

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה
מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר
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*Shmuessen from
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פרשת בהעלותך

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לכבוד אדירי התורה!

פרשת בהעלותך

דַּבֵּר אֶל אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו בְּהַעֲלֹתְךָ אֶת הַנֵּר אֶל מוֹל פְּנֵי

הַמְּנוֹרָה יֵאִירוּ שְׁבַעַת הַנְּרוֹת: (במדבר ח' ב')

רש"י: למה נסמכה פרשת המנורה לפרשת הנשיאים, לפי שכשראה אהרן חנוכה הנשיאים חלשה דעתו, שלא היה עמהם בחנוכה, לא הוא ולא שבטו, אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא חייך, שך גדולה משלהם, שאתה מדליק ומטיב את הנרות.

Rashi asks: Why is the Parshah of the Menorah put next to the Parshah of the Nesi'im? The answer is because when Aharon saw the inauguration offerings which the Nesi'im had brought and neither he nor anyone from his Shevet had participated, he became downcast. Hashem then told him: "Your portion is greater than theirs for you will light and fix the Menorah."

Why Was the Menorah Used as a Comfort for Aharon?

The Ramban asks on this: Why did Hashem specifically mention the lighting of the Menorah to comfort Aharon? There were many other ways to demonstrate that his portion was greater than that of the Nesi'im. He was the revered Kohen Gadol who represented the entire Jewish people in the service of Hashem! Besides for lighting the Menorah there were many other services which Aharon performed such as the burning of the Ketores, the offering of all the Korbanos on the Mizbeich, and the special Minchas Chavitin which the Kohen Gadol brought every day. Additionally, the Kohen Gadol was the only one who could perform the Yom Kippur service, and he alone was allowed to enter the Kodesh Kadashim. Why does Hashem specifically mention the lighting of the Menorah to emphasize the greatness of Aharon's portion?

The Lighting of the Menorah Was a Demonstration of Hakaras Hatov

R' Chaim Shmulevitz answered this question with a lesson we can learn from the following Midrash. The Midrash Tanchuma tells of a dialogue which Aharon had with Hashem after he was commanded to light the Menorah. Aharon said to Hashem, "Do You need my light? You created the sun and the moon and all the nocturnal constellations! You give light to the *Klal Yisrael* with your clouds by day and a fire by night!

What light could I possibly give to you?" The Midrash brings a *mashal* to explain the answer.

A blind man was walking on a path with someone who had perfect vision. It was a path with which the blind man was unfamiliar, and it would have been treacherous to go alone. However, the man with vision took care of the blind man and he guided his every step. When they reached their home the man with vision asked the blind man to light a candle. This is a difficult task for a blind person, but he was happy to do it for his friend. However, he had just one question. "Why can't you do it yourself? You have perfect vision. You guided me on that long unknown path. Why do you suddenly need my help to light a candle?" The man with vision responded, "Indeed I am able to do it myself, but I want to give you an opportunity to repay me."¹

Based on this Midrash we can understand why Hashem specifically used the lighting of the Menorah as a comfort for Aharon. The lighting of the Menorah was a 'repayment' to Hashem for the light which he bestows on our world. Thus, in lighting the Menorah, Aharon was given the chance to show *hakaras hatov*, and this is the greatest opportunity one could wish for. Now that he would be able to demonstrate *hakaras hatov* to Hashem, albeit on a very small scale, he was convinced that his portion was greater than that of the Nesi'im.

The Importance of Hakaras Hatov

Why is *hakaras hatov* such an important thing? The answer is that when a person develops this *middah* of *hakaras hatov* it changes his entire perspective of the world. He becomes a person who recognizes the good in his life and this will boost the entire scope of his *Avodas Hashem*.

If we grow accustomed to appreciating all the good that we have, and we learn to thank Hashem for each and every detail of our lives we will develop a deep and powerful relationship with Hashem. We will be

¹ As an aside, R' Chaim Shmulevitz would teach an important lesson based on this Midrash. If you have done someone a favor it is proper to allow him to repay you. Until he repays you, he will feel subordinated to you, and you may also feel superior to him. It is therefore proper to allow him to repay you so that you should be on equal ground.

able to withstand all our trials and tribulations because we will know and feel that Hashem is guiding every step with His loving and merciful Hand.

My rebbi R' Elya Roth zt"l was a master in the area of hakaras hatov. When he would go out at night (before he became blind) he would look up at the moon and exclaim, "What a beautiful moon! Thank You Hashem for the moon! Thank you for the fresh air! It is so wonderful to breathe your fresh air!" When he would walk home from Shacharis he would look at the sun and say, "What a beautiful sun! It brings light and warmth and happiness to our world! Thank You Hashem for giving me the sun!"

Someone once said to him, "Do you think you are the only one in this world? Do you think Hashem made the sun for you?" To this R' Elyah responded, "What's the problem? Let everyone enjoy the sun! But just because Hashem made the sun for others too that does not diminish the good which He has done for me! He gave me a wonderful sun and I am ever so grateful for it!"

One time, R' Elyah needed a procedure done to his colon and my friend and I brought him to the hospital. We helped him sign all the necessary paperwork (he was blind and could not do this alone), and we then waited outside his room while the procedure was taking place. It was an especially difficult and painful procedure because he was unable receive anesthesia due to his heart condition, and the screams which came from inside the room were terrible and heartbreaking.

When they allowed us in to his room after the procedure we could not find him at first. His sheets were white, he wore a white yarmulke, and his face was quite literally the same color. All we saw was white on his bed and we only realized he was there because there was a bit of yellow in his beard! His breathing was slow and labored. He called us close to him and he said to us, "I want to explain to you what just happened." He then began to fantasize:

"I was supposed to be in Sha'ar Shechem lying on the floor with an Arab stabbing me with knives. I should have been screaming much louder than I was. I should have been on a dirty, horrible floor, gushing blood from all over my body. I would have been all alone with no one to help me. It would have been terrible!"

He then looked up and said, "How much do I thank you Hashem for not doing that to me! You brought me to a hospital, and You put me on a clean bed. You sent me a wonderful, merciful doctor who is taking great care of me, and who is trying to minimize my pain as much as possible! Can I ever thank You Hashem for all the good that You bestow on me?!"

Such is the perspective of someone who excels in the area of *hakaras hatov*! By recognizing and thanking Hashem for all the good which he has, he develops a deep love for Hashem. He knows that Hashem is his loving Father, and he fully understands that everything Hashem does is good.

The Results of a Lack of *Hakaras Hatov*

On the other hand, one who does not have *hakaras hatov* can end up in terrible places.

If a child would have proper hakaras hatov to his parents he could never go off the derech r"l. If he would appreciate all the hard work which his parents put into him, and how with endless devotion and dedication they toiled to raise him he could never cause them such terrible, horrific pain and anguish.

It goes even a step further. Chazal say, "כל הכופה בטובתו של חבירו, כל הכופה בטובתו של הקב"ה" *If someone does not have this middah of hakaras hatov, and he does not properly give thanks to people who have helped him, he will end up denying the good which Hashem does for him.*

After my father passed away, I took over his shul in the Bronx for a half year. One day there was a blackout and since the elevators were temporarily out of order many older people were unable to come to shul. I scrambled to put together a minyan, unfortunately with no success. The next day an old man who was unable to come to shul the day before approached me and said, "Do you see? Hashem and I have a deal. He makes my feet carry me, and my stomach digest my food, and I make sure to help out the minyan. If my feet can't carry me than there won't be a minyan. If Hashem doesn't do his part than I don't have to do mine!"

This is the way someone without *hakaras hatov* talks! He thinks he can get even with Hashem! How convoluted! Does he not realize how indebted he is to Hashem?! If he would listen to just one tape from R' Avigdor Miller zt"l he wouldn't talk for the rest of his life! There are

millions of things with so many small details that he must be thankful for! His body is like a city of factories all working to keep him alive and healthy! Each and every part serves its own special purpose without which he could not function properly. Does he really think Hashem 'owes' him anything?

He should thank Hashem for his kidneys! People without functioning kidneys have to undergo terrible suffering with dialysis treatments. They limit the amount they can eat and drink, and they become terribly knocked out from the treatments! All one needs to do is to open his eyes and he will find endless things to be grateful for.

One cannot properly fulfill his obligations as a person and as an *Eved Hashem* without developing this *middah* of *hakaras hatov*. This is why Aharon was comforted when Hashem told him that although he did not participate in the *Chanukas HaNesi'im* his portion was yet greater because he would be the one to light the Menorah. The lighting of the Menorah was done as a demonstration of *hakaras hatov* as the Midrash teaches, and thus Aharon would have the opportunity to perfect this *middah*. This was indeed a unique chance to elevate himself to ever loftier levels in his *avodas Hashem*.

The Extents of Our Obligations in Hakaras Hatov

I heard a story about a very choshuve Rosh Hayeshiva in Eretz Yisrael. It was the first night of Rosh Hashana and a youngster met this Rosh Hayeshiva coming back from the old city. The youngster who was on his way home from shul was surprised to see this Rosh Hayeshiva coming from that direction as it was nowhere near his yeshiva. He asked the Rosh Hayeshiva, "Did you daven Maariv yet?" The Rosh Hayeshiva answered that he had not yet davened. The youngster was taken aback. It was already late and most shuls had already finished davening. Why did this Rosh Hayeshiva not daven yet, and why was he in the old city far from his yeshiva?

The Rosh Hayeshiva explained that there was an Arab worker in the Yeshiva who was afraid to walk home alone. There had been a bomb that day in Machane Yehuda and the Arab was sure that if he would try to walk home he would be stopped by the police and he would be taken into custody for questioning. He approached the Rosh Hayeshiva and said, "You must help me! I cannot come

home to my family tonight! What should I do?" The Rosh Hayeshiva felt that the entire yeshiva owed hakaras hatov to this Arab. He came early in the morning, and he worked hard the whole day to take care of the yeshiva's needs. It was therefore proper that the yeshiva should reciprocate and help him in his time of need. Therefore, as hakaras hatov the Rosh Hayeshiva felt obligated to help this Arab worker and he escorted him the whole way home!

This demonstrates the extents we must go to in order to show *hakaras hatov*. Even for a simple non-Jewish worker this Rosh Hayeshiva felt that because of *hakaras hatov* it was worth it to delay Maariv for the entire yeshiva – and this was the night of Rosh Hashana!²

R' Chaim Shmulevitz felt that he even owed *hakaras hatov* to his students.

One time, R' Chaim came home from a Bar-Mitzvah which ended late and he was very worn out. His son asked him, "Where were you?"

"At a Bar-Mitzvah", R' Chaim responded.

"Whose Bar-Mitzvah?" asked the son.

"So-and-So."

"Why did you go to his Bar-Mitzvah, he has nothing to do with our family?"

R' Chaim explained: "The father has been coming to my shmuessen for the past fifteen years."

² Although this is an amazing story which demonstrates just how far we must go to show *hakaras hatov*, and it surely left a lasting impression on the talmidim of the yeshiva, Rav Rabinowitz felt that it would not have been the approach of R' Chaim Shmulevitz. This is because aside from the *hakaras hatov* which the Rosh Hayeshiva owed to the Arab, he also owed *hakaras hatov* to the talmidim of the yeshiva as we will see in the next story. Therefore, said Rav Rabinowitz, R' Chaim would not have kept the talmidim waiting to daven Maariv. As far as the Arab was concerned, he would have found some other way of getting him home.

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His son did not understand, "Okay so when you make a simchah he should come as hakaras hatov, but why did you go to his simchah?"

R' Chaim responded, "You don't understand, if this person stops coming to my shmuessen then his friend will also stop coming and so will the next person. Before I know it no one will be coming to my shmuessen and there will be no more R' Chaim Shmulevitz! I wouldn't talk to the walls! Of course I owe him hakaras hatov for coming to my shmuessen!"

This shows us that when it comes to *hakaras hatov* nothing can be overlooked. Even a Rosh Hayeshiva like R' Chaim Shmulevitz who dedicated himself and gave so much to his talmidim felt that he still owes them *hakaras hatov* just for being his talmidim. Let us work on developing this *middah* and through this we can be elevated to great heights.

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