

Say to Aharon, “Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the land; it shall become lice. (8:12)

Rashi explains that Moshe *Rabbeinu* could not bring the plague of lice on Egypt, because it meant striking the ground, something Moshe could not bring himself to do. The dust of the earth protected him from being discovered when he used it to conceal the corpse of the Egyptian whom he had killed. For Moshe to have struck the land would have been a blemish on his attribute of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude. *Chazal* teach that whoever denies the favor he benefitted from his fellowman will not stop there. He will also one day deny Hashem’s favor as well. One whose character is deficient is blemished across the board. He will not restrict his abysmal behavior to human beings. He will also manifest his ingratitude to Hashem.

Hakoras hatov actually means recognizing the good that one bestows on me. One cannot appreciate what he has not acknowledged as good. He must first concede that he has been a beneficiary, and afterwards he can demonstrate his gratitude. Unfortunately, acknowledging a favor received is probably more difficult and less common than acting gratefully. Sadly, we tend to look for any opportunity to ignore the favor and the benefactor.

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, relates the following anecdote. One of the cities in eastern Europe held a raffle. People from all over the country purchased raffle tickets. The mere thought that a dollar ticket could win a million dollars was mind boggling. A kind-hearted grocer who was known for his acts of *chesed*, kindness, attempted to reach out to Yosele, a man plagued with abject poverty, who lived on whatever scraps he could gather.

“Yosele, why do you not purchase a raffle ticket? Who knows? You might win and become a millionaire.” Yosele thought that his friend, the grocer, had lost his mind, “I am unable to scrape together the few pennies necessary to buy some stale bread, and you expect me to buy a raffle ticket? Have you taken leave of your senses?” The grocer was not deterred, “But look at how much you might win. Your financial problems would be solved.” This went back and forth until Yosele finally said, “Good, I will buy a ticket if you tell me where I can get the money for it.”

“I will lend you the money,” the grocer replied. “This might be the opportunity of a lifetime. I want to help you.” Yosele countered, “What if I lose? How will I ever pay you back?” “Do not worry,” replied the grocer. “If you lose, you owe me nothing. If you win, you will have more than enough money to pay me back.” Yosele would have to be a total fool to pass up such an offer. He agreed to buy a raffle ticket. After all, it was a “win-win” situation. A few days passed, and the lottery occurred. The grocer kept Yosele’s ticket for him. One can only begin to imagine the shock and excitement that overtook the grocer when he saw that Yosele’s ticket had the winning numbers! There were no phones (and even if there were, Yosele could not have afforded the service). The grocer decided he would notify Yosele of his good fortune. It was a freezing night in the dead of winter. A blizzard was pelting the city with snow that was quickly piling up. Yet, the kind-hearted

grocer went out in search of Yosele, who, due to his poverty, lived in a broken-down, ramshackle hovel on the outskirts of town.

It took the man a few hours trudging along in waist-deep high snow to reach Yosele's home. It was pitch dark, not a fire, not a candle to illuminate the house. It was past midnight. Yosele was probably sleeping, but the grocer was sure that he would welcome being woken up to hear the exciting news. He kept on knocking and knocking. When this did not work, he tried screaming. Finally, Yosele called out, quite upset, "Nu, tell me." "Do you expect me to stay outside in this frigid cold? Let me in, so that I can warm up." "Absolutely not," Yosele said. "It is the middle of the night. I need my sleep. Tell me what you have to say."

The grocer saw that Yosele was a hard sell. His wretched life had affected his character, and he was not about to let anyone into his "home." "Ok, Yosele, I will tell you the great news while I am freezing out here. You won! You won the lottery! You are no longer a poor man. You are a millionaire, probably the richest person in the city."

A few minutes passed, and Yosele came to the door. The grocer thought that he would finally be allowed into the house, maybe even get a hot drink to warm his bones. How shocked he was to hear Yosele berate him, "I cannot understand you," he began. "*Nu*, everyone knows me as Yosele, the poor man, who lives a wretched life. They treat me abysmally because they look at me negatively. That is the way (some) people are. You, however, know (now) that I am a millionaire. How dare you come and wake me up in middle of the night! Where is your respect? You should be ashamed to come banging on my door as if I were still living a life of poverty!"

This is human nature. We pray and pray, and, as soon as we receive a positive response, we stop praying. We forget to Whom we had been praying and for what reason. Husbands forget all they benefitted from their wives during their marriage. They ignore the *hakoras hatov* imperative. If one does not maintain a sense of gratitude to his/her spouse, how can he/she expect to appreciate what Hashem does for him/her?