

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

MIZMOR L'TODAH

Finding Joy

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

A psalm of thanksgiving, call out to Hashem, everyone on earth. Serve Hashem with gladness, come before Him with joyous song... For Hashem is good, His kindness endures forever, and from generation to generation is His faithfulness.

מזמור לתודה הריעו לה' כל הארץ: עבדו את ה' בשמחה. באו לפניו ברננה... כי טוב ה' לעולם חסדו. ועד דר ודר אמונתו.

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word



רננה is tefillah with praise and thanksgiving to Hashem (1 Melachim 8:28). Dovid Hamelech states (Tehillim 3:9), "Lashem hayeshuah al amcha birchasecha selah. Salvation is for Hashem, Your people must bless You forever." Rashi sees a powerful connection between the beginning and the end of this statement. "It is His obligation to save His servants and His people," writes Rashi, "and it is the obligation of His people to bless and praise Him." In other words, it is like a pact, a covenant of reciprocal obligations. Why does Hashem want to save His people? Because when He does, they will praise Him for it. Therefore, **by being prepared to sing His praises for everything He will do for them, they become deserving** of having those things done for them. The key to everything is praising and thanking. That is what He wants.

Of course, anyone with the slightest bit of sophistication in the concept of the divine understands that **Hashem does not need our gratitude and praises** in the way people desire to be thanked and praised. All Hashem wants is to bring humankind, and Klal Yisrael in particular, ever closer to Him so that they will rise to ever higher levels of spirituality and holiness. When we thank and praise Him, we are propelled upward, and that is exactly what He wants (Adapted from Praying With Fire 2, Forward, by Rav Mattisyahu Salomon).

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Reason to Celebrate

The daily miracles Hashem provides for us stir us to thank Him with joy.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Grateful for Every Day

In the time of the Beis HaMikdash, people would bring a korban תודה, a thanksgiving offering (Vayikra 7:12) when they survived a life-threatening situation, such as a serious illness, a sea voyage, a desert journey, or captivity (Berachos 54b). During the offering of this sacrifice on the Temple altar, the Leviim would sing the joyful Psalm 100, מזמור לתודה (Shavous 51b). Since the Temple's destruction, in lieu of the sacrifices, מזמור לתודה is included in the morning prayers on weekdays.

But why do we recite מזמור לתודה every day if it was sung only when a person "miraculously" survived a life-threatening situation? The Siddur She'lah and Ya'avitz explain that no day goes by without man experiencing a "miracle." However, the recipients of these miracles do not always recognize them (Nidah 31a). Therefore, we recite מזמור לתודה to acknowledge the miracles inherent in every day.

The Talmud states, "Who is rich? The one who appreciates what he has" (Avos 4:1). Happiness comes from appreciating and consciously enjoying what one already has. Sometimes that awareness awakens only when a person nearly loses what he has, for instance, when he experiences a potentially life-threatening situation. Once a person understands the precious value of his gifts from Hashem, his joy overflows; he cannot contain his feelings of gratitude. Therefore, he invites everyone on earth to join him, to "call out to Hashem" and recognize the goodness He constantly bestows. With this consciousness, a person naturally fulfills the commandment to serve Hashem with happiness—עבדו את ה' בשמחה—for the sense of being showered with Divine gifts day in and day out can arouse no other emotion but joy.

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

In Perspective

Old Mr. Newhouse lived alone, next door to Michael Levine and his family. Mr. Newhouse often called Michael to come and help him with some household chore or repair, and Michael tried his best to respond graciously, even though the requests often interfered with his own busy agenda. One day, Mr. Newhouse called Michael and said, "I know you have been looking for a job for awhile. My nephew works at an accounting firm and they



are looking for someone with just your experience to take a management position. Are you interested?" Of course, Michael was very interested, for his finances were in woeful shape and the new job paid nearly twice what his old job had paid. It would be the difference between struggling and having plenty.

He took the job and prospered. From then on, every opportunity he had to lend

Mr. Newhouse a hand was grasped with pure joy. He even called upon his children to offer their help to their neighbor. "What can we possibly do to repay the man who's done so much for us?" Michael thought. "It's our greatest pleasure to show him our appreciation!"

When we can look around and see evidence of a benefactor's largesse, it's easy to feel overflowing gratitude. The more we focus on the good that surrounds us, the more we perceive Hashem's infinite largesse, from which naturally flows the desire to praise and thank Him.

Try This!

▶ Pinpoint one thing you are extremely grateful for and spend a few minutes truly relishing this gift. Recall the joy you felt upon first receiving this Divine gift, and let it resonate in your heart. Reconnect to this feeling when you say the words "עבדו את ה' בשמחה".

Did You Know

▶ **The Eternal Song**

The Midrash (Vayikrah Rabbah 9:7) teaches, "In the future, all of the karbanos yachid, the individual animal sacrifices, will be nullified except for the korban todah, which will not cease; all of the tefillos will be nullified, but hoda'ah, praise, will not cease." For this reason,

a person should say מזמור לתודה melodiously, as an expression of joy. One does not say מזמור לתודה on Shabbos or Yom Tov (the thanksgiving sacrifice is not offered then), on the days of Pesach (the thanksgiving sacrifice is not offered on Pesach because of the prohibition against chametz which applies then), on Erev Pesach or on Erev Yom Kippur (Siman 51:9, Mishneh Berurah, Ibid:21).