



CHESED: THANK YOU OR THANK GOD?

If my friend is gracious enough to give me a twenty-dollar bill as a present, my gratitude would appropriately be directed at him. Yet, if I happen to find a twenty-dollar bill on the street, to whom should I direct my gratitude?¹

For those who aren't particularly spiritual or religious, finding money on the street may engender positive emotions, but gratitude would likely be absent, since there is nobody to thank. For those who are religious, however, such fortunate experiences could lend themselves to being grateful to God. Dr. David Rosmarin and colleagues² hypothesized that since religious individuals have more opportunities to feel and express gratitude, they consequently are able to reap the positive benefits associated with gratitude — such as increased feelings of happiness and life-satisfaction — above and beyond the advantages associated with gratitude in general.

Taking the twenty-dollar bill

example one step further, we can add an additional layer of reflection. When my friend gives me a gift or performs an act of kindness for me, in addition to the gratitude toward him or her, shouldn't my gratitude be supplemented with an additional gratitude toward God? Consequently, every benefit accrued socially should also be attributed to God's providence and beneficence, leading to a double feeling and expression of gratitude.

An interesting manifestation of the blurring of interpersonal and Divine gratitude emerges from a vague verse in Ruth, as analyzed by Professor Mordechai Cohen, in his article "Hesed: Divine or Human? The Syntactic Ambiguity of Ruth 2:20."³ After Ruth tells Naomi about how Boaz treated her with such generosity, Naomi blesses Boaz to God, "who has not abandoned *His* kindness with the living *and* with the dead" (Ruth 2:20). The ambiguity is as to whether Naomi is saying that Boaz should be blessed because he, Boaz, did not abandon

his kindness with the living or the dead, or if Boaz should be blessed, and God should be blessed, as God did not abandon His kindness to the living and the dead. If the former, the blessing is targeted just to Boaz. If the latter there is a dual blessing, one toward Boaz for being the actor of the kindness, and one toward God for orchestrating the kindness.

In his article, Professor Cohen outlines the varying opinions of the medieval commentaries, analyzes ancient translations, and surveys the modern scholarship. In the end, he suggests that the text is deliberately ambiguous, highlighting a "theological significance essential to the book of Ruth, which reflects a synergic relationship between human and divine kindness" (p. 34). The obscuring of the line between human and Divine kindness stems from the recognition "that it is God's providence that makes human efforts of *chesed* successful, even possible" (p. 35), and that the

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