

# Ki Savo

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The expression is, *kafui tovab*, which means “denier of good.” To the extent that a person does not appreciate the good they have been given, first by God and then by anyone who may have acted as His *sbaliach* to give it, is the extent that they are a *kafui tovab*. Our entire judgment on *Rosh Hasbanab* is with respect to this, so we might as well get a better handle on it while there is time.

*Rashi* refers to this trait in this week’s *parsha*:

*And you shall come to the kohen who will be [serving] in those days, and say to him, “I declare this day to God, your God, that I have come to the land which God swore to our forefathers to give us.” (Devarim 26:3)*

*And say to him: that you are not ungrateful [for all that God has done for you]. (Rashi)*

This is the *mitzvah* of *bikurim*, the bringing up of the first fruits of a person’s crops to the *kohen* in the Temple. The offerer doesn’t just drop off his *bikurim* and leave. He has to make a whole declaration while doing it, called *viduy* (confessional), and it includes what *Rashi* has explained.

Most people would agree that good manners are essential for getting by in life, and that it is crucial to always show gratitude for any good you receive. Sometimes that can mean a sincere thank you to a benefactor, or in the case of God, giving Him praise. But the greatest way to show your appreciation for anything you receive is to use it in the way it was intended by the giver, even if they do not recognize that you are doing this.

*Hakaras batov*—recognition of the good—is everything. It is the difference between

being happy in life or miserable. One of the major factors in divorce is a lack of this trait by one or both spouses, and why it is rising in the religious community as well. In fact, so many divorces could have been avoided if there had been more *bakaras batov* in the relationship, and sometimes they have been avoided once the couple understood this and worked on it.

Essentially, it was the reason why we were expelled from *Gan Aiden*, and what we're supposed to be fixing up over history:

*And the man said, "The woman whom You gave [to be] with me she gave me of the tree; so I ate." (Bereishis 3:12)*

*Whom You gave [to be] with me:* Here he showed his ingratitude. (*Rashi*)

But Adam was only reporting the truth! If anything, he was only passing the buck. What does his statement have to do with ingratitude, and why was that even an issue at such a crucial moment in human history?

## **Shabbos Day**

WHAT IS THE basis of *bakaras batov*? That's easy. Recognizing good, right? Yes, and not exactly, or else there would be a lot less dissension in the world. It's being able to recognize that something *is* good, and once a person does that it is easy to show appreciation for it.

How many times do you hear, "He had it all and blew it!" or, "she had so much and then she ruined everything!"? That basically is what Yirmiyahu said of the Jewish people when he wrote, "*Eichab*." It asks just one question, "How can you, the Jewish people, reach such spiritual heights and know such success and then lose it all and be exiled?"

What's worse is that God warned us, once in *Parashas Bechukosai* and again this week's *parsha*. This makes the question as well, "How can we have so many explicit warnings about so many consequences of straying from God and ignore them and the later, suffer them all?" Today, many Jews don't believe in Torah so it doesn't shake them up. But back then, they did believe, so why weren't they kept in line because of them?

We don't have to search long and hard for the answer to that question because the Torah provides it:

*...because you did not serve God, your God, with happiness and with gladness of heart, when [you had an] abundance of everything. (Devarim 28:47)*

In other words, it's a chain reaction. The first stage is that you stop seeing the good in the good you have, and it becomes unimportant in your eyes. Then you start to feel a sense of lack and a need to go after more in life to make you feel happy. This forces a person to spend increasing less time on spiritual matters while pursuing physical ones.

It's not over yet. This reduced spiritual connection results in an automatic spiritual desensitization that makes it easier to sin and harder to perform *mitzvos*. Eventually a person pushes God and Torah from their heart, until they become so cut off that they have no idea any more of the danger they have created for themselves. And whether one is a believing Jew or not, we are no strangers to danger.

Just like the maintenance of physical health requires a person to consistently manage smaller things like sleep and diet, likewise spiritual health requires a person to maintain smaller things like maintaining an appreciation of the good we have. It's because it is so small that we tend to overlook and forgot about it. . .and eventually suffer the devastating consequences that were destined to result.

That's the way it often works in life. Small, seemingly petty acts that were or weren't performed that resulted in frightening results. Car crashes because someone was too lazy to signal when turning a corner or changing lanes. Deaths from head-on collisions because they checked the messages for a moment while driving, and so on.

But it works both ways. Just as bad things can happen from ignoring small things, great things can happen from paying attention to them. We're about to enter the Ten Days of Repentance. Our lives hang in the balance whether we take it seriously or not. We're going to be evaluated based upon recognition of the good that God has given us, reflected in the way we lived out the previous year.

Now what?

### **Seudas Shlishis**

ONE OF THE amazing things about people is how quickly they can take something, or someone, for granted. The greatest and happiest people in society are not necessarily the richest, because at the end of the day, it is not how much you have that makes you happy, but how much you appreciate what you have.

There are people who can be, and are, happier than the richest people in the world though they barely make ends meet from day to day. Last week I replaced a kitchen tile that had been chipped about 10 years ago (how it happened is another story). I

recently found two spare tiles and finally had the tile replaced after being bugged by it for more than a decade.

It was a small chip, but it was gray hole against a beige tile. Most people didn't notice it, or care about it. But I did, especially every Friday when I washed the floor for *Shabbos*. This Friday I found myself staring at the place where that gray hole used to be, feeling tremendous joy that I no longer saw it. I just couldn't appreciate it enough.

When I began this *dvar Torah*, I did not intend for it to be an advertisement for my latest book, *Half Full: A Book About Contentment In A Discontent World*. Honestly. The truth is, I rarely know at the beginning what I'll be writing about at the end, but having gotten here, I realize this is exactly what they book is about, being able to 1) find the good and, 2) appreciate the good we find.

We learn so much in school about so many things, but never about this. We learn about everything else in the pursuit of happiness, and yet leave out the one thing that can guarantee it. *Hakaras hatov* is not a hobby. It is a life's work because every level we move up spiritual, the greater our capacity to see and appreciate good increases. Like *teshuvah*, it becomes more profound as we become more profound, and we find ourselves getting more pleasure and joy from things that, yesterday, we thought could only make us slightly happy.

"You don't know what you have until you lose it" is an ancient saying from a problem that has become even more intense in modern times. While I had a car, I made sure to never let it get below a quarter of a tank, so that I would never be one of those guys on the side of the highway who thought they had enough gas to make it, but didn't. Eventually I forgot that my car needed gas to run, even though I kept filling it up.

It worked the same way with eating. I used to be one of those people who made a point of never going hungry. If I felt a light feeling in that direction, I quickly quashed it with some kind of snack. Food became only something to enjoy and not part of my survival, and therefore I lost appreciation of it. Even *Yom Kippur* and *Tisha B'Av* weren't so bad because I had so many calories stored away.

That eventually led to a diet, and after a while I re-learned what hunger was like. In fact, there have many times since then when I have felt profoundly hungry, and even simple foods are like a mini-feast. I eat less food than before, but I appreciate more now than ever, which has also served to improve my intention when making *brochos* for the things I eat.

Now I just have to work on a master applying the same approach to the rest of my

life.

### ***Ain Od Milvado, Part 64***

THE KING IS coming. *Elul* means that the King of Kings is going out to the countryside, so-to-speak, to connect with His citizens. And like all good citizens, we're supposed to be excited about this and run to the place that we can see Him which, when it comes to God, means in our hearts.

When it comes to human relationships, they are either love relationships or fear relationships. It's hard to love another human if we fear them. But somehow we're supposed to both love *and* fear God, and the key to that seemingly impossible task is *ain od Milvado*.

Let's work backwards. It's called *Yom Kippurim*, meaning "a day like *Purim*." *Purim* is the day that we recall that both Mordechai and Haman were products of God's will regarding the destiny of the Jewish people. Thus, we end of Yom Kippur declaring no less than seven times that *Hashem* is *Elokim*, meaning that God is responsible for all of it, the obviously Godly parts and the seemingly Godless parts.

*Rosh Hashbanah* begins the process of reacquainting ourselves with this idea and level of *ain od Milvado*, and we are being evaluated on how well we live by it. As the *Gemora* says (*Sanbedrin* 97b), the Hamans of history are there, Heaven sent, to "inspire" us to do *teshuvah* with the help of fear when we need it. But the Mordechais of history teach us that it is all because of God's love for us that He even sends the Hamans in the first place.

And that's how we "go out" to greet the King. Yes, we have fear of God and His judgment. But it is tempered with love of God because we understand that it is only out of His love that He judges at all.