

Darkei HaChizuk

ארבעה צריכים חיזוק (ברכות לב:) - שיתחזק אדם בהם תמיד בכל כחו (רש"י)

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Two Parts to Hoda'ah

Chanukah just passed. The mitzvos special to Chanukah are *l'hodos u'lehalel*, to express thanks and praise, as we mention in Al HaNissim: "and they established the eight days of Chanukah to express thanks and praise. *Hoda'ah* and *Hallel* are two different concepts.

There are two sub-categories in *Hoda'ah*: 1) *modeh al ha'emes*, admitting the truth 2) expressing thanks, having *hakaras hatov*.

On Chanukah, we first admit the truth that we received wonderful things on Chanukah. The Yevanim wanted *l'hashkicham Torasecha u'leha'aviram meichukei retzonecha*, "to cause them to forget Your Torah and to remove them from [fulfilling] Your statutes." The Chanukah miracle is that the Yevanim's decree was nullified and we merited having the Torah and mitzvos, and even *chukim*, and we can learn Torah and keep the mitzvos.

So first we acknowledge the truth that this was no coincidence, nor was it nature fulfilling its course, it was only the direct result of *rachamei Shamayim*, Heavenly mercy: *b'rachamecha ha-rabbim!* This is one part of *Hoda'ah*, like an admission that litigants make in court — when they declare that they speak the truth. The second part of *Hoda'ah* is expressing thanks. After we understand and know that we received many kindnesses from HaKadosh Baruch Hu, we are obligated to say thank you for it.

What does it mean saying thank you? When someone receives a favor from another person, he has to give something back in return, to help him with whatever he needs. But how can we return a favor to Hashem? In the Shir HaYichud, we say: *Mah ashiv Lach, v'hakol Shelach*, "What can I return to You, for everything is Yours." And in Hallel, we say: "How can I repay Hashem for all His kindnesses to me?" The only way we can *k'viyachol* pay back Hashem is to do His will, *retzon Hashem!* Performing good deeds, being *osek* in Torah, doing *chesed*, and fulfilling all the mitzvos is His will.

This is what *Hoda'ah* obligates us to do. Acknowledging and admitting the truth that we merited *chasdei Shamayim*, Heavenly mercy, obligates us not only to say "thank You," which is not enough, but also to be *osek baTorah* and fulfill all the mitzvos. That is our thanks.

The Berachah of Thanks in Shemoneh Esrei

In Shemoneh Esrei, in Modim, we say: "We thank You, for it is You Who are Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers for all eternity, our Rock, the Rock of our lives, the Shield of our salvation are You from generation to generation." This is acknowledging the truth that we acknowledge and admit that the truth is that "You are" the Rock of our lives, and whatever we have is not an act of nature; it is all due to Hashem's great mercy.

Then we continue "we shall thank You and speak Your praise." This is expressing thanks — for our lives, our souls, for Your miracles — we say thank you for everything. At first we admit the truth that we know the truth and believe with complete faith that everything is in Heaven's hands. And this obligates us to perform *retzon Hashem*.

This is the *Hoda'ah* that we are obligated on Chanukah: to admit the truth that all the miracles were Heavenly miracles; that there was no coincidence and they were not just nature running its course. Furthermore, we must understand that this obligates us to do Hashem's will and to serve Him with all our hearts.

In Modim we mention "for our lives that are given over in Your hands." Every moment of life is *chasdei Shamayim*, Heavenly mercy. Chazal (*Bereishis Rabbah* 14:9) say the following on the *pasuk*, "*Kol haneshamah tehallel Kah*": for every single breath a person takes, he must thank and praise the Creator. Even one breath is not nature, it's Heavenly mercy. There is no such thing as nature!

Explanations of Modim D'Rabbanan

In *chazaras hashatz* we say *Modim d'Rabbanan*, which includes a request: "Please continue to give us life and sustain us..." At first we say, "We thank You, for it is You Who is Hashem our G-d and the G-d of all flesh, Our Creator, Creator of the universe." This is admitting the truth that we acknowledge and admit that everything is in Heaven's hands.

Then we continue: "Blessing and thanks for Your name... for giving us life and sustaining us." Two concepts are mentioned here, similar to the two concepts mentioned in the *Shehecheyanu* blessing: "for giving us life" and "for sustaining us." What are these two concepts?

Simply speaking, the explanation is that “*Shehecheyanu*” is thanks for life itself, but sometimes a person can be alive but not functioning; he might be paralyzed. This is why we say “for giving us life” and “for sustaining us.” We are alive and we have the energy to function and do whatever we need to do.

Then we offer up another *tefillah*: “so too, give us life and sustain us... to fulfill Your statutes and do Your will and serve You with a complete heart.” In Modim, we do not make any such request — there, we are only expressing thanks, as we explained previously, we are admitting the truth that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is the Rock of our lives. And then we say thank You for our lives and our souls... The entire *berachah* is solely thanks: “All living souls will praise You... it is pleasant to give thanks to You.” While there is not even one request in this *berachah*, in Modim D’Rabbanan, there are requests — for *ruchniyus*, that we should be *zocheh* to fulfill Your statutes and do Your will and serve You with a complete heart. This is the *madreigah* of serving with a “complete heart.”

We finish off the *berachah* by saying “*al she’anu modim Lach*,” which the *mefarshim* explain (*Sotah* 40a) that we are thanking Hashem for being able to thank! Not everyone is able to express thanks. For example, if someone cannot speak, he cannot express thanks verbally. So we are saying thank You for the very fact that we can express thanks.

Realize That Everything Is a Heavenly Gift

As mentioned, we are thanking HaKadosh Baruch Hu for keeping us alive and sustaining us — **we are expressing thanks for life itself, and for being active. We know and it’s clear to us that everything in life is a *chesed* from Hashem; it doesn’t happen automatically, nor is it nature running its course, it’s “You have given us life.” HaKadosh Baruch Hu gives us life. And it’s “and You have sustained us” — the energy You’ve given us and all the actions we can perform are also *chasdei Hashem*!** Life itself and the ability to be active are two separate *chassadim*. Every single action is a *chesed* from Hashem.

It is a great *madreigah* to know this, remember this, and believe this, because a person doesn’t notice it naturally. The *Chovos HaLevavos* writes the reasons for this in the introduction to *Shaar HaBechinah*: When a person is born, he is still small and doesn’t have the intelligence to understand that someone is sustaining him and giving him ability to function. It’s not possible for him to have *emunah* yet because he is so young and doesn’t have intelligence. Afterward, he slowly matures, but his youthful habits remain.

Attaining this knowledge and clarity — that it should be clear that everything is a *chesed* from Hashem — is a great *madreigah*. It’s not a simple feat.

One must think and think until he attains this understanding. It not something that happens overnight, it takes time and thought — much thought — to know that nothing is nature, but it’s rather all a *chesed* from Hashem, and the fact that I must express my thanks obligates me to keep all the mitzvos. If I wouldn’t, it would be a crime, it would be a lack of *hakaras hatov* and lack of understanding. Besides for the mitzvah involved, and the concept of Gehinnom and Gan Eden, from the perspective of *hakaras hatov*, of the intellect, I must do Hashem’s will because I am constantly receiving one *chesed* after another from Him. Whatever I receive is *b’chesed u’verachamim*, out of kindness and mercy, and not due to my own *zechuyos*.

Even the Chashmona’im Needed Mercy

In Al HaNissim, we say: “And You, in Your great mercy, stood by them in their time of distress.” It was not due to the Jews’ great merit that Hashem performed so many miracles to abolish the Yevanim’s decrees — the miracles were solely due to Hashem’s *middah* of *rachamim*, His great mercy!

It’s true that the Chashmona’im acted with *mesirus nefesh* — and so did many of the Jews at that time, as the Midrash relates (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32:1): “Why are they taking you out to be stoned? Because I circumcised my son...” The Chashmona’im were more devoted; they gave up their lives to fight. Their war with the Yevanim was against the laws of nature. And yet, the salvation was only due to “Your great mercy.”

The Yevanim’s decrees were due to Hashem’s *middas hadin*, attribute of strict justice. The Bach explains (*Orach Chaim* 670) that these decrees occurred because there was a weakening and deficiency in the *avodah* in the Beis HaMikdash. Therefore, the decrees were a *middah k’neged middah*, causing them to stop their *avodah*. This was *middas hadin*. The salvation, however, was not *middas hadin*, they didn’t earn it as the result of any great merit; it was the result of *middas harachamim*, the attribute of mercy — of “Your great mercy.” Without *middas harachamim*, the salvation would never have been possible.

The prayer then continues: “...in the times of the wicked Greek kingdom.” In some places, the word “Greek” is omitted (see *Berachos* 61; *Shabbos* 15, and more), and it could be that they the name was omitted out of fear — they were afraid the non-Jews would stir up trouble for the Jews.

The Reward for Mitzvos

The reason for this is because it’s written in *Iyov* (41:3), “Who preceded Me, and I will repay him.” The Midrash expounds (*Vayikra Rabbah* 27:2): “*Ruach hakodesh* says: Who preceded Me? I will repay him. Who praised Me before I gave him a *neshamah*? Who put up a mezuzah before I gave him a house? Who made me *tzitzis* before I

gave him a tallis?” That is, HaKadosh Baruch Hu is saying, “Who did something for Me that I’d have to pay him for it?” HaKadosh Baruch Hu doesn’t have to pay anyone anything for doing the mitzvos — whatever man has is from Hashem! A person can perform the mitzvah of mezuzah, but from where did he get a house? Who gave him the house to put up a mezuzah? It’s all from Hashem; it’s *chesed Hashem* that he has a house! Or regarding tzitzis, who gave him the garment? It’s all a *chesed* from Hashem.

Therefore, according to *middas hadin*, no one should be receiving *sechar* for the mitzvos that he does, because all his *kochos* and abilities to do these mitzvos are a *chesed* from Hashem: “You have given us life and sustained us.” If he wouldn’t have had *koach* to do whatever he needs to do, he wouldn’t be able to exist. Heaven sent him the *kochos* and possibilities to use them for mitzvah observance, and he is obligated to use them! If he doesn’t do mitzvos, he’s a sinner! He doesn’t deserve reward for not being a sinner. According to *middas hadin*, a person does not deserve all the reward for mitzvos, or even Olam HaBa. The rewards are solely *b’chesed* and *rachamim*.

However, there are *madreigos* when a person does mitzvos *mei’ahavah*, when he does mitzvos because he enjoys doing *retzon Hashem*, he loves fulfilling Hashem’s will. This is a lofty *madreigah*, called *lishmah*, *l’shem Shamayim*. For mitzvos on this *madreigah*, one can earn his reward *b’din*.

In the *berachah* of Yotzer Ohr, we ask: “Eternal G-d, in Your great mercy, have pity on us.” This is for the same reason: one can only call upon Hashem’s mercy, we aren’t deserving by *din*. This parallels the *nusach* in Al HaNissim: “In Your great mercy You stood by them.”

In Ahavah Rabbah, we make a request for success in Torah. We use a number of expressions of mercy: “Our Father, our Merciful Father, the Merciful One, have mercy on us!” But first we mention the love Hashem has for us: “You have loved us with abundant love, You have pitied us with exceedingly great pity.” That is, without the “abundant love” and the “exceedingly great pity” it would not have been possible for us to receive the Torah. Torah is Hashem’s playthings, as it states (*Mishlei* 8:30): “And I was His delight every day.” In order to give Torah, we need abundant love and this is the love that Hashem has for us, and we thank Hashem for this — for the abundant love and the for the Torah He gave us.

If There Is an Obligation, We Can Do It

Chanukah is a time “*l’hodos u’lehallel*,” and this is the mitzvah and *takanah* of Chanukah, “*l’hodos u’lehallel*!” Since there is an obligation on Chanukah, it’s a sign that during Chanukah, there is *siyatta d’Shemaya* and possibilities to express thanks.

The level of *hoda’ah* is a very lofty *madreigah* — it’s the ability to feel that whatever we have is *chasdei Shamayim*, and to feel that we are obligated to express thanks. These feelings are *madreigos*. However, the fact that it’s an obligation indicates that it’s not difficult and it is possible to attain these *madreigos*. During Chanukah, we receive special *siyatta d’Shemaya* to express thanks.

Ahavas HaBriyos Is Engrained in Our Nature

If there is an obligation to do something, that means it’s possible. Take for example, loving your fellow as yourself (*Vayikra* 19:18) — *ahavas habriyos*. You may think, how can one command a person to love someone else? Doesn’t love depend on *teva* and reality? But since there is an obligation of “*v’ahavta l’reiacha kamocha*,” it is a sign that this is the *teva*! *V’ahavta l’reiacha kamocha* is engrained in a person’s nature; every single Jew was born with a *teva* of loving his fellow Jew.

It states in *Koheles* (7:29), “Hashem made man straight and they sought many calculations.” By nature, a person was born straight, and if he doesn’t make calculations, he will have *ahavas habriyos*, *v’ahavta l’reiacha kamocha*. This is the Jewish nation’s *teva*, as they say (*Yevamos* 79a): “There are three signs in this nation: merciful, bashful, and *gomlei chasadim*.”

Therefore, the mitzvah of *v’ahavta l’reiacha kamocha* is part of our nature. If there is a mitzvah, it’s a sign that it’s our nature and every single person can fulfill “*v’ahavta l’reiacha kamocha*.” However, our calculations disturb us. We have an obligation to do away with these calculations and think about having *ahavas habriyos*, as is engrained in our nature.

A Jew’s Nature and a Non-Jew’s Nature

This is the explanation of the story related in the Gemara (*Shabbos* 31a) about the non-Jew who wanted to convert and asked to be taught the Torah on one foot. Hillel told him “What you do not like, do not do unto your fellow.” the non-Jew wanted to know what he would gain if he’d convert. After all, if he’d remain a non-Jew and observe the seven Noachide mitzvos, he’d be considered a *tzaddik*, because he fulfills his obligations. He has no obligation to convert, he only has to observe the seven Noachide mitzvos — which are all negative mitzvos: do not serve *avodah zarah*, do not act immorally, do not murder, etc., and then he’ll be considered a *tzaddik*. So what would he gain from converting?

Hillel’s response to this was: “What you do not like, do not do unto your fellow.” If you convert, you’ll gain a new nature and you will not be able to cause pain to someone else. Just as you don’t want others to cause you pain, you also wouldn’t want to cause others pain. A non-Jew does not have this nature; causing others pain does not disturb him because a non-Jew does not have the trait of mercy.

I've already told you about an episode I witnessed as a child in Russia. We had non-Jewish neighbors who owned a dog. Once the dog chased after a cat and ripped it apart and bit it. The non-Jews laughed as they watched the scene. I couldn't watch it; I felt so bad for the cat. What was so delightful about watching a living creature being ripped apart by a dog? Their enjoyment was one of cruelty and their joy was one of cruelty. There is no such thing in Am Yisrael; our nature is to be merciful and *gomlei chassadim*. But non-Jews don't have the trait of mercy.

This is what Hillel told the convert: if you convert, you will gain a new nature and you will receive a Jewish *neshamah*. And then you will have *rachmanus* and won't be able to pain others.

This is the difference between a Jew and a non-Jew: a Jew has a holy *neshamah* with good *middos*.

Torah and Mitzvos Change One's Nature

However, there are many calculations against good *middos*, so not everyone has *ahavas habriyos*. But the original, straight nature of a Jew is *ahavas habriyos*. This is very visible in young children — each one loves the other. When they grow up a bit, they start making calculations, and their nature changes. We must rid ourselves of these calculations and act with good *middos*, as is our true nature.

Therefore, we need *siyatta d'Shemaya*, which is attained by acting in ways that changes nature. Chazal say (*Kiddushin* 30b), "I created the yetzer hara, I created the Torah as an antidote to it." This is referring to *esek haTorah*. The *Mishnah Berurah siman aleph* writes that the antidote is "the *mussar* of *ma'amarei Chazal*," learning *mussar*, which arouses a person to act according to his true nature — the nature of *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho* and of *hakaras hatov, l'hodos u'lehallel*, as we explained earlier.

Hallel and Contemplating Hashem's Greatness

Hallel is another matter, which involves extolling Hashem's greatness and His might. This also has to be done with an inner feeling, to praise Hashem as a result of contemplating Hashem's greatness, as it states (*Tehillim*

92:6), "How great are Your creations Hashem." Rabbeinu Yonah (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 3:17) writes that this is one of the most lofty positive mitzvos, "the *maalah* of contemplating Hashem's greatness." He cites related *pesukim*: "And you shall know today and place it on your heart that Hashem is G-d" (*Devarim* 4:39). And: "Hashem looked down from Heaven on man to see if there exists a wise man who seeks Him out" (*Tehillim* 14:2). This is called *yiras haromemus*.

One comes to realize the greatness of Hashem by contemplating nature — seeing how the whole world runs through *hashgachah pratis*, everything functions due to *retzon Hashem*. All living creatures in this world sustain each other. Hashem sends an angel to every plant, and the angel tells it: Grow! (See *Bereishis Rabbah* 10:6.) Then there's the entire galaxy — the sun, the moon, and the stars, planets and regular stars, and there are vast distances between them.

It's well known that the sun is about 150 kilometers (93 miles) away from earth. It takes it about eight minutes till the sun's light reaches us. The sun we see appears eight minutes after the sun actually rises. Similarly, after the sun sets, we can still see light for another eight minutes. There is one planet (Neptune) whose light only reached Earth over the past few years. It is so far away from Earth that it took thousands of years from Creation until its light reached us. This shows us Hashem's greatness, as it states (*Tehillim* 104:24): "How great are Your creations, Hashem!"

One must look for Hashem's greatness in every single matter, in every single person. Take for example, the ability to speak, to see, or hear — we have all these abilities only through *hashgachas Hashem*. We are the recipients of *chasdei Shamayim* at every single moment: we can hear, speak, and see. But we don't notice it. It's a great *madreigah* to notice and contemplate this, and to offer praise for it. Chanukah specifically is a time that was established to express thanks and praise, and there is *siyatta d'Shemaya* for it at this time.

Yehi ratzon that we all merit fulfilling our obligations. May we attain all these *madreigos*.

Please daven for
גיטה פייגה בת רבקה
לרפואה שלימה ומהירה בתוך כל חולי ישראל

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