



Praying WITH Passion

GIVING MORE MEANING TO OUR TEFILLAH - ONE WEEK AT A TIME ISSUE NO. 154

Tefillah Focus Of The Week: **שמנה עשרה** *The Need to Thank*

ועל כלם יתברך ויתרומם שמך
מלכנו תמיד לעולם ועד. וכל
החיים יודוך סלה, ויהללו את שמך
באמת. הא-ל ישועתנו ועזרתנו
סלה. ברוך אתה ה', הטוב שמך
ולך נאה להודות.

The Gemara (*Baba Kama* 92b) illustrates the extent of our obligation for *hakaras hatov* with the concept that a person should not throw a rock into a pit of water from which he draws. This is so even though water is an inanimate object that has no feelings, and has no intention to help us. *Michtav M'Eliyahu* (Volume 3, Page 98)

explains *Chazal's* profound lesson: We need to show thanks not because the giver was inconvenienced on our behalf, or because he intended to perform a service for us. Rather, we give thanks solely because we were the recipient of good. This alone should cause our hearts (cont. P. 2)

Meaning:

The simple translation of the prayer

For all these, may Your Name be blessed, and exalted, our King, continually forever and ever. Everything alive will gratefully acknowledge You, Selah! And praise Your Name sincerely. O G-d of our salvation and help, Selah! Blessed are You, Hashem, Your Name is "The Beneficent One" and to You it is fitting to give thanks.

Theme:

An essential concept of the prayer

Why Thanks?

We give thanks to Hashem because it is spiritually strengthening for us to recognize the good we receive in this world.

Insight:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Benefit and Belief

We end the blessing of thanks with the words "and to You it is fitting to give thanks." We are thanking Hashem because giving *hakaras hatov* is the right thing to do.

Word to the Wise: Meaning within the word

We conclude the first section of *Modim* by saying, ועל כלם יתברך, "For all these (the open and hidden miracles, the goodness and blessings, etc. that we previously mentioned in *Modim*) may Your Name be blessed...". The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 31a) explains that when a person pains his parent, Hashem 'says', "It is good that I did not dwell amongst them because had I lived there, I too would have been hurt." Why does hurting a parent cause Hashem to 'say' that He does not desire to live in such a home? A person who pains his parent shows that he does not feel a debt of gratitude to his parents, perhaps because he feels that his parents helped him to satisfy their own needs rather than to truly assist him. Therefore, the child may then think that he does not owe Hashem gratitude either, since Hashem's kindness does not "cost" Him in any way.

Rav Dessler (*Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Volume 3, Page 99) clarifies that the mitzvah to honor parents is not based on the parents' sacrifice for their children's best interest. Rather, children "owe their lives" to their parents solely because they brought the child into the world and the child receives many benefits from them, even when providing those benefits may also be in the parents' best interests. Similarly, we thank Hashem because we owe our everyday existence to Him and we derive great benefit from our ability to live.



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שְׁמֹנֶה עֶשְׂרֵה The Need to Thank

(INSIGHT cont.)

to swell with positive feelings toward the giver. We should feel compelled to give back even more than we received, starting with a heartfelt expression of thanks.

Our consummate service to Hashem is built on the foundation of *hakaras hatov*, recognizing the good which we receive from Him. In fact, this concept is alluded to in the first of the Ten Commandments, “I am your G-d that took you out of Egypt from the house of slavery.” Our belief in Hashem is connected to the arousal of our feelings of thanks for our redemption from Egypt and its slavery. (*Ibid*, Volume 1, Page 50)

Visualize:

Images that bring the prayer to life

The Billionaire's Gift

The struggling Steinberg family could barely pay their monthly bills. They knew

every trick in the book to stretch a dollar, and never bought a new item until the old one was utterly unusable. But Yaakov Steinberg's Uncle Shmully, lived an entirely different existence. He was the founder of a successful real estate empire. He was, in fact, a billionaire. One evening, Uncle Shmully was sitting at a family wedding with his nephew Yaakov. From their conversation, he began to get a picture of Yaakov's stress-laden life. Two days later, the Steinberg's discovered, to their shock and amazement, a \$50,000 check in the mail. A note said, “Use this to get yourselves on your feet. All the best, Uncle Shmully.” It was a turning point for the Steinberg family, and all the progress they made from that point in every area of their lives could be traced back to the opportunities opened by Uncle Shmully's check.

From the point of view of Uncle Shmully, the gift was an amount he could easily afford to give. It was, in his world, “pocket

change.” Yet for the Steinbergs, the money was the elixir of life. They could pay their debts, buy a car that didn't need repairs every other week, invest a little money and start their lives over with a relatively clean slate.

Similarly, Hashem's store of goodness has no limits. Nothing He gives us diminishes Him in any way. Our gratitude arises from the great benefits, experiences and opportunities for reward and elevation that life gives us.

Try This!

- ▶ Everything we receive, even from friends and family, ultimately comes from Hashem. The people and events that bring things into our lives are only His agent. Think of something you especially value, and imagine it coming directly from Shomayim into your life, when you say ולך נאה להודות.

Did You Know

▶ A Severed Bond

Last week's “Did You Know” explained that if one talks during the *chazan's* repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrei* — *chazaras hashatz* — the condemnation is harsher than any mentioned in all of *halachah*. Why does this sin merit such strong disapproval?

Rav Matisyahu Salomon (*Sefer Matnas Chaim*, pages 192-194) explains that the level of condemnation reflects the message being expressed by the person who is engaged in conversation. He shows his great disrespect for prayer and demonstrates his innermost feeling that it is meaningless to him, for it is pre-empted by a conversation with his friend. Such behavior severs the unique bond that prayer forges between man and his Creator. It is this severed relationship that is “too great to bear,” for who can bear life without a connection to Hashem!