# "You didn't build that": A Morally Mature Theology of Thanksgiving <a href="mailto:raphael.magarik@gmail.com">raphael.magarik@gmail.com</a> // Jack Flamholz Memorial Yom Iyun

#### Leviticus 14:34

When you come to the land of Canaan, which I am giving to you as a possession, and I place the plague of leprosy on a house of the land of your possession...

ויקרא יד:לד כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל אֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם לַאֲחֻזָּה וְנָתַתִּי נָגַע צָרַעַת בְּבֵית אֶרֶץ אֲחֻזַּתְכֶם:

## Vayikra Rabba 17:6

"And I place the plague of leprosy"—Rabbi Hiyya taught: is it *good* news for them that plagues come on them?! Rabbi Shimon son of Yohai taught: When the Canaanites heard that Israel were coming, they arose and hid their money in their houses and fields. The Holy Blessed One said: "I promised their ancestors that I would bring their descendents into a land full of all goodness, as it says, 'And houses full of all goodness [which you did not fill]' (Deuteronomy 6:11)." What does the Holy Blessed One do? God sends an eruption of plagues on this person's house, and he tears it down and takes out the treasure.

ויקרא רבה י״ז:ו וְנֶתַתִּי נָגַע צָרַעַת, תָּנֵי רַבִּי חָיָא וְכִי בְּשׁוֹרָה הִיא לְהֶם שְׁנְּגָעִים בָּאִים עֲלֵיהֶם. תָּנֵי רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָאי כֵּיוָן שְׁשְׁמְעוּ כְּנַעֲנִים שְׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל בָּאִים עֲלֵיהֶם עָמְדוּ וְהִטְמִינוּ מָמוֹנָם בַּבָּתִים וּבַשְּׁדוֹת, אָמַר הַקְּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא אָנִי הִבְטַחְתִּי לַאֲבוֹתֵיהָם שְׁאֲנִי מַלְנִיס אֶת בְּנֵיהֶם לְאֶבֶיך מְלֵאָה כָּל טוּב, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דברים ו, יא): וּבָתִּים מְלֵאִים כָּל טוּב, מָה הַקְּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא עוֹשֵּׂה מָגֵרָה נָגַעִים בָּבֵיתוֹ וְהוּא סוֹתָרוֹ וּמוֹצֵא בּוֹ סִימֵא.

### **Leviticus Rabbah 17:2**

A person says to his friend, "Lend me a measure of wheat," and he says, "I don't have it"; "lend me a measure of barley," "I don't have it"; "a measure of dates," "I don't have it." A woman says to her friend, "Lend me a sieve," and she says, "I don't have it"; "lend me a sifter," and she says, "I don't have it." What does the Holy Blessed One do? God sends an eruption of plagues on this person's house, and since they have to remove all of their implements, everyone see and says, "Didn't that person say they had nothing? Look how much wheat there is here, how much barley there is here, how many dates there are here—the house is plagued with such bad plagues!" Thus Moses warned Israel: "When you come to the land of Canaan."

ויקרא רבה י״ז:ב׳ אָדָם אוֹמֵר לַחֲבֵרוֹ הַשְּאִילֵנִי קַב חִטִּים וְאָמֵר לוֹ אֵין לִי, קַב שְׁעוֹרִים, אֵין לִי, קַב הְּמָרִים, אֵין לִי. אָשֶּׁה אוֹמֶרֶת לַחֲבֶרְתָּהּ הַשְּאִילִנִּי נָפָה, הִיא אוֹמֶרֶת אֵין לִי, הַשְּאִילִנִּי כְּבָרָה, וְאוֹמֶרֶת אֵין לִי, מָה הַקְּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא עוֹשֶׁה מְגֶרֶה נְגָעִים בְּתוֹךְ בֵּיתוֹ, וּמִתּוֹךְ שֶׁהוּא מוֹצִיא אֶת כֵּלָיו הַבְּרִיּוֹת רוֹאוֹת וְאוֹמְרוֹת לֹא הָיָה אוֹמֵר אֵין לִי כְּלוּם, רְאוּ כַּמָּה חִטִּים יֵשׁ כָּאן, כַּמָּה שְׁעוֹרִים, כַּמָּה תְּמָרִים יֵשׁ כָּאן. לְוַוֹט בֵּיתָא בְּאִלֵּין לְוִוּטִיָּא... לְפִיכָךְ משֶׁה מַזְהִיר אֶת יִשְּרָאֵל: כִּי תָּבֹאוּ אֵל אֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן.

## Kil Yakar (Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz, d. 1619) on Leviticus 14:34

The essential reason [for house leprosy] is miserliness, as our sages teach from the verse, "and the one whose house it is shall come forth"—the one who designates his house for himself and does not benefit others with it (Bavli Arakhin 16). For this reason, God gave him as an inheritance a house full of all goodness: to test him, whether he would do good from his house also to others, for, "Mine is the silver and gold, says God" (Haggai 2:8). And

everything that a person gives to others, it's not her own that she gives, rather it comes from the Table on High, and that why she acquired it. Thus it says, "When you come to the land of Canaan, which I am giving to you as an inheritance"—for "not with their sword did they conquer the land, and their arm did not save them" (Psalms 44:4), rather the right hand of God did so, to give them the estate of nations. And there is no room for the miserly to say, "My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth" (Deut 8:17), for behold, it is God who gives you strength and inheritance, and if so, it is logical that you must give to your people's poor. And if you... are among the miserly, who ascribe their property to themselves, then I will place the plague of leprosy on "a house of the land of your property"—that is, on a place which you regard as your own property as if you grabbed it with your own strength...

כלי יקר על ויקרא יד:לד עיקר הטעם בעבור צרות העין, כמ"ש רז"ל (ערכין טז) מן פסוק ובא אשר לו הבית זה שייחד ביתו לו לעצמו ולא היה מהנה ממנו אחרים, כי לבעבור זה נתן ה' לו לאחזה בית מלא כל טוב לנסותו אם ייטיב מביתו גם לאחרים כי לי הכסף והזהב אמר ה' (חגי ב ח) וכל מה שהאדם נותן לאחרים לא משלו הוא נותן כ"א משלחן גבוה קא זכי ליה לכך נאמר כי תבואו אל ארץ כנען אשר אני נותן לכם לאחזה כי לא בחרבם ירשו ארץ וזרועם לא הושיעה (תהלים מד ד) כ"א ימין ה' רוממה, לתת להם נחלת גוים. ואין מקום לצרי עין לומר כחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה. שהרי ה' הוא הנותן לך כח ואחזה, וא"כ דין הוא שתתנו משלו לעניי עמו ואם לא תשמעו בקול דברו ותהיו מן צרי העין המיחסים האחוזה אל עצמם אז ונתתי נגע צרעת בבית ארץ אחזתכם. ר"ל במקום שאתם מיחסים האחזה לכם כאילו אתם האוחזים בה בכח ידכם, לכך נאמר מיד ובא אשר לו הבית. זה שייחד ביתו לו לעצמו לומר שבכחו ועוצם ידו בנה ביתו. או יאמר אחזתכם זה שייחד ביתו לו ואינו מהנה ממנו לאחרים ובא אשר לו הבית זה שייחד ביתו לו כפשוטו ממש כי שניהם מדברים מצרות העין הנמשך ממה שתולה האחזה בעצמו.

Claudia Card, "Gratitude and Obligation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 25.2 (1988) The idea of a debt of gratitude seems paradoxical. If that for which gratitude is due was neither for sale nor a mere loan but was in some sense gratis, what sense does it make to feel indebted for it? How can one repay such a debt without transforming the transaction into one in which gratitude has no place? What kind of debt is this?... The debtor paradigm works best for relatively formal obligations. It presents problems for informal and personal relationships... Contractual bonds are not the only ethically significant interpersonal ties... A debtor may have cause to be grateful for the extension of credit. Does the debtor then owe two debts? Moral bookkeepers may say so and consider that paying interest takes care of the second debt. [But] then there seems no basis for gratitude...

A bond more coherent with gratitude and friendship than that of the debtor is that of a trustee or guardian not under contract. Owing gratitude is more like having accepted a deposit, than like having taken out a loan. In taking out a loan, I am extended credit. My position is inferior to that of my creditor, in that I am subject to non-reciprocal constraints—at least sensible creditors so arrange matters. By contrast, in receiving a deposit, I already have credit. I do not have to prove myself; my judgment is relied upon. Deposits are a source of pride. As a beneficiary, I can regard myself as the "trustee" of another's good will or concern. I cannot literally return another's good will, but I can reciprocate it... In paying a debt, I discharge that obligation. I am no longer bound to my former creditor; that special relationship is concluded. By contrast, living up to informal obligations tends to confirm, or reaffirm, the special relationship involved rather than to bring it to a close. As I live up to my obligations to friends and associates, we become closer friends and associates. Our ties deepen, become stronger...