

# Mussar HaTorah

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Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

19 Iyar, 5768 Vol. 9, No. 4

Parashas Bechukosai

“AND I WILL REMEMBER FOR THEM THE COVENANT OF THE EARLY ONES ...” (VAYIKRA 26:45)

**Hashem will remember  
the merit of the  
generation that left Egypt**

AFTER RELATING THE TROUBLES AND PERSECUTIONS that will befall the Jewish people in their exile amongst the nations, the Torah tells us that Hashem will remember the covenant He made with the Patriarchs, and the covenant of the “early ones” whom He took out of Egypt. According to Rashi, this latter treaty is the one made with the twelve tribes. The Ohr HaChayim elaborates that this could refer to the *pasuk* in Yirmiyahu (2:2), “So says Hashem (to Israel), ‘I remember for you the kindness of your youth, your love as a bride, following Me out into the desert, into an unsown land.’” This would mean, explains the Ohr HaChayim, that Hashem will remember the merit of the generation that left Egypt and followed Him into the wilderness and thereby entered into a covenant with Hashem.

According to this interpretation, the pact with Hashem was not a conventional agreement where two parties agree on a mutually accepted commitment. In this case, one side—the Jewish people—performed a kindness for the other party—Hashem—and without any negotiation, any text or statement, the second party is bound by a covenant to help the first party from persecution. What kind of treaty is this? No words, no documents, not even a handshake, and suddenly Hashem has a huge obligation towards us. How are we to understand it?

**The Torah concept of  
chesed extends far  
beyond**

Gratitude is a concept that we perceive but a tiny glimmer of its full, blinding radiance. We tend to confine it in our minds to a mental “balance sheet” of favors owed and repaid. But the Torah concept of *chesed*, and the obligation of one who has received a *chesed* from another, extends far beyond, as the Midrash says (Shmos Rabbah 4:2), “If one opens his door to his friend, that friend owes his life to him.” B’nei Yisroel’s *chesed* to Hashem of going into the wilderness, however small and insignificant in the face of the overwhelming ocean of miracles and wonders performed by Hashem for them, creates a burden of gratitude tantamount to a covenant in the depth of its commitment.

**I am required to emulate  
this quality as well**

The cornerstone of human character development is the idea of emulating Hashem. When we seek to learn about *chesed*, compassion and gratitude, the ultimate role model is Hashem Himself. Our lesson here is the extent of commitment created by *chesed* done for us, even by those who “owe” us far more in return. Reb Yisroel Salanter, though, went one step further: he tried to do *chesed* to those who wronged him. His source for this incredible righteousness—Hashem. Reb Yisroel pointed out that Hashem constantly bestows kindness upon us; even at the very moment we sin and rebel against Him, He continues His flow of life giving sustenance and health to us. If Hashem is kind to those who wrong Him, reasoned Reb Yisroel, then I am required to emulate this quality as well (Nesivos Ohr p. 115). Needless to say, this type of conduct has potent effectiveness in healing interpersonal rifts, wounds and bitterness.

Our goals determine our actions. If our role models are self centered, petty human beings, then we can expect our behavior to mirror theirs. If, however, we set our sights on the lofty standards of Hashem’s attributes, our conduct will reflect and befit the holiness of the *neshomah* within us. We will feel the true extent of gratitude, and show kindness to all in a manner that cannot help but increase peace and friendship among our people.