

Darkei HaChizuk

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

A Sichah from Maran HaGaon Rav Gershon Edelstein *shlita*, Rosh Yeshivas Ponevez • Parashas Vayigash 5782

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Giving Thanks During Chanukah

Chanukah came to a close this week. The Beis Din HaGadol that existed during the period of the Chanukah miracles instituted these days of Chanukah for giving thanks and praise, *l'hodos u'lehallel*, for all generations to come. *Hoda'ah* for Hashem's *chesed* and miracles, and *hallel*, praising, as well.

Hoda'ah is the reciting of "Al HaNissim" in davening and Birkas HaMazon, and *Hallel* is the full Hallel we recite during all eight days of Chanukah. These are the two *takanos* instituted during that period: *l'hodos u'lehallel*.

The truth is, throughout the year, we have various additions in our *tefillos*. Every week, we have a special Shabbos *tefillah*; we recite *ya'aleh v'yavo* on Rosh Chodesh — this too is a *takanah* from the Beis Din HaGadol. *Ya'aleh v'yavo* is also recited on Chol HaMoed. On Yom Tov, we have a completely different davening, but on Rosh Chodesh, we recite the daily prayers with the addition of *ya'aleh v'yavo*.

However, all of these are "hazkaros," remembrances; they don't fall into the category of "hoda'ah," giving thanks. On Chanukah, on the other hand, there is a special *takanah* of *hoda'ah* in our *tefillos*. On Rosh Chodesh and Chol HaMoed, we add in the "remembrances" such as *ya'aleh v'yavo* in the *berachah* of *Retzei*, but on Chanukah, we include our *hoda'ah* in the *berachah* of thanks: *Modim anachnu Lach*.

In Birkas HaMazon too, throughout the year we include the additional prayers — such as *Retzei* on Shabbos and *ya'aleh v'yavo* on Rosh Chodesh and Yom Tov — in the "Racheim" blessing before "U'vnei Yerushalayim," we insert our *hoda'ah* on Chanukah in the *berachah* of "Nodeh Lecha." This is a special *takanah* of giving thanks.

Expressing Thanks in Modim All Year Long

Every *tefillah* during Chanukah includes *hoda'ah*. Truthfully, we have *hoda'ah* in every *tefillah* all year round: in the *Modim berachah* in Shemoneh Esrei.

Modim is part of the last section of three *berachos*, which begins with *Retzei*.

We recite many expressions of thanks in *Modim*. The first words of the *berachah* are "Modim anachnu Lach, We give thanks to You..." A few lines down, we once again express *hoda'ah*: "Nodeh Lecha u'nesaper tehillasecha, We will thank You and will relate Your praise." Why do we mention two expressions of thanks — *Modim*, and *Nodeh Lecha*? What are these two *hoda'ahs*?

It would seem that the explanation is that the first *hoda'ah*, **Modim anachnu Lach**, is like a litigant admitting a truth. We are admitting the truth and recognizing the reality that You are Hashem Elokeinu, everything is from *Shamayim*; nothing happens *b'derech hateva*. **Tzur chayeinu**, the Rock of our lives; we acknowledge that we are alive, and **Magen yisheinu**, You are the Shield of our salvations, that is, we experience *yeshu'os* too. When we are faced with difficulties, Hashem saves us. **Atah Hu l'dor vador**, throughout the generations, for all of Klal Yisrael, You are there. We express our thanks and acknowledge the truth that we, along with all Klal Yisrael, receive so many *chassadim* and favors from HaKadosh Baruch Hu. We express our thanks for this in the plural form.

Then we continue: "**Nodeh Lecha u'nesaper tehillasecha**, We thank You and will relate Your praise." This is a different aspect, and we express our thanks for it as well. At first, we were just like a litigant admitting the truth, acknowledging that we received favors, declaring that nothing is a coincidence and everything is from *Shamayim*. But once we've acknowledged this truth, it obligates to express thanks, to say thank you. And that's why we continue: *Nodeh Lecha*, Thank You! *U'nesaper tehillasecha* — this wording denotes *hallel*, praise. We will give thanks and praise, *l'hodos u'lehallel*.

We say this prayer three times a day — we admit the truth, and express thanks: *Modim* and *Nodeh Lecha*. On the days we recite *Mussaf*, we say it a fourth time.

What are we thanking for? Every individual is expressing his own personal thanks, and expressing communal

thanks for the whole *tzibbur*. Parts of the *tefillah* are in plural: “*Tzur chayeinu, magein yisheinu... al chayeinu hamesurim b’yadecha v’al nishmoseinu hapekudos Lach*, Rock of our lives, Shield of our salvation...for our lives that are committed to Your power and for our souls that are entrusted in Your hand.” *Al chayeinu* refers to our physical life, and *al nishmoseinu* is talking about our *neshamahs*, the fact that we have a soul.

When a person sleeps, he is still alive and breathing, but he doesn’t have a *neshamah*. His *neshamah* comes back only once he wakes up. Every morning, we recite *Modeh Ani*, thanking Hashem for returning our *neshamah*. When a person sleeps, he only has his *nefesh* and *ruach*, similar to an animal. He does not have a *neshamah*, which only comes back when he’s awake. This is the meaning of “for our *neshamahs* that are entrusted to You.”

“And for Your miracles with us daily” — A person is constantly experiencing miracles. We aren’t aware of them and don’t even know about them, as Chazal say (*Niddah* 31a): “One who experiences a miracle is not aware of it.” So this is another thing we thank Hashem for: for Your daily miracles; for Your miracles for each individual, and for the miracles affecting the entire community. The word *Modim*, “we give thanks,” is plural. Not only do we express our thanks for ourselves, we thank Hashem for His treatment of Klal Yisrael — “For Your miracles with us daily, for Your wonders and favors at all seasons.” This is the reality.

But do people really think like this? Do we really feel the reality that we are living through miracles and we are obligated to thank Hashem? Do we feel that we are receiving kindness and mercy our entire lives? Such a mindset is the opposite of human nature, and we need to have *emunah* to feel this way.

Our Souls Are Pawned for Hashem’s Kindness

Once a person arrives at this level of *emunah*, it obligates him further. If a person knows that he receives so many kindnesses and favors from HaKadosh Baruch Hu, it obligates him to give something back, to fulfill whatever Hashem demands of him. Even if there would be no demands, when a person gets a favor from someone else, he naturally wants to express his gratitude, and to honor his benefactor and try to fill his wishes. But here, it’s not merely a natural response; it’s a Torah obligation! Therefore, one cannot even fathom the gravity of obligation of *hoda’ah*, and how much it obligates us.

In *Chovos HaLevavos* (*Shaar Avodas HaElokim* chap. 5) it says that the mind tells the soul: “Do you know that you are *chabulah*, pawned, due to the kindnesses of your Creator?” The soul receives so many kindnesses from the

Creator and must give something in return for them, but it cannot. So it is pawned as a result; its very life is pawned to HaKadosh Baruch Hu! It’s like the *pasuk* states (*Iyov* 12:10): “The soul of every living thing is in His hands.”

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (1:10) regarding the attribute of submissiveness: “His Creator created him *yeish me’ayin*, “something from nothing,” and performed kindness with him, and His hand guides him at all times and saves his soul at every moment.” A person must maintain the mindset that he is “something from nothing.” And who made him “something from nothing”? HaKadosh Baruch Hu! “He performed kindness with him” — once man was created, HaKadosh Baruch Hu performs kindness with him for his entire life, “and His hand guides him at all times.” He is constantly guiding him and leading him, and giving him intelligence to know how to live and how to continue living. “He saves his soul at every moment” — Hashem saves his soul by sustaining him. All of man’s sustenance and vitality is from HaKadosh Baruch Hu, Who holds man’s soul in His hand. If so, this obligates us!

The first thing it obligates us to do is *esek haTorah*. Of course, each person does what he can; even if it’s a half-hour or hour daily. Each person’s obligation is measured against the time he has available for learning.

Enjoyment in Torah Is Food for the Soul

Esek haTorah, the “business” of learning Torah is a very pleasant occupation, if one learns in the proper manner — if one knows how to learn and learns the parts of Torah that he naturally wants to learn, it will be very interesting. The *pasuk* describes *divrei Torah* (*Tehillim* chap. 19), saying they are sweeter than honey, more than honey. *Divrei Torah* calm the soul and make a fool wise; they make the heart joyous and brighten up one’s eyes. These are descriptions of all sorts of enjoyment inherent in *esek haTorah*. We cannot fathom the greatness and magnitude of this pleasure.

I believe I once saw an explanation in *Derashos HaRan* about why *divrei Torah* are so pleasant and sweet. Whatever the body needs for proper functioning is found in tasty things. For example, food and drink are both necessary for a healthy body, so Hashem made food and drink taste good.

That’s how HaKadosh Baruch Hu created the world — whatever the body needs to function tastes good and is available. The *Chovos HaLevavos* (*Shaar HaBechinah* chap. 5) writes that anything necessary and essential to the world will be readily available and it won’t be hard to attain it — such as air for breathing, which the body

constantly needs. Air is found in every place and at all times. So too, drinking water, which is extremely necessary for man's existence, is found in many springs and rivers. Food, which is not needed as much as water, is not available in the same abundance as water, but *baruch Hashem*, we do have food to eat. Whatever the body needs is present, and it's not hard to attain it.

So anything that is essential for man's physical existence is pleasurable and tastes good, such as food and drink. Sleep is also on this list. It's human nature to enjoy sleeping and resting. The *Sefer HaChinuch* writes that the body needs four things: food, drink, rest (aside from sleep), and joy. A person should have things that make him happy; he should have a pleasant feeling. HaKadosh Baruch Hu created the things the body needs; they are around, they're readily available and they taste good.

But what makes a person happiest is *esek haTorah*. It is the greatest pleasure and greatest source of happiness in the world, as Chazal say (*Avos* 6:4), "You will be fortunate in this world." This is because *esek haTorah* is the most essential, necessary commodity for the *nefesh* and *neshamah*. The *neshamah* also needs sustenance, and Torah is food for the soul. That's why Hashem made Torah with such special, inherent pleasure. This is true regarding all *divrei Torah*, halachah and Aggadah — each person can choose what attracts him. There are very interesting, enticing *divrei Torah* — because it is food for the soul.

The Great Joy of Being Fascinated by Torah

They said in *Avos* (ibid.), "This is the way of Torah: eat bread with salt, drink water sparingly, sleep on the ground, and live a life of privation, yet toil in Torah. And if you do so, you will be fortunate in this world." Four difficulties are mentioned here: eating bread and salt, drinking measured water, sleeping on the ground, and besides all these difficulties, also living a life of privation. But if you "toil in Torah," you will be "fortunate in this world." Why? This is simply the reality! A person who toils in Torah, who is fascinated by Torah, is the happiest person in the world.

Even though he only has bread and salt to eat, it satiates him; he doesn't feel hungry. The only thing is that it's not so delicious. And even though he drinks water sparingly and doesn't drink a lot, he has enough and is not thirsty. And when it's time to sleep, he sleeps on the ground as much as he needs to and is not tired anymore. Regarding living "a life of privation," if things cause him pain and he has some worries, learning Torah can make him forget all about his pain and troubles!

"You will be fortunate in this world" means that this is the greatest happiness and good fortune that exists in this world. A person who does not toil in Torah is not luckier; the only person who is fortunate is someone who toils in Torah. Of course, the time and amount is individual, each person according to his abilities. Even if he only has a half hour a day to learn, he will be happiest during that half hour.

One must follow his preferences when deciding what to learn. This is very important: each person should learn whatever suits his nature, so that he can understand the learning *b'pashtus*. When a person learns Torah that is *pashtut* for him, then it is a pleasure. But when he learns *b'amkus* against his nature, it is not interesting. Torah that he understands *b'pashtus* is interesting and it's *Toras emes*, true Torah. I once heard in the name of the Gra that Torah that is *pashtut* is *emes*, and *emes* is *pashtut*. When a person learns in this manner, he will have pleasure and "will be fortunate in this World" through toiling in Torah and being fascinated by Torah.

Money and Honor Do Not Create Happiness

If someone has a lot of money, does that make him happy and fortunate? Does he lead a happy life? The reality has proven that the opposite is true! Such a person is not happy! And he has difficulties, but he hides them because he doesn't want people to know about them. It's not a secret that wealthy people do not have *Olam HaZeh*, and not only that, Chazal say (*Koheles Rabbah* 1:13): "One who has one hundred wants two hundred, and one who has two hundred wants four hundred." He constantly wants more; he always feels like he's missing something!

The Midrash there states that a person does not even have half his desires fulfilled by the time he dies. Someone who has *ta'avos*, desires, like the desire for money, can't even attain half of what he wants. Why is this so? Because one who has 100, wants "another" 200 — so that he'll have a sum of 300. But he only has 100, which isn't even half of 300. He is constantly living with a desire for money and no matter how much he attains, he still wants double that amount. If he has a million, he wants another two million — so he'll never have even half of what he wants! This is the "Olam HaZeh" of someone who has a *ta'avah* for money.

The same is true regarding the desire for honor. The *Mesillas Yesharim* (chap. 11) spoke about this at length. He says, Honor pressures man, and desire for honor is stronger than the desire for money. People spend their money in order to attain honor, and no matter how much honor a person receives, he's never satisfied and always wants more. It's like the desire for money — one who has 100, wants 200; one who loves honor will always want

more than what he has, and he won't even have half of what he wants. That's the "Olam HaZeh" of someone who has a desire for money or honor.

The truth is, this is a big mistake. Everyone's fate is written on Rosh Hashanah and sealed on Yom Kippur — whether they will be poor or wealthy, lowered or raised up high. Everything's been decided already. Furthermore, Chazal say (*Avos* 4:1), "Who is a rich man? One who is happy with his lot." It has nothing to do with how much money he has, because if he has money but isn't happy with what he has, he feels deprived and lacking. Can a person like this be considered a wealthy man? He's a poor man! Because he lacks things! A person who is happy with his lot, however, isn't missing anything, so he is a rich man. He has whatever he needs and is not lacking anything.

Similarly, the *mishnah* continues: "Who is honorable? One who honors others." When a person honors others, he becomes honorable and everyone else honors him. I was familiar with someone who honored others, and when he made a bar mitzvah for his son, people came from all ends of the city to honor him. Someone who honors others will be honored. He, for his part, just honors other people and does not ask for honor, but the reality is that everyone honors him.

Chazal also say (*Avos* 6:3), "There is no honor aside from the [honor of] Torah." This is another concept. What is honor? It's a spiritual pleasure. And the Torah is the greatest spiritual pleasure. Therefore, there is no honor — no spiritual pleasure — like the pleasure of Torah, about which Chazal say: "You will be fortunate in this world," there is no greater happiness than this.

A person who merits following these rules and ways of life will live a happy life, "you will be fortunate in this World." But one needs *emunah* for this; it's not simple to lead this type of lifestyle. One needs *siyatta d'Shemaya* for everything and *zechuyos* as well. If a person has *zechuyos*, he will have *siyatta d'Shemaya* in whatever he needs.

B'eZRas Hashem may we all merit the necessary *zechuyos* to lead this type of lifestyle. May we be *zocheh* to uphold these principles and merit good, happy lives.

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