



How Frum Do You Have To Be?

ARE YOU TELLING ME TO BE FRUM?

Today, I want to discuss an interesting question that was posed to me. It is something that I experience quite often when meeting people. The question is: "What is the level of Yiddishkeit, of *frumkeit*, of religion that Hashem expects of me? Does Hashem expect everybody to be committed to the same degree?" It would be very difficult to imagine that Hashem would expect from a little fellow from Chicago the same that He would want from a fellow from Lakewood or Meah Shearim. So the question is: "Are people's different environments just coincidental, or is that indicative of what level of *frumkeit* Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants from the person?"

When I was involved with *kiruv*, I often found people, who when they first became *frum*, they got into it, and then they kind of cooled off and found their balance. It always brings to mind a story. I was involved with a very powerful, wealthy, successful businessman. He got all into Yiddishkeit, and was in the *shteiging* mode big time. And then, one day, I didn't see him. He didn't answer his phone. He was involved with *rabbanim*. He was involved with *roshei yeshivah*. He was the kind of guy who wanted to get involved. One of his big agendas was that he wanted to be in charge. He was a leader. I explained to him that for Yiddishkeit he should approach it from a *talmid's* perspective by learning. "Don't give *eitzos*. Yiddishkeit is already an old and established *mesorah*," I told him. And then the guy disappeared.

Maybe six months later, I met him. He was wearing this big, Israeli West Bank yarmulke; a big, white, knitted yarmulke with different colors. I said to him, "My friend, where have you been?" He said, "I was finding myself." I said, "I hope you don't mind me saying it, but to me it seems like you're lost. The fellow I saw six months ago is not the same fellow I see now." He said, "I'm going in a different direction." I said, "That's my point." He couldn't become a *macher* in this area, so he decided that he's going to join a Mizrahi crowd and with those people, it's an open field. He can be a *balebust*, a leader, in that area.

But the question is, how *frum* is *frum*? Should a person feel guilty if he's not so *frum*? It's a very good question. Does everybody have to wear black and white? If you're in a *yeshivah*, you wear black and white. If you're wearing a purple shirt in *yeshivah* or a lilac, pink colored shirt and white pants there's something wrong with that. My grandfather once saw a *bachur* walk into the *yeshivah*, way back in the day, wearing a white suit. He called out loud to him and said, "I'll take two ice creams!" That's what ice cream salesmen used to wear in those days: white suits. "I'll have two!" There's a certain way you dress in the *yeshivah*. There's right and wrong.

Now, there's definitely no *heter*, no matter where you come from, to be like a *goy*. To emulate the *umos haolam* is definitely unacceptable. But within the Yiddishkeit world, the question is: how committed does one have to be to Hashem and Torah? How religious does one have to be? Is there room for fluctuation?

REUVEN WAS HELD TO HIGH STANDARDS

In this week's *parshah* we find a story. Yaakov Avinu begins to speak to Reuven, and he says **ראובן בכורי אתה**, "Reuven, you are my firstborn." (Bereishis 49:3) Then afterward, he gives him very strong *mussar* and tells him, **פחו כמים**, you were quick to be angered. Rav Yerucham (Da'as Torah) says a very interesting thing. Rav Yerucham says that the *mussar* that he received for getting angry quickly was only because he was Reuven, the *bechor*. He was the firstborn. The firstborn has a leadership quality, *kehunah*, *malchus*, *bechorah*. The *bechor* is supposed to stand up. Yaakov said, "You know what you did? You were **פחו כמים**. You did it a little hurriedly. You got angry, and you did it in a way that it should not have been done. And therefore you lost all your rights of the *bechor*. That means had you not been the *bechor*, it wouldn't have been held against you. It was held against you only because you are the *bechor*."

Because of a person's station in life, sometimes he's granted less leeway. And if a person has a lower station in life, he is then granted more leeway.

4 TYPES OF GOODNESS AND GIFTS

There's a *moradige Chovos Halevavos* (Rabbeinu Bachya, 1050-1120) in *Sha'ar Avodas Elokim* (Chapter 6), where he discussed the level of *frumkeit*, of service to Hashem, that Hashem expects from each and every Jew.¹ Many of us

¹ אמר השכל כי תוספת העבודה על אנשיה מתחלקת מדרך הכלל והפרט בטובה עליהם. והטובה על המדברים על ארבעה ענינים. הראשון טובת הבורא הכוללת כל האדם והוא המצויא אחר שלא הי' דבר נמצא והחיותם והטובה להם בכל אשר הקדמנו זכרו בשער השני מן הספר הזה וע"כ הם חייבים לבורא יתברך עבודה כוללת והם כל התורות השכליות אשר נהג בהם אדם והנודן ונהג ובנינו ואיוב וחבריו עד ימות משה רבינו ע"ה, וכו'. והענין השני טובות הבורא על עם מן העמים ואומה מן האומות כמו שהטיב לבני ישראל בהצויאם מארץ מצרים והביאם אל ארץ כנען וחיבים בה עבודה יתירה על העבודה הראשונה והיא התורות השמעיות אחר שהזכיר והעיר על התורות השכליות, וכו'. והענין הג' טובות האלקים על משפחה ממשפחות האומה ככהונה וליה ורע המלוכה בבית דוד וחיבים על זה עבודה יתירה ועבודת הכהונה והלויה ידועות ומבוארות בספר תורת האלקים, וכו'. והענין הרביעי טובת האלקים על איש מאישי בני אדם נתיחד בה משאך משפחתו ועמו ושאר המדברים כנביא מובהר או נגיד (ס"א נביא) מצווה להנהיג אומה או חכם העיר אלהים או חכם המלכה ותבונה ועצה דומה לזה ועל כל טובה מהם יתחייב בעבודה יתירה לאלקים, וכו'. ועל אלה ארבעה הענינים חייבים בני האדם בעבודת האלקים וכל אשר יוסיף הבורא טובה לאדם חייב עליה עבודה. ומן הראיה על זה כי התבואות חייבות במעשר שנאמר (דברים טז) עשר תעשר את כל תבואת ארצך ומי שנתן לו האלקים מאה כור של תבואה חייב ממנה עשרה כורים לאלקים ומי שנתן לו האלקים עשרה כורים חייב לאלקים מהם כור אחד. ואם יוציא האחד תשעה וחצי והשני אחד יהיה הראשון ענוש והשני מקבל שכר. וכן אומר במי שלא היה לו בן בטלה ממנו חובת המילה ולימוד התורה ומי שהוא פיסח בטלה ממנו חובת החג ומי שהוא חולה בטלו ממנו מן המצות מה שאינו יכול לעשותו. ועל ההקשה הזאת יתחייב מי שיחדו הבורא יתעלה לטובה בתוספת עבודה עליה, וכו'.

may not like it.

He says the more Hashem gives you kindness the more Hashem is *meitiv* with you, the more goodness that Hashem gives you, the more you are expected to be *frum*. You are automatically obligated more in the service of Hashem. You have less ability to do what you want.

Chovos Halevavos says there are four categories of good that Hashem grants people. Some good is granted to all mankind. Then, there is a specific good that is granted to nations. There is good that Hashem grants to specific families. And then there is good that Hashem grants to an individual. On each one of these levels, we have to ask ourselves, "Where do we fit in? What class of benefits are we enjoying? Are we enjoying the class of benefit that

is granted to all mankind - two eyes, two ears, two hands, two feet, working organs, movable parts, not broken down?" Your "status" is based on your level of being a recipient of *tov* from Hashem. For example, are you of average health? Are you below average health? So Hashem creates statuses for each one of us.

Here is a person that is created by Hashem with a strong, healthy, emotional side. His mind doesn't play tricks on him. Many people suffer from emotional challenges or disorders. Here is a person who is created as a handsome or a good-looking fellow. That's a big *tovah* from Hashem that not all mankind has. Most people are basically in the ugly duckling category and they have to live with it. I once knew a *bachur* who had very large ears. You know what he did a few years later? He became a Brisker and he grew himself big, Brisker *peyos*. The problem was solved. It wasn't recognizable anymore.

You have to figure out where you stand in this world. Is your head quick or are you slow? Is your hearing good? How is your eyesight? Every single thing obligates a person. Those are the gifts given to mankind in general.

Next, you have to ask yourself, do you realize that you have an obligation based on the fact that you're part of the Am Yisrael? You could have been born Episcopalian. You could have been born somebody from Rwanda. You could have been part of the Hutu nation, or you could have been born part of the Tutsis, and you would have been relegated to the bottom of the barrel.

Now, there are many benefits to belonging to a certain nation, especially if you're the host nation. That's a tremendous benefit. Do you know what we say every day in davening? Every single *tefilah* concludes with *עלינו לשבח לאדון הכל לתת גדולה* ליוצר בראשית, it is incumbent upon us to thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu *שלא עשנו כגויי הארצות*, that He didn't make us like the other nations. He could have made you a Syrian ISIS fellow. He could have made you born some kind of an Iraqi from the desert, one of the nomads. Instead, Hashem created you to be part of Klal Yisrael.

Did you ever think about what kind of a family you come from? I recently became very thankful for that. A very nice man whom I'm still looking forward to meeting told me, "I have an interesting story for you." I said, "What is it? I'm intrigued." He told me that he was born from a mother who was handicapped, and she found herself in a very compromised situation. He was the result of that situation. A very dishonorable situation. The guy was born from this union. He has no idea who his father is. It could have been anyone of hundreds. The fellow went through challenges, but he pulled himself up by his bootstraps, and eventually, he got his act together and raised a family. And after going through very tumultuous times in his youth, he settled down and raised a *frum* family. I'm looking forward to meeting him. I told him, "It's a big honor to meet a person like you." When I got off the phone with this guy, I said to myself, "Wow. I never thanked Hashem that I know my father and I know my mother!" That's a *brachah* in itself.

How many people come from well-to-do families, and they're accorded status and honor? You know what you owe Hashem for that? Big time.

A number of times, I met people from well-to-do families who told me their grandfather was a competition to Korach. He had honor, respect and riches. And then you look at the kids, and you say, "What happened to you? You didn't live up to your obligation. You took the *brachos* that Hashem gave you and you buried yourself in your own pleasures. You chose to live a hedonistic lifestyle. You mainly pursued pleasure for your own sake. You didn't realize that you were obligated to continue in your father's and your grandfather's footsteps. That's an obligation and Hashem is going to hold you responsible for that. Hashem is going to say, 'What did I need you in this family for? I gave you a father. I gave you a grandfather who paved the way for you. And you blew it on Me.'"

ARE YOU AS FRUM AS YOUR GIFTS OBLIGATE?

A person has to know that the level of *frumkeit* expected of him is determined by the amount of *berachos* Hashem has granted him. Are you as *frum* as you're supposed to be?

Now, listen to what the *Chovos Halevavos* says. The degree that is incumbent upon a person to add to his *avodas Hashem*, depends on his relationship to the general good and specific good that were given to him. Ask yourself, do you have a wife? Do you have children? Do you have a job? Can you pay your bills? Do you know how *frum* you have to be? Do you know what kind of commitment to *avodas Hashem* you have to have?

There are a lot of people who, even if they're married, don't have children. There are people who have children who struggle with their job. There are people who struggle with getting married and staying married.

You have to know it's very frightening because most people never even sat down and contemplated what they have been given. What good did Hashem grant you? Did Hashem give you supportive parents?

Here is a person who was born into a family that is not *frum*. That's a difficult challenge. Being born into a family not committed to Yiddishkeit is a big disadvantage. You grew up with people who were jungle people. That's what the *gemara* (Bava Metzia 83b) says.² People who were born without Yiddishkeit are like people from the jungle. Now Hashem came, went down into the *אָשכּנז* and He was *יְרִים אֶבְיוֹן* (Tehillim 113:7), He lifted up the impoverished person, that's you, and He saved your life and He brought you back to Yiddishkeit. Do you know what kind of a *brachah* and obligation you have to Hashem? It's unimaginable! But instead, do you know what people think? "Hashem had better be happy with whatever I'm offering Him, because I could have continued in the way I was born." You're very wrong, my friend.

If you're a person who grew up and never once knew what it meant to be challenged by financial difficulties, if you never lacked anything growing up, do you know how much you owe Hashem? Here is a person who has brothers or relatives who went off the *derech*, yet he or she managed to stay on the *derech*. You know what kind of *siyata deshmaya* they had to have for that? Unbelievable!

People think they're *frum*. They're big *tzaddikim* for being *frum*. They're doing Hashem a grand old favor. You should know someone who thinks that way is an absolute *shoteh*. You do nothing for Hashem by being *frum*. The only one you're doing this for, is yourself. That's like saying a fellow who *lehavdil elef havdalos* goes to Yale University or Harvard, and he says he's doing the dean and the board of Harvard a favor by getting good grades.

HASHEM SAVED YOUR LIFE

A person has to know that Hashem saved your life, and even though you tried to fall, Hashem saved you against all odds. He was *meitiv* to you. He gave you friends to encourage you. He gave you *rebbei'im* to teach you Torah. He gave you a community to live and grow in. He gave you a *yeshivah*. You have to think and look at all the things Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave you. We owe *avodah* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu just if we get an average life, what everybody else gets.

Here is a boy who is struggling or a young lady who is struggling. They're not so interested. "I don't like the pressure of Yiddishkeit. I want to do what I like to do. I want to pursue my own dreams." But you have a *chiyuv*! You have an obligation! You owe Hashem! You don't even think and recognize what Hashem gave you. So you have to start to perform *mitzvos* with an awareness and a mindset of: "I'm doing it because I'm indebted to Hakadosh Baruch Hu."

WHY ARE YOU PUTTING ON TEFILLIN?

Now, this is a tremendous *zechus* for a person. The *Chovos Halevavos* says that you know what happens if a person does *mitzvos* out of a sense of indebtedness to the Ribono Shel Olam? Let's say, a person proclaims his allegiance to Hashem every morning by putting on *tefillin*. Now, most people are not proclaiming allegiance to Hashem. What's the reason they're putting on *tefillin* in the morning? Because they have to. They have a habit that they've created that they've got to put on *tefillin*. That habit drives them, hopefully, to put on *tefillin*. Some people used to have the habit. But people don't understand one thing: when you're putting on *tefillin* in the morning, do you know what you're doing? You're saying: "Hakadosh Baruch Hu, I'm pledging my allegiance to You and I'm acknowledging. It has nothing to do with Your commandments. I'm acknowledging that I am Yours and I'm *meshabed* (subjugate) my heart, my eyes, my ears, my head, my mouth. I'm *meshabed* myself to You and to Your service. I'm indebted to You." Do you know why you're learning Torah? Because Hashem put you in a *yeshivah*. Many people don't appreciate that. They should know that someday they're going to appreciate it and someday they're going to bang their hearts for not *chapping arein* every single second!

The *Chovos Halevavos* (ibid) tells us that if you do *mitzvos* out of a sense of indebtedness, do you know what that does? That brings Hashem to shower you with much more *tovos*.³ That's why when people tell me, "I have a problem. I'm suffering," do you know what I tell them? It's one of my standard lines. First thing I say is, "Did you ever thank Hashem for watching over you in that area?" Do you know what the answer is? "No." Ask somebody who has a knee problem. For years and years and years, you had no knee problems.

Did you ever thank Hashem once for healthy and well-functioning knees? Did you ever feel indebted to Hashem because of that? "No." Did you ever feel indebted to Hashem because your heart was working well? "No." You took it for granted. When it started not working well, then you woke up. Your kidneys, your intestines. One of the biggest miracles that human beings have is digestion, to eat delicious food. Hashem has an amazing system. If you would think about it, you'd realize how indebted you are to Hashem!

I thank Hashem for giving me my grandfather (Rav Avigdor Miller) because I don't think I ever would have enjoyed my food like I do without my grandfather. My grandfather taught me how to enjoy food. He would chew on his food and think about all the various tastes that he felt in that chew! We know we read these wine bottles, and we think that these people who wrote these words on the back of the wine bottles were absolute *shikorim*. Hints of vanilla, hints of rosemary, hints of cherries, hints of blueberries. I don't know what the guy ate before he made this wine test. Maybe he ate blueberry pie and decided it's blueberry! Maybe he had a vanilla latte, and he decided it's a vanilla latte! Do you know how many tastes there are in food? Tremendous tastes! If you just think about it for a second, you'll be overwhelmed.

OBLIVIOUS TO HIS CHESSED

You never once thanked Hashem. And then all of a sudden, Hashem comes knocking on your door to ask for your attention and what does He use for that? The gift that Hashem gave you.

² דרש רבי זירא ואמרי לה תני רב יוסף מאי דכתיב (תהלים קז, כ) תשת חשך ויהי לילה בו תרמוש כל חיתו יער תשת חשך ויהי לילה זה העולם הזה שדומה ללילה בו תרמוש כל חיתו יער אלו רשעים שבו שדומין לחיה שביעה.
³ (שם) ומי שדבק בהם כלם לעבודת האלהים יטיב לו האלהים בטובה מיוחדת משאר בני אדם ויתן לו מעלה יתרה בעוה"ז והגמול הגדול בעוה"ב כמו אברהם שאמר לו האלהים (בראשית ט"ו:א) אל תירא אברם אנכי מגן לך שכרך הרבה מאד, וכו'.

Let's take an example of food. Every one of us enjoys food. Do you know how many people suffer from food problems? They can't eat oil. People have allergies. Every second person has allergies. Some people can't have nuts. It's dangerous. Some people can't eat gluten. They can't eat this. They can't eat carbs. There are so many foods people can't eat. It can drive you nuts. I don't know if I've ever been to a family in my life where somebody did not experience food problems or food allergies. You have a problem with lactose. You can't have milk. You can't eat pizza. You can't eat ice cream. You can't eat so many things! What do you think Hashem is telling you? Around the *yeshivah*, every second guy has issues with food. Why is it like that? You know why? Because eating is one of the biggest, absolute *tovos* in the world! It's not just something that maintains your health. The joy of eating is such a tremendous joy, you can't imagine! But, very few people ever felt obligated to make a *brachah* before or after eating while having this amazing *tovah* in mind. You tell Hashem, "I'm going to take what I want. I want to eat like a *sheiget*, like a *kelev*. Just like a *kelev* eats, *besbuk*, I want to eat in the *shuk* and I don't want to be *meshubad* to anything. I just want to get into that food." And then, all of a sudden, you know what Hashem does? He puts the vise on and all of a sudden your stomach cannot function. The food doesn't go down and it can't go from the esophagus into the stomach and from there it can't go into the next level. It has to be broken down by the bile. It has to go in there slowly in order to process it and break it down.

EATING BREAD IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BENTCH

We don't understand the *chessed* of Hashem. Do you know how *frum* you have to be for this? At least *bentch* like a *mentch*! But you don't want to *bentch* like a *mentch*. Do you know what you're asking for? You're begging Hashem to give you a sickness. That's what you're doing. You're begging Hashem. If a person never had that habit of thanking Hashem for the food, I'm going to suggest that you get working on it very, very quickly! You better start making *brachos* out of indebtedness to Hashem - even if you don't want to make *brachos*, even if it's against your *shitah*, even if you don't like to wash for Hamotzi because it's too many prayers. Start to *daven* to Hashem and wash to eat bread with the *bracha* of Hamotzi and when you are finished, *bentch* like a *mensch*!

The *Chovos Halevavos* tells us that if you thank Hashem for the *tovos*, Hashem is going to do more *tovos* for you. Who doesn't want more *tovos* from Hashem!?! All Hashem says is, "Be a *mentch*. Appreciate that I'm doing *tovos* for you. You should feel obligated to Me." That's not an unnatural thing to request, *rabbosai*. And Hashem is going to give you a reward for doing this. Hashem is going to give you reward, in this world and the next. Also, if you never thank Hashem, you have no sense of *hakaras hatov*.

The *Chovos Halevavos* continues by describing what you should expect if you don't thank Hashem, and if you're going to persist in your stubbornness. Here is a child who grew up in a well-to-do home. He was blessed with everything, and then Hashem turned the faucet off. Why did Hashem turn the faucet off suddenly? You know why? "You never lived up to your obligation. You never thanked Me. You never once lived up to your obligation to Me." Hashem said, "I was so nice to you and so patient with you, but you never thanked Me. You never did a *mitzvah* out of indebtedness to Me. You did what you wanted, no more than what you wanted."

Listen to what *Chovos Halevavos* he says (ibid 6:3).⁴ If you want to know what you can look forward to in your life, the *Chovos Halevavos* tells it to us straight up. ומי שימרה האלקים בטובותיו, someone who rebels against Hashem and His *tovos*. He's not thankful. He doesn't feel indebted. He won't go out of his way to demonstrate an indebtedness to Hashem. You know what Hashem does to all the good things? Sadly, people think, "As long as everything is going good for me, I'm not dependent on Hashem." A person who has a secure job absurdly thinks, "*Baruch Hashem*, that's one area I don't need to come onto Hashem." That's what he thinks. A person has health. He thinks, "*Baruch Hashem*, I don't have to come to Hashem for this."

NO "THANK YOU" - NO GIFTS

Now, what happens is, in spite of all the *tovos* that Hashem gives him, the guy does not thank Hashem. Listen to what he says: יפול, he's going to fall, ממדרגת המדברים, from the level of a rational, speaking human being. Unbelievable! He's going to fall from the *madreigah* of the *medabrim* and Hashem is going to treat him like an animal. He's going to fall *אל שפל מדרגת החי שאינו מדבר*, to the low level of an irrational creature, i.e. animal. Hashem is going to look at him like an animal and treat him like an animal and Hashem will give him the *din* of animals in this world! And you want to know what the

judgment is in the next world? Take a look over there and you'll see. The *Chovos Halevavos* says he can look forward to the most awful and terrible things.

Here, you have a fellow who has good looks. *Baruch Hashem*, he has good looks. He's very happy. He's a good-looking boy. His mother told him, "Boy, are you sharp! Boy, are you good-looking! What a cool guy you are!" So, instead of becoming indebted to Hashem, the guy starts to be *mesalsel besa'aro*, while he still has it. He starts to play with his hair. He starts to walk around thinking what a *shvitzer* he is. "I'm Mr. Cool." Hashem says to him, "That's how you thank Me?! I could have made you look like a guy who had a bombed out face and went through a bombing run in Vietnam. I could have made you have ears that people would bump into. I could have made you with a nose that everybody stops to look at and asks if it's really your original nose or it one that you stuck on." Hashem could have made him with teeth that look like somebody turned them into chopped meat and then pasted them together with glue in his mouth. You could have a chin that looks like three chins, and somebody would ask you, "Excuse me, did you rob those chins?" "No. I stayed in the line too long, so Hashem gave me three of them. Hashem told everyone to keep moving. 'Take one and keep moving.' I figured if it's chins, they're probably going to offer some good stuff. I'll stay on the same line and get

⁴ ומי שימרה האלקים בטובותיו יפול ממדרגת המדברים ומעלותם אל שפל מדרגת החי שאינו מדבר ויהיה דינו כדון הבהמות בעולם כמי"ש (תהלים לז) ואויבי ה' כיקר כרים וגו' ודינו בעוה"ב הרע שאין למעלה ממנה כמי"ש (ישעיהו לג:יא) רוחכם אש תאכלכם.

doubles." He got doubles. And now he looks like a piece of work.

He should've been saying to Hashem, "Hashem, I owe You so much! I'm so thankful to Hashem that I don't have to be bothered by my looks. Hashem, I'm going to thank You." Then maybe the fellow will keep his hair, and he'll keep his looks. I've watched people who I considered were good-looking people grow up. It's amazing. They grow up, and there's nothing to look at anymore. What happened? Hashem took away their looks. That's all. Now, they look ordinary, or they look unordinary. You see people get old and their noses hang down in the middle of their mouths. What happened to the nose? Gravity pulls the nose down into the mouth. Here is a fellow who was *mamash* spiffy sharp. Soon, he's bent over like this. You know why? He never thanked Hashem for a straight back. You know how many people suffer from scoliosis? One in six have a problem with their back structure. Do you know what that is? There you are standing straight, ramrod straight. You feel like a million dollars. You never once thanked Hashem. You never once acted like you owe Hashem anything.

Now the *Chovos Halevavos* (ibid.) says a very interesting thing. Sometimes, you see people who don't thank Hashem. They look like bulls. They look like healthy beasts. He quotes a *passuk* וְאֹיְבֵי ה' בְּיָמֶיךָ, the enemies of Hashem, כִּי־רִיב, Hashem will treat them like He treats the sheep (Tehillim 37:20). You hear what Hashem says? Such a person is an enemy of Hashem. If they're not thankful to Hashem, they're an enemy of Hashem! If you're a person who doesn't feel indebted to Hashem for the kindness that Hashem gave you, Hashem is going to consider you an enemy. You know how He's going to treat you? He's going to fatten you up. He's going to stuff you up. Here is the sheep behind the guy's house and they keep on bringing him stuff to eat all day long. The sheep is thinking, "Boy, *baruch Hashem* I made it to *olam haba*. I don't have to graze around. I don't have to travel around up the mountains and down the mountains to get food. The food is right here." What he doesn't realize is that he's getting stuffed up by the family to be *shechted* for the holiday. He's going to be slaughtered.

Hashem takes you also. He makes you 'nice and round' - i.e., He gives you a decent life. You should know Hashem is hurrying to give you the *tovos*, to fatten you up, in order to make sure you have a very bright and hot *Gehinom*.

IT COULD HAVE BEEN ME

And when Hashem brings you challenges in this world, and you hear about challenges from other people, you should say, "Wow! That could've been Me! Hashem, I thank You. I owe You, Hashem. I'm going to serve You with more diligence." Sometimes, you have a person in a *frei* family. I've seen this also. For some strange reason, the family is supportive. It's amazing. It's a tremendous *chessed*. The family looks up to this fellow. They help him with financial support, and emotional support. They encourage him. That's also a *chessed* Hashem.

REUVEN'S HUGE OBLIGATION

This is the lesson we learn from Reuven. Reuven was given the most unique status in the history of the world. The firstborn of Yaakov Avinu. The entire world was created for Klal Yisrael, and Reuven was the *bechor* of the Jewish nation. He had awesome *ma'alos*, *malchus*, leadership, *bechorah*. The best family. There was nothing he didn't have. He was respected by all his brothers. And Yaakov told him, "Reuven, perfection. You owe Hashem perfection. This position is not given to the average person. It's not even given to the above-average person. And if you don't serve Hashem to perfection, you're going to pay for that."

There is a famous statement from Rav Yisrael Salanter, who said, "I know my head is equivalent to the heads of a thousand normal people. But I also know that I have a thousand times more obligation in *avodas Hashem* than all those people." That's what a person has to know. Hashem grants people *yichus*. We are all *meyuchasim*. We are בני אברהם, *בני אברהם*, that Hashem swore to. We're יצחק, *יצחק*. We're part of עדה יעקב, *עדה יעקב*. What does it say? לפיכך אנחנו חייבים להודות לך, *לפיכך אנחנו חייבים להודות לך*, *yichus*, stature, obligates a person. However, it doesn't afford a person benefits - to lord it over others.

The fact that I was *zocheh* to such a *zeida*, obligates me. The fact that I was *zocheh* to such a father, obligates me. The fact that I was *zocheh* to the *rebbei'im* that I was *zocheh* to, obligates me. I'm a very lucky person. Because I know many people who don't have *rebbei'im*. I know people who rejected their parents or their *rebbei'im*, *nebach*. And *baruch Hashem* Hashem gave me *rebbei'im*. So when I say, "I'm *chayav lehodos*," it means, I'm *chayav lehodos* more than you. Hashem gave me a wife, a great wife. Hashem gave me a great life. An ability to teach Torah. Hashem helped maintain my physical life. Hashem made me feel good, pumped up most of the time. Hashem helped me sleep well, digest my food well, enjoy the food while it's going down, and He helped me teach Torah to many people. Do you know how indebted I am to Hashem?! Tremendously indebted! And I hope and I ask Hashem to help me never forget that indebtedness and to help me get stronger in my saying מודים אנחנו לך, *מודים אנחנו לך*, "Hashem I am so *modeh*, and it's not from me. It's all from You. This is all the *tovah* You granted me, Hashem." That's what *modim* means. "Hashem, I'm *modeh*, I admit that all the benefits I have are from You."

And therefore, you thank Hashem for it. And if you'll thank Hashem, Hashem will give you more good. Who doesn't want more good?!

COMPLAINTS, LACK OF APPRECIATION, PAIN

Most people act like they want more, but they never thank Hashem. You know what they do? They complain. They're complainers. And when you complain, Hashem says, "You want something to complain about? Let Me help you. You're complaining about *narishkeit*. I'll give you what to complain about. Your back won't work. You'll get sciatica nerves running down your feet." When was the last time you thanked Hashem for your feet? All of a sudden, you get this pain

shooting down your back, and you feel like you're in a vise. You feel so much pain, you can't imagine! You don't know where the pain is coming from. You never thanked Hashem. Why not? You know what most people foolishly think? "It won't happen to me. I'm not that type. I exercise. I stay in shape. I run. I go on the treadmill. I play sports. I work out every day. I eat healthy." Look at how all the ballplayers end up looking like worn-out *shmattas* with busted-up faces. They die young because their bodies are so racked and they've taken such abuse. *Gornisht*. The famous boxers, they have their few moments in the sun, and then they get on the radio, and they ask the boxers questions: "What year is it today?" "Wha babababa." The guy was once the king of the world, the biggest boxer in the world. And what does he have now? He's slow. He can't think straight. He doesn't know what year he's in. He's wearing diapers. What a *nebach*, the poor guy! Have you ever thanked Hashem for that? If you don't thank Hashem for that, you pay the price. Everybody thinks it's not *nogea* to him. I'm telling you, it's *nogea*. Don't call me up someday, asking, "How come Hashem put me in diapers?!" "Because He said, 'I warned you.'"

YOU'D BETTER FEEL INDEBTED

Does Hashem let you sleep at night? You'd better jump up in the morning and thank Hashem for that! Your *Modeh Ani* better be out of this world! You'd better feel indebted. And if not, you'll fall asleep all day. Hashem is מעביר שיני מעיני, Hashem takes away the sleep from your eyes. Hashem is נותן ליעף כוח. Do you know how many people complain, "Oy, I have no *koach*. I have no *koach*." You know how common that is? Have you ever heard that? I don't think there's one person in this room whomever heard someone say, "Oy, I have no *koach*." It's such a common thing, it's unbelievable! Young people with no *koach*. What do they say? Maybe he has mono.

Rabosai, get the mono out of your brains. Start to thank Hashem. Start to jump for joy and bring *tovos* upon yourself and live up to your responsibility of the *chassadim* that Hashem has given you and the status that Hashem has given you, and live up to it. You'll get *tovos* in this world and *tovos* in the next world.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If we simply think about the many constant *tovos* and *chasadim* we receive from Hashem, we can become overwhelmed. Consider for a moment our physical health, like digestion, vision, hearing, muscle tone and nerve health, ability to fall asleep and wake up refreshed, or having emotional stability and a happy disposition. Suddenly, most of us face the stark reality that we have not lived up to our responsibility in thanking Hashem for even a tiny fraction of these *tovos*. Or do we ever think about and appreciate having been raised in a healthy and loving family environment, being happily married, or having spiritually and physically healthy children? The list of examples each of us can think of is virtually endless and many are unique to each individual. The bottom line is that the more of these *tovos* we receive, the more we are obligated in our *hakoras hatov* to Hashem and, correspondingly, the more we have to elevate our *Avodas Hashem*. This coming week, when I perform one particular daily *mitzvah*, I will have in mind (*bli neder*) that, "Hashem, I am pledging my allegiance and my *Avodah* to You and I'm dedicating my entire being to You, because I am indebted to You for all Your *chasadim* and *tovos*." Also, instead of flying through *benching*, this week, I will, *bli neder*, slow down and will say it with more *kavana*, at least the first *brocha*. Furthermore, before I daven *shmonei esrei*, I will think about one *tovah* that I am thankful to Hashem for that day, and I will think about it during the *Modim*. And in *zechus* of committing myself to thanking Hashem more and elevating my *Avodas Hashem* in relation to these *tovos*, I will merit to be on the receiving end of more *shefah*, *brocha* and *hatzlacha* from Hakodosh Boruch Hu, Amen!