

Va'eira 2016

1.

Frogs and anger

The Steipler (Birchas Peretz) quotes Rashi who says that there was originally one frog. Every time the Egyptians would hit a frog it would multiply. Logic would dictate that they should have stopped hitting the frog once they realized what resulted! The actions of the Egyptians were seemingly completely illogical. Why did they continue to hit the frogs?

The Steipler explains that they did this out of anger. They were angry at what was happening, so they kept on hitting the frogs, despite the senselessness of this action.

We learn from here a big lesson regarding anger; when one gets angry, if he would just listen and not respond, the matter would slowly fade away and end. However, if one reacts in the heat of the moment and doesn't stop to think, the problem will only escalate. Angry people tend to think the best thing to do is fight back in some way; however, usually that is in fact the worst option.

2.

Hakaras hatov

The pasuk relates (7, 9) that Moshe was commanded to instruct Aharon to take his staff and toss it in front of Pharaoh in order that it would turn into a snake. Similarly, the first three makkos Moshe was commanded to instruct Aharon to perform because he was not allowed to do it himself (7:19, 8:1, 8:12).

Why exclusively these four did Moshe not perform himself?

The Shemos Rabbah (9:10) quotes Rebbi Tanchum who says that Hashem said that **since the water saved Moshe when he was an infant; he shouldn't hit it. That is why by the makkos of blood and frogs Aharon brought the makah, because Moshe couldn't hit the water out of hakaras tov** (recognition of the good/ gratitude). **Similarly, the Shemos Rabbah (10:7) quotes Rebbi Tanchum who says that Moshe wasn't allowed to hit the dirt either since it saved him when he buried the Egyptian he killed. This is why Moshe didn't throw the staff on the ground and these makkos were performed via Aharon.** (Rashi quotes these Midrashim. (7, 19 and 18, 12))

Many questions arise from this: First of all, how could Rebbi Tanchum say Moshe didn't hit the water or land out of hakaras hatov? Did the water and the dirt go out of their way to do anything? Why did Moshe feel the need to have hakaras hatov? Furthermore, how does water or land appreciate the hakaras hatov that Moshe bestowed upon them? They don't feel anything; they are not people! Additionally, even though the water saved Moshe, he was still in a dangerous situation. What if no one had found him or the basket he was placed in flipped over? The water would have actually killed him then! The same applies to the dirt. Moshe killed an Egyptian and hid him in the ground in order to conceal the fact that he killed an Egyptian. This incident became known anyway, so how did it really 'save' Moshe? Another question is that these makkos would alter nature and cause the water and dirt to be used for holy purposes.

Consequently, they would be performing a gargantuan Kiddush Hashem via the land. If so, why

was it inappropriate for Moshe to hit them if the end result was something so positive? Finally, how could we apply this lesson of hakaras hatov to our own lives?

The Ohel Aryeh (pages 78-79) quotes Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zasa"l who says **hakaras hatov is so vital to the extent that even water which saved a person must be given gratitude. Even though water, dirt and ground don't have feelings; nevertheless, one benefited from them must express gratitude!**

There was a story with Rav Gustman zasa"l that while he was once watering the plants and making them nice his students asked him what he was doing. He told them that when he was fleeing for his life in World War II, he would hide in the bushes. Since they played a part in saving his life, he now wanted to demonstrate his hakaras hatov. (See Rav Gustman pages 91-92 and page 99)

Rav Moshe Sternbach, in Taam V'daas (page 46) writes that we can learn a great lesson from Moshe being grateful to the ground. **It's a kal v'chomer; since Moshe was grateful to dirt, surely one should be grateful to a friend who helped you even one time!**

We find the concept of hakaras hatov other places throughout Tanach as well. The pasuk says (sefer Bereishis (29, 35)) when Leah gave birth to her fourth child and said "this time let me gratefully praise Hashem"; therefore she called his name Yehuda." The Seforno explains that the name Yehuda means giving thanks.

Hakaras hatov is found in various Gemaras as well. **The Gemara in Bava Kama (92b) relates that Rava asked Raba bar Mari from where do we know that you can't throw dirt into a well from which people drank, even if you don't need it anymore? He answered that we learn it from the pasuk that says you even need to be grateful to the Egyptians because you lived there. Rashi says that if you benefited from something even once, then you can't mistreat it. The Maharsha says really we should hate them for trying to kill us, but even so, the pasuk teaches us that since we did receive pleasure from living in their land we must be demonstrate gratitude.**

Rav Eliyahu Dessler in his Michtav M'Eliyahu (chelek 3 pages 98-101) writes that there are different levels of gratitude. The first level is giving thanks to someone who did a favor, even a basic favor. The second level is that the chidush and concept of hakaras hatov is not solely based on what the giver actually did, meaning how much effort he put into helping you or how great of a burden it was. **Even if it may not have been so hard for that person to help you or do you a favor, you still have the same obligation of showing your gratitude to that person. The highest level of gratitude is being makir tov to inanimate objects.** He brings a proof from the Shulchan Aruch (180, 4) that relates a Halacha based on the Gemara in Eruvin (64b). One who finds food on the floor, isn't not allowed to walk past the food leaving it there. Rather, he needs to pick it up in order to show gratitude to the food! We see that even towards inanimate objects we must have hakaras hatov. (The simple reason why we need to pick the food up is in order that there is not beziyon (disgrace) to the food.)

Let's return to one of the original questions, why couldn't Moshe hit the water? Seemingly it would be more logical for Moshe to hit the water and create a kiddush Hashem? The reason for

this is **our middos get affected by our feelings. Meaning and therefore, if we are sensitive even towards inanimate objects, then all the more so will our feelings towards other people be sensitive and correct. The opposite is accurate as well, if we act negatively towards even non-living things, then those feelings will extend in a negative way to how we look at and treat people.** A spiral negative ripple effect will result from one having bad middos. Meaning, if one has bad middos, this will (directly or indirectly) cause him to possess bad feelings and insensitivities. The insensitivity will then cause a lack of hakaras hatov. Even if Moshe could have said that he was hitting the water in order to make a kiddush Hashem and it wasn't for a bad reason, Moshe still would have been affected negatively because at the time that Moshe would hit the water, he would be lacking hakaras hatov.

In summary, Moshe had to directly exhibit hakaras hatov towards the water and land because it's necessary to demonstrate gratitude even towards something that doesn't feel or understand; it is dependent on the fact that you benefited from it! Furthermore, even though Moshe was still in danger while in the water and the ground didn't permanently cover up the Egyptian, nevertheless since Moshe received some benefit from the water and dirt, he therefore needed to demonstrate proper hakaras hatov. Additionally, even though the striking of the land would be a kiddush Hashem, nevertheless he would still be striking objects which helped him in the past which would negatively affect his middos (at Moshe's level).

Lastly, we can apply this to our own lives by learning to say thank you and trying to give gratitude to anyone who helps us in any way with our lives. It's irrelevant if it's their job or you think that it was the easiest task in the world for them to accomplish. Even if it a menial task was performed, if a person does something that you benefit from then say thank you! For example, we should say thank you to security guards, custodians, waiters and doctors etc.

In addition we need to be grateful to Hashem, like the Bereishis Rabbah (14:9) quotes Rebbi Chanina who asks; what does the pasuk in Tehelim mean when it says "כל הנשמה תהלל יה" "let all souls praise God, Halleluyah"? **With every single breathe that a person breathes he needs to give praise to Hashem! We are granted new life every second!** One way to read to pasuk is to see that its saying with every (כל) breathe (הנשמה); you need to praise Hashem (תהלל יה)!

There is a story that Reb Pesach Krohn relates (Reflections of the Maggid (pages 82-86)) regarding hakaras hatov.

One day Rav Shach called up his grandson and asked him to order a car to somewhere near Chaifa so he could attend the funeral of a certain woman. The weather was terrible and Rav Shach was very old and not in good health so the grandson protested. However, Rav Shach was steadfast in his determination to attend this levaya; the grandson gave in and they made the lengthy two hour journey. Rav Shach's grandson was under the impression that there would be an enormous amount of people at this funeral, regardless of the weather, if this woman was so important that Rav Shach himself felt so strongly about attending. He was surprised when they pulled up and there was barely a minyan. The funeral was short and simple and Rav Shach said kaddish at the conclusion. As his grandson escorted him back to the car, Rav Shach stopped in his place, closed his eyes and stood there in the freezing cold as the rain dripped off his hat and coat. His grandson tried to get him to the car, but Rav Shach wouldn't budge. After a few minutes passed by, Rav Shach finally went into the car. On the entire trip back Rav Shach hardly

spoke. When they arrived home, his grandson asked him who this woman was that he felt the need to make such a long trip in such terrible weather to attend her funeral.

Rav Shach told him a story that occurred when he was 12 years old. A yeshiva was opening up for the top bachurim and most serious learners. The Yeshiva was very selective regarding the applicants that they would accept. Each bachur was informed that if he couldn't pay for a room, he'll have to sleep in the Yeshiva. When the winter came, the nights were unbearable. It was freezing and he was also suffering from hunger. One day he received a letter from his uncle telling him that he should join him in his business. He assured Rav Shach that he would teach him everything he needed to know and that he would inherit the business. Rav Shach thought about it and decided to leave Yeshiva and join the business. He was going to stay a couple more days and leave after Shabbos. On Friday, a woman came to the Rosh Yeshiva and told him that she just got up from sitting shiva for her husband with her husband's family. He was a businessman who sold blankets and she had some extras that she didn't want to schlep (bring) back with her to where she was from, so she gave them to the Rosh Yeshiva. He gave one of those very warm Russian blankets to Rav Shach. On that Friday night, Rav Shach said, he was warmer than he had been all winter. Consequently, he decided to stay in Yeshiva full time and became a great talmid chacham and Gadol. Due to that woman who brought those blankets, Rav Shach remained learning full time instead of leaving Yeshiva to go work. That woman eventually moved to Israel. Rav Shach told his grandson that the funeral they just went to was for that woman and that he felt he had to go as an expression of hakaras hatov for receiving the blanket which caused him to remain in the Yeshiva.

Rav Shach's grandson then asked why, after the funeral, he insisted on standing in the cold rain for a considerable amount of time? Rav Shach answered that over the years one tends to forget how things used to be. The reason that he stood in the cold was to remember how cold he really was back then in Yeshiva so that he could properly give thanks for her kindness!

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