Jewish Tribune – Ki Savo

**An Attitude for Gratitude**

Ever heard of Antonio Avizorone? Well neither had I until a few days ago, when I read that Antonio had grown up in a small town in Italy. One day he came across a siddur that was translated into Italian. He opened it up and read the first prayer, Modeh Ani, Thank You, Hashem for waking me up in the morning. He was startled. “This is how Jews start their day?” He was so moved and impressed, he decided to convert to Judaism and became Avraham Avizorone.

The Alshich explains that the essence of the mitzvah of bikkurim which features at the beginning of this week’s parsha is hakoras hatov, expressing gratitude. The Alshich continues that hakoras hatov is fundamental to our emunah and observance of mitzvos. That is why the mitzvah was carried out with so much fanfare and the farmer made a public declaration of thanks to Hashem.

Not only does the concept of giving thanks give us our name (Yehudi), the Midrash Rabbah at the very beginning of Bereishis tells us that the world was created for the sake of the mitzvah of bikkurim.

And perhaps that is why we begin each day with words of gratitude.

Sometimes, you come across phrases and ideas in tefilla that are astonishing, and you are surprised that it has taken this long for you to notice it. Well I had that experience recently. Take a look at Modim D’Rabbanan. Modim anachnu loch, we thank you Hashem … al she’anachnu modim loch, for being able to thank you.

Wow. What a remarkable thing to say. But what exactly does it mean?

I will leave the reader to come up with their own ideas but let me share with you a thought which I had. My wife is a therapist and often notes that “hurt people, hurt people”. Hurt people also have a tough time saying thank you. Maybe it is too painful to admit they needed help. After all, as Rav Hutner notes, the word modim both means to thank and to admit. The connection is that when we say thank you for something, we are essentially admitting that we were lacking and needed help.

We therefore thank HKBH for being wholesome, humble and honest enough to be able to thank and to admit that we need others and ultimately Him.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky lived to age 95 and in the last few months of his life was extremely ill and very weak.

A yeshiva bochur named Chaim Goldberger volunteered to spend the nights in Rav Yaakov’s room to take care of the tzaddik’s needs. One morning, Rav Yaakov presented Chaim with a token of his appreciation – Rav Yaakov’s newly published sefer on Chumash.

Chaim was touched by the gift and asked if Rav Yaakov could sign his name inside the sefer. Rav Yaakov’s daughter did not think that his condition would allow for this but said she would ask him.

The following evening, Chaim was delighted to find his gift on the table with the name “Yaakov Kamenetsky” (in Hebrew) inscribed inside in Rav Yaakov’s handwriting.

“Do you know what my father did after you left yesterday?” Rav Yaakov’s daughter told Chaim. “He asked for a pen and paper. Then slowly and carefully, he practised writing his name many times, to make sure that when he would inscribe your sefer, he would do legibly. He feels great hakoras hatov to you and did not want to ruin your sefer by writing in a sloppy manner.

We have numerous occasions to express gratitude every day, not just to others, but to HKBH (think Asher Yotzar, Brochos, Tefilla – both formal and spontaneous) and this week’s parsha, as ever, is a timely and timeless reminder of this.

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