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The Importance of Hakarat Hatov: Our Obligation To Be Thankful Rabbi Eli Mansour

There are many lessons that we could learn from the Jews enslavement in Egypt. In particular, the lesson of hakarat hatov, recognizing the good done and appreciating it. At the end of Moshe's life, Hashem tells him to take revenge of the Midyanim. He gives this task over to Pinchas to do. Why? Usually Moshe Rabbeinu was very meticulous when it came to mitzvot. G-d didn't have claims against Moshe for passing it to Pinchas. Moshe Rabbeinu grew up, was raised, got married and had children in Midyan. It is not grateful for Moshe to take revenge and lead the war against the midyanim that he owes gratitude to. But how did Moshe know that Hakarat Hatov was so important that it overrides the word of G-d? He learnt it from Egypt. Aharon hit the Nile because Moshe Rabbeinu was saved by the Nile. (same with the frogs and lice). He could have done the greatest kiddush hashem by hitting the Nile! You think the Nile would be offended if it was hit? You think the ground cares? But those are the facts, G-d didn't want him to hit the Nile and the ground, all the more so he shouldn't kill the Midyanim. Moshe Rabbeinu excelled at this trait. When Hashem told him to redeem the Jewish people, Moshe answers G-d that he's interested but he needs to ask his father-in-law first. Why ask Yitro? G-d told you so do it! Moshe Rabbeinu is telling G-d that it would not be befitting to just leave Yitro and go without asking permission. That's Hakarat Hatov. Moshe gets to the well, daughters of midyan are in trouble and Moshe saves them. They thank him. He says don't thank me, thank the Egyptian. Listen I don't deserve all the credit, I killed the Egyptian that's why im here. Thank the Egyptian. You think the Egyptian wanted to help Moshe Rabbienu? We are always looking for reasons not to thank people. Moshe is the opposite, he tries to find every person hes thankful to.

Whats so important about showing appreciation? Is it just because its etiquette? Being polite? "Vayakom melech chadash al mitzrayim asher lo yada et Yosef" Two opinions: either the same king who didn't know Yosef, or a new king that didn't know Yosef. Even if it's a new king, its very unlikely that he didn't know Yosef. He didn't know Egyptian history? Both lacked hakarat hatov. Yosef saved the whole country to death. We will subjugate his children and grandchildren to bondage? Later, when the makkot fall on his head, Pharaoh says I don't know who G-d is. He denies G-d, he's an atheist. It starts with "I don't know Yosef" and it leads to "I don't know G-d". A lack of hakarat hatov to a human being leads to a lack of hakarat hatov to G-d. We must do mitzvot out of hakarat hatov to Hashem. The neviim tell us the demise of Shmuel Hanavi. Bnei Yisrael eulogized him. There was a guy there named Naval who didn't go to Shmuel's funeral. (What did Shmuel do for me? Its not like we were very close. There are so many people there anyway, what difference do I make?) Then, the servants of David ask him for food, and Naval says no. What's the end of Naval? He became an atheist.

Yaakov built huts for his sheep and he called the place sukkat. Whats the big deal? That was the first time that huts were built for sheep. It came out of hakarat hatov

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to the sheep. That sukkat was not incidental. It was a great lesson. You show hakarat hatov to the sheep. You think the ground knows? The Nile knows? It is for you. Its for the person. You want to have heightened sensitivity of hakarat hatov all the time because you know what it could lead to.

Yosef and the wife of Potiphar. Yosef saw the face of his father and he stopped. He saw the lesson that his dad stood for which was hakarat hatov. He said to himself, if Potiphar is my boss how could I sleep with his wife, is that hakarat hatov? I cant do that. It's the worst thing I could do. The hakarat hatov of Yaakov avinu saved Yosef.

Why is it so hard to show gratitude? Because it is shameful. Saying thank you is an admission of dependency. I needed you for something and nobody wants to be dependent on someone else. We have ego and pride. We want to give, be like G-d. We don't want to take. It's a blow to our pride, that's why its so hard. Its so shameful that there is a wild Yerushalmi that speaks of trees. A tree that you took the branches coming out of the tree and you replanted part of the tree into the ground. You hope for it to become independent and become its own tree. So long as the leaves of the new tree are facing away from the mother tree, you know its taking. Once it faces it, you know its on its own. When its taking it is embarassed, when its giving it could look in the face. It affects plant life, all the more so human beings. If you are humble like Moshe you have no problem.

A law in Gemara Brachot discusses laws of employees of praying on the job. If its lunch time, he doesn't have to make all the brachot. But we see the opposite in Mishna bikkurim that all the workers would come out and greet the people coming to give bikkurim. Why? Because bikkurim is gratitude. It overrides other considerations. Its worth it. Gemara writes that ones wife passes away if people ask him for money and they don't give them. Speak of someone that owes a debt. Of course the wife dies because of something she did. But what did the husband do to lose his wife? Because he doesn't pay back money. Rav Chaim Shmulevitz says a person that owes money and doesn't pay back, that is not hakarat hatov. It shows you're a kafui tovah. If this guy doesn't pay people that he owes, rest assured he doesn't have gratitude to his wife. How can we call ourselves religious if we don't have hakarat hatov? Saying thank you should not be a burden.

The whole chazaat hashatz the chazan is working hard, saying all the brachot, and all we do is say amen- we agree! But when it comes to modim, Amen is not enough. Everyone must get up, bow and say modim. You cant say thank you through a messenger. It's a great lesson.

Why is it easier to say thank you to a store clerk than to your wife or parents? Its because it's a sketch. You don't mean it, you don't feel obligated to him. But when it counts, that's when its hard. Now you owe the thank you and its much harder.

That's why Jews are called Yehudim, from Yehuda, Leah said thanks for Yehuda. We should swallow our pride, become gracious and express it personally over and over again. It will lead to hakarat hatov to G-d. Rav Chaim Shmulevitz used to go to the wedding of every person in his shiur. Read gedolim storues. Be'ezrat hashem if we could be a little more thankful, Moshiach will come soon. Amen.