

Pursuit of Purpose

INSPIRING A LIFE OF MEANING AND CONNECTION

The Pain of Hakaras Hatov

Based on the weekly Shmuess given by HaRav Shaya Cohen, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshiva Zichron Aryeh

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנחם | הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר | רפאל חיים דוב בן בן-ציון שלום | ר' ברוך בן ר' יהודה | שרה בת ר' יחזקאל | ראובן יוסף בן יהושע | דב בעריש בן פסח צבי לרפואה שלמה יוסף בן מלכה מטל | יעקב אליעזר בן חנה נשא

In this week's Parsha (16:15), Moshe reacts to the rebellion of Korach and says, "I did not take one of their donkeys". The Seforno comments, "Even the normal benefits one gets from his friend, I did not get from them, as I didn't even accept a donkey to borrow. Clearly, my leadership was completely for their benefit and to help them, and it was not self-serving for my benefit as is the norm of all leaders. They are only complaining about my leadership because they are denying the good they received from me".

Upon initial analysis this Seforno is puzzling. How did Moshe Rabbeinu know that their rebellion was rooted in their denying the good that they received from him. Perhaps it was rooted in jealousy. Just because he didn't use his position for any personal benefit, doesn't mean people couldn't be jealous of him. From where does the Seforno deduce that the rebellion was rooted in denying the good?

Moshe Rabbeinu must have understood that if they received a pure good without any ulterior motive, on the one hand it is human nature to feel loved and cared about. However, on the other hand, receiving good with no ulterior motive completely overwhelms a person, as they are now burdened by having to repay this good. This overwhelming obligation created through receiving such good can compel a person to deny the good he received.

Moshe Rabbeinu recognized that there could have been other motivations to this rebellion. However in the context of the pure good that they received, the most logical and compelling motivation based on human nature, is their inability to cope with the burden of the good that they received, leading them to denial. Whereas if Moshe Rabbeinu would have borrowed a donkey, they could have rationalized that his good was self-serving, and that they didn't owe him all that much, which would make the possibility of jealousy equally or more compelling.

We can glean from here a powerful insight into human nature that has ramifications for us and how we relate to others. In terms of ourselves, it is important to focus on the Chesed Hashem in our lives. However we also need to be aware of the fact that at times this can overwhelm us, as we feel obligated. This can cause us to deny the good. It is therefore important that we constantly reinforce and refocus on our obligation to Hashem, as we may subconsciously be compelled to deny His good. This idea would possibly explain why we need to accept upon ourselves the yoke of heaven so often, as we are constantly being pulled to shirk this obligation. In regards to others, we may sometimes be surprised that after showering good upon someone, they respond to us in a cold and callous way. We are left feeling confused and underappreciated. However, from here it is clear that this reaction can be rooted in their need to deny the good in order to remove the obligation they feel towards you. As Reb Aryeh Levine ZT"L used to say if someone mistreated him, "What big good did I do for him that he had to mistreat me".