

## WHAT DO I OWE YOU?

### PARSHAS VAERA

Saturday Review of March 13, 1943:

*A traveler for a big publishing house couldn't wait to get to St. Louis, where his oldest friend owned a prosperous bookstore. "Sam," he said to the owner the moment they were alone, "I want you to lend me \$2000." "The answer, Joe," said Sam, "is positively no." "But, Sam," protested the salesman, "In 1929, when Bond and Share broke from 189 to 50, who gave you ten thousand dollars to keep you from being wiped out?" "You did," admitted Sam. "And in 1931, when your daughter Shirley had that tropical disease, who took her down to Florida because you couldn't get away from business, who did, Sam?" "You, my friend, you did." "And in 1933, when we were fishing together, who dove into the rapids and saved you from drowning at the risk of his own life?" "You did, Joe. It was wonderful!" "Well, then, Sam, in Heaven's name, why won't you lend me \$2000 now when I need it?" **"All the things you say are true," said Sam, nodding his head slowly, "But what have you done for me lately?"...***

This attitude is clearly NOT what the Torah teaches us. The Torah teaches us to show appreciation - the *midah* of *Hakaras HaTov*.

❖ **Rashi quotes a Midrash** which explains why Aharon, rather than Moshe, initiated the plagues of blood and frogs: The water had protected Moshe when he was thrown into it, in a basket, as a baby. Therefore, it would have been improper for Moshe to smite the water.

Water is an inanimate object, yet the Torah is teaching us an important lesson. If you benefit from an object, do not cause it any harm. This applies literally and figuratively. If a person showed you kindness you certainly should show your gratitude.

❖ **The Midrash explains**, whenever you benefit from a place, you must show your gratitude by doing something for that place. When Yaakov went to the city of Shechem, (Bereishis 33:18) he

*"[Hashem said to Moshe] Say to Aharon... [and the waters of Egypt], will become blood."  
(Shmos 8:19)*

instituted something for the benefit of the city (either establishing markets or minting coins).

❖ **The Ibn Ezra (Dvarim 8:14) says**, we Jews should never forget we were lowly slaves in Egypt and experienced suffering, hunger, and thirst in the wilderness. Hashem, in his loving kindness, took care of us. Rav Zelig Pliskin, quoting Rav Mordechai Gifter zt"l, explains that this teaches us the depth of gratitude we must have. We must reflect on our total experience- not just the good. We must remember how desperate and uncomfortable we were before we were saved by Hashem. Then we will be able to recognize the extent of the kindness that we received from Hashem and properly express our appreciation to Him. Rabbi Pliskin adds that we must also show the same type of appreciation when people do good for us.

### **Our Attitude is Gratitude!**

*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.*