

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

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Shmuessen from
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פרשת כי תבא

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לעילוי נשמת
ידידנו היקר והצנועה ר' אפרים
בן ר' שלמה אביגדור רבינוביץ
זצ"ל

פרשת כי תבא

וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ לְפָנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ: וְשִׂמְחָתָּ בְּכָל הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּלְבֵיתְךָ

(דברים כ"ו: י"א)

And you shall bow in front of Hashem, your G-d; and you shall rejoice in all the goodness that Hashem your G-d has given you and your household

כִּי תִשְׁמַר אֶת מִצְוֹת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָּיו: (כ"ה ט')

When you observe all the mitzvos of Hashem your G-d and you follow in His Ways

Hakaras Hatov/Gratitude

Of all the different *middos tovos* we are taught by Chazal and the Sifrei Mussar, one of the most important is *Hakaras Hatov/gratitude*. In fact, according to the Chovos Halevavos, the primary driving factor in our *Avodas Hashem* is our gratitude for the myriad infinite kindnesses that Hashem has done for us. As we shall see, we learn important lessons in our *parshah* about this great *middah* and about its far-reaching effects in our *Avodas Hashem*.

יְהִי עִמָּךְ חֵן וְחַסְדֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ - Emulating the Middos of Hashem

To begin our discussion, let us first focus on a *passuk* in the *parshah* which is a source for the general obligation to practice all *middos tovos*. The Torah tells us *וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָּיו/You shall follow in His ways*. What are Hashem's ways which we must follow? Chazal explain to us the understanding of this *mitzvah*, in the following manner: *Just as Hashem is merciful, so should you be merciful; just as He is gracious, so should you be gracious; just as He performs kindnesses, so should you perform kindnesses*. In short, there is an obligation for us to strive to emulate all the attributes of Hashem's goodness which He exercises toward His creatures. In fact, the source for all positive *middos* is the goodness of Hashem. We do not practice them as independently 'good' attributes, but because they are attributes revealed to us by Hashem, the ultimate Source of Goodness.

Where Can We Find the Middah of Hakaras Hatov Practiced by Hashem?

These two ideas that we are discussing lead us to the following question: If, as mentioned, *Hakaras Hatov* is such an important *middah*, where do we find that HaKadosh Boruch Hu practices this *middah*? After all, the source for all good *middos* is Hashem, as demonstrated in the *passuk* of *וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָּיו*; from where, then, in Hashem's dealings with Creation does this *middah* of *Hakaras Hatov* stem?

It would seem to me that the words of Chazal elsewhere illustrate for us that we *do* find this *middah* of *Hakaras Hatov* practiced by HaKadosh Boruch Hu. How so? The Gemara (ברכות כ:) tells us that the *malachim* came to HaKadosh Boruch Hu with a complaint.

"It is written in Your Torah," they argue, "אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשָּׂא פָנִים וְלֹא יִקַּח שוּחַד/Hashem does not show 'recognition' nor take a bribe.' And yet, You do show favoritism to Klal Yisroel, as it is written in Birchas Kohanim, וְיִשָּׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ/Hashem should show you recognition!' How is this a fair standard?

Hashem responds to the malachim: "True, I do not generally show favoritism or recognition. However, how can I not extend recognition to Bnei Yisroel? For I commanded them with the mitzvah of וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ/You shall eat and be satisfied and bless Hashem. They are only

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obligated to bentch after they eat a full-fledged, satisfying meal' and yet they are stringent and bentch after eating a mere k'zayis or k'beitzah!

Understanding Why Showing Recognition to Klal Yisroel is not 'Favoritism'

What is the understanding of Hashem's response? How does our bentching after a minimal amount justify Hashem's favoritism toward us?

I heard the following *mashal* from Rav Uren Reich shlita to explain Hashem's answer to the *malachim*:

Yoni and Ari were business partners who ran a housewares store together. One day, Yoni saw Ari selling a few expensive appliances to a customer at cost price. After the customer left the store, Yoni ran over to Ari.

"What just happened?" he inquired. "Why did you give such a large discount?"

Ari dismissed Yoni's concern with a wave of his hand. "Oh, you mean Yitzi? He davens in the same shul as I do, and I felt it proper to treat him nicely."

Yoni was furious. "Oh, so everyone who davens in your shul, or who lives on your block, or who send their children to the same school as you, will all get their merchandise at cost-price?! If that's how you will run your store, you will their never make any profit. FROM NOW ON, EVERY SINGLE CUSTOMER PAYS FULL PRICE, NO MATTER WHO HE IS! UNDERSTOOD?"

Ari begrudgingly nodded his head.

The next day, one of the store's suppliers walked in. Yoni devoted his full attention to him, making sure he found exactly what he needs. In the end, Yoni gave him his order for half-price.

Ari could not believe his eyes. "Just yesterday," he fumed at Yoni, "you give me a tirade about how to run a business. You even got me to agree never to give the tiniest discount to anyone. And now you go and give someone half-off?! What is this?!"

Yoni put his arm around Ari pityingly and explained. "You don't understand. You see, that man was our supplier. If I am not going to give special treatment now, what's going to happen at Yom Tov time when we need our major orders? We will need to use and overuse the services of that supplier, hoping he'll have the patience to send to us as we need, even when it's busy for everyone. If we won't help him now, he'll busy himself with other stores at Yom Tov time, and we'll run out of merchandise to sell!"

"For a supplier," Yoni concluded, "we must give preferential treatment, because he has something that we need in return!"

Through Being Stringent in Bentching, Klal Yisroel is Like Hashem's 'Supplier'

In a similar way, by being stringent upon ourselves to seek extra ways to fulfill the *mitzvah* of bentching, we are establishing ourselves as Hashem's 'suppliers' in fulfilling the purpose of Creation. The world must come to a recognition of Hashem's kindness and greatness, and we proclaim it by acknowledging Hashem as the source of our nourishment. Hashem therefore grants us 'recognition', not as an expression of unfair favoritism, but as a necessary and 'deserving' acknowledgement of the mission we have undertaken on HaKadosh Boruch Hu's behalf.¹

¹ [Ed] This does not mean in absolute sense, for in true reality, Hashem does not need our *mitzvos*, as the *passuk* says (איוב ל"ה ו-ז) /If you sinned, what have you done against Him; if you acted righteously, what have you given Him. However, Hashem in His great kindness created a world in which it is as if He needs

Based on this Gemara, it emerges that indeed, Hashem does demonstrate the *middah* of *Hakaras Hatov* in his *hanhagah*. Klal Yisroel 'does for Hashem', and Hashem acknowledges that with an appreciation and a recognition. We must then emulate HaKadosh Boruch Hu in this fundamental *middah*.

Bikkurim Are a Lesson in the Middah of Hakaras Hatov

Now let us turn to some great lessons in *Hakaras Hatov* which we see in our *parshah*. The first *mitzvah* in the *parshah* is *Bikkurim*, and as the *pesukim* and Chazal teach us, the *mitzvah* of *Bikkurim* is one straight lesson of *Hakaras Hatov*. A person spends the winter months toiling in his orchards and fields, and immediately upon sight of the first growth, he brings the new fruit to Hashem amid great joy. He places the fruit in front of the *mizbeach*, and he openly declares that he is not an ingrate. As Rashi tells us (רש"י כ"ו ג') *You should proclaim to the Kohen that you are not ungrateful*. Instead, the field owner describes in great detail the sequence of events which led to his ownership of his land. He mentions *Yetzias Mitzrayim* and how Hashem gave Eretz Yisroel as an inheritance to Bnei Yisroel. He then thanks Hashem for the delicious fruit that his orchards produced, and he bows in gratitude.

This *mitzvah* is clearly a prototype and a lesson for how we should practice the *middah* of *Hakaras Hatov*. Many meforshim say that it is for this reason that these *pesukim* were chosen by Chazal to be recited on Pesach at the Seder. When we seek to thank Hashem for his great miracles of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, the *parshah* of *Bikkurim* is the place to find the proper expression of gratitude.

The Levels of Dveikus Achieved through the Hakaras Hatov to Hashem

What is the final result of this supreme gratitude to HaKadosh Boruch Hu? The *mitzvah* concludes with a *השתחוואה*/a *bowing* in the Bais Hamikdosh in front of Hashem. Concerning the nature of this bowing, the Ohr Hachaim writes the following breathtaking words²:

"The passuk here awards us a glimpse into the wondrous goodness that awaits each tzaddik as the reward for his mitzvos in this world. The soul of the tzaddik draws close to the most pleasant of Light, and he will bow in front of it without any separating partition. Fortunate is the soul of a man who achieves this maximum state of existence! This hinted in the passuk אלקיך לפני ה' והשתחווית לפני ה' /And you shall bow in front of Hashem your G-d – this means that as one bows, he will attain a level of recognition of his G-d. This leads him to the ultimate joy associated with closeness to Hashem, as taught in the following passuk ושמחת בכל הטוב /You will rejoice in all the good – referring to Hashem Himself, who is the ultimate Source of all Goodness."

The words of the Ohr Hachaim demonstrate for us how the *middah* of *Hakaras Hatov* brings a person to great heights of connection and relationship with Hashem. It is not a *middah* which, as the *yetzer hara* tries to convince us, restrains us from our own freedoms. On the contrary, it is through this *middah* that we can achieve such awesome spiritual pleasure, a level from which we would otherwise be completely restrained.

Rashi in the end of the *parshah* teaches us a similar idea as we have seen in this the Ohr Hachaim. When Moshe Rabbeinu tells Bnei Yisroel that after 40 years in the *Midbar*, they finally merited a level of *דעת*/knowledge, Rashi explains (כ"ט ג') *to recognize the kindnesses of Hashem and to cleave to Him*. Here too, we are taught that the recognition of Hashem's kindnesses brings one to the ultimate state of *dveikus* in Hashem.

our *mitzvos*, in order to grant us the merit and reward for fulfilling His will. Within the framework of the Creation, Hashem *כביכול* 'needs' our Avodah to Him in order to bring Creation to its perfection.

² ז"ל האוה"ח: ואמרו והשתחווית לפני ה', בזה העיר ה' רוח חיים בטובה המופלאה בעדות המופלג אשר יזכו אליו הצדיקים, והוא שתתקרב נפש הצדיק לפני אור הנערב ותשתחוה לפניו באין מסך מבדיל, אשרי נפש אדם שתגיע לגדר מופלג כזה, והוא אומר והשתחווית לפני ה' אלקיך, שם תכיר הנפש אלקיה, ואמר סמוך לזה ושמחת בכל הטוב. על דרך אומרו (תהלים קמה ט) טוב ה', ולהעריך על זה אמר בכל הטוב, פירוש דבר הכולל כל הטוב, ואין זה אלא הקדוש ברוך הוא שהוא מקור הטוב, עכ"ל.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz's Emphasis on Hakaras Hatov

Based on this understanding of the awesome *madreigos* which are attainable through *Hakaras Hatov*, it is no wonder that Rav Chaim Shmulevitz z"l devoted so much of the content of his shmuessen in Mir Yeshivah to this topic. He would constantly stress, over and over again, how central is this *middah* in Yiddishkeit, and how without it a person did not even begin his *shteiging*. He would bring proofs and sources from all different places to demonstrate the importance of the *middah*. As we now see, this *middah* is our own ticket to experiencing the *madreigos* of understanding Hashem and *dveikus* to Him, for which we are created. Indeed, how central this *middah* is, as Rav Chaim stressed to us.

Not only did Rav Chaim Shmulevitz z"l speak about this *middah*, but he was נאה דורש ונאה מקיים – he practiced this *middah* to the very maximum of his capabilities. There are countless stories of how he went out of his way to demonstrate his gratitude for kindnesses done to him. Here, we will mention one of them, which brings out the extent to which he applied this *middah*.

In his later years, Rav Chaim returned home one night after traveling to a simchah. He was exhausted and worn out from the trip, and he sat down to rest in his home. His son, seeing his exhausted state, inquired which simchah Rav Chaim had attended.

"It was the bar mitzvah of the son of so-and so," Rav Chaim explained.

"What connection do you have to him?" his son inquired.

"He comes to hear my shmuess."

This answer surprised Rav Chaim's son. "Because he hears your shmuess, you are obligated to attend his simchah? Perhaps he should come to your simchah out of his appreciation for you, but why must you attend his simchah?!"

Rav Chaim responded with surprise. "If he doesn't come, he will cause another person to stop coming. In the end, no one will show up. To whom should I say my shmuess – to the walls?! – I certainly owe him Hakaras Hatov!"

Let us realize that Rav Chaim's shmuessen were legendary, attended by hundreds of people who crammed into the Bais Medrash each week to hear the heartfelt words of *mussar*. There was clearly no cause for concern that Rav Chaim would lose his audience. And yet, Rav Chaim appreciated each individual who attended, because without all the different individuals there, the room would be empty – leaving Rav Chaim to say his shmuess 'to the walls'. True, perhaps Rav Chaim would not have been capable of attending the simchah of every one of the hundreds of people who listened to the shmuess. The individual of this incident, however, was a regular, who had made it his business to faithfully attend the shmuessen over a period of years, Rav Chaim recognized the kindness inherent in this practice, and he acknowledged it with *Hakaras Hatov*.

This incident demonstrates how Rav Chaim Shmulevitz did not seek ways to exempt himself from the obligation of gratitude, but the contrary. He sought extra ways in which he should feel an obligation of *Hakaras Hatov*, even where it would not be automatically perceived. Rav Chaim understood the great importance of this *middah* and, he was therefore so careful one must be never to let any possible opportunity or requirement for *Hakaras Hatov* go unnoticed.

Relevance to Yamim Noraim

As we shall illustrate, this lesson of *Bikkurim* applies specifically to the time of year of Yemei Haslichos and Yamim Noraim.

Hashem's Revelation of the 13 Middos Harachamim

Let us turn to the time in our history when Bnei Yisroel had just entered the Midbar. Their journey climaxed with Mattan Torah, which would culminate with their receiving the Luchos

from HaKadosh Boruch Hu Himself, and with the Shechinah dwelling in their midst. In the midst of this upward spiral, the yetzer hara and the Eirev Rav enticed the Bnei Yisroel to participate in a most terrible act – the Cheit Ha'Eigel. The sin was so awful that Hashem informed Moshe Rabbeinu that all was lost. The Bnei Yisroel would be destroyed, and a new nation would emerge from Moshe. Moshe begged for Heavenly Mercy in the merit of the Forefathers, whereupon Hashem agreed to annul the decree of destruction, while still only leading Bnei Yisroel from afar. Although were able to remain in existence as a Nation based on Moshe's tefillah, it was only based on the merit of their ancestors. They would go into Eretz Yisroel under the guidance of a malach, and there would be no Mishkan. They had lost much of their own direct relationship with Hashem.

It was at that point that Hashem performed a tremendous revelation for Moshe Rabbeinu.

“Moshe,” Hashem said, “when you davened to Me, your only backing was the merit of the Avos. True their merit is great, but it is still finite. I will now reveal to you the extent of My own Heavenly Mercy, which is infinite!”

The Shechinah then ‘passed’ in front of Moshe, and Hashem allowed Moshe to learn the 13 Attributes of Heavenly Mercy that Hashem practices for Klal Yisroel. “With these Attributes,” Hashem said, “I grant infinite Mercy to whom I see fit.”

What emerged from that great Revelation was that Hashem would personally lead the Bnei Yisroel into Eretz Yisroel with the Mishkan in their midst, as was originally meant to be. For the most part, the sin of the Eigel was forgiven. Through the Middos of Rachamim, the relationship between HaKadosh Boruch Hu and Klal Yisroel was restored.

At the end of the exchange, Hashem added an important point to Moshe. The 13 Attributes were not meant to be a one-time display of Mercy. Instead, they were a lesson for all future generations of Klal Yisroel.

Hashem told Moshe, “I am establishing a Bris/a Covenant with Bnei Yisroel regarding these Middos. When Bnei Yisroel are in a time of difficulty, let them perform the Order of these 13 Middos in front of Me, and I will have Mercy on them!”

This important message from Hashem became incorporated into the psyche of Klal Yisroel for all generations. The 13 Middos of Rachamim became an integral part of our davening for all times of *tzarah*. In these times of Yamim Noraim specifically – the time of year in which the Middos were originally revealed – we mention the Middos in our Selichos numerous times each day. This culminates with Yom Kippur in which the Middos form the main body of the final Tefillah of Neilah. They are clearly a key element in our being *zoche* each year to Heavenly Mercy in the Awesome Judgement of these days.

A Connection Between the 13 Middos and the Mitzvah of Bikkurim

Let us now focus on the *pessukim* of the *parshah* of the *מדות* י"ג, from which we will see a connection to our themes of *Hakaras Hatov*:

The 13 Middos are followed in the Torah by *pessukim* in which several *mitzvos* are commanded. As Ramban and other mefarshim discuss, the placement of these *mitzvos* is not coincidental; rather, each *mitzvah* is inherently connected to the *parshah* of the Middos.

With this understanding, we will now analyze a fascinating point made by the Meshech Chochmah:

In the very last of the *pessukim* commanding those *mitzvos*, the *mitzvah* of Bikkurim is given. *ראשית בכורי אדמתך תביא בית ד' אלקיך /The first growths of your land, you shall bring to the House of Hashem your G-d.* As said, this implies a connection. Regarding Bikkurim, however, the connection does not end there. The Meshech Chochmah points out further that in our *parshah* of Ki Savo, the

name of י-ק-ו-ק appears **13 times**, corresponding to the **13 Middos**! It seems clear then that the two areas have a correlation between them.

י"ג מדות בין Bikkurim and the Meshech Chochmah

The Meshech Chochmah merely makes this point, without offering any words of explanation for what is in fact the connection between the two themes. Based on our discussions, however, the correlation seems quite obvious. As seen from the Rashi and Ohr Hachaim in our *parshah*, the state of *Hakaras Hatov* for Hashem's kindnesses brings one to a level of *dveikus*, where there is a closeness and a connection with Hashem. The 13 Attributes of Mercy accomplished the very same outcome – the relationship between Hashem and Klal Yisroel was restored. The *pessukim* hint to us, then, that by working on the *middah* of *Hakaras Hatov* that *Bikkurim* teaches us, we can be *zoche* to the actualization of the *Middos Harachamim* and their intended goal of renewing and strengthening our relationship with HaKadosh Boruch Hu. How important this aspiration is in the time of the Yamim Noraim, when we need such *Rachamei Shamayim*.

Bez"V we should be *zoche* to find favor in the Eyes of Hashem and see an abundant measure of His Mercy and Kindness.

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