

# DON'T FORGET TO SAY THANK YOU

*by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch*

In its discussion of foreign peoples who may convert to Judaism, the Torah excludes Ammonites and Moavites, but allows Edomites and Egyptians, under certain conditions. "You shall not reject an Edomite, for he is your brother; you shall not reject an Egyptian, for you were a sojourner in his land. Children who are born to them in the third generation may enter the [Jewish people]."

(Devarim/Deuteronomy 23:8-9). Rashi (R' Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040-1105, the commentator par excellence, whose commentary is considered basic to the understanding of the text) notes that Egyptians are allowed to convert and eventually marry naturally born Jews because they accepted Ya'akov Avinu (Jacob our Patriarch), his children and grandchildren into Egypt during the famine. Therefore, in our appreciation, they may convert.

We should have appreciation for their giving us refuge!? The collection of the Egypt's abundance during the most prosperous years of the Egyptian Empire was under the watchful eye of our forefather Yosef (Joseph). The aforementioned seven years of famine came to a conclusion five years early in the merit of the arrival of Ya'akov Avinu. How did they reimburse us for those kindnesses? They turned us into slaves, beating us and forcing backbreaking labor upon us. They exacerbated the work conditions by refusing to supply straw for the bricks while maintaining the production quota. They slaughtered our sons, embedding them in the bricks and tossing them into the Nile. How can we be obligated to have any semblance of appreciation to this morally corrupt nation?

Michtav Me'Eliyahu (collected writings and discourses of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1891-1954) of London and B'nai Brak, one of the outstanding personalities and thinkers of the Mussar movement) explains that, although the years spent in Egypt were pain filled, that does not detract from their gracious act, no matter how mean spirited they were throughout. Yes, the Torah tells us, the obligation for appreciation extends that far.

But we should not be surprised, continues Rabbi Dessler. Our lifelong mission is to foster our G-d consciousness and emulate His ways and we see from the Torah that G-d's own "sense of appreciation" is wondrous. He "safeguards the covenant and the kindness for those who love Him and those who observe His commandments, for a thousand generations" (ibid. 7:9). This is for our performance of His mitzvos (Divine commandments), acts which are for our benefit but do nothing for Him (as it is impossible for finite humans to do anything that benefits the infinite, omnipotent Master of the Universe). Similarly, when G-d tried, through Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah) to bring us back to

His service, the Prophet relates, "The word of the L-rd came to me, saying, 'Go and cry in the ears of Yerushalayim saying: Thus says the L-rd, I remember in your favor, the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, when you went after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.'" (2:1-2) In truth, when the Jewish nation followed G-d out into the wilderness, they had just witnessed the most fantastic array of miracles and knew G-d is all powerful and looking only for their best interest; they were also motivated to follow Him to ensure their survival! Nevertheless, even though G-d has no inherent need for followers, G-d paints this decision as a generous leap of faith, expressing appreciation for their trusting Him. If G-d blesses us with kindness as a response to our actions which do nothing for him, how much greater is our obligation to one who DOES bestow goodness upon us?

But, more so, concludes Rabbi Dessler, in today's day we find ourselves more challenged to reach out and grab the mitzvah opportunities. But knowing G-d is reaching out to us, generously showering us with His goodness in response to our genuine embrace of Him and His mitzvos - chessed (acts of kindness), prayer and Torah study opportunities that surround us and concretize our connection to G-d, acts which benefit our lives - make it much easier for us to reach out and take hold of the extended hand.

Have a good Shabbos!

Please forward your questions for Rabbi Avruch to [RabbiAvruch@MilwaukeeKollel.org](mailto:RabbiAvruch@MilwaukeeKollel.org)

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