

## That you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land. (26:2)

The *mitzvah* of *Bikkurim*, bringing the first fruits to the *Bais Hamikdash*, teaches us the significance of *hakoras hatov*, recognizing the good/benefits we receive and paying gratitude to our benefactor – which, in the case of *Bikkurim*, is Hashem. While anyone who possesses a modicum of common sense understands the importance of gratitude, we do not realize how far the obligation for gratitude goes and how one who does not live with *hakoras hatov* as a way of life is considered a deficient human being. The *Ramchal* (*Mesillas Yesharim* 8) underscores the importance of every human being aware of and taking a penetrating look, at all of Hashem's wonders and miracles of which he and the rest of the world are the beneficiaries. "There is no person, regardless of his circumstances, whether he suffers abject poverty or is blessed with amazing wealth, whether he is healthy or is unwell, who does not [if he puts his mind to it] notice Hashem's abundant kindness." Indeed, *hakoras hatov* leads to a strength of one's commitment to Hashem and observance of His *mitzvos*.

Horav Eliezer HaLevi Turk, *Shlita* (*Otzroseihem Amalei*), quotes a tradition attributed to the *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna*, who hardly ever uttered a word in any language other than Hebrew – other than *dank*, "thank you." His students explained that the word *dank* has the same *gematria*, numerical equivalent, as *Olam Habba* (*dank* – *daled, nun, kuf* – 154. *Olam Habba* – *ayin, vov, lamed, mem, hay, bais, aleph* – 154). This alludes to the idea that one who is *makir tov* will merit *Olam Habba*. Horav Elazar M. Shach, *zl*, said that *dank* is related to *gedank*, memory. This teaches that one who receives a favor from someone is obligated to remember the debt of gratitude that weighs heavily upon him.

A young *kollel* fellow was seeking to strengthen his *avodas ha'tefillah, davening*, to Hashem. He understood that such changes do not just happen. One has to take "baby" steps and progress slowly until he reaches the pinnacle for which he is aspiring. One must have a goal in his prayer, i.e., to pray for a specific achievement, such as: success in Torah study; greater *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven; *menuchas hanefesh*, peace and calm in his life. He approached Horav Chaim Kanievsky, *zl*, with his question, hoping to hear his sage advice.

Rav Chaim asked him, "Do you have parents?" He replied, "*Baruch Hashem*, until one hundred and twenty." "*Nu*," said Rav Chaim. "What is your question? The first *tefillah* for which you should pray is for your parents' health. This is *hakoras hatov*, appreciation for what they have done and continue to do for you. This is the first step in growth."

A certain judge was the subject of a disquieting rumor concerning his ethical character. He was allegedly accepting bribes from litigants. A judge must be the paradigm of honesty. The mere fact that such a rumor had been spread about the judge was despicable. If there was smoke, the chances were that there was some fire to generate it. When asked concerning the veracity of the

rumor, he replied, “Even if, by chance, a litigant would approach me with “pay” for a favor, it would mean nothing (he would ignore it), because I, as well as all the other judges, live by a strict code of ethics of which honesty is at the top. There is no fear that a bribe of any sort would cause us to alter our opinion.” (In other words, he did not deny accepting a bribe, but maintained that it had no effect on him – whatsoever.)

When *Horav Meir Chodosh, zl*, heard this arrogant statement, he declared, “If this is true (that he would not be swayed by a bribe), then he may not serve as a judge for another reason. Anyone who accepts a gift from someone – and does not feel that it behooves him to reciprocate in some way – is not a *mentch*, human being. Such a “person” is disqualified from serving as a judge.”

One cannot calculate the long-term benefits enjoyed as the result of an act of kindness. Years later, it is discovered that one’s life, and, hence, his success were catalyzed by one act of selfless kindness. When the *Rebbetzin* of *Horav Refael Kook, zl*, *Rav* of Teverya, was *niftarah*, passed away, *Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl*, expressed his desire to be *menachem aveil*, comfort the bereaved. When word reached the ears of the mourners, themselves men of stature in Torah, they responded that it was unnecessary for the aged *Rosh Yeshivah* to make the trip. *Rav Shach* insisted on making the journey – regardless of his advanced age and poor health. Furthermore, when he arrived at the home of the deceased, he insisted on climbing up the three floors to their apartment, despite their desire to come downstairs where the *Rosh Yeshivah* could meet with them. *Rav Shach* refused to have the mourners alter their schedule or place in which they sat. It took him fifteen minutes to climb the two flights. As soon as the venerable *Rosh Yeshivah* of Ponvezh entered the room, he was immediately surrounded by members of the family and others who had gathered to comfort the mourners. He sat for a few moments to gather his strength before he spoke.

“I am certain that you surely want to know the reason for my insistence on personally coming here and climbing the steps to meet with you. A number of decades have passed since the time that I studied together with the *Brisker Rav, zl*. (He had a small group of illustrious students whom he taught daily.) During the period that I studied with the *Rav*, a member of his household became gravely ill and required around-the-clock care. As a result, the daily schedule for the entire household was upended. They had neither night nor day. The *Rav*’s ability to give *shiur* properly and spend time with his students was hampered. One of the *Rav*’s closest students mentioned that he would contact *Rebbetzin Kook* in Teverya to ask if the ailing young man could recuperate at her home, where the climate was more therapeutic. The *Rebbetzin* was contacted and gladly accepted. *Baruch Hashem*, the change of venue appeared to have been what the doctor had ordered. The young man regained his strength. The *Rav* thanked the *Rebbetzin* profusely, not only for playing a major role in the young man’s recuperation, but also in allowing his return to his learning and teaching schedule. In other words, the learning from which I benefited during the time I spent with the *Brisker Rav* was made possible due to the herculean efforts of *Rebbetzin Kook*. Do I not owe her *hakoras hatov*?”