

# GRATITUDE - A HEREDITARY TRAIT?

*by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky*

Marriage: The tie that binds. It is the building-block of any nation and the foundation for its growth. Yet Jewish law restricts whom the children of Abraham may marry - even among those who share their own faith. The Torah tells us that neither an Ammonite nor Moabite male may marry into the direct descendants of Abraham.

True they may marry other converts, but they can never enter a direct union with descendants of Klal Yisrael.

The Torah tells us the reason for this restriction. "On the fact that they (Ammon) did not greet you with bread and water as you left Egypt and for employing (Moab) Bilaam the son of Pe'or to curse you" (Deuteronomy 23:4-5)

One must truly wonder: according to the Torah, anyone is allowed to become a Jew. It requires acceptance of the mitzvos and the responsibilities that Judaism entails. Yet the Torah it seems, has great reason to disallow males who descend from the nation of Ammon and Moab from marrying direct descendants of Abraham. Surely it is solely not the refusal of bread and water or the employing of a sorcerer to curse the Jews. After all, the Egyptians enslaved the descendants of Jacob, nevertheless, Egyptian converts may marry Jews - albeit after three generations of waiting. Even converted descendants of our enemy Esau may marry the children of his nemesis brother Yaakov. What then is the inherent evil trait of Ammon and Moab that disallows their union with Abraham?

**A brilliant young student entered the portals of Yeshiva Torah Voda'ath in the 1940s. Hailing from a distinguished rabbinic family which instilled within him a creative mind, he questioned some of the arcane dormitory rules and restrictions that were imposed with boys of less character in mind.**

But rules, said the dormitory counselor, are rules and he wanted to have the young student temporarily expelled until he would agree to conform. An expulsion of that sort would have left the young man (who lived out of town) no alternative but to leave the Yeshiva.

They brought the matter before the Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky. "True," he said, "rules are rules, but I owe this young man something." The dorm counselor looked stunned.

"In the 1800s this boy's great-grandfather helped establish the kollel (fellowship program for married

Torah scholars) at which I would study some decades later. I owe his family a debt of gratitude. If the rules disallow his stay in the dormitory, then he will sleep in my home."

An essential trait of the Jewish people is gratitude. The children of Avraham are instilled with it, whether it be gratitude to Hashem or his mortal messengers. However, it seems that Ammon and Moab have no sense of gratitude. Their forebear was Lot, Avraham's nephew who raised Lot and was saved him during a vicious war. Avraham taught Lot the spirit of hospitality and helped establish him in life. Yet Lot's children, Ammon, and Moab, showed no gratitude. In fact, they were eager to destroy Avraham's children - both physically and spiritually. There can be no fusion of those two traits.

We can handle enemies. When an Edomite or Egyptian accepts the faith he can become a true partner in every aspect that bonds Jews - even marriage. But in the harmony of the Jewish family, in the building the future of our nation, there is no room for ingrates.

Moabite women however, are exempt from the ban. It seems that they had no control over the decisions. How interesting it is to note that the Moabite convert, Ruth, the woman who showed tremendous gratitude toward her mother-in-law was the precedent-setting example that lifted the ban on Moabite-women converts.

Those actions of gratitude and understanding ultimately led to the birth of King David the forebear of Moshiach.

***Dedicated in Memory of their beloved father and zayde R' Fishel Yitzchok ben R' Shmuel Zisblatt, by his children and grandchildren and the entire Zisblatt Family  
Good Shabbos!***

Copyright © 1997 by [Rabbi M. Kamenetzky](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

If you enjoy the weekly Drasha, now you can receive the best of Drasha in book form!  
Purchase **[Parsha Parables](#)** - from the Project Genesis bookstore - **[Genesis Judaica](#)** - at a very special price!

The author is the Dean of the [Yeshiva of South Shore](#).

Drasha is the e-mail edition of FaxHomily, a weekly torah facsimile on the weekly portion which is sponsored by ***The Henry and Myrtle Hirsch Foundation***

**Books by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky:**

