

Gratitude from the Torah

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Shemot

What is the Connection Between Gratitude and Humility?

Gratitude for the Divine Gifts Received Through People

It's not always easy to be grateful to Hashem, as we are not always aware of all the goodness, He constantly showers upon us. Since Hashem is concealed in this world, all his personal gifts to us are likewise hidden. They often come to us through other people that Hashem chose as emissaries. This is why the Hebrew term for gratitude, Hakarat Hatov - 'recognizing or calling out the good' is so central to Judaism. When we receive a gift or a favor from someone, we mustn't forget to be grateful to both the person who benefited us and Hashem who sent him or her. We must always remember to be kind to those from whom we once benefitted, as it states, "Don't throw stones into the well from which you drank" (*Babylonian Talmud, Bava Kama 92b*). Every time I walk to B'erot to teach I pass the Bat Ayin community building which has now become the headquarters of the soldiers protecting our Yishuv. I mentally send them my blessing, as I'm so thankful that because of the soldiers' constant vigil 24/7 we can all sleep well at night. We can also do nature hikes and run in the forest. Since October 7th before I go on my weekly walk/run, I call the security of Bat Ayin to let them know where I plan to go. It gives me a feeling of safety, knowing someone capable is looking after me. I'm also thankful to the army in general for the wisdom of letting the residents of our Yishuv, who were called in as reservists, serve here in Bat Ayin. Not only does it make it much easier for these soldiers to see their families, but they will moreover be able to do a much better job protecting us, since they know the terrain, and because they are motivated to the utmost to guard over their own family and friends. So, thank you, Hashem, for Your protection and for imbuing the IDF with wisdom!

The Consequence of Ingratitude to Hashem's Agents That Benefits Us

In *Parashat Shemot*, a new Pharaoh rose, who had entirely forgotten about how Yosef benefited his country and that without him, Egypt wouldn't have survived the seven years of famine. Due to his lack of memory and gratitude, the 'new Pharaoh began oppressing the Hebrews. Eventually, this oppression resulted in the slavery for 210 years of the Hebrews in Egypt.

ספר שמות פרק א פסוק ח ויקם מלך חדש על מצרים אשר לא ידע את יוסף:

"A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef" (*Shemot 1:8*).

A NEW KING AROSE - [There is a controversy between] Rav and Samuel. One says: He was really new, and the other one says: His decrees were new (*Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 11a*). Since the Torah does not say: The king of Egypt died, and a new king arose, it implies that the old king was still alive, only that his policies had changed, and he acted like a new king who did not know about him (Rashi, *ibid.*). "At first, he denied the good that Yosef did for him, and afterward he deteriorated in his evil to the lowest depths, for he denied Hashem and even was cruel towards a low and shattered nation." (*Yefe To'ar, Midrash Shemot Rabbah 1:8*). Rabbeinu Bachaya quotes the midrash which asks, Was he Pharaoh] unfamiliar with Yosef? Rabbi Avin said: This is analogous

to one who stoned someone beloved by the king. The king said: 'Behead him because tomorrow he will do the same to me.' That is why the verse wrote [this] about him, as though to say: Today [he acts as one], "who did not know Yosef," tomorrow he is destined to say: "I do not know Hashem" (*Shemot* 5:2); (*Midrash Shemot Rabbah* 1:8). This midrash illustrates the importance of showing gratitude even to the friends of the one who benefits us or even just to his servant as we learn from the following Talmudic metaphor: "The wine belongs to the owner, yet the thanks are given to the waiter." I.e., the wine belongs to the king. Still, those who drink thank the waiter, because it is common courtesy to say thank you and express gratitude to that waiter who serves the wine, since if we don't show gratitude to the one who serves us the goodness, we will, in the end, come to be ungrateful to the owner (*Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia* 92b). In other words, if we do not train ourselves to thank Hashem's agents that benefit us - we will end up becoming ungrateful to G-d. "Whoever denies the good of his friend, in the end, will deny G-d's good" (*Midrash Hagadol* cited in *Torah Sheleimah*).

Gratitude Includes Actively Remembering What Others Have Done for Us

"One who is careful not to be ungrateful will not sin easily," because the root of all negative traits is ingratitude. When we master the trait of gratitude, we will naturally not oppose Hashem who sustains us daily with life, food, and all our needs (Rabbi Yonatan Eibshutz, *Ya'arot Dvash*). The first sins in the Torah were due to ingratitude. Although Hashem elevated the serpent above all the animals with the ability to walk upright and speak, it misused these powers to tempt Chava to sin against G-d (*Bereishit* 3:1). The first man likewise was ungrateful when he blamed Chava for his eating from the Tree of Knowledge saying: "The woman whom You gave [to be] with me she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (*Ibid.* 3:12; *Babylonian Talmud, Avoda Zara* 5b). "This trait of ungratefulness is also a branch of the trait of haughtiness" (*Ya'arot Devash* *ibid.*) Thus, the punishment of the snake, "You shall crawl on your belly," counters its haughtiness by removing the privilege it received from G-d to walk upright. Interestingly, Pharaoh - who also displayed extreme haughtiness - personifies the serpent: "Thus said Gd, Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the great serpent that crouches inside its rivers, who has said, 'My river is mine, and I have made myself.'" (*Yechezkiel* 29:3). Whereas the Nile represents the predictable watering of the fields, the unpredictability of rain encourages reliance upon Gd. By relying on the Nile, Pharaoh became synonymous with his river, his god, his philosophy of denying Gd's active involvement in life. No wonder he easily forgot the embarrassing fact that he had relied on and benefitted from Yosef who was greater and wiser than himself. Gratitude depends on not only appreciating what others do for us but also actively remembering what others have done for our benefit. To remain active appreciators, we must exercise both humility and memory.

Giving Birth to the Redemption of Israel Through Actively Looking for the Good

Gratitude in Hebrew is called הַכָּרַת הַטוֹב /*hakarat hatov* - 'recognizing the good.' In contrast to Pharaoh who lacked appreciation, Moshe's Mother Yocheved recognized the goodness of her son immediately at his birth, as it states:

סַפֵּר שְׂמוֹת פְּרָקָב בַּפְּסוּק בַּיּוֹמָהּ וַתֵּרֶא אֶת־בְּנֵי וַתֵּרָא אֶת־כִּי טוֹב הוּא וַתִּצְפְּנֶהּ וְשָׁלְשָׁה יָרְחִים:

"The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son and she saw that he was good, and she hid him for three months" (*Shemot* 2:2).

Don't all parents consider their newborns good? Why did the Torah need to state this? The reason is that Yocheved noticed something extraordinarily good when Moshe was born – the whole house was filled with light as in, “G-d saw the light that it was good” (*Bereishit* 1:4); (Rashi, *Shemot* 2:2, based on *Sotah* 12a; *Shemot Rabbah* 1:20). It would have been sufficient to state “And she saw that he was good” (without the אלה/Hu in the end). The Torah added the word, אלה/Hu because it is the name of G-d. אלה/Hu – “He’ has created us and not us” (*Tehillim* 100:3). “I am G-d אלה /Hu is my name” (*Yesha’yahu* 42:8). The word טוב/*tov* alludes to the house being filled with light and the word אלה/Hu to the Shechinah that she Mohe’s mother saw with her son. I believe Yocheved’s special quality through which she merited to become the mother of Moshe was that “she saw that he was good!” She was on a high enough level to see the light and the Shechinah attached to Moshe because she was actively looking for the good through which she could see and realize Moshe’s full potential. Seeing the good in others and especially in our children is one of the main qualities needed to raise them to achieve their highest potential. Yocheved not only gave birth to Moshe, as the main Hebrew midwife during the Egyptian exile, she was instrumental in birthing the Jewish people to emerge from slavery to freedom. During the current challenging time for Israel, we must learn from Yocheved to actively look for the good and appreciate every divine miracle, small or great in order to give birth to the redemption of Israel!

Gratitude Focus for the Week of Parashat Shemot

- **Seek the good and notice the benefit you receive from anyone** – It could be the service person who fixes your internet or the warehouse clerk who has been helpful to you. Make sure to show your appreciation and give thanks. Last week I arrived late at the music store to buy a new guitar. The guy was about to pack up, but he stayed to help me find the right guitar, which I thankfully bought. I wasn’t going to detain him trying to help me without at least giving him business. Needless to say, I thanked him profusely!
- **Make a point of noticing the good in your significant other and anyone else who is close to you** – and validate the good you recognize with a sentence that begins “I am grateful for . . .” If you get irritated with him, do your utmost to look for the good points even in that which irritates you. For example, if your husband, your mother, or someone else yells at you for leaving a mess, focus on how this person has a good quality of appreciating and clean and orderly space.
- **When following the news, look for the positive** – Although war is so terrible, and the losses so painful, we mustn’t let it get us down and make us depressed. Even within the pain of war, there are sparkles of light. Notice how the Jewish people are coming together like never before. Share stories of miracles and the greatness of our people who are stepping up to show love and care to the soldiers and one another. Watch this video to learn of the good this war has brought Israel: <https://youtu.be/Wib2FedT2hA>