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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

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THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

PARSHAS KI SAVO

Rav Chananya Chollak founded Ezer Mizion, a medical and social support organization in Israel. A wealthy supporter was visiting him, and they decided to daven Ma'ariv at the Kosel. While at the Kosel, they heard uncontrollable crying coming from an older man. Rav Chollak and his friend watched the elderly Jew in awe and with a feeling of compassion. Together, they decided to help this fellow Jew with whatever he needed, be it medical or financial help. When the elderly man finished his prayers, they approached him with an offer to help. The gentleman thanked them for their kindness but told them that he did not need their help. He said, "Baruch Hashem, I am a blessed man. Everything is wonderful." "Then why were you crying and davening like that?" The elderly man answered that his tenth child had just gotten married the previous night. He had come to the Kosel to thank Hashem for allowing him and his wife to live and participate in this special occasion.

In so doing, this elderly Jew had followed in the ways of King David. King David had prayed with equal intensity, when he asked for Hashem's help as when he had thanked Hashem for his salvation. (In the Spirit of the Maggid by Rabbi Paysach Krohn)

"You are to take of the first, of all the fruits that you bring from your land, that Hashem has given you...." (Devarim 26:2)

Rabbi Avigdor Miller zt"l was known to urge people to notice and express appreciation to Hashem for all the good that Hashem does. If one would stop to think for a moment, one could think of so many reasons to thank Hashem. Thank you, Hashem, that I am alive. Thank you, Hashem, that I have food to eat. Thank you, Hashem, for a comfortable bed and warm blanket. Thank you, Hashem, that I am not barred from doing mitzvos. Thank you, Hashem, that I was not involved in the car accident that I had just passed, and many, many more reasons to thank Hashem. How many can you think of? Try to get a minimum of 25.

There is a mitzvah of bikurim, of bringing the first fruits from each of the 7 special fruits grown in the

Land of Israel, to Yerushalayim. There, they are presented to the kohanim in the Beis HaMikdash. The procedure and procession were very elaborate. When the people bringing the bikurim passed through different cities on the way to Yerushalayim, the city dwellers came

to greet them. Even workers would pause their work to greet those who were bringing bikurim.

The Alshich says that normally a worker is forbidden to stop his work, even just to give a greeting, because the time lost

would be considered stealing from his boss. If so, what is so special about this mitzvah of bikurim that halacha requires the Jewish workers to stop working for a short while, to greet those Jews bringing bikurim?

The Alshich has a similar question on a Midrash in Parshas Bereishis. The Midrash states that the world was created for the sake of that which is called "Reishis" [first]: The world was created for the sake of the nation of Israel who is called "Reishis". Likewise, the world was created for the sake of Torah, which is called "Reishis". Finally, the world was created for the sake of the mitzvah of bikurim, which is called "Reishis". The Alshich asks what is so special about this mitzvah of bringing bikurim that it was given as a reason for the creation of the world?

The Alshich answers that the mitzvah of bikurim contains within it something that is fundamental to being a human being — the obligation for people to express their gratitude, their hakaras haTov. HaKaras haTov is so necessary and vital that the whole world's creation was

actualized just for this mitzvah, which teaches us and trains us in the attribute of gratitude. The obligation to show appreciation to Hashem is one of the basic tenets of serving Hashem. Hashem gives us life, food, and EVERYTHING!! ALL that we have is from Hashem! We must constantly think about and appreciate that. This mitzvah is so special that even workers must stop working for a short while to participate in it.

The Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer [Chapter 7] writes that the reason Adam was exiled from the Garden of Eden was due to his ingratitude. His sin was not merely eating from the Tree of Knowledge. He blamed it on, "The woman you gave me, she gave me the fruit and I ate it." (Bereishis 3:12) As Rashi points out, Adam was being ungrateful. Hashem had presented him with Chava as a gift. Yet, Adam complained that she was the one who had caused him to sin.

Whenever Rabbi Yaakov Neiman zt"l visited Radin, the Chofetz Chaim zt"l would trouble himself to arrange lodging for him. Why? Rabbi Neiman explained that the Chofetz Chaim had to periodically travel to Warsaw to deal with the publishing of his sefarim. In Warsaw, the Chofetz Chaim used to stay in the home of Rabbi Neiman's wife's grandfather. The Chofetz Chaim felt an obligation of hakaras tov, appreciation, to his host. Therefore, he wanted to, likewise, help the man's grandchild. We see the extent of the obligation to feel hakaras tov. Even though the Chofetz Chaim's presence in the grandfather's house was an honor for the

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grandfather, the Chofetz Chaim still felt an obligation to show appreciation to his grandchildren.

From the actions of Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer zt"l we see the extent of the obligation to show appreciation. One of Rabbi Meltzer's illustrious students invited him to his son's bar mitzvah that would be taking place on Shabbos. He invited him as a sign of respect but did not expect Rabbi Meltzer to walk the long distance and up four steep flights of stairs to his home. In the middle of the bar mitzvah, Rabbi Meltzer appeared. Everyone was shocked that he had come. Rabbi Meltzer said that he felt obligated to come because of hakaras hatov. What favor had been done for him that he felt obligated to reciprocate? When Rabbi Meltzer had seen the invitation, he had a flashback to his student's wedding. It seemed as if the wedding had recently taken place, yet now he had a son of bar mitzvah age. Rabbi Meltzer said that this thought made him realize that time flies so quickly. Therefore, he felt that he must immediately do teshuvah while he still could, while he was still alive. Since this occasion inspired Rabbi Meltzer to do teshuvah, he felt obligated to show appreciation to his student. Therefore, he came to the bar mitzvah.

Hakaras HaTov is so fundamental that a person is only considered a mensch when he appreciates all the many favors that Hashem does. No matter what the state of our life is, we are so indebted to Hashem for life itself!

**We must stop to think and show appreciation for all the kindness that others do for us.
When we give the proper appreciation to others, for the favors that they do,
then we can begin to properly appreciate all that Hashem does for us.
(dvar Torah, in part, based on Yalkut Lekech Tov by Yaakov Yisroel Beifus)**

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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