

SAY THANK YOU

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Saying thank you is one of the basic courtesies of human interaction. Though elementary and straightforward, it is often forgotten or neglected. In saying thank you, we are acknowledging that we are dependent upon the goodness and consideration of others and that we are not completely in control over events and even of our own decisions in life.

In traditional homes, both Jewish and general, some of the first words that children are taught are "thank you," "please" and "may I." In fact, these words are the building blocks of civilized behavior and of being able to get along peacefully and gently in this world. But because of our egotistical nature, as children and later in life as adults, we resent the necessity of having to use these words and to thereby acknowledge our dependence upon others.

It is always ironic that we expect expressions of gratitude from others but are very sparing in granting them ourselves. If this be true, as I feel it is in families and among other relationships, it is also true regarding our relationship to our Creator. The Torah refers to the lack of gratitude as a cardinal sin of personality. It is based in arrogance and a false assessment of one's place in the world. Therefore, Judaism stresses humility, for only in humility can one expect to find expressions of gratitude.

The Torah reading of this week begins with the necessity for expressions of gratitude for the blessings of a bountiful harvest and the first fruits of the agricultural year. These fruits were to be brought to the Temple in Jerusalem as an offering to the priests serving there and as an acknowledgment of appreciation to God for having provided this bounty to the farmer.

There is no question that the farmer invested a great deal of effort, sweat and toil in bringing his crops to fruition. Because of this effort and the investment on the part of the farmer, there is a temptation that he will view these new fruits as an entitlement. For after all, he was the one who devoted the time and effort necessary to produce them. There is a danger that he will forget that there really are no entitlements in life and that one has to say thank you for everything that is achieved, though ostensibly we have labored to achieve this much desired goal.

Rather, it is incumbent upon the farmer to thank his Creator for the land and the natural miracles that occurred daily in the production of food, grain and fruit. As the old year winds down, we should all remember to say thank you for life, goodness and family, and pray that the new year will bring us more of the same.

Shabbat shalom
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