

## Yosef said to the one in charge of his house, “Arise, chase after the men; when you overtake them, you shall say to them, “Why do you repay evil for good?” (44:4)

One would have expected Yosef to instruct his agent to simply ask the brothers, “Why did you take the cup? Why did you repay evil for good?” This is not the first question one asks of someone who has just stolen his silver cup. The *Zera Shimshon* explains that Yosef asked this question by design, in order to send home a message to the brothers. He intimated, “When our father made me a multi-colored coat, you became jealous. You became so jealous that it was sufficient reason for you to sell me as a slave.

“If, however, you were to take the time to examine the relationship between my mother and your mother, indeed, you will note that what you did was in stark contradistinction to the manner that my mother treated your mother. You conveniently forgot that our father was destined to marry my mother. Knowing that our grandfather’s word left much to be desired, our father gave our mother special signs. Becoming aware that a switch would take place, manifesting extreme sensitivity that your mother not be embarrassed, my mother gave your mother the coveted *simanim*, signs.”

This is why Yosef told his aide to ask the brothers, “Why do you repay evil for good?” This is why the *Midrashim* which record Yosef’s admonishment to his brothers use the expression, “You sold the son of Rachel,” rather than, “You sold Yosef.” This is to underscore Yosef’s critique of their behavior: It is one thing to act callously to a brother; it is a totally unforgivable act to ignore the life-altering favor that this brother’s mother had done for their mother.

We have no shortage of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude, stories. Our *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah giants, excel, not only in their knowledge of the length and breadth of Torah, but they also embody the finest *middos*, character traits. To them, gratitude was the prerequisite to *mentchlichkeit*, human decency. One who does not appreciate and pay gratitude to those who benefit him is simply not a *mentch*. The following story inspired me due to its unique approach to *hakoras hatov*.

*Horav Bentzion Felman, zl* (one of Bnei Brak’s prominent *poskim*), had an unusual practice: he would write his *chidushei Torah*, novella, and *p’sakim*, halachic decisions, on the back of invitations. *Bnei-mitzvah*, weddings and other celebratory occasions became his venue for writing his thoughts. When he was *niftar*, passed away, his family discovered a cabinet filled with thousands of invitations which had been used for this purpose. (Many of these cards were transcribed and included in the *Sefer Shalmei Todah*.) During the *shivah*, seven-day mourning period following his *petirah*, his sons revealed the reason for this practice.

One of *Rav Felman*’s students noticed his *Rebbe* writing on the back of an invitation. He said, “*Rebbe*, I would be honored to buy notebooks for the *Rebbe* in which to write his *chiddushim*. This way the *chiddushim* could be arranged in order and kept together.”

*Rav* Felman replied, “Do you think that I lack paper? I have many blank notebooks. However, I write on the backs of invitations by design. I am invited to numerous *simchos*, joyful events. My time is limited, preventing me from attending. I am so busy that I am even unable to respond properly to each invitation (with a proper blessing and good wishes). The least that I can do is be *makdish*, sanctify/designate, the *z’chus*, merit, of the learning that went into preparing and writing the *chiddushim* on the card, so that it become a source of success and good will for the *bar-mitzvah* boy or young couple. In this manner, I am at least able to show some *hakoras hatov*, appreciation, to them for inviting me.”