

KOL TODA

Gateways to Gratitude: Giving Thanks to Hashem



L'Olam Odehka

THE BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE

Purim is drawing near when we read the Megilla. As the story of the Megilla unfolds, things look bleak for the Jewish nation Haman, the villain, plots to annihilate them, and the king, Ahashverous, does his bidding. The tables start turning when the king asks for his "Book of Remembrance" to be read before him. This was a book in which people who had done favors to the monarchy were recorded. This was a turning point in the Megilla, and it has practical ramifications – the reader, when reading the Megilla, is required to raise his voice at this point. It is the point where the miracle begins to unfold

What is the significance of this "Book of Remembrance" instigating the salvation? What is the secret of Haman's great power?

The Gemara in Chullin (139b) asks: "Where is Haman alluded to in the Torah? In the verse 'Have you eaten from the tree' [Heb: "Hamin Ha'etz" – "Hamin" same letters as "Haman"]." This apparently hints to the fact that Haman was hung on a tree. But it is really deeper than that. Haman symbolizes the Evil Inclination, the Yetzer Hara, whose root is in the primordial Serpent, as the Maharsha tells us – the root of Haman is from Eisav and Amalek who draw their power from the primordial Serpent.

Who is Haman? Haman is a loyal son of a nation that is characterized by ingratitude. Chazal in Mechilta Beshalach tell us: "Amalek, a nation of ingrates, brings retribution on a nation lacking in gratitude." Haman had everything he could want – sons, wealth and honor. He had it all, but it was all valueless in his eyes, he didn't even see it. Why? Because one man didn't bow down to him. His very name alludes to this – he is Haman, he wants *hamon* – lots and lots, and nothing is ever enough for him.

Where is the root for this unquenchable thirst and bottomless pit of desire? From the Tree. Adam and Eve had every single tree in the Garden of Eden. One tree was all they could not eat from, and it was from it that they ate. The serpent caused them to doubt G-d's benevolence and convinced them to eat from the tree by narrowing their vision to focus exclusively on the one thing that was prohibited to them. All they saw was what they didn't have.

The Evil Inclination to this day, employs precisely the same tactic. He narrows our vision and works hard, to pull a shade over our eyes so we don't see the incredible gifts and countless blessings

that fill our lives. This is the root of Amalek.

The power of closing our eyes to the good that we receive and surrounds us has the potential to seriously impair the course of history and the fulfillment of the plan of creation. It is what caused the first Sin (as we are told in Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer chapter 7), caused the Spies to slander the Holy Land, caused people to see the negative in each other in the Second Temple, leading to its ultimate destruction and our current long bitter exile. It is the very root of all pain and trouble as we are told in the Torah (Devarim 28, 47) "For you didn't worship G-d your Lord with joy and goodness of heart from abundance of all."

Our mission and destiny in the world is to correct this primordial Sin, and erase the root of Amalek. When we work hard to keep our eyes open, to remember and see G-d's goodness and focus on the blessings that fill our lives, we are rectifying that sin, and bringing the world to its ultimate objective.

Therefore it is most appropriate that at the very moment that Ahashverous opens his "Book of Remembrance" and starts reading the favors people did to him in order to demonstrate his gratitude to them, that is the moment that marks the beginning of Haman's downfall.

Similarly, when one is in need of salvation, the most propitious way of achieving it is to "open our 'Book of Remembrance'" and recall all of

Hashem's kindnesses past and present. This is the master-key that opens the Heavenly gates of salvation.

Remembering G-d's favors to us is not only a Biblical commandment (see Sharei Teshuva 3:17), it is also a great eye-opener – it helps us become aware of G-d's magnanimous generosity, His supreme love, and to realize the extent of His amazingly considerate providence. Man is like a vessel filled with blessing that rains down on him from above. A vessel, can only be filled if it is intact. When the vessel is riddled with holes, holes of ingratitude and displeasure, no measure of blessing can fill the vessel – it will always be lacking. But someone who focuses on Hashem's kindnesses is filled with gratitude and love of Hashem. His Vessel is filled and overflows – "You anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows!" (Tehillim 23:5).



TZADIKIM THANK HASHEM

THANKS FOR EVERYTHING

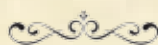
Rabbi Avigdor Miller's grandson once came to visit him. Upon entering the house he found his grandfather standing by a bowl of water, putting his head in the water for a while, taking it out and after taking a deep breath once more putting his head in the water.

"Zaidy! What are you doing!?"

Rabbi Miller flashed his grandson a broad smile: "Not to worry!" he said, and plunged his head right back in the water. He kept his head down a little, and then lifted it up, taking in a deep breath air. He then explained to his grandson: "For the past few days everyone's been complaining that the air in the area is polluted and unhealthy. I felt that this is affecting my appreciation of the amazing, invaluable gift of fresh air. That's why I immersed my head in water to renew my appreciation for this most precious gift. Every time I lift my head out of the water and my lungs fills with delightful delicious air, my heart fills with gratitude to Hashem for this wonderful indispensable entity that He designed for us!"

Translator's note: My grandfather, Dr. Sylvan Shane, *a"h*, would speak in awe

and amazement of the 22.5% oxygen in the air we breathe, not one percent more, not one percent less, precisely what we need for our wellbeing. More oxygen would make us feel drunk, less would be fatal. No matter how many trees we burn, no matter how many people live on the planet, there is always the same percentage, and it never changes. Who is standing there, constantly regulating the oxygen level in the world to enable us to live healthfully and happily?



A young man had a baby one year after marriage. He came to Rav Shach *zt"l* to ask him if he should make a Kiddush in honor of the birth. "If your daughter had been born after eighteen years of marriage – eighteen years of heartrending prayers and supplications – would you make a Kiddush?" asked the rav. "Most certainly!" said the man. "So, just because Hashem was good to you, and spared you eighteen years of anguish and pain, is that a reason to thank Him less?"

WHATEVER HASHEM DOES IS FOR THE BEST

Rabbi Shimon of Yeruslav, *ztz"l*, lived to a ripe old age. When asked how he merited his long life, he said, "Many times people have all kinds of questions – why does he have more than I do, why do I have this painful circumstance, why doesn't anything go well for me? They can have so many questions that Hashem finally tells them, 'Look, whatever I do is just and true. But in your world it is impossible to understand. Come up here and you will understand all the answers.' And then people have to die in order to understand Hashem's ways. I, on the other hand, have no questions on the ways of Hashem. Everything that Hashem does is for the good, as it is written (Devarim 32:4): 'The Rock, perfect is His work, for all His ways are justice...righteous and fair is He...' And since I have no questions, they've left me here to live." From the Hebrew Cheshvan 5776 edition of Kol Toda.



L'Olam Odehka
"Forever will I thank You"



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