

BESIDES BEING IRRATIONAL, THIS IS THE POLAR OPPOSITE OF A TORAH APPROACH.

Every member of *Klal Yisrael*, whether he is a *Kohen* who traces his lineage to Shevet Levi, a *Yisrael* or a *ger tzedek*, is known as a *Yid* or *Yehudi*. The Chiddushei Harim teaches a powerful explanation for this phenomenon, one that also helps shed light on why so many struggle nowadays in the pursuit of happiness.

Cognizant of the fact that Yaakov Avinu would have 12 *shevatim*, Leah had assumed that each of his four wives would give birth to three sons. When her fourth son was born, she named him Yehudah to express her gratitude to Hashem for receiving "more than [her] portion."

A *Yid* is known by this name, *Yehudi*, so that he should go through life, says the Chiddushei Harim, knowing that everything Hashem gives him is more than he deserves. In other words, Hashem doesn't owe us anything. We owe *Him* everything.

One of the great challenges of contemporary living is the pernicious influence of the culture of entitlement. To a large extent, our parents and grandparents lived lives driven by a sense of deep responsibility. Today, sadly, a sense of entitlement reigns supreme. So many of us subconsciously feel entitled to have virtually perfect lives, and be surrounded only by people who always know what to say to us and exactly what to do for us. The moment we hit a bump in the road, and something doesn't go precisely as we want, we become dejected and frustrated.

If only we lived a life according to the principle that Hashem doesn't owe us anything, and everything we have — including the clothes we wear and the food we eat — is an undeserved gift, the pursuit of happiness would be much easier.

This helps explain a question about our celebrating Chanukah as well.

We rejoice over the fact that *neiros* lit in the time of our ancestors burned eight days. Yet we haven't merited to light the *Menorah* in the *Beis Hamikdash* for close to 2,000 years! In the greater scheme of things, one would have thought that the miracle of having a lit *Menorah* at the time of *nes Chanukah* would be overshadowed by all these centuries when we didn't merit to light *neiros* in the *Beis Hamikdash*.

However, when one recognizes that every single thing we receive is a gift from Hashem, and that we are not entitled to anything, focusing on when the *neiros* did burn instead of when they didn't is fully understandable. (Based in part on a teaching of Harav Tzvi Meir Zilberberg).

This applies to the way we perceive our interpersonal relationships as well.

Clearly in every type of relationship, the more we focus on giving instead of focusing on what we are getting, the stronger and more productive that bond will be. How much more so when at stake is our relationship with our parents. One of the most devastating causes of the pernicious influence of American culture is that many Jews today perceive their parents in a negative way. This is fueled in part by a dangerous psychological theory that encourages people of all ages to blame virtually every problem they have on the assumption that, while their parents were loving and caring, they were "insufficiently attuned" to their children's emotional needs.

Besides being irrational, this is the polar opposite of a Torah approach.

This is how the author of the *Sefer Hachinuch*, one of the *Rishonim*, explains how we should approach the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av va'eim*:

It is fitting for a person to acknowledge and return kindness to people who were good to him, and not be a vile ingrate, because that is an evil and repulsive attribute before Hashem and man. He should take to heart that the father and the mother are the cause of his being in the world, and hence it is truly fitting to honor them in every way and give every benefit he can to them, because they brought him into the world, and also exerted themselves on his behalf when he was little...

We have an obligation to fill our hearts with gratitude toward our parents simply because, thanks to them, we are in this world. Even if all they did was give birth to us and feed us when we were infants, that is sufficient reason for enormous gratitude.

In other words, we owe our parents everything. They owe us nothing.

If we only inculcated this fundamental principle in our hearts, so much unnecessary *agmas nefesh* would be avoided, and so much more happiness would be achieved. ■