

Good Yom Tov and Chag Sameach, everyone.

Klal Yisrael mourns the tragic and senseless murder of Lucy Dee of Efrat and her two daughters, Maia and Rena, this week. Terrorists shot 20 bullets into their car as they drove in the Jordan Valley over Chol Hamoed. May Hashem comfort the grieving family and bring an end to this terror.

Klal Yisrael also mourns the *petira* this week of Rebbetzin Bruria David, the founding dean of the Beth Jacob Jerusalem Seminary, known as BJJ, where she educated *bnos Yisrael* for more than half a century. She was the only child of Rav Yitzchak Hutner, the venerated Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Chaim Berlin. She was very educated in her own right, with a doctorate in Jewish history from Columbia University, written about the Mara"tz Chajes, and she was the main editor of her father's *Pachad Yitzchak*. Her impact on close to three generations of women will be a lasting testament to her dedication to *Klal Yisrael*. May her *neshama* have an *aliya*.

As this wonderful and inspiring Yom Tov of Pesach comes to an end, and the many *k'zeisim* of *matza*, many *kosos* of wine, and abundant helpings of *maror* and *charoses* fade into distant memories, what is one message of Pesach that we can take with us into the weeks and months ahead?

There is one theme that is an integral part of the Pesach story, *hakaras hatov*, recognition, appreciation and thankfulness for the good in our lives. **Rav Yerucham Levovitz**, the famed *mashgiach* of the Mir Yeshiva from 1911-1936, in his *Daas Chochma U'Mussar*, writes that our responsibility on Pesach to see ourselves "as if" we left *Mitzrayim*. means that we should feel intense personal gratitude as if we ourselves were actually rescued from the Egyptian servitude. As if we ourselves were rescued from the vulgar and aimless culture that that led to nowhere, and as if we ourselves were given the freedom and tools to live a life of principle and purpose, and everlasting and eternal meaning. Because that is the real impact that yetzias mitzrayim had on us.

דעת חכמה ומוסר חלק א מאמר מז: "חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים", שירגיש עצמו באותה בחינה של הכרת הטוב כמו שהרגישו א"ע אותם היוצאים ממצרים. וכל דיני הפסח, הסדר וכו' כל אלו הם האמצעים שע"י יוכל האדם להגיע לדרגה זו שיעשה "מיוצאי מצרים" כמו שנתבאר במאמרים הקודמים.

And this attitude of *hakaras hatov* is supposed to open up for us a new perspective on life; to see life clearly—and to be conscious of the all-encompassing role of God in our lives. **Rav Mattisyahu Solomon**, in his Haggada, *Matnas Chaim*, focuses on the famous **Ramban** at the end of Parshas Bo about *yetzias mitzrayim*. There, the Ramban uses the word מודה multiple times. He understands from here that the Ramban is teaching that the overall purpose of all *Mitzvos* "Zecher l'yitzias Mitzrayim" is to **acknowledge** and **appreciate** Hashem's place in this world...to live lives of *hakaras hatov*. To love life with a realization of לפניך...מודה...we owe our existence to God.

רמב"ן שמות פרק יג טז (פרשת בא): וכן כל כיוצא בהן מצות רבות זכר ליציאת מצרים. והכל להיות לנו בכל הדורות עדות במופתים שלא ישתכחו, ולא יהיה פתחון פה לכופר להכחיש אמונת האלהים. כי הקונה מזוזה בזו אחד וקבעה בפתחו ונתכוון בענינה כבר הודה בחדוש העולם ובידיעת הבורא והשגחתו, וגם בנבואה, והאמין בכל פנות התורה, מלבד שהודה שחסד הבורא גדול מאד על עושי רצונו, שהוציאנו מאותו עבדות לחירות וכבוד גדול לזכות אבותיהם החפצים ביראת שמו: ולפיכך אמרו (אבות פ"ב מ"א) הוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה שכולן חמודות וחביבות מאד, שבכל שעה אדם מודה בהן לאלהיו, וכוונת כל המצות שנאמין באלהינו ונודה אליו שהוא בראנו, והיא כוונת היצירה, שאין לנו טעם אחר ביצירה הראשונה, ואין אל עליון חפץ בתחתונים מלבד שידע האדם ויודה לאלהיו שבראו, וכוונת רוממות הקול בתפלות וכוונת בתי הכנסיות וזכות תפלת הרבים, זהו שיהיה לבני אדם מקום יתקבצו ויודו לאל שבראם והמציאם ויפרסמו זה ויאמרו לפניך בריותיך אנהנו,

*All these commandments are designed for the purpose that in all generations we should have testimonies to the wonders so that they should not be forgotten and so that the heretic should not be able to open his lips to deny the belief in [the existence of] G-d. He who buys a Mezuzah for one zuz [a silver coin] and affixes it to his doorpost and has the proper intent of heart on its content, has already **admitted** the creation of the world, the Creator's knowledge and His providence, and also his belief in prophecy, as well as in all fundamental principles of the Torah, besides **admitting** that the mercy of the Creator is very great upon them that do His will, since He brought us forth from that bondage to freedom and to great honor on account of the merit of our fathers who delighted in the fear of His*

Name. It is for this reason that the Rabbis have said: "Be as heedful of a light commandment as of a weighty one," for they are all exceedingly precious and beloved, for through them a person always **expresses thankfulness** to his G-d. And the purpose of all the commandments is that we believe in our G-d and are **thankful** to Him for having created us, for we know of no other reason for the first creation, and G-d the Most High has no demand on the lower creatures, excepting that man **should know and be thankful** to G-d for having created him. The purpose of raising our voices in prayer and of the service in synagogues, as well as the merit of public prayer, is precisely this: that people should have a place wherein they assemble and express their **thankfulness** to G-d for having created them and supported them, and thus proclaim and say before Him, "We are your creatures."

And this attitude of *hakaras hatov*, when applied universally to life, gives meaning and adds a deeper dimension to everything else we experience during this Yom Tov and, indeed, to all the experiences of our lives.

It's one thing to be free, but it's another to appreciate that freedom.

It's one thing to have a caring God who is invested in us, but it's another to appreciate His ongoing presence in our lives.

It's one thing to have a family, but it's another to appreciate those who are closest to us and the support and love they provide for us.

As the **Mishna in Pesachim** (10:4) teaches us, the Seder is intentionally structured מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח beginning with the bad and slowly arriving at the good. This is modeled after the declaration a farmer made when he brought his first fruits (*bikkurim*)...starting at the beginning with all the hardships, ארמי אובד אבי, and ending with the success ויביאנו אל המקום הזה, finally reaching the goal of being in Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Moshe Feinstein writes that this structure of מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח is there to help us appreciate what we have. If we don't take a moment to think about where we came from, where we would be without all the gifts in life that we sometimes take for granted, then it can be difficult to fully appreciate what we have.

The **Mishna in Avos** (3:14) writes:

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ג משנה יד:הוא היה אומר חביב אדם שנברא בצלם חבה יתירה נודעת לו שנברא בצלם שנאמר (בראשית ט) בצלם אלהים עשה את האדם חביבין ישראל שנקראו בנים למקום שנאמר (דברים י"ד) בנים אתם לה' אלהיכם חביבין ישראל שניתן להם כלי חמדה חבה יתירה נודעת להם שניתן להם כלי חמדה שבו נברא העולם שנאמר (משלי ד) כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם תורתי אל תעזבו:

Human beings are fortunate to have been created in the image of Hashem, and more fortunate that Hashem helped us know and appreciate that fact. Second, the Jewish people are fortunate to be considered God's children, but are even more fortunate because Hashem let us know and appreciate that fact. Finally, the Jewish people are fortunate that we were given the Torah, but even more fortunate that Hashem let us know and appreciate that He gave us this special gift.

The **Netziv**, based on this Mishna, writes that similarly in *Yetzias Mitzrayim*--when God said ולקחתי לכם...-- He not only rescued the Jewish people, He did it in a way they could appreciate their relationship with Him. That is what וידעתם means—not only has He claimed us as His nation—He let us know and appreciate this relationship.

נצי"ב בהעמק דבר שמות כ"ט:ט:מה:עוד הבטחה שידעו ויבינו כי אני ה' אלקיהם. וזהו מעלה גדולה כמש"כ לעיל ו'ז: וט"ז:ו. ובמשנה דאבות תנן חביבין ישראל שנקראו בנים למקום. חביב יתירה נודעת להם שנקראו בנים למקום. פי' אלו נקראו בנים ולא הודיעם הכתוב שכן הוא היה חביב. אבל חביב יתירה מזה הוא שנודעת להם שנקראו בנים למקום. כך הבטיח ה' שמלבד שיהיה כן אלא שהמה ידעו וישכילו כי כן הוא.

Hashem is always there, sustaining us, looking out for us; but we, as limited human beings, do not always appreciate that. We sometimes take things for granted, assuming that the good things are just the way things are. We sometimes lack an awareness and appreciation for what we have.

The **Ramban** writes that our faith and relationship with Hashem is based on *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. God did His part—and it is now up to us to appreciate that experience and integrate its timeless message into our lives...

On Pesach, we are told to think about where we came from and what we have been given, so that we can appreciate all our blessings and thank God for the gift of being part of the Jewish people—fully appreciating our faith and our freedom.

The connection between Pesach and appreciation is epitomized in the song *Dayeinu*. We think of this song as a staple of our Pesach Seder, but it was not part of the Haggados in Eretz Yisrael during the Temple era. It was first mentioned in an appendix to the 9th Century Haggadah of the **Rav Amram Gaon** and did not become a formal part of most Haggados until the middle ages...in dark times of exile..

Why was it added? Why did it become a formal part of the Haggadah?

Let us consider its lyrics and its message. *Dayeinu* breaks down the parts of the redemption from Egypt into 15 separate stages and says that—for each one--we must be thankful. If God had taken us out of Egypt but had not carried out judgment against the Egyptians, we should have thanked Him. If He had given us the Egyptians' riches, but had not split the sea, we should have thanked Him...

When we take a broad view, the song is hard to understand.

If God had taken us out with the Egyptians' riches, but had not split the Sea—*Dayeinu*, would that really have been sufficient?

If God had brought us to Har Sinai, but had not given us the Torah, would that really have been sufficient?

What are we trying to accomplish by breaking down the story of the exodus from Egypt into 15 steps? We focus on each of the steps because doing so helps us appreciate all the miracles that God did for us—individually—appreciating each step for what it was...even before getting to the final destination.

Dayeinu teaches us an important lesson about appreciation. It teaches us that, in life, if we wait for the perfect ending before feeling gratitude, we will never be happy; we will never be thankful, we will never appreciate what we have. But if we train ourselves to appreciate everything, step by step, as we experience things, we can feel happy with what we have, and can live with contentment.

When we are in *galus*, it can be hard to appreciate—in the midst of all the darkness and confusion we experience--all the *bracha* that we do have. *Dayeinu* teaches us to carefully examine and appreciate all the little things that are good, as they are happening. *Hakaras hatov* is about acknowledging all the good, step by step...

Rav Matisyahu Salomon has an interesting insight about *makas kinim* (lice). **Rashi** writes that Moshe Rabbeinu did not strike the ground for *makas kinim* because the earth had saved him by concealing the body of the *Mitzri* he killed, and so he was beholden to the earth.. But consider the fact that the *Mitzri's* death was kept secret for only a single night because, one day later, Dasan and Aviram told Pharaoh what had happened and Moshe was forced to run away. As it turned out, the ground did not end up protecting Moshe Rabbeinu, so why was he *makir tov*?

Rav Matisyahu explains that, for one night, Moshe Rabbeinu slept calmly, feeling confident that his secret was safe. This is the nature of *hakaras hatov*—a person with good *middos* appreciates each and every act of kindness and sees himself as obligated. Because of that single night of peaceful sleep, Moshe felt unable to strike the ground. That is the *midda* of *hakaras hatov*.

Appreciating and recognizing all the good things in life have helped the Jewish people endure the challenges and the dark times over the centuries. In the middle ages, in the bitter *galus*, *Dayenu* helped give people perspective...and appreciate the good things to be thankful for...הכרת הטוב...appreciating all the good.

I heard the following story about *hakaras hatov*: **Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach** was once in the hospital. He made a point of thanking every doctor and every nurse for the care they provided for him, while he was in their care. But he also asked if he could see the woman who went from room to room to water the plants in the hospital rooms. He said that the plants brightened up his room and, therefore, the woman who watered them to make sure that they would stay fresh also needed to be thanked for her efforts. Many people may thank a doctor or a nurse who was helpful to them. But who thinks about the person who waters plants?

And when we are thankful and acknowledge what others do for us, it not only changes the way we think, but also the way we act; the way we respond to others. The **Ramcha"l**, in *Mesilas Yesharim* (Perek 8), when writing about living life with zeal and passion, writes:

ספר מסילת ישרים פרק ח: ואמנם, מה שיוכל להגביר ההתעוררות הזו הוא ההסתכלות ברוב הטובות, שהקדוש – ברוך – הוא עושה עם האדם בכל – עת ובכל – שעה, והנפלאות הגדולות שעושה עמו מעת הלידה עד היום האחרון, כי כל מה שירבה להסתכל ולהתבונן בדברים אלה, הגה ירבה להכיר לעצמו חובה רבה אל האל המטיב לו, ויהיו אלה אמצעים לשלא יתעצל ויתרפה מעבודתו. . .

However, that which may intensify this passion is reflecting on the many good things that the Holy One blessed be He does with a man at all moments and times and the great wonders G-d performs for him from the time of his birth until his final day. For the more one looks into and contemplates these things, the more he will recognize his enormous debt to G-d Who bestows good to him. And he will certainly not be lazy and lax in his avodas Hashem.

והנה אין לך אדם באיזה מצב שימצא, אם עני ואם עשיר, אם בריא ואם חולה, שלא יראה נפלאות וטובות רבות במצבו...עד שאין לך אדם שלא יכיר עצמו חייב לבוראו. ובהסתכלו בטובות אלה שהוא מקבל ממנו, ודאי שיתעורר להודות לעבודתו, כמו שכתבתי למעלה, כל – שכן אם יתבונן היות כל טובו תלוי בידו יתברך, ומה שמצטרך לו ומה שמוכרח אליו, ממנו יתברך הוא, ולא מאחר, אשר על כן ודאי שלא יתעצל מעבוד עבודתו יתברך ולא יחסר לו מה שהוא מוכרח אליו.

There is no human being, in any situation, whether rich or poor, healthy or ill, that does not benefit from wonders and great things in his situation. Everyone has many things for which to thank Hashem in their lives. And when one contemplates everything he receives from Hashem, it will inspire him to push himself in avodas Hashem....

Rav Soloveitchik once said: before revealing to Moshe His "Thirteen Attributes of Mercy," God made a puzzling statement. This statement has been a source of mystery through the ages. Before revealing His love and compassion and kindness and patience, He said:

שמות פרק לג (כג) וַהֲסֵרְתִּי אֶת־פָּנַי וְרָאִיתָ אֶת־אֲחֹרַי וּפָנַי לֹא יֵרָאוּ :

You shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."

Rav Soloveitchik explained this as follows: when we are surrounded by love and warmth, when life is good and we are happy, at that time we don't see God's "face." At such a time, for a variety of reasons, we do not always "face up" to our blessings, appreciate them and value them.

Only later after God's presence has passed, after the *middos ha-rachamim* are gone, only then do we see God's "back." Only then do we begin to understand how lucky we were -- and are no more; how precious our experience was — but now it is gone.

Now, perhaps too late, we learn to cherish and admire what we should have acknowledged earlier. It is only in retrospect, after the good times, so to speak, are gone, that they will be fully cherished and longed for.

What healthy person appreciates his limbs until, Heaven forbid, they are threatened with paralysis or amputation? Who is thankful for his heart until it starts to give him trouble? Who thinks about his lungs until his breathing becomes difficult? And who truly appreciates loved ones when they are still with us? And who really lives with a full realization of God's role in every aspect of our lives, when living in relatively good times.

דברים פרק טז פסוק ח: יְעֲשֶׂה יְיָ מִיָּמִים תֹּאכַל מִצֹּת וּבֵינֵינוּ הַשְּׂבִיעִי עֲצֹרָתָהּ לַה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה: ט

That is what the end days of Pesach are all about... עצרת לה' אלקינו

Stopping; and appreciating... God...Appreciating our loved ones...Appreciating our precious time on this earth...Appreciating all the blessings we have...our history and destiny...

And although we hope for a *לשנה הבאה בארעא דישראל*, we hope for our final destination of *Mashiach*, we can be thankful NOW for all our blessings...

As we think of our beloved relatives at *Yizkor* this morning, as we ponder a past worth perpetuating, we are also a bit sad: we are regretful, and we may blame ourselves, for waiting until we can only see the "back" of those relationships before appreciating them. We may blame ourselves for failing to value them while we were face to face with them. If only we had shown more love, more tenderness, more patience, more gratitude while they were alive, to their very faces, and not only behind their backs, so to speak, when they are irrevocably gone! All of us are guilty of that human failing, of waiting until the revelation of love is past and only then looking after it longingly. We are all guilty of failing to fully appreciate the blessing in our lives when it is there.

So let us make a resolution that when we look around the table at our final Yom Tov meal this Pesach at those we care about, or look around the shul at the friends and neighbors we may take for granted, let us remember that life does not last forever, that those we have with us now will not remain with us indefinitely. So let us cherish them now. Enjoy the present. Be grateful for what we have. Let us learn the lesson of *Dayeinu* and apply it to our lives. As we say *Yizkor* and remember all those who are no longer with us, let us appreciate everything we have now, and all the time we had with those who are no longer with us. And let us be inspired to appreciate all of the blessings in our lives, while we have them...May we learn to appreciate all our blessings that Hashem showers upon us...and may we merit the day of ultimate blessing, with the rebuilding of the *Beis Hamikdash*...*bimhera viyameni*...amen.