

KOL TODA

Gateways to Gratitude: Giving Thanks to Hashem

OPPORTUNITY FOR RAIN

The month of Cheshvan is the epitome of fall – rain, chilly nights, sweaters. Shortly before this new month begins, during Simchas Torah, we change our *tefilla* in the *Shemoneh Esrei* in recognition of God's power to give rain: **"He makes the wind blow and He makes the rain descend."** Then, on the seventh of Cheshvan we begin in Eretz Yisrael to pray for rain. We recognize Hashem's role, and then we pray to Him.

What is the importance of praying for rain?

Parashas Bereishis tells of the Creation of the world. On the third day, the plants were created – in potential. It is brought in *Chullin* (60b, based on *Bereishis* 1:11): "...And on the third [day], where it is written: **'Let the earth bring forth,'** they [the plants] had not yet emerged, rather they stood just below the surface of the ground until the sixth day." Why was the emergence of the plants delayed?

"Now no tree of the field was yet on the earth, neither did any herb of the field yet grow, because Hashem God had not brought rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the soil" (*Bereishis* 2:5). Rashi comments on "...because Hashem God had not brought rain upon the earth...": "Because there was no man to work the soil and no one recognized the benefit of rain. But when man came and understood that rain was essential to the world, he prayed for it, and it fell, and the trees and the herbs sprouted."

It is up to man to recognize the goodness that Hashem gives. This brings us to prayer, and actualizes the entire Creation.

Rain, *geshem*, is a physical manifestation of Hashem's bounty. It is a clear and open expression of Hashem's love for us and goodness, demonstrating that Hashem hears our

prayers and gives us what we need. But rain can only come when we first recognize its benefit, appreciate the need for it, and most importantly, realize that it is Hashem Who sends it.

Indeed, it is acknowledgment, prayer, and appreciation that unlock the doors of blessing. After being the recipient of Hashem's benevolence, and realizing that it is Hashem Who bestows the goodness, we appreciate Hashem's goodness and we come to thank Him – which again brings us close to Him, and opens up the channel for Hashem to give us more.

The Hebrew word *"l'hodot"* carries a double meaning, to acknowledge and also to give thanks. Being that Hebrew is a Divine language, one that was used to create the world, it contains multiple layers of meaning, all which complement each other. Acknowledging and thanking, two aspects expressed by one word, go hand-in-hand. When we acknowledge that everything is from Hashem, that everything occurs by *hashgacha pratis*, Divine Providence, we then come to appreciate Hashem and to thank Him – to thank Him for everything. And THIS is the very purpose of the entire Creation!

The Ramban writes at the end of *parashas Bo* (*Bereishis* 13:16): "...and the purpose of Creation is for man to acknowledge that God created him, and there is no other purpose in Creation, and there is nothing that God the Most High desires other than for man to know that God created him and to thank Him for being created..."

"Let them thank Hashem for His kindness, and for His wonders to the children of men" (*Tehillim* 107:8). Let us open our hands in gratitude, prepare the buckets, and catch every drop of His blessings!

SHEHAKOL NIHEYEH BIDVARO

Yehuda is running late. So many things on his list to do today! Meetings, appointments, the list is endless. Oh, how he wished that the day would be just one or two hours longer.

After three hours of running a marathon of assignments, Yehuda deserves a break. A neat little café looks inviting, and he steps inside. A smartly dressed waiter appears and hands him a leather-bound menu, but Yehuda needs only a coffee.

Two minutes later a café latte is placed before him, a spoon perched near the cup at just the right angle. Along with coffee comes the bill – tucked neatly in a leather-bound holder. Yehuda peeks at it while sipping his coffee. Twenty dollars!

He puts down the half-finished drink and motions the smart-alecky waiter to come over. Just wait till he hears what he has to say!

"All I ordered was a cup of coffee! A teaspoon of coffee, an extra sugar, and two ounces of milk mixed with some hot water. And for that you charge twenty dollars?"

"Sir," bowed the sleek waiter, "it is true that you only ordered a cup of coffee. But you got it in a glass cup, with a spoon and saucer, I am here to help you, and the menu is leather-bound. There is music here, and I don't know if you noticed, but you are sitting on a designer chair made of the latest materials, in a most exquisite design. Yes, it is only a cup of coffee, but so much surrounds it..."

Our world, explains Rav Yisrael Salanter, is just the same. It wasn't without reason that *Chazal* established the blessing of *"...shehakol niheyeh biDvaro"* – Blessed are You, Hashem...by Whose Word everything came to be", for drinking a simple cup of water.

How do we understand this? Why before drinking a cup of water do we need to recall that the whole world came to be by Hashem's Word? Why not thank Hashem simply for the water itself? The reason is that it is upon us to thank Hashem for providing not only the water, but also for all the pleasures that surround that cup of refreshing sparkling water. When a person pours a glass of water and recites, *"Baruch Ata... shehakol niheyeh biDvaro"* – Blessed are You, Hashem...by Whose Word everything came to be", he is acknowledging and thanking Hashem for not only the water, but also for all of the pleasures surrounding it.

Hashem created a whole world full of His wonders – mountains and hills, trees and flowers, rivers and seas, clear air, chirping birds, a nice breeze.... The world's pleasures are here for us so that we will come to recognize, praise, and thank Hashem, Who lovingly has given it all to us. Let us thank Hashem, and gratefully partake of them!

Yehoshua Wiseman

A WORD OF GRATITUDE

On the verse (*Tehillim* 3:9), "Salvation is Hashem's, upon Your people is Your blessing, *Selah*," Rashi explains: It is incumbent upon Hashem to save His servants and His people, and it is incumbent upon His people to bless Him and thank Him forever."

DROP BY PRECIOUS DROP

A PERSONAL STORY

I walked along the windswept side-streets, deeply inhaling the cool fall scents. Leaves crunched underfoot and the sound of children running to catch the school bus filled the air. Sukka boards and decorations were packed away till next year and the sound of the shofar faded into the distance. Back to the regular routine. Everyone was revving up for another long winter.

"Back to your regular schedule?" I heard the conversation in front of me.

"Sure thing. The *yomim tovim* just disappeared... Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, the joy of Sukkos. And what happened to all my new-year resolutions? It seems that we just have to fit right back into the flow of things."

I wanted to answer those two, to tell them my story. It happened exactly one year ago. But being an introvert, I find it hard to just talk to people. But still, I wanted to tell my story and publicize it, so after I saw your newsletter I decided to send this in.

For long years I suffered from headaches that came and went. Not simple headaches – splitting ones. Only one who has experienced such headaches can really understand. When I was having a headache, I couldn't learn my *limudei kodesh* and often could do almost nothing.

One day, I decided there must be some kind of medicine for my pain. After asking around, I found myself going to a widely recommended professor who would hopefully give me something to cure my headaches. Sure enough, I walked out of his office with reams of prescriptions. I filled them at the nearest pharmacy and went home, ready to finally start living like a normal person.

I can't say exactly when the change began.

First I felt dizziness. I then found myself sleeping more than usual. More and more I felt out of sorts. Finally I returned to the doctor, who ran a blood test. It showed that I was having serious liver problems. I didn't connect the dots, as the professor maintained that my problems were not linked to the pills I was taking for my headaches.

I began running from doctor to doctor trying to figure out all my problems. Meanwhile, I began experiencing terrible nausea – I could eat almost nothing and had absolutely no appetite. I remember myself traveling on the bus and watching someone lift up his child. I had no energy to be able to do such a thing and I wondered how in the world he could. The whole world looked grey and cloudy. I wanted to open the window and yell out to him, "Hey, you! Do you know enough to appreciate that you can lift up your child? Did it even occur to you that some people can't do that?" I, for one, could not even lift up a book.

During lunch hour, when all my friends were in the lunchroom, I walked about a bit. There were people eating hungrily, enjoying their food. But I was feeling so nauseous. If I had not been such an introvert I would have taken a megaphone and shouted, "Did you ever appreciate that you have an appetite – that you have the desire to eat? You don't know, but amongst you is a man who cannot even think of food without feeling nauseous. Say thank you! Say thank you for the simple things that you have!"

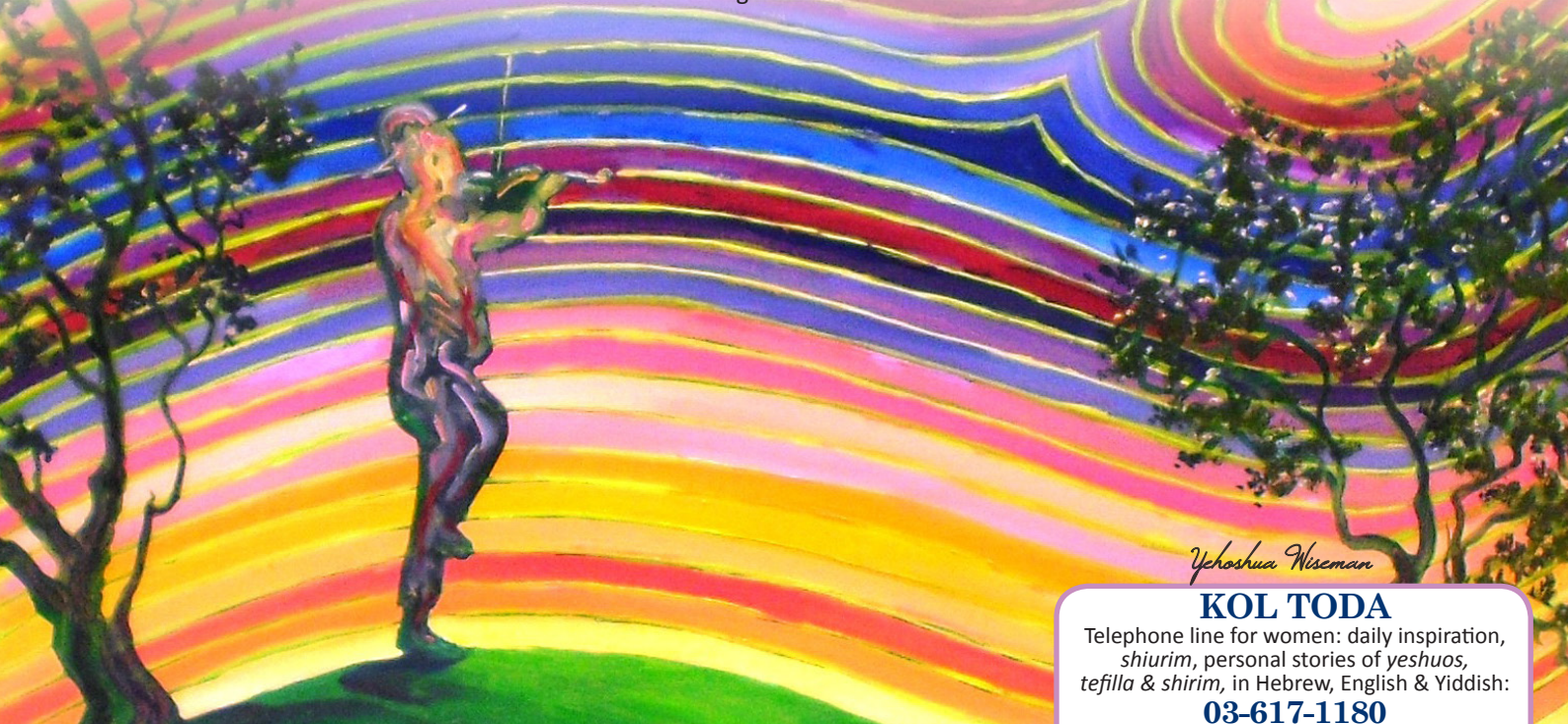
For the first time in my life, the thought hit me in full force – we don't know how to thank Hashem. Everything seems so simple, so natural, and is taken for granted. It's normal to feel healthy – to have energy, to feel hunger and to be able to eat. Only when these wonderful gifts were taken from me

did I realize what a loss it was for me to have lived without knowing how to thank Hashem for them, to raise my eyes up to Him and say, simply, "Thank You, Hashem."

In Hashem's infinite kindness, I came upon another doctor who was a wonderful *shaliach* that delivered me from darkness to light. When he saw the name of the drug I was taking he told me to throw it all into the trash and announced that I would now become healthy. And indeed, a week after getting off the drug, I slowly began to return to normal. But as to my old life.... My new life took on a deeper and stronger meaning. I began to thank Hashem for every little thing. When I was hungry and wanted to eat I would say, "Thank You, Hashem!" and dance a little jig. When I would get up in the morning and walk with strength and vitality, I would feel endless gratitude and love for our Creator.

I remembered all this now. So you say "back to routine"? "Ordinary"? No such thing, forget it. Let us take advantage of this winter to thank Hashem for our everyday abilities, for the "usual" things, for the health of our limbs.... By thanking Hashem for these gifts, we can reach newfound levels of gratitude that will bring us to powerfully connect with our Creator. There is no need to wait for Hashem to first take these gifts away, God forbid. Let us open our eyes now. Let's stop and think, and raise our eyes to the Heavens and say, "Thank You, Hashem. Thank You, Master of the World! Thank You for my good health, my appetite, and my energy.... Thank You for it all!"

With drops of thanks to Hashem throughout the day for these wondrous everyday gifts, we can turn the long winter into a winter full of happiness, exhilaration, and true thankfulness to Hashem.



Yehoshua Wiseman

KOL TODA

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

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Dedicated *l'ilui nishmos* Eliezer ben David *a"h*, Chaya bas Michel *a"h* & Pinchas ben Yosef *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
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