

NATIONAL CONSEQUENCE

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Expressing appreciation is central to the proper social workings of families and society. As an interdependent, integrated entity, we must be able to communicate our understanding of the value imparted when we are given a gift, a helping hand, a bit of advice, a word of encouragement, or a listening ear.

This is in contrast to the animal world where interdependency is a by-product of nature and instinct. The lion's den, the ant hill, or the beehive function as perfectly effective societies because Hashem has ordered them to be so. The worker bee, ant, or lioness, do their jobs because the law of the jungle dictates such behavior, whether or not they are acknowledged and thanked for doing so.

This is not so with the human species. We are told that *"if not for the fear of government* (meaning: potential societal punishment) *man would swallow alive his fellow man"*. Humankind must be taught and trained in the necessary decencies of social expectations and behaviors.

The most basic unit of human interaction is the parent - child relationship. It is essential for the continuity of the human race and framed in basic, instinctual feelings. A mother and father are protective of their child far beyond the basic necessities for survival. In many instances, the parent cares and protects far beyond what the child's behavior would dictate.

In such instances, parents must be trained, against their instinctual tendencies, to show "tough love" for their more difficult and wayward children. However; these same feelings of love and protection are not instinctual in the child - parent relationship.

Children are easily able to ignore the primacy that parents have, and should continue to have, in their lives. Under the rationalized guise of independence and individual expression, children can be exceptionally hurtful and uncaring toward their parents. They too must be trained to understand the value imparted to them from parents who raised them, cared for them, stood beside and behind them, and imparted to them the ultimate gift of life. They too must be trained to express their appreciation for all that the parents have gifted to them.

In last week's Parsha, Moshe reviews the Ten Commandments. As everyone knows, the fifth commandment is to "honor one's father and mother". The inclusion of this law on the Luchos shows the importance that Hashem placed upon this fundamental relationship, as well as underscoring that such a relationship is not necessarily instinctual. (e.g. the Torah does not command us to sleep,

breathe, or eat.)

The relationship between the Bnai Yisroel and Hashem is often described as that of a parent to a child and a child to a parent. It reflects the total dependency that a child has upon his parent and the total dependency that the nation has upon Hashem. The natural tendency of the child and the nation is to deny their dependency upon the parental figure. However, as the child must be taught to understand the primacy of the parent in his life, so too must the nation be taught to understand the primacy of G-d in their lives.

Expressing appreciation begins with understanding. Our expectations for appreciation are far greater when relating to a maturing or adult child than with a younger child. The maturing child has the ability to understand how important parents are, and to recognize the fundamental gift of life that they have imparted. The same is true for the Bnai Yisroel. Hashem had a far greater expectation that we would express our appreciation (through our adherence to the Torah) after we had matured than when we were just starting out.

The 40 years in the desert were our years of national maturation. The daily manifestations of G-d's caring in the setting of the desert emphasized our total dependency upon Hashem. This assaulted our natural tendency toward independence and forced us to acknowledge our dependency and our responsibility to express appreciation. As Moshe said good-bye to his beloved nation, he explained to them their fundamental dependency upon G-d, and forewarned them about their tendency to deny it.

Pasuk 17, Chapter 9 in this week's Parsha states, *"...be careful that you do not say to yourself, 'It was my own strength and personal power that brought me all this prosperity'".* Moshe forewarned us that our personal and national downfall will come about when we do not give Hashem His due credit.

Regardless of personal education, training, initiative, ingenuity, national unity, effort, military might and intelligence, our successes are the direct result of Hashem's ongoing direction and intervention, and it is incumbent upon us to express that understanding and appreciation.

As the Bnai Yisroel were poised to enter the Land of Israel, Moshe directed their attention to the realities of being the "Chosen People" living in the "Promised Land". The bottom line was cause and effect, action and reaction. As pointed out, the experience of the desert taught them basic dependency upon G-d. This was most evident with the Mana that fell daily from heaven and in the fact that their shoes and clothing hadn't worn out.

These experiences were the foundation for the nation having absolute confidence and faith in Hashem regarding the future battles for the Land. However, His protection came with a price tag: expressing their appreciation by following His Torah and His Mitzvot, and removing from Eretz Yisroel all idolatrous practices and influence. The Land was and is a special place where the symbiotic relationship between G-d, Land, and People is manifest in the dirt, stones, fruit, and rainfall.

By keeping the ways of Hashem, all of nature will serve us faithfully. Children will be born whole and healthy; the farms will provide for a strong economy; our cattle herds will grow and prosper; and the Land will flow with milk and honey. We will be victorious in battle and our military successes must be attributed to G-d, and only G-d.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that we merited our successes. If the past was any indication of the future, then we were destined to sin and lose faith, and to "test" G-d. G-d will then want to punish us; yet, His promise to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, will guarantee His forgiveness. Hashem simply wants us to show our understanding and appreciation by listening to His laws and reaping the benefits of His natural law.

The second paragraph of *Shema*, which is recorded in the sixth Aliya, captures the essence of Parshas Ekev. A closer look at this paragraph, and the entire concept of cause and effect, suggests that the Eretz Yisroel is ruled by a system more intimate than reward and punishment. We don't just receive reward and punishment. As judiciously mandated through our actions, we put into effect a consequence that is as natural to the workings of the universe as nature itself. Through keeping the Torah we empower a system to function, as intended, in the service of humankind. If we do not fuel the system through our adherence to Halacha, then the natural system grinds to a halt resulting in famine and destruction. Moshe presented these conditions to the Bnai Yisroel as they prepared to occupy the land. Appreciation through devotion, commitment, and faith is the only thing that G-d asks in payment for His love and protection.

"...what does Hashem want of you? Only that you remain in awe of G-d, that you follow all His paths, love Him, and serve Him with all your heart and all your soul." (10:12)

Good Shabbos.

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