

“If he shall offer it for a Thanksgiving-offering.” (7:12)

The imperative to pay gratitude to Hashem *Yisborach* and to everyone that benefits us is a compelling one. Fortunate is he who is able to show that appreciation. I have been writing about *hakoras ha'tov* – recognizing the benefit we receive and demonstrating that recognition – for many years, but I never thought I would publicly convey my personal *hakoras ha'tov* to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu Shehechiyani v'Kimani, u'Gemalani Kol Tuv*.

Chazal teach us that the *Korban Todah* was accompanied by forty loaves of bread, so that the beneficiary would be “encouraged” to invite people in order to relate Hashem’s *chassodim*, kindnesses, to them. I, likewise, use the medium of the *Peninim* to express my gratitude and hopefully to educate others so that what happened to me will help others know how to respond in a similar situation.

Parashas Tzav coincides with *Parashas Terumah* in my writing cycle. On Friday night, *Parashas Terumah*, my life changed – because it almost came to an end. *Nissim min HaShomayim* guided a few hours that felt like an eternity. I went to bed that night with no indication of any impending problem. Suddenly at 3:20 a.m., I woke up with an excruciating pain in my upper ribcage, just below my throat, that emanated full-circle to my back and neck. It was like no pain that I had ever previously experienced. The intensity and suddenness were so incredible that I understood that something was wrong. I immediately got dressed, woke my wife, and called 911. I figured that if I was acting in undue haste, the medics would tell me this. I had the *Siyata d'Shmaya* to maintain the presence of mind not to delay, but to act immediately.

I was “fortunate” that the E.M.S. crew came immediately; the emergency room physicians were waiting when we arrived, and the members of the catheterization team were immediately placed on call. At 5:30 a.m., I was already being wheeled into the cardiac catheterization lab for the first of two procedures.

I write all of this because the *Peninim* is *Baruch Hashem* read by many people, and I feel that my greatest *hodaah*, offering of gratitude, is to help others know how to respond in a similar episode. I look back, and I wonder what *zechus* I had to survive. I have no idea if it played a role, but I have always felt that the “*Shabbos*” would protect me. For the past seventeen years, I have made an effort to walk down to the hospitals on *Shabbos* to visit patients that are either known or referred to me. I have made it a point to emphasize the significance of not leaving a Jew alone in a hospital setting for *Shabbos*. Hashem gave me the energy to walk, a family with the patience to tolerate it, and the resolution to continue doing what is the right thing, even though it was difficult at times.

Perhaps my *zechus* was the fact that I would publicly convey my experience, so that other *Yidden* will live. My cardiologist tells me that “time is muscle.” The faster one receives cardiac intervention, the less heart muscle is damaged. For “some reason” I did not wait, and at the first sign of pain I called 911. Most people do not do this. They search for antacids or painkillers,

anything but make the call that could save their lives.

I never thought that I would use *Peninim* as a vehicle for expounding about diet. There is no question that a low-salt, low-fat diet is not as palatable as its counterpart, but living to see your children and grandchildren grow up is certainly an option I would not trade for a piece of *kishke*.

Last, we are taught that Hashem prepares the *refuah*, remedy, before the *makah*, illness. We should do the same. Prepare *zechusim*, merits – give Hashem reasons to keep you alive. Make yourself necessary. Provide a service for others that is vital, even if it is not comfortable or “plaque worthy.” Furthermore, the Manchester *Rosh HaYeshivah*, *Horav Yehudah Zev Segal, z.l.*, writes that we often take the gifts of good health and life for granted, while bemoaning things that are trivial by comparison. For this and other reasons, it is good to visit a hospital from time to time. Aside from fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *Bikur Cholim*, visiting the sick, and giving encouragement and succor to someone in need, one comes in contact with people who only yesterday have been well and are unfortunately ill today. This serves as a vivid reminder to be forever grateful for the gifts of good health and life.

I close with a thought from *Horav Shimon Schwab, z.l.*, from his commentary on the *Siddur*. He explains that *hodaah* means more than “thank you.” It is a confession of our indebtedness. Hence, the *tefillah*, *Modim*, is an expression of our indebtedness to Hashem, especially for the following: *Al chayeinu ha’mesurim beyadecha*, “for our lives which are entrusted into Your hand.” We must constantly realize that our entire lives are in His hand

- from birth until our very last breaths. We live and die by His will. May I add that while we live our lives *b’derech ha’teva*, following conventional medicine, we must never forget – and always give thanks to – Hashem, because it is only through His will that we

V’al nishmoseinu ha’pekudos lach, “for our souls which are in Your care.” We pay gratitude to Hashem for guarding the *neshamah*, which He emplaced within our bodies at birth and will retrieve at the moment of death. Throughout this period, He guards it.

V’al nisecha shebechol yom imanu, “for Your miracles that are with us every day.” This is a reference to the *nissim nistarim*, hidden miracles, which comprise so much of our lives. We are not aware of the major illness we might have contracted or the dangerous situations we go through in our daily lives. Each of us could easily relate a number of examples.

V’al nifleosecha v’tovosecha shebechol eis – erev, va’boker, v’tzaharayim, “And for Your wondrous deeds and bestowal of goodness, which occurs at all times – evening, morning, and afternoon.” In its simple interpretation, we pay gratitude to Hashem for all of the hidden miraculous events which constantly occur, for which we express our thanks thrice daily in the *tefillos* of *Maariv*, *Shacharis* and *Minchah*.

Rav Schwab, however, offers a compelling alternative approach to understanding these three periods. He maintains that they are a reference to the moods or circumstances in which one may find himself. *Erev*: one may find himself in an “emotional state of *erev*.” Like evening, it is dark, black and unknowing. He feels that his life is declining, either due to age or *mazel*. Nothing seems to go right. He feels a sense of hopelessness; he is at the “end of his rope.”

Boker: A person may be in a *boker* state of life when he notices a glimmer of light rising into his life. Little by little, things begin to fit into place and turn around for him.

Tzaharayim: In the *tzaharayim* state of his life, the sun is shining brightly. Everything he touches turns into success. He has the feeling of being on “top of the world.”

In this sense, we pay gratitude to Hashem *Yisborach* for our lives which He holds in His hands, regardless of the state of being our lives are in at the time. We trust and affirm that He holds the key to our existence. It is because of His will and kindness that we are alive. Regardless of the condition in which a person finds himself, being alive is in itself the greatest gift from Hashem.

I began writing this *Peninim* in the hospital and finished it a few days later at home. I thank the reading public for indulging me, and I fervently hope that I have made an impact. If my experience will save another life, then it will all have been worthwhile.