

# KOL TODA

## Gateways to Gratitude: Giving Thanks to Hashem

### The Radiance of Gratitude

All Jewish holidays commemorate miracles. Every year we celebrate them, rejoice and praise Hashem remembering the miracles that took place in the past. On Chanukah, we have an additional mitzvah, to do our best to publicize the miracle. That is why we kindle the lights in a place that is visible to passers-by, at the right height that people can easily see them and we light them specifically at night to make it noticeable from a distance.

What is so special about the Chanukah miracle that is so important to publicize?

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt"l answers this question.

There is a fundamental difference between the Chanukah lights and other mitzvos like lulav and matzah. The lulav and matzah remind us of the kindnesses of Hashem that occurred in the past, but the purpose of the Chanukah lights is to arouse us to actively thank and praise Him, as we say in the prayer of Haneiros Halalu: "Kedei le'hodos u'lehalel le'shimcheh hagadol – in order

to thank and praise Your Great Name."

#### How to Thank

How should we thank Hashem? "Yodu laHashem chasdo venifla'osav livnei adam – Give thanks to Hashem for his kindness and relate His wonders to the children of man" (Tehilim 107). There are two parts to this mitzvah – to thank Hashem personally and to share the miracles with other people. As the Malbim writes: "An important aspect of gratitude to Hashem is to publicize the kindnesses, for by doing this we arouse others also to appreciate His greatness [thereby demonstrating our gratitude by causing nachas ruach to our Heavenly Benefactor]."

Similarly, we say every morning in Shacharis: "Hodu la'Hashem kir'u bishmo hodi'u ba'amim alilosav – Thank Hashem, publicize His Name, relate His deeds to the nations." How should we thank Hashem? By publicizing His Name – and telling the world about His goodness.

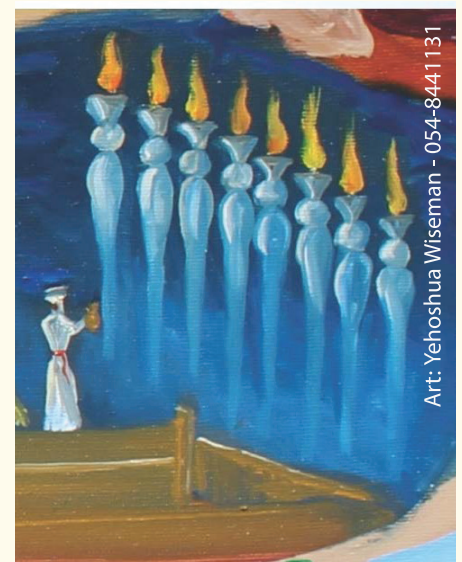
Also Mizmor Letodah (Tehillim

100) the chapter of gratitude, starts with a call to the whole of humanity to appreciate the goodness of Hashem. This is why publicity is so central to Chanukah, the holiday of expressing thanks to Hashem.

#### Spend All Your Money

All mitzvot assei of the Torah that require spending money, do not obligate a person to

### What is so special about the Chanukah miracle



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spend more than one-fifth of his assets (See Shulchan Aruch Orech Chaim 646). Nevertheless, for the Chanukah lights this limitation does not apply, as the Rambam writes in Hilchot Chanukah, 4:12: "The mitzvah of kindling Chanukah lights is a very cherished mitzvah. A person should be careful in its observance to publicize the miracle and thus increase our praise of G-d, and our expression of thanks for the miracles He wrought on our behalf. Therefore, even someone who does not have money, should borrow or sell personal effects to be able to light the Chanukah lights." What is so exceptional about this mitzvah that the regular rules don't apply?

When publicizing a miracle, one is actually fulfilling the mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem, publicizing the exceptional kindness and goodness of Hashem. Just as one is obligated – in extreme circumstances – to sacrifice one's life in order not to cause a Chilul Hashem, so too, Chazal require us on Chanukah to make an extra effort, above the standard requirements, in order to fulfill the supreme mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem.

### Gratitude in the Torah

There is a chapter in the Torah that demonstrates vividly how we should thank our Creator. When Eliezer, Avraham's servant, goes to find a wife for Yitzchak, he offers a dramatic expression of thanks to Hashem upon finding her (This shows the importance of thanking Hashem for one's marriage partner, a topic expounded on

in the book 'The Fifth Voice'). Immediately after he finds Rivka, Eliezer prostrates himself fully on the ground and expresses heartfelt gratitude to Hashem. But Eliezer does not stop there – he goes on to relate in detail the exceptional providence that he experienced to the family of the girl. He does not just suffice with generalized thanks but mentions every facet of the outstanding providence that he experienced. "Avodat Hakorbanot", written by the Chofetz Chaim's son-in-law, explains that one who expresses gratitude should elaborate to the maximum of his ability on the details of the kindness he experienced, as the passuk says in Tehilim (107) "They sacrifice thanksgiving offerings, and relate His deeds with elated song."

This is why, when Eliezer comes to Lavan's house he turns down offers of food – until he concludes thanking Hashem. Only after relating all the details of the Heavenly providence was he prepared to eat.

In the merit of publicizing this kindness of Hashem, Eliezer's life was saved. The Midrash tells that he was served a plate of poisoned food, but since he would not eat until he finished speaking, in the meantime the plates were exchanged and his life spared.

Sefer Darash David remarks that this is an example of public expression of gratitude to Hashem bringing about further miracles and kindnesses. As the Peleh Yoetz writes: "One of Hashem's kindnesses is that when we thank Him and praise Him for

His goodness, He considers this an exceptional mitzvah and merit. The merit is so great that it warrants further miracles occurring to him, as the passuk in Tehillim says: "He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors me... and I will (therefore) show him (further) salvation." (Tehilim 50)

The Torah goes into great detail describing the story of Eliezer to teach us how valued expressing gratefulness is in Hashem's eyes. This is the meaning of what Chazal tell us: "The speech of the servants of our Patriarchs is more esteemed (in Heaven) than the Torah of their sons."

### A Cherished Mitzvah

The Rambam's assertion that the mitzvah of kindling the Chanukah lights is "a very cherished mitzvah", is now clear. Publicizing Hashem kindnesses causes exceptional Heavenly nachas ruach.

An important lesson can be learned from this: The Chanukah lights are so highly regarded because they are a public declaration of Hashem's kindness. But they are not the only means of spreading the word. We ourselves can become a living menorah. If we constantly relate to others Hashem's kindnesses, we will be cherished in Heaven no less than the menorah.

Let us arouse our hearts to praise and thank Hashem enthusiastically, and inspire others to do the same, and thereby fill the world with more and more appreciation of His amazing gifts and kindnesses.



# Chanukah – A Guide to Gratitude

## 10 lessons we can learn from Chanukah about gratitude.

**1. Details count!** Read the prayer of Al Hanissim. So many details, factors and facets of the miracles are described. When you offer thanks, mention all the many details and features that you appreciate – it shows how meaningful the gift is to you.

**2. Refresh!** Look for new things, new angles, new ideas that you may have not yet noticed. Certainly, don't forget the old, but one new candle every night of Chanukah teaches us to be constantly on the look out for new and refreshing things to appreciate, while not forgetting the old.

**3. Publicize!** It is not enough just to feel gratitude in your heart, or light the Chanukah candles in the privacy of your home. The candles need to be lit in a place that will be seen outside. Gratitude must be expressed in a way that it will reach as many people as possible, so that as many people as possible will grow in their gratitude to Hashem.

**4. Regular is amazing!** Don't forget to express your gratitude for the mundane. Why do we light eight candles of Chanukah if the miracle of oil was only for seven days, while the first day was a natural occurrence? The Alter of Kelm teaches that this is to remind us that even nature is nothing less than miraculous.

**5. With all your heart!** Gratitude is not only saying 'thank you', but a deep-felt feeling of gratitude. Feeling esteem and love for the One Who aided and protected us with love and kindness. This is the reason for the accepted practice to sing songs of praise (such as "Maoz Tzur") following the lighting of the Chanukah candles, mentioning all the miraculous deliverances of our nation from the early days of our history.

**6. The key to loving Hashem!** Rambam describes the mitzvah of kindling the Chanukah lights as a "cherished mitzvah". Expressing thankfulness to Hashem is the key to fulfilling the supreme mitzvah of loving Hashem. Someone who thanks

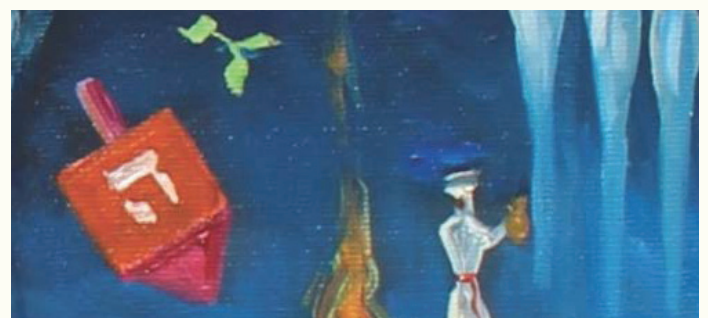
Him continuously, will become aware of His amazing goodness, come to love Him and feel great joy in bringing Him nachas ruach.

**7. Light up the darkness!** In the same way that the Chanukah lights light up the dark winter nights, thanking Hashem makes everything shine and glow. Even the most difficult situations are made lighter and brighter through appreciation of our many gifts.

**8. The key to joy and happiness!** Gratitude gives a person a happy and joyous life. The days of Chanukah are called in the Gemara "days of praise and gratitude" whereas the Rambam rephrases this and writes "days of praise and joy". Gratitude makes life happy and joyful.

**9. Heavenly Pleasure!** Gratitude to Hashem carries with it a taste of the state of bliss and joy that our soul will experience in the next world. On Purim, when the threat was on their bodies, we are given a mitzvah to give pleasure to the body, whereas on Chanukah, where the threat of annihilation was on their souls, the holiday's mitzvah is to bring pleasure to the soul by thanking and praising Hashem.

**10. Thanks is forever!** Chazal tell us that all holidays will become redundant in the ultimate future-world, except for Chanukah and Purim. Similarly, all sacrifices will become superfluous except for the Sacrifice of Thanksgiving. The same is true for all forms of prayer, except for Mizmor LeToda – the prayer of thanksgiving.



## A Word of Gratitude

"Why are we called Yehudim? The word Yehudi has the same root as hodayah - thankfulness. The uniqueness of Yisrael over all other nations is that we acknowledge that everything comes from Hashem and thank Him for it."

*Poked Akarim, Rabbi Tzadok Hakohen from Lublin*

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