

Say to Aharon, “Take your staff and stretch out your hand on the waters of Egypt.” (7:19)

Rashi comments that, concerning the plagues of blood and frogs, Aharon *HaKohen* was the one who struck the water. Moshe *Rabbeinu* owed a debt of gratitude to the natural resource because it was the Nile that protected him as a newborn infant. The obvious question is: Does water have a mind? Does water have feelings? It is inanimate. Why does one have to maintain a sense of gratitude to it? Indeed, *Chazal* teach, *Bira d'shasis bei maya al tizrok bo even*, “The well from which you drink, do not throw a stone into it.” It would seem that this is playing the demand for gratitude a bit far. *Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl*, explains that, while the inanimate object does not have feelings, one's subconscious will become flawed as a result of his lack of gratitude. His *middah*, character trait, of *hakoras ha'tov*, gratitude, will be tainted.

I cite this to underscore the importance of gratitude. A person who fails to acknowledge the kindness or benefit he receives from others reveals a deficiency in his humanity. A person who does not appreciate the good that others do for him is essentially disconnected from society. He does not belong among those who value upright, decent living. Furthermore, one who recognizes good is capable of seeing good. One who overlooks kindness becomes hardened, incapable of empathy or humility. Gratitude is not an optional virtue – it is the measure of a man.

Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* cited by *Lechem I'fi hataf*) writes that, if one finds a good Torah thought in a *sefer*, he may not speak negatively of that *sefer* or its author, even if it may be true. The *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna* explains *Chazal* concerning the well from which one drinks that, if one benefits from a *d'var Torah* in a *sefer*, he should not throw a stone; do not humiliate or cast aspersion on the author or the *sefer*.

The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* (preface to *Pri To'ar*) writes that when one reads his *sefer* with the intention to find something upon which to disgrace or speak against the author, he will be punished with excommunication and even death. Indeed, in some instances, an individual has spoken against an author, and the author threatened him with death (in a dream). It was only after the individual begged forgiveness were the author's feelings assuaged.

In conclusion, we are constantly reading *sefarim* from which we benefit. Sadly, this does not prevent us from making derisive remarks when the author errs, or when we simply do not agree or understand what he is saying. How careful we must be in acknowledging and appreciating all who benefit us.