



# GROWTH

## At The

# YOM TOV TABLE

## PESACH

**Special Holiday Double-**  
**Sided Edition!**

### Where's the Gratitude?

*There was once a man who faced tremendous financial setbacks and struggled to support his family. He borrowed great sums of money from several people, but wasn't able to pay back. One day, one of his creditors knocked on his door and offered an ultimatum: either repay the loan in full within the next month, or have everything in the house of that equivalence collected forcibly. For the next 4 weeks, the man tried obtaining the money he needed to repay. Twenty four hours before the due date, he realized that he didn't have enough; he just couldn't do it. He explained the whole situation to his wife, and told her that they needed to leave urgently before their house would get confiscated. They took out their wagon and packed everything valuable that they owned. After strapping the wagon onto the horse and having jam-packed it with furniture and valuables, he stuffed his children among the packages, dressing them up and preparing them for the long, cold night ahead. They stuffed their wagon beyond capacity with everything they needed; there was just one problem. There was no space left for their newborn baby, even on their laps.*

*Desperate, the father strapped the child above the hood, underneath the ropes, trying to stuff the baby there as snug as possible. It wasn't a safe option, but they hoped for the best. Finally, they set out and traveled on the road for several miles, and with every turn and ditch in the road, the ropes loosened as the wagon shook. It didn't take too long before the baby, snug in his scarf and blanket, slipped off and landed in the muddy road as the wagon drove on. The parents hadn't even noticed.*

*Before the baby was about to die, a wealthy man galloping on his horse passed the road and noticed a baby on the ground. The wealthy man, who never had children in his life, was overjoyed. He saved the infant and adopted this child as his own. And so, the baby went from a life of poverty to a life of unbelievable wealth, and he grew up in the rich man's mansion. The child was given the best nurses, the best teachers, and the best butlers.*

*One day, when the boy had turned 20, the wealthy man who had raised him for two decades went out for the day. Upon returning that evening, he was met with a chaotic scene: his servants were fleeing the mansion in terror, frantically screaming and urging him to escape. As he drew nearer to his home, he was confronted by the havoc that had overtaken his estate. One wing was in flames, the other was getting destroyed; glass was*

*shattering everywhere. All his maids and butlers were running for cover. The man was dumbfounded. "Where's my son?" he screamed. "Is he okay?" He ran into the line of fire, only to realize that the one causing all the havoc was none other than the young man himself! He was the one swinging the sledgehammer and setting the mansion on fire. "What are you doing to my house?!" the man exclaimed. Upon hearing the voice of his adopted father, the boy descended into a manic rage, pursuing him with the intent to kill.*

*By sheer luck, the man narrowly escaped.*

How would you title this boy in the anecdote above? As an ingrate, most likely. "That's what you do to the man who did so much for you?" anyone would say. "Unbelievable!! How dare you lay a finger on the man who raised you and picked you up from a muddy floor, where you could have died?! Where's your decency? Where's your *hakarat hatov*?!"

R' Avraham Yosef, after sharing this anecdote, asked: Isn't this story identical to that of Moshe Rabbenu? He, too, was stranded in the river as a 3-month-old baby, where he could have died, and Pharaoh raised Moshe in his palace for around 20 years. Yet, Moshe came back and struck Pharaoh with plagues that wreaked havoc upon Egypt!

To clarify, this question does not justify the wicked Egyptians and their actions; it merely addresses why, out of all the Jews, was Moshe picked? Hashem could have chosen someone whose child had been slaughtered for Pharaoh's blood bath to have gone and punished Pharaoh! Out of the hundreds of thousands of Jewish men in Egypt, Moshe was the least qualified for one simple reason: he owed the most *hakarat hatov* to Pharaoh! He never got whipped by Pharaoh once, he never had to work a day in his life, and he ate from Pharaoh's table. Why did Hashem insist on the seemingly least qualified candidate? What happened to basic gratitude?

In fact, this question becomes strengthened upon further analysis. When Hashem appeared to Moshe at the burning bush and finally sent him off on the journey of the Jews' redemption, Moshe proclaimed that he couldn't go just yet. After all was said and done, Moshe explained that he was unable to go back to Egypt and save the Jews before having received permission from his father-in-law, Yitro. Although there

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were millions of lives on the line, Moshe, out of his immense *hakarat hatov* for all the kindnesses of Yitro, felt bound to his father-in-law and wouldn't leave without his consent – even at the expense of Bnei Yisrael's bitter exile.

In fact, we know that Moshe even displayed *hakarat hatov* to inanimate objects! Moshe couldn't perform the first three plagues himself because the first two required hitting the Nile River, which saved his life as a baby, and the third mandated hitting the ground, which helped bury the Egyptian man he had killed, thereby saving his life. In Moshe's high sensitivity towards appreciation, he couldn't even bring himself to show "indecent" in any way towards the earth or a body of water.

Consider another incident: Years later, when Klal Yisrael would be commanded to wage war with Midyan after they made thousands of Jews stumble into sin and brought a plague upon the Jews, Moshe didn't lead the war himself. Since Midyan had hosted and benefited him when he fled Egypt, he felt *hakarat hatov* to the place in which he had stayed, and therefore sent Pinchas to lead the war and punish Midyan, rather than doing so himself.

The question begs now more than ever: what happened to the *hakarat hatov* owed to Pharaoh? Clearly, the concept of gratitude is so fundamentally important that it even applies towards inanimate objects and for seemingly small nuances. Moshe was extra sensitive of *hakarat hatov* even when the benefit brought about was minimal and temporary, yet he had no qualms when it came to Pharaoh, who did so much more for him to actually *deserve* his *hakarat hatov*! And even if Egypt had to pay for its actions, why is it any different than Midyan, where Moshe delegated the duty due to his personal token of appreciation? Why did Hashem specifically want ONLY Moshe to punish Mitzrayim?

R' Yaakov Mizrahi shared a beautiful answer, illustrated by the following account.

*There was once a man who was owed a considerable sum of money, but found himself stuck; his debtor hadn't paid him back, and he didn't know how to approach the situation. He definitely couldn't hound the fellow, but he didn't want to lose the money. He wasn't sure exactly how to remind his debtor to repay the loan with the right sensitivity. He consulted a rabbi for advice, and the chacham responded: "Do you owe anyone money?"*

*Thinking the rabbi might have misunderstood his dilemma, he explained: "No, rabbi, he owes me money..." The sage nodded his head. "I understand, but do you owe anybody money?" The man responded that he wasn't sure, and that he would look into it. He looked into his finances, and indeed found that he did indeed owe someone money. Immediately, he took care of it and made sure to repay the individual in full. Within 24 hours, his debtor gave him a call and asked on his own, "Do I owe you money?"*

*The man was astonished. Just like that, it was all resolved, with no need for confrontation.*

Chazal teach us that Hashem runs the world with His characteristic of *middah k'neged middah*, "measure for measure." Sometimes, through certain life-experiences, we merit to get 'wake-up calls' from our Creator and work on improving or fixing a certain aspect in life [Note: only for ourselves; it's not anyone's place to judge others, G-d forbid...].

With this in mind, we can see the story unfold. Pharaoh did something horrible. He didn't just subjugate and enslave a people; he did so to the *Jewish* people. Not too long before, Egypt was condemned to suffer a 7-year famine. Just to put things in perspective, think for a moment what Egypt would look like after 7 years of a ravishing famine. There would be nothing left to Egypt – no kingdom, no economy, no society, no people, no palace, no life. Egypt would have completely been wiped out... without the help of Yosef HaTzaddik. Yosef helped Pharaoh and his people not just to survive, but to flourish and become the world-power of the time. Yosef had even monopolized all the money, cattle, land, and people of Egypt; they all came to be under the ownership of the Egyptian government. He not only kept Pharaoh alive; he had accumulated unimaginable wealth for the Egyptian Throne.

And then, Pharaoh had the audacity to subjugate Yosef's family to backbreaking slavery and torture. Pharaoh had acted as the biggest ingrate, lacking even the most simplistic level of decency! The *last* people he should have ever imagined enslaving was the Jewish People!

Thus, there was no better way to wake up Pharaoh, *middah k'neged middah*, than to have sent Moshe Rabbenu – to give him a taste of his own medicine. Pharaoh was put in a position to think: *Moshe, you? Out of everybody? You ate on my table! You ingrate!* That was when Pharaoh could have a light-bulb moment. *Stop, think! Did you do the same thing? Did you repay evil to someone who you ate from?*

This explains why Moshe was the perfect candidate – the *only* candidate – to punish Pharaoh. Of course, it goes without saying that *hakarat hatov* is among the most important concepts in Judaism. But Hashem puppeteers the world *middah k'neged middah*, and Pharaoh was supposed to have gotten the message right away and free Bnei Yisrael immediately. Ultimately, though, Pharaoh chose to play it the hard way.

*Let us stand in sharp contrast to the ways of Pharaoh by putting hakarat hatov on a pedestal, as well as viewing events in life with more depth to truly grow from each experience...*

*"We want the shofar with no cracks, the etrog with no blemishes, and the beautiful menorah that has pure oil. Yet, on Pesach, we dare to 'break out matzah,' to discuss and search for the broken pieces." (R' YV Jacobson)*