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Forever seems like a very long time, yet a Moavite or Amonite is forever forbidden from marrying into the Jewish people. The Torah cites the following reasons: Moav and Amon hired Bilam to curse the Jews and did not offer us bread and water when we passed through their land. Does this sanction not sound a bit harsh; is there no way for these people to right their wrong?

Ramban explains that Amon and Moav, the children of Lot, should have felt gratitude for all that Avraham Avinu had done for their father. Avraham rescued Lot from the four kings and it was in Avraham's *zechut* that Lot and his daughters escaped the destruction of *Sedom*. A nation that lacks this basic human attribute may not join with our people. Rav Yerucham Levovitz, in *Da'at Torah* points out that every nation has intrinsic characteristics that are passed down from one generation to the next. Jews for example, are known for being *bayshanim*, *rachmanim*, and *gomlei chasidim*. Therefore these two nations cannot mix with ours as their nature is antithetical to our essence.

The *middah* of *hakarot hatov*, explains Rav Ezechai in *Birkat Mordechai*, is a fundamental *middah* of the universe. Kindness is not something to be ignored. Indeed a little further in the *parashah* we find the prohibition against oppressing an Egyptian

because we sojourned in their land. Imagine! The same Egyptians who tortured us, who threw our babies into the Nile! Nevertheless, our interactions with them must appropriately reflect our appreciation for their hospitality. Although they themselves forgot the kindness of *Yosef Hatzadik*, we can never forget that they gave us a place to stay. Notes Rav Ezechai, the contrast imparts a powerful lesson in Torah *middot*.

One underpinning of a thankless attitude is the desire to live without being bothered, observes Rav Goldstein in *Sha'are Chayim*. When one ignores his surroundings and is complacent within his own sphere, he loses opportunities to express thanks. We are all guilty of this as we are continually surrounded by the endless beneficence of Hashem's bounty, yet at times we neglect to convey our recognition of this infinite blessing. Chodesh Elul is a fitting time to notice and appreciate the goodness and grace that Hashem showers upon us as well as the generosity that others share with us. *Elul* is a wonderful time to pick up the phone or send a quick message to someone thanking them for a kindness done. Thus, we can approach the *Yamim Noraim* with feelings of appreciativeness and gratefulness for HaShem's boundless mercy and commit ourselves to use our blessings for the good of others. ■