, "Here in America there is no tolerance for such fanaticism. We will notify the authorities that you are preventing your children from attending school."

Rav Shmuel was compelled to stand before a judge and explain why he did not conform to the law of the land. He told the judge in simple language that a Jew cannot send his children to a non-Jewish school. He offered to establish his own school. The judge allowed him three months to start a "Jewish" school – which is exactly what he did. This is how RJJ was founded. Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, was wont to say, "If not for that judge, there would not have been Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yaakov Yosef."

Dr. Kagan was a female physician who was medical director of Bikur Cholim Hospital in Yerushalayim. The Kaminetzer Mashgiach, Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, observed her yahrzeit with the study of Mishnayos and Kaddish recital. When queried for a reason, he explained that she went out of her way to address the needs of their children. Yerushalayim's population had experienced a number of serious epidemics, such that ministering to the needs of children often meant exposure which could lead to serious personal illness. Dr. Kagan did what had to be done – regardless of personal consequences.

Furthermore, the Rachmastrifka Rebbe, zl, promised her Olam Habba, a share in the World to Come. How can one not say Kaddish for such a holy woman? Rav Stern had heard about the Rebbe's promise, and, out of curiosity, asked Dr. Kagan for the reason behind the promise. She explained (with some emotion) that during a devastating epidemic, the Rebbe's son had become ill, and his life teetered back and forth. She had never left his side, nursing him back to complete health. When the Rebbe asked how he could pay her back for all of her kindness, Dr. Kagan replied, "I would like the Rebbe to sign on a petition for 'women's equal rights.'" The Rebbe thought for a moment and said, "You can ask for much more. Why waste a blessing on something like that?" She thought, and then said, "Fine, I would like the Rebbe to guarantee me a portion in

Olam Habba.” The Rebbe immediately rose to his feet and declared, “I promise you Olam Habba on the condition that everything that you do will be l’shem Shomayim – for the sake of Heaven – not for personal glory or financial benefit. Furthermore, I promise you that you will soon be saved from certain death!”

A few days later, after spending an entire night in the hospital ministering to the needs of sick children, Dr. Kagan crossed the street without looking for cars. She was hit by a speeding car and thrown one hundred feet. Nonetheless, she picked herself up, brushed herself off, and continued walking. The Rebbe’s promise was realized.

Rav Stern concluded, “For such a holy woman, it is a privilege to say Kaddish.”

One last story. There is a well-known picture of Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, feeding a saucer of milk to a cat. This attests to the extraordinary chesed, kindness, of an individual who was recognized as one of the premier mashgichim of the last century. There is, however, a story behind this picture, which is even more sublime.

One evening, the Rebbetzin went to the yeshivah’s (K’far Chassidim) storage room to return some dishes that had made the rounds and had not been returned. When she opened the door, she was greeted by mice who had made themselves comfortable in the storage room. The Rebbetzin was concerned lest these unwelcome creatures would make their way into the yeshivah’s supplies. The man in charge of the kitchen suggested bringing a cat to the storage room to protect the food. They located a stray cat and gave it a home. It would be on “duty” during the day and sleep in a corner of the storage room at night.

One day, Rav Elya observed the cat “patrolling.” He asked about it. “Who is feeding the cat?” the Mashgiach asked. The manager of the kitchen replied, “The mice in the storage room.” “If the purpose of the cat is to expel the mice, and it is has been successful, then it has nothing to eat. No food – no mice. What will the cat eat? If you want it to serve you – you must feed her!”

The very next day, Rav Elya assumed the responsibility of feeding the cat. After all, he owed her for protecting the yeshivah’s food supply.