

Parashat Noach 5784, 2023:

*Hakaret Hatov?*

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**ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו, כל בני ישראל בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ**

The post-Flood world should have been one wherein mankind felt humbled before the Almighty, as their forebears had so recently survived near-universal decimation. As such, they should have demonstrated *hakaret hatov* (manifest gratitude) to Him for His great *chesed*. Instead, we are met with this disturbing *pasuk* regarding the Tower of Babel: “And they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make ourselves a name, lest we be scattered [by G-d] upon the face of the entire earth.’” (*Sefer Bereishit* 11:3-4, this and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

At this juncture “Hashem descended to see the city and the tower that the sons of man had built.” (11:5) As Rashi (1040-1105) notes, the expression, “the sons of man had built,” is very peculiar:

But the sons of whom else [could they have been]? The sons of donkeys and camels? Rather, [this refers to] the sons of the first man (*Adam HaRishon*), who was ungrateful and said (*Sefer Bereishit* 3: 12): “The woman whom You gave [to be] with me [she gave me of the tree; so, I ate]”. These, too, were ungrateful in rebelling against the One Who lavished goodness upon them and saved them from the Flood.

In sum, Rashi views the actions of the *Dor HaHaphlagah* (Generation of the Great Dispersion) as paralleling *Adam HaRishon*'s behavior when asked by Hashem, “Have you eaten from the tree [of knowledge] of which I commanded you not to eat?” (3:11) Rather than taking personal responsibility for violating the one *mitzvah* entrusted to him, Adam denied his guilt and blamed G-d for having given him Chava; and Chava, in turn, for giving him the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. The Ba'al HaTurim (Rav Ya'akov ben Asher, 1270-1340) supports this perspective

when he notes that Adam's reaction personifies the *pasuk* (verse), "He who repays evil for good—evil will not depart from his house." (*Sefer Mishle* 17:13)

Unfortunately, Adam, and the *Dor HaHaphlagah*, repaid Hashem's beneficence with ingratitude. Years later, the *Dor HaMidbar* (the Generation of the Desert) sadly repeated this pattern over and over again. As Tosafot in *Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah* 5a state: "Therefore, [Moshe] labeled them [the Jewish people as practitioners of] *kafui tovah*, since they refused [to give thanks to Hashem for all of His kindness,] that is, they refused to recognize the good that He had done for them in all these matters." The Torah Temimah (Rabbi Baruch Halevi Epstein, 1860-1942) expands upon Tosafot's gloss and suggests that *kafui tovah* is far more than a failure to recognize the good that someone else has performed for you; instead, it is a conscious rejection of the kindness—as if it never had taken place.

The Abarbanel's (1437-1508) analysis of *kafui tovah* complements Tosafot's explication:

The vilest of all *middot* is *kafui tovah*. This is the case, since when a person recognizes [and gives voice] to the benefit he has received from another individual, he adds to the strength of the benefactor to [continue to] provide him with overflowing kindness, with a full sense of desire and in complete goodness. When, however, the recipient of manifest kindness consciously withholds the requisite recognition of the good that is his benefactor's due, he weakens his supporter's strength and aspiration to demonstrate further kindness to him. (*Commentary on the Torah, Sefer Shemot*, chapter 29, this, and the following translations my own)

The Abarbanel cites Rav Ammi's words in *Talmud Bavli, Ta'anit* 8a in order to reinforce his exposition of our term: "Rain falls only for the sake of Men of Faith (*ba'alei emunah*) [that is, trustworthy people]," as it is said, "Truth will sprout from the earth, and righteousness will look down from heaven." (*Sefer Tehillim* 85:12, Talmud translation, *The Soncino Talmud*) In the Abarbanel's estimation, *ba'alei emunah* are the people who practice *hakaret hatov*. As such, he reasons that those who engage in *kafui tovah* are the same people that our Sages identified as

individuals steeped in brazenness and temerity (*azut panim*), and the ones who cause droughts. This idea is intimated in the text, “And the rains were withheld, and there has been no latter rain...you refused to be ashamed.” (*Sefer Yirmiyahu* 3:3) Little wonder, then, that the Abarbanel maintains:

Everything proceeds as our Sages said: “During the times that the Jewish people fulfill the will of the Omnipresent [that is we guard the Torah and verbalize our *hakaret hatov*], we add to the power, so to speak, of that which is Above. As the text says, ‘Now, please, let the strength of Hashem be increased, as You spoke...’ (*Sefer Bamidbar* 14:17) [Conversely,] during the times that the Jewish people fail to fulfill the will of the Almighty, we diminish the power, so to speak, of that which is Above. As the text states, ‘You forgot the [Mighty] Rock Who bore you; you forgot the G-d Who delivered you.’” (*Sefer Devarim* 32:18)

According to Rashi, Tosafot, the Abarbanel and the Torah Temimah, *kafui tovah* is a reprehensible behavioral trait that manifests itself in a brazen repudiation of the good which either Hashem or an individual has done for us. Its remedy, therefore, must be the polar opposite action, *hakaret hatov*, wherein we demonstrate heartfelt gratitude to our benefactor through words and deeds. With Hashem’s help, may we master this *middah* and fulfill *Shlomo HaMelech*’s stirring counsel: “Kindness and truth shall not leave you; bind them upon your neck, inscribe them upon the tablet of your heart; and find favor and good understanding in the sight of G-d and man.” (*Sefer Mishle* 3:3-4) *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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