



## ❧ HAKORAS HATOV (PART 2) ❧

### HOW BIG OF A MITZVAH IS HAKORAS HATOV?

Our discussion today is about the obligation of *hakaras hatov*.<sup>1</sup> In the hierarchy of all *mitzvos*, where does *hakaras hatov* stand? How important is it? What would you say?

The Chovos Halevavos tells us that the base upon which all *avodas Hashem* stands is *hakaras hatov*. You know, when you ask most people for a favor, what do they want to know? "What have you done for me lately? Why should I do it for you?" A lot of people ask that. So Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "I'll tell you what. I'm going to beat you to it. I'm going to provide for you first. I will first take care of you." And if a person receives benefit from Hakadosh Baruch Hu and he does not respond, he's not being *makir tova*.

Now there are two levels of behavior we observe in people in this matter. There is one person for whom you do a favor, and he doesn't respond in any way. He doesn't do anything bad to you – he just doesn't respond. And then there is another person who is *מְשִׁיב רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה* - "he repays good with evil" (Mishley 17:13); you did him a *tova* and instead of giving back a *tova*, he responds with bad. You know what it says in the *passuk* about such a person? The *passuk* (ibid) says, *לֹא תִמּוּשׁ רָעָה מִבֵּיתוֹ* - "evil will not be removed from his house."

A father called me up today, a *heimishe yid*. He said to me, "I have lots going on in my life." Every time he tried to do things, everything fell through. And he wanted to know why he was not getting the *tova*. I told him, "Could you think of somebody who did a *tova* to you, and instead of you being *meishiv* a *tova* to him, you were *meishiv ra'a* to him, you repaid him with bad? Could you think of such a case?" He said, "Could it be this? Could it be that?" I said, "My friend, I'm not here to tell you. I'm just here to give you the prescription. Now you figure it out." He says, "I'm middle-aged already," he tells me. "How am I going to remember everybody I ever did something to?" I said, "If Hashem is giving you a reminder, so Hashem is telling you that you can figure it out. And when He gives you a message - *יִפְשֵׁט בְּמַעֲשָׂיו*. You are supposed to do *בְּפִשּׁוֹשׁ מַעֲשֵׂים*." (search your actions).

### RECEIVING GIFTS OBLIGATES US

Do you think that if somebody benefitted you, you have the right to walk away, close your eyes, and ignore it? You have to know, you are inviting *ra'os* into your life, into your home! When somebody does you a *tova*, you have a *chiyuv* to respond in the right way. It's not simply a nice thing to do, it's an obligation. The Vilna Gaon writes (commentary on Sefer Rus), the first one who does the other one a *tova*, that's a nice thing, that's a *chessed* – if Reuven extends himself to Shimon, for example. That's a nice thing to do. But to reciprocate, that's a *chiyuv*, an obligation.

Your parents do you *tovos*, they load you up with *tovos*. You are *chayav* to them. What a *chiyuv* are you *chayav* to them! Now the little *mechutza'im* or the big *mechutza'im* say, "They didn't do enough." Or, "They did it for their own good. They took care of me for their own *kavod*, they didn't do it for me" Oh, Hashem is going to come and see you. Then you are bringing *ra'a* into your life and you are going to wonder why the *ra'a* is coming. "I'm not a bad guy. I don't bother anybody. I keep to myself." No, my friend. You're a *meivi ra'a el toch beisecha*. You are bringing *ra'os* to yourself.

Before you take from somebody, don't think you are not going to owe them. It's a very important lesson. That's the basis of all *avodas Hashem*. That's why the Chovos Halevavos writes in Shaar Habechina to know about all the myriads of *tovos* and miracles that Hashem does for us because that is what will arouse you to *ahavas Hashem*, and *avodas Hashem*.

So here is a person who says, "I'm not into *ahavas Hashem*. I never asked Hashem for things." I mean, oh, is that guy lucky that Hashem is a *baal harachamim*. Because if anyone you were doing *tovos* for, to the degree that Hashem does *tovos*, would say to you, "I never asked you to do me anything," even if you weren't a *baal kaas*, even if you weren't a *ragzan*, you know what you would do? You would do a big smile and say, "Okay, goodbye." And you would flip the switch. You wouldn't say, "Let me give you more, let me give you more." You wouldn't say that.

### THIS REALLY BOTHERS HASHEM

The Steipler notes something very interesting. Almost all of the *aveiros* in history that Hashem was upset about, were for not having *hakaras hatov*. Adam Harishon was thrown out of *Gan Eden* because of *kfiyas tov*. You know what

<sup>1</sup> To access "Part 1" from last year, please visit [www.sichosyisroel.org](http://www.sichosyisroel.org) and search for Parshas Ki Savo from 5782



## 100 THANK-YOUS IN A DAY!

You're learning a lot of firsts today. Do you know what is the biggest *chiyuv* in quantity that a Jew has on a daily basis? In other words, what *chiyuv* do you have to repeat many, many, many times a day, every single day of your life? You know what that *chiyuv* is? You would think talmud Torah. I'll give you a big hint. You have to do it every single day 100 times.

היה רבי מאיר אומר, R' Meir used to say, חייב אדם לברך מאה ברכות בכל יום - a person is obligated to recite one hundred blessings every day (Menachos 43b). Isn't that amazing? Imagine if you stop any Jew in the street and ask, "Are you religious, sir? How long are you religious for?" "Oh, I was born religious." "Okay. Is there anything you do 100 times a day?" "I have no idea. I say negative things, *lashon hara*, 100 times a day maybe." "But what *mitzvah* are you obligated to do you 100 times a day?" People don't know. It says חייב אדם. And he learns it out of a *passuk* in the Torah.<sup>4</sup>

Now, what is the *pshat* in this? If a person is *chayav* to say 100 *brachos* a day you have to ask why? I remember my *rebbe* (R' Meir HaLevi Soloveichik) was always counting his *brachos*. Not on a regular day because on a regular day, he knew for certain that he was covered. But every single Shabbos or Yom Tov, he was always counting his *brachos*. I asked my *rebbe*, "What are you afraid of? You're not starving, you're not living in the desert.? I told him, "What are you afraid of, you're not going to make 100 *brachos*?" "I'm holding by 97, holding by 96." It was amazing. He took the *chiyuv* seriously.

### WHAT DOES BARUCH ATAH HASHEM MEAN?

*Brachos* are a form of *hodayah* to Hashem. When you say a *brachah* to Hashem, what are you doing? So there are two schools of thought in the *Rishonim* about what a *brachah* means. When you say *baruch atah Hashem*, what do you think that means? *Baruch atah Hashem* - "Blessed are you Hashem." Now how do you understand that? If somebody would ask you, "Are you giving a blessing to Hashem?" What are you going to answer?

So I'm going to tell you. Don't ever forget this point. At least if people say, "What did you learn there?" You can say, "I learned what blessings mean." Anything else? Hopefully. But that's a starting point. A good enough starting point. *Baruch atah Hashem* means, "You Hashem are the source of all *brachos*. You are the *mekor* of *brachah*." So what do I say to Hashem? *Baruch atah Hashem elokein u melech ha'olam malbish arumim*, "I thank You for the clothes." You know what I'm saying? I'm not thanking Him. I'm acknowledging that Hashem gave me clothing - I'm being *modeh* to Him, I'm admitting. *Modim* means admission. I'm saying, "I'm *modeh*, Hashem, that You are the source of my clothes." You are the source that I'm not an *eved*. You are the source that I'm not a *goy*. There is no other reason why I'm not a *goy* other than the fact that that's what Hashem chose, and so on and so forth. To acknowledge I'm standing on solid ground because Hashem made that ground solid for me. That is one *pshat* in *baruch atah Hashem*.

What is the other *pshat* in *baruch atah Hashem*? That Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants the little me to say to Him, "Hashem, I want the awareness that You are the One Who clothes people to be increased in the world." So when I say *baruch atah Hashem*, the awareness of You should be *baruch* - *baruch* means increased - that You are the *malbish arumim*. Do you know how many people know that Hashem gives them clothes? I don't believe many people think about it. I think if you took a poll and asked people, "Who gives you clothes, where are your clothes from?" They would say, "My mother, my father, my husband, my wife," all kinds of stories, *bobbe maasehs*. "I choose my own clothes, I buy my own clothes," they would say. You know how many *yidden* really know that Hashem gives them clothes? Not too many.

So therefore we say, "Hashem, I want the awareness that I have clothes from You to become increased. I want that awareness and realization to be increased." For example, when you say a *brachah* "*shelo osani goy*," what should you be thinking about? Someone will ask you one day, "Why aren't you a *goy*?" What's the response that most people would give? They would say, "Because my mother was Jewish." That's not why you're not a *goy*. You're not a *goy* because Hashem decided you shouldn't be a *goy*. And you want that awareness to become increased. If we would truly have that awareness, we would be praising Hashem all day long, and we would feel extremely obligated to Hashem! And therefore, R' Meir was telling us that a person has to know that you have to thank Hashem every single day.

Now, imagine you did somebody a *tova* and the guy would come to you 100 times every single day to say "thank you," what do you think you would tell him after a day or two? "Listen, do me a favor, buddy, buzz off. You're starting to become a pest. I appreciate it, but this is getting to be too much." He comes the next day 100 times. You say, "Shrek, give me a break!" But Hashem wants me to do that. He doesn't think I am being a pest. Hashem wants to hear from me!

I want to tell you the biggest *chiddush*. You know what the biggest *chiddush* in the world about *brachos* is? That I, who am a figment of Hashem's imagination - my entire existence and being at every second is only due to the fact that this second and this moment, Hashem wills that I should exist. I am to Hashem less than what a speck of dust on the floor under my shoe is to me! A speck of dust is an independent being from me. Maybe I'm a bigger being, a smarter being and, that is a smaller being, less smart. But me to Hashem?! I am nothing! Zero! I only exist by His will. And Hashem still wants to hear from me? He gave me the opportunity that me, this little *gornisht*, could come and empower Hashem. He created a system where I could give credit to Hashem. Yes, I could empower Hashem! I could increase the awareness of Hashem in this world. That is just mind-boggling. He gave me a *mitzvah* where I could thank Him. Could you imagine if a guy created a computer and the computer would say, "Thank you for creating me, thank you for creating

<sup>4</sup> תניא היה רבי מאיר אומר חייב אדם לברך מאה ברכות בכל יום שנאמר (דברים י, יב) ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלקיך שואל מעמך

me.” Would that even be anything? *Gornisht*. You know why? Because the guy had to program that into the computer to say that. So it makes no sense.

So here Hashem creates me, and He tells me what I could do and what I can't do, and then He says, תנו עז לאלקים, - “Ascribe might to Hashem” (Tehillim 68:35). “Serve me in the best possible way,” Hashem says. “Just encourage, express yourself that you want Me to be known in the world. It's My world. There is nothing else that exists without Me or but Me.”

### TO BLESS HIM IS “PLEASURE UPON PLEASURE”

I heard a *chiddush* from my *zeide* (R' Avigdor Miller) that I never heard anywhere else. I've not even seen it anywhere else. And he says that he heard it from his *rebbe* in Slabodka (R' Yitzhak Isaac Sher, 1880-1952). He quoted from the famous *sefer*, the Kuzari (3:12-13), where he discusses one of the reasons that Hashem created *brachos*. What is the reason that we make *brochos*? He says, וְיִוְסִיף לוֹ, to increase upon a person עֲרֻבוֹת עַל עֲרֻבוֹת, *pleasure upon pleasure*. Hashem wanted to increase pleasure upon pleasure, שִׁבְרָךְ תָּמִיד, *that you should always bless Him*. When you bless Hashem constantly, that is another jolt of pleasure! Even though the Kuzari says it's one of the reasons, my grandfather used to say, his *rebbe* says it's *the* reason. It's not one of the reasons, it's **the** reason.<sup>5</sup>

So R' Meir tells us that *hakaras hatov* is something that you can never forget and you should never forget. You know why Hashem tells me to be *makir tov* to Him? Not because He wants me to serve him, but because Hashem wants me to bask in His kindness. He wants me to have *geshmak* on top of *geshmak*.

But the way we make *brachos*, I can tell we never had any *geshmak*. The way we make *brachos* looks like it's a punishment! When a person makes *brachos*, the person is not increasing his *geshmak*. It's not what the person is doing. But Hashem is trying to increase your *geshmak*, to make you realize that even if you are drinking simple water you are taking a drink of the most delicious liquid. Hashem says, “I'm giving you this liquid, and I tell you, make a *brachah* before you enjoy this liquid. You know why? I'm trying to increase your *geshmak*.”

### THE DELICIOUS TASTE OF COFFEE

I remember in the Shomer Shabbos *shul* in Boro Park, a tremendous place of *chessed*, they had a big sign over the coffees, a quote from my *zeide*: “Give special thanks for the kindness of the taste of coffee.” I remember seeing that sign and saying, “Wow, I never once thought about it.” I don't mind coffee, but did I ever thank Hashem for the special taste of coffee? I don't know if my grandfather ever drank coffee. He liked water. He was a water man. He thought water was the best. But if you think about it, you realize, “Wow, it's amazing *taka*.”

So Hashem wants you to be *makir tov*. And *hakaras hatov* makes you aware of how much you receive from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And the more you are aware that you receive, the happier you will be. But if you don't think about the *brachah*, even if you enjoy the coffee and say, “This coffee is absolutely delicious,” it won't help you reach that happiness. Today, coffee became a big thing in the world. When I grew up, there was no such a *metzius*. Everybody drank the same coffee. The same bitter coffee, you drank it and finished. Now, they made it smooth, and there are woody tastes, nutty tastes, buttery tastes. It's got the taste of every food possible.

They go to the Himalayas, and they bring it from there. Sometimes when I drink a cup of coffee, if it's one of these rare exotic coffees, which they say on the back of the packet that it comes from the Himalayas, I think, “What kind of *sheker* is that? It probably comes from their backyard in Indiana, and they say they bring it from the Himalayas.” I don't believe them for one second. But whatever it is, even imagining it comes from there makes me feel good. I feel I'm drinking something exotic. And I try to picture that there is some guy wearing funny clothes, on some mountain in the Himalayas, and he's got a sack over his back, and he's throwing in coffee beans that he's picking off, one by one. And Hashem is saying, “This is for Yisroel Brog.” Hashem marks it: make sure this gets to Yisroel Brog. So He's thinking about all the *hishtadlus* of how to make the coffee get here, and when it gets here, it has to be delivered to a local store. Then you have to have a kind-hearted *bachur* who will get it and bring it here and deliver it to me.

Now you can order things from China, and it comes in a couple of days. From China? China is like the other end of the universe. It's a *peleh* and that's why it is worthy of our *hakaras hatov* to Hashem.

### WHO WOULD CHOOSE TO BE SAD?

A person has to know that *hakaras hatov* is the greatest of all the *middos* and if you don't have it, firstly, you're missing out on the secret to a happy life. And a person who is not happy by choice, Hashem is very angry at him. Hashem says, “You like to be sad? I'm going to give you more sadness.” You like being sad? It's going to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Hashem is going to bestow upon you exactly what you want. A boatload of unhappiness. “That's what you want? I'll bring you the Titanic full of unhappiness,” Hashem says.

A person has to walk around happy. You have to think about this happiness. Hashem says, “You'd better express thanks and be *mechavein* when you say *berachos*, if you want to have *areivus al areivus*.”

Here is a mother trying to give a kid pleasure. Did you ever see a mother trying to feed a kid, and the kid is not

<sup>5</sup> כמו זה יתה בהגלות חיים ערבים וְאָרָה פְּרִי תוֹרָתוֹ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וּבְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, וְמִי שֶׁהוּא סוֹבֵל הַגְּלוּת מִתְקַצֵּף, כְּמַעַשׂ שֶׁהוּא מַפְסִיד עוֹלָמוֹ וְאַחֲרֵיתוֹ. אָמַר הַחֶבְרִי: וְיִוְסִיף לוֹ עֲרֻבוֹת עַל עֲרֻבוֹת, שִׁבְרָךְ תָּמִיד עַל כֹּל מָה שֶׁהוּא מוֹצֵא מִן הָעוֹלָם וּמִה שְׂמוֹצְאוֹ מִמֶּנּוּ.

in the mood? They eat, duh, deh. Then he starts to cry. The mother says, "You are not getting dessert unless you eat this delicious food." And the kid is screaming and crying. And the mother, *nebach*, she's forcing him to eat to make him happy. Is that normal? It's not normal.

### A LOST OPPORTUNITY

In conclusion, I want you to know, there is an amazing *gemara*. It's a frightening *gemara*. The *gemara* (Sanhedrin 94a) says an amazing thing. Hakadosh Baruch Hu once chose a known individual to be Mashiach. You know who that was? Chizkiyahu Hamelech. Hashem wanted to make him Mashiach. During his lifetime, he was besieged by one of the greatest armies, the army of Sancheirev, and he raised Klal Yisrael up to an amazing level of *bitachon*. And Hashem wanted to make him Moshiach. And then Hashem changed His mind so to speak. He canceled the order. You know why? "רבש"ע ומה דוד מלך ישראל" אמרה מדת הדין לפני הקב"ה, *middas hadin* said to Hakadosh Baruch Hu: "רבש"ע ומה דוד מלך ישראל", the great-grandfather of Chizkiyahu, Dovid, said *כמה שירות ותשבחות לפניך*, and you didn't make him a Moshiach? So Chizkiyahu, for whom You performed such amazing miracles – he was deathly ill and You healed him, he was surrounded by armies, millions, and You took them all out for him, and he didn't say *shira* to you – are You going to make him Moshiach?" And therefore, he did not end up becoming Mashiach. What a tragedy.<sup>6</sup>

Now, I have no doubt that Chizkiyahu Hamelech said *shira* to Hashem. What do you think?! He just went on with his life? Of course, he said *shira* to Hashem! But he didn't give the *hodayah* the way it was expected for having such miracles happen to him. I see people getting up at their kids' *bar mitzvahs* and thanking their wife nonstop for putting together the *bar mitzvah* or the *kiddush*, and I'm thinking to myself, "I wonder if this guy ever thanked Hashem in this fashion." The only thing I say to myself is, "I hope he doesn't mean it, then Hashem won't feel bad because it's just words." Do you hear what prevented Chizkiyahu from being Mashiach? He wasn't *makir tov* the way he was supposed to be. That is very tragic.

### OUR BEST MERIT BEFORE ROSH HASHANAH: HAKORAS HATOV TO HASHEM

We are now standing before Rosh Hashanah, and every one of us would love to know, is there anything that we can do to buy a little *zechusim* for ourselves? Could we buy a little merit? Is there anything we could do to make our life better? And the answer is, you can. Be *mekabel* to be *makir tov* to Hashem. Thank Hashem for a year. Go through every single *inyan*. How many nights this year did you not sleep? How many days were you stuck in the hospital? How many days did you spend at the doctor's office? How many days did you not have enjoyment in your life? Think about the meals, the clothes, the air conditioning, the weather, all the great things that you enjoyed. So you had a blackout once. It's a drop in the ocean when you begin thinking about all the things Hashem did for you. You got that blackout in the middle of the summer heat because you never once thanked Hashem for air conditioning. When that air conditioning comes back on, you are going to understand how thankful and grateful you should be for air conditioning and how you can't take it for granted.

I want to say that I'm extremely grateful. I don't know where to begin. When I wake up in the morning, I think, "How many times did I wake up this year?" Unbelievable! I was able to go through my day, walking around, without breaking any limbs. You know how many people had something that broke? Tons of people. The doctors are making a fortune. Breaks, hands, feet, ankles. Older people have it all the time. And younger people, as well. I need to think about what Hashem did for me. He gave me a wife, he gave me family, he gave me *talmidim*. You have to thank Hashem for each and every one. Thank Hashem for your house, your bed. It's unreal how many *tovos* Hashem does for us if we just pay attention and think. If you went through this list already, then start thinking about your eyes, your mouth, your heart, your lungs, and your digestive system. Think. Every day you use something. Things could break. That's how things are. Things break. Hakadosh Baruch Hu made it hat it never broke for us. So for that, we have to be *modeh* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu We'll buy ourselves some *zechuyos* and we'll be happier. We won't walk around looking like we're in a morgue. We'll be smiling no matter what Hashem doesn't give us. And we'll be *zoche* to a *shana tova*.

<sup>6</sup> למרבה המשרה ולשלום אין קץ וגו' (ישעיהו ט, ו) א"ר תנחום דרש בר קפרא בציפורי מפני מה כל מ"ם שבאמצע תיבה פתוח וזה סתום ביקש הקב"ה לעשות חזקיהו משיח וסנחריב גוג ומגוג. אמרה מדת הדין לפני הקב"ה רבש"ע ומה דוד מלך ישראל שאמר כמה שירות ותשבחות לפניך לא עשיתו משיח חזקיהו שעשית לו כל הנסים הללו. [רש"י: כל הנסים הללו - שניצל מסנחריב ונתרפא מחליו] ולא אמר שירה לפניך תעשהו משיח לכך נסתתם.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

*Hakoras hatov* is the basis of all Avodas Hashem, as the Chovos Halevavos and the Ramban tell us. Not expressing *hakoras hatov*, by walking away from a person after they do us a *tova*, or failing to acknowledge his *tova* - literally brings evil to the כפוי בטוב. When we experience interpersonal struggles, the first place we have to look is whether there is a lack of *hakoras hatov*, along with introspection and פשפש במעשים. There is nothing that bothers Hashem more than כפיית הטובה. So the first thing we should ask ourselves when facing a challenge is, "What did I do to upset Hashem? Was I perhaps כפוי בטוב - not being grateful for Hashem's daily *chassadim* to me and my family?" The good news is that there are numerous reminders to help us stop and think about the constant *chessed* of Hashem, like *birkas modim* and *birkas ha'shahar*, which are all forms of *hoda'ah* to Hashem, reminding us that He is the source of all these blessings - whether it's our health, our clothing, or the fact that we are *yiddin* and not *avodim*, and so on. This coming week, when I say *birkas ha'shahar*, I will try to identify one area in these *brochos* where I am really grateful to Hashem, especially if I had some challenges in that area (i.e., thank Hashem for healthy eyes, healthy feet, healthy back, physical strength or stamina, clothing, my needs being fulfilled, etc.). Besides realizing that Hashem is the source of those *brachos*, I will also think about how I would like for that awareness to increase throughout the world. By practicing my daily *hakoras hatov* to Hashem in the month of Elul, iy"H, I will be *zoiche* to a