

# KOL TODA

Gateways to Gratitude: Giving Thanks to Hashem

## THANKFULNESS - The Way to the *Geula*

As *Am Yisrael* was getting ready to leave the *midbar* & enter the Holy Land, Moshe *Rabbenu* sent twelve spies to scout the Land (*Parashas Shelach*). The outcome was disastrous. Upon returning from their mission, on the night of the ninth of Av, the spies **"spread an [evil] report about the Land which they had scouted..."** (*Bamidbar* 13:32). They described the Land & the people living there, unfavorably for the Jewish nation. Upon hearing the report, **"The entire assembly raised their voices & shouted, & the people wept on that night"** (*Bamidbar* 14:1). As a result, Hashem decreed that that assembly would die in the Wilderness, & the rest of the nation would not enter the Holy Land for close to thirty-nine more years.

And further, our Sages tell us (*Ta'anis* 29): Hashem declared, **"They cried tears for nothing; I will designate that night as a night of tears, for generations."** Our Sages explain that the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* & the ensuing exiles, & all the tears & pain that *Am Yisrael* has suffered since that critical event in the *midbar*, all resulted from those purposeless tears. The Ramban finds a source for this *gemara* from the words of King David (*Tehillim* 106: 24-27): "They rejected the desirable Land; they did not believe His Word. They complained in their tents; they did not hearken to the voice of Hashem. He raised His Hand to them to cast them down in the Wilderness, & to cast their seed among the nations, & to scatter them among the lands."

What was the essence of those tears? What was behind the senseless, purposeless weeping that ultimately destroyed the *Beis HaMikdash* & caused our exile & has produced endlessly deep rivers of tears & bloodshed?

Moshe *Rabbenu* in his admonishment to the nation said (*Devarim* 1:27): **"You slandered in your tents & said 'Because Hashem hates us He took us out of the land of Egypt....'"** Rabbenu Yona, the great medieval Sage, comments on this verse in his masterpiece *Sha'arei Teshuva* (3:231): **"And many times he who is ungrateful sees the good as bad... and at times he will think that Hashem's kindness is revenge, to pay him back for something, as it says, '...because Hashem hates us....'"**

Those tears that were shed in the *midbar* were tears of ingratitude. The generation did not appreciate Hashem's kindnesses. They did not believe that Hashem was doing something for their benefit. Instead of thanking Hashem for the Land they were promised, they cried.

The gravity of the punishment can teach about the weight of the sin. How terrible it is to be ungrateful! How much Hashem despises it that one does not appreciate a kindness. Yet why do we continue suffering for that sin in the *midbar*?

What sin is it that still remains with us, stretching out our exile seemingly endlessly?

Yirmiyahu HaNavi tells us the answer in his *Book of Lamentations* (1:2): **"She weeps bitterly in the night, & her tear is on her cheek...."** Our Sages comment on that verse: "She weeps bitterly in the night" – for the sin of the Spies, "& her tear is on her cheek" – in every generation we repeat the same sin. In every generation the sin is still living; the tears are still fresh, dripping down the cheek, being wept again & again, thousands of years.

The Chafetz Chaim, *ztz"l*, in his work *Kuntres Ahavas Yisrael*, tells us: **If we do not look to correct that bitter sin which is the main reason for our prolonged exile... Although we wish & long for the building of the *Beis HaMikdash*, we are obligated to first correct that which caused its destruction.** By rectifying the sin of the Spies – the sin of baseless fault-finding – we can help bring about the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash*!

In these days of mourning for the *Beis HaMikdash*, we see here the profound connection between its destruction & lack of gratitude to Hashem. As long as we are still crying & complaining about "misdeeds & discomforts," judgment on those baseless tears in the *midbar* is re-aroused, causing further harm, pain, & destruction.

If we want to merit to see the *Mikdash* rebuilt, we must dig out & destroy every vestige of ingratitude & increase our thanks & praise to Hashem. By contemplating the infinite acts of kindness that Hashem does for us, which are infinitely greater than what He could possibly, so to speak, "owe" us, we בע"ה can reach the understanding & obtain the *emuna* that even the trials & difficulties where Hashem's Hand is hidden, are truly for our benefit.

Expressing gratitude to Hashem is the reason for our coming into this world. It strengthens our connection to Hashem, increases our awe of *Shamayim*, increases our overall happiness, & strengthens our *emuna* that everything that Hashem does is for our good. Moreover, expressing gratefulness to Hashem, corrects the sin of the Spies & brings the Final Redemption closer, may it be soon, in our times, amen.

## BEAR THE BURDEN

A known *chassidic* court was experiencing institutional difficulties. A group of people had made it their business to hinder all attempts at development, & the *chassidim* were becoming more exasperated by the minute. They came into their leader to discuss the problem, & to think of ways to stop the harassment. The elderly rebbe lifted his eyes, surprised. "Them?!" he asked incredulously, "They are making us trouble? But why? We didn't do them any favors!..."

**A joke. Or is it?**

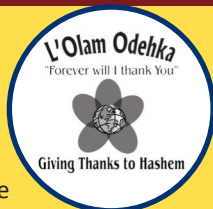
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One of the heaviest burdens to carry is the burden of gratitude. Showing appreciation & expressing gratefulness are anathema to our natural instinct, as seen at the early age of two – the "me, mine!" stage – & often carries on through the independence-seeking teenage years & into adulthood.

When the newly established Jewish nation comes to Moshe in the Wilderness & complains (*Bamidbar* 11:5), "We remember the fish we ate in Egypt *chinam* – for free!" Rashi explains the words "for free" to mean – without the debt of gratitude. These fish came to us of our own toil – we thanked no one for them. They now had to bear the debt of gratitude to Hashem for the manna that rained down on them daily.

The most natural of instincts is to ignore the benefactor, to throw away those thank-you cards, turning away from anyone who did us a kindness. It is also one of the most alienating, isolating tactics of man. It is an unburdening of the worst kind – to owe "nothing to nobody"; "don't do me any favors." It unravels human relationships of every kind, & diminishes our relationship with Hashem.

Hashem wants to be in touch with us. That was the main purpose for the Creation of the world. Hashem wants man to be involved in a constant, ongoing relationship with Him. The foundation of that relationship with Hashem is *hakaras hatov*, acknowledging His kindnesses – what we have, what we once got, & what we will get in the future, בע"ה. We bend our back to the burden of acknowledgment, that – yes, we did get, we owe, we are thankful, & we long for the connection. *Modim anachnu Lach....*



## A WORD OF GRATITUDE

"...and we will sing out and rejoice throughout our days" (*Tehillim* 90:14). Metsudas David explains: "Since we thank You, You will return to bestow goodness on us for the abundant thanks & praise. And we will return to thank You again. And so it will go, back and forth, all the time."





## SEEING WELL/ *based on a true story received by L'Olam Odehka*

Everything started a few weeks after little David was born. Both she & her husband had noticed something wasn't right with his eyes – they didn't seem to be able to focus. All his eyes did was dance around & flutter, seemingly with no pattern or form. The nurses at the well-baby clinic sent them to the pediatrician who then referred them to an eye specialist. After an extensive examination, the specialist sat them down with a grim look on his face:

"Look, you really have no other option. He must be hospitalized immediately. I would like him to go to Assaf HaRofeh. I hope that there he will receive the best treatment. The doctors there are among the best in this field."

In the hospital, after another long examination, they decided to send the baby for a neurological evaluation. This was the beginning of an exhaustive race that seemed to take years – although in reality it was only a few short months. Appointments, running to the hospital, more appointments, wrestling with the insurance – the ordeal took up her whole day. There was almost no time for anything else. In between she would grab something from the fridge, but with two other children to care for, who had time for anything else?

Nighttime found her lying in bed rehashing the day's appointments – & the dire predictions they heard. Sleep would evade her & she spent her nights awake, in thought. Mornings found her groggy & frazzled rushing to get to the next appointment on the list.

A few days later they found themselves sitting again under the neurologist's pitying gaze. He wanted yet another brain scan. She felt like the sky was falling down upon her.

"Did you see how he looked at us?" she asked her husband that night. "His eyes conveyed so much pity. They must think that there is brain damage & he just can't bring himself to tell us. I know it!" & the tears came. It all came gushing out in long sobs. Nothing her husband said could calm her.

"We both have had a long day," he said. "Let's just go right to sleep."

His wife didn't answer. She knew it would take her hours to fall asleep now. She didn't even have the energy to go to bed & try to fall asleep. She sat herself in the old armchair, throwing off the piles of toys & clothing that had accumulated there. It was so late.... And she was so worried... such a little baby...

"It went so easily with the first two," she thought to herself. "Too bad we learn to be grateful only when something goes wrong." Her thoughts roamed to her friend, Ruthie, who had introduced her to the organization called "L'Olam Odehka." She told her about her new participation in a group giving thanks to Hashem.

"Everyone spends at least one minute a day thanking Hashem. We each gave in a name

for prayer, & all the women in my group pray for those people after our daily thanks to Hashem. You don't know what it does for me. I became hooked! I've begun thanking Hashem for everything! My life has changed. I don't even recognize myself anymore!" she had said, laughing.

"To thank Hashem? For everything? How can I thank Hashem for everything? Now?" she thought to herself.

"Do you hear me, Hashem?" she began aloud. "Do you really expect me to thank You now? Right now?" The tears that had since dried up started flowing again, but now they tasted different. They were not tears of pain, of distance. They were tears of connection, of yearning to come closer, like the tears of missing a good friend whom she hadn't seen for a long time....

"I know Hashem that I never spoke to You like this... but I know that You are listening... now I realize that I sort of forgot about You in the last couple of weeks..." & the tears flowed down her cheeks in rivulets, clearing out the hard feelings. Her eyelids suddenly felt heavy & she fell into a deep sleep. She slept on that chair like she never slept in her life.

The next day she could hardly wait. That night, after everyone had gone to sleep, she made a beeline for her old armchair. She felt like she was sharing a secret, waiting for a meeting with her secret friend, the Creator of the World. Yesterday's meeting was so exciting for her, so comforting; she had to repeat it again.

"Master of the World, I know You are listening," she began, "I know that You love me & everything that happened to me is from You & for my benefit. But Hashem," she pleaded, "let me feel that it is really good. And if you expect me to thank You now, please give me the words to do it, please give me the energy..."

And she started. Mumbling at first, her words were hesitant, but she plowed on, determined. "Thank You Hashem for the house that we live in, & that it is warm, thank You for the food in the refrigerator...." & suddenly she felt that a door had opened, & the words came flooding out as if a dam had finally burst. "Thank You Hashem for my health! And for my wonderful husband & my two beautiful healthy children that You gave me! And thank You for the energy that You gave me to wash the dishes today, & to clean up the children's room that was such a wreck... & thank You for little David. You surely have compassion on him, for Your compassion is endless... we understand nothing, so thank You..."

The sweetness that spread through her body was the most gratifying feeling. The next day she decided to sign up to be part of a Thankfulness Group & at the end of the week she got a Gratitude Flower with names of people to pray for. Every single day she awaited her special time to meet Hashem. And every day, she asked Hashem to please help her see

the good & to thank Him for it.

It became a daily ritual. First she would go over her physical well-being & thank Hashem for the different functions that were all healthy. Then she would remember what she did that day & thank Hashem for her abilities. She would thank Hashem for her children who were learning Torah. And she would make the effort to always find things about David for which to thank Hashem. "Thank You for his stomach that works... that he eats & drinks..." And she would thank Hashem simply for her ability to thank Him.

No one could really say when the change had happened, but it was evident with every passing day. He seemed to be focusing better & better. After a whole month, his eyes were able to focus completely. The monthly checkup showed that he had advanced in every way, & at their meeting with the neurologist he decided to close David's case. "It seems that his problem is resolving. He must be growing out of it. You have to be very thankful to G-d," he said.

She smiled to herself, "Very thankful...very thankful..." She had a strong feeling that it was her moments of thankfulness to Hashem that brought about the sudden change. The doctor's words seemed to hint at this. She looked out of the window mumbling, "Thank You Hashem for making David well... & for enabling me to see the good... & thank You," she whispered, choked by her feelings... "thank You that now little David also sees it...."



### KOL TODA

Telephone line for women: daily inspiration, shiurim, personal stories of *yeshuos*, *tefilla* & *shirim*, in Hebrew, English & Yiddish:

**03-617-1180**

This newsletter is dedicated *l'ilui nishmos* Eliezer ben David *a"h* and Chaya bas Michel *a"h* Artwork: Yehoshua Wiseman - 054-844-1131  
**Take upon yourself at least one minute per day to thank Hashem, & give in a name for tefilla: 04-678-1947 or 02-580-8137**  
 We would be glad to hear your own stories about thanking Hashem. Please send your stories to the email indicated below.  
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