

## Now, O' Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem, your G-d, to go in all His ways and to love Him, and to serve Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and all your soul. (10:12)

In the *Talmud Menachos* 43b, *Chazal* derive from this *pasuk* that a Jew is obligated to recite one hundred *brachos*, blessings, daily. This is derived from the word, *Mah*, before the words, *Hashem Elokecha sh'oele meimach*, "What – does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you?" The "*mah*" is interpreted to mean *meah*, which means one hundred. *Midrash Tanchuma*, Korach 12, adds that David *Hamelech* initiated the decree to recite one hundred blessings daily as a merit to save the nation from continuing to lose one hundred men each day. Apparently, as explained by the *Tur Orach Chaim* 46, one hundred Jews died every day, and no one understood why. Employing the means of *Ruach HaKodesh*, Divine Inspiration, David was able to determine that, by having the nation recite one hundred *brachos* daily, they could circumvent the Heavenly curse placed upon the nation.

**Horav Moshe Leib Sassover, zl**, writes, "Who am I, the smallest of the small, who never feared (had reason to fear) the Master of Masters? (In other words he was a truly righteous and holy Jew). But if I sinned but once (in the fact) that I do not recite the one hundred blessings with (proper) *yirah u'pachad*, fear and trembling; that (as a result of this) I am angering my Creator Blessed is He, one hundred times a day! Woe is to me, and woe is to my soul that I (am responsible for this) blemish every day."

Upon reading this personal self-assessment of the holy *Sassover*, we are all obviously weakened and anxious about the efficacy of our blessings. If this righteous Jew was anxious concerning his *kavanah*, proper intention, upon reciting these blessings – what should we say? Better we should say nothing. We are all witness to the constant deluge of *tzaros*, troubles, financial, physical, spiritual and emotional, with which we are all in one way or another beset. Yet, this simple remedy which comes to us from none other than David *Hamelech* is ignored. Perhaps it is as the *Sassover* implies: It is simply too much to expect. Is there any way to salvage the remedy without so much of the responsibility? Is there an "easy" way out?

In his *Shvilei Pinchas*, **Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita**, explores the issues, devoting an entire thesis to this subject. He quotes the **Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei Tosfos**, in their commentary to the above *pasuk*, who write, "Our Sages decreed that we recite the blessing of *Modim* (in the *Shemoneh Esrai*), which coincides with the one hundred blessings. One who recites the *brachah/tefillah* of *Modim* with the proper *kavanah* will thereby fulfill his obligation to recite one hundred blessings. The *gematria*, numerical equivalent, of *Modim* is one hundred.

*Rav Friedman* continues with an explanation of the significance of the *Modim brachah*, especially

the critical importance of bowing down in concession as he begins the blessing. The *Talmud Bava Kamma* 16a teaches that the spine of a deceased person transforms into a snake seven years after he is buried – if this person, when he was alive, had not bowed down for the *Modim* prayer. This same bone which is transformed into a snake is the bone from which the person will be recreated in the World to Come. Thus, *Tosfos* adds, a person who was deficient in properly expressing his gratitude during the *Modim* prayer will have no bone from which to be recreated. It has been transformed into a snake. His options are eliminated. *Tosfos* actually have great difficulty with this concept, since every person has the potential to enter the World to Come. The *Zohar* adds that such a person will not rise up for *Techiyas HaMeisim*, Resurrection of the Dead.

In any event, the consensus is clear: One who does not bow for the *Modim* prayer will be the victim of eternal punishment. Why is this? *Rav Friedman* illuminates us with a citation from the **Toras Chaim's** commentary to *Meseches Bava Kamma* 16a. He explains that *Chazal* were *mesakein*, decreed, that one recite the *Modim* prayer thrice daily to fulfill the mandate indicated by the *pasuk* in *Sefer Tehillim* 150:6, *Kol ha'neshamah tehallel Ka*, "Let all souls praise G-d." *Chazal* interpret *kol ha'neshamah*- all souls, as *Al kol neshimah u'neshimah tehallel Kah*, "For each and every breath of air that one takes, he should praise G-d." We have a constant obligation to offer our gratitude to the Almighty for every moment of life. Nothing is to be accepted as chance. It is all by Heavenly design and gifted to us by the Almighty.

I take the liberty of quoting a loosely translated version of the *Toras Chaim's* commentary. "Hashem performs an incredible kindness for man every day, every moment, every second. The *baal ha'nes*, one who experiences a miracle, is rarely aware of his miraculous gift. He thinks *olam k'minhago noheig*, the world goes about in its usual custom. In other words, out of a sense of complacency, man thinks that this is the way of life; thus, he loses sight of the miracles which sustain him. He does not realize that every step, every movement, every breath, which he takes is (a gift) from Him.

It would be only proper that man should pay gratitude for these myriad miracles of which he is the beneficiary. This is what is meant by *Chazal* when they say that one should give praise *Al kol neshimah u'neshimah* – "for each and every breath." This is really how it should be: One should constantly bless Hashem, because one's debt of gratitude is ceaseless and never-ending.

Since it is unrealistic to expect a person to remain in constant prayer throughout the day, our sages established a prayer whereby we are able to offer gratitude to Hashem in a cumulative manner for the boundless good which we receive from him. This is the *Modim* prayer.

The *Toras Chaim* now addresses *Chazal's* statement concerning the spine of one who does not bow down during *Modim*. The first premise which he establishes is that when one pays gratitude – he bows. *David Hamelech* says, *Eshtachaveh el heichal kodshecha v'odeh es Shimcha al chasdecha*, "I will prostrate myself toward Your Holy Sanctuary, and I will acknowledge Your Name, for Your kindness" (*Tehillim* 138:2). One who remains erect while conceding/confessing/paying

homage demonstrates his lack of sincerity. This was demonstrated by Dasan and Aviram, Moshe *Rabbeinu's* primary nemeses, who, upon being called to present themselves before him, (the Torah emphasizes that they), stood erect before him, in defiance of his exalted position. The *Midrash* teaches that the primordial serpent came to entice Chavah. It came standing erect, filled with conceit, expounding arrogance with malice. This was the serpent's way of saying, "I do not fear Hashem." Thus, explains *Rav Friedman*, one who does not bow down for the *Tefillah* of *Modim* will have his spine turn into a snake. The snake was the "father" of all those who refuse to bow down. This person might utter the words of *Modim*, but it remains mere lip service. He does not really mean what he is saying. Adam *HaRishon's teshuvah*, repentance, spared him a similar punishment.

**Horav Bunim, zl, m'Peshishcha** was once queried by a fine, observant Jew who simply found it very difficult to provide for his family: "Why do those who do not put on *Tefillin* and do not observe *Shabbos* live in fancy homes, while those of us who adhere strictly to the Torah often suffer the pangs of hunger and deprivation?"

The *Rebbe* answered with a powerful insight into the distinction of punishments meted out to the three participants in the sin of eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, Tree of Knowledge. Adam was told that he would earn and eat his bread by the sweat of his brow. Chavah was told that she would have great difficulty and suffer pain when delivering her children. The serpent, however, seems to have gotten away with a light punishment. He would crawl on the ground and eat dirt. Crawling on the ground is not fun, but having one's "food" available whenever is a plus. How is this to be considered a punishment?

We fail to acknowledge that the greatest reward available to man is the ability to establish and maintain a close relationship with Hashem. As long as one must pray to the Almighty for sustenance, there is an indication that Hashem cares and that He wants to hear from man, that He wants to maintain this relationship. When Hashem grants him his livelihood on a silver platter, it means that Hashem really wants nothing more to do with him: As He said to the serpent, "Here is all the food you will ever need. Do not bother Me. I want nothing to do with you." When Hashem "grants" us opportunities for prayer, it is a sign of love. He is waiting to hear from us.

Gratitude is an attitude. When one allows himself to delve into the character trait of gratitude, he soon realizes how much good there really is in life. While there will always be some things which we are lacking, we should shift our focus on that which we have. There is no limit to what we do not have. If this becomes our central focus in life, we will be bitter, dissatisfied people. **Horav Nachman Breslover, zl**, was wont to say, "Gratitude rejoices with her 'sister,' joy, and is always ready to light a candle and have a party. Gratitude does not have a strong relationship with such traits as boredom, despair and taking life for granted. Gratitude does not allow for one to feel sorry for himself – regardless of his situation. One of the distinguished *Baalei Mussar*, Ethicists, began his *Mussar shmuess*, discourse, by pounding on the lectern, followed by, "It is enough that we are alive!" That was his entire *shmuess*.

We close with a now well-known story. It concerns the famous virtuoso violinist, Izhak Perlman. He was in New York to give a concert. When he was a child, he was stricken with polio, resulting in his difficulty in getting around. His mobility was quite limited, as he had to wear braces on his legs and was relegated to getting around with the support of crutches. When the famous violinist ascended the stage, it was a sight to behold him crossing the stage slowly and reaching the chair upon which he sat during his recital. The audience waited patiently for the super-star to traverse the stage.

Perlman signaled the conductor to begin. No sooner had he completed the first few bars of his solo than one of the strings of his violin snapped loudly, making a noise much like a gun shot. While it was early in the concert and Perlman could have halted the concert to fix his violin, he did not. He waited momentarily and once again signaled for the conductor to continue from where they had left off. With only three strings left on his instrument, Perlman was able to redesign the score in such a manner that he was able to complete the concert with three strings, playing with passion and artistry. When he finally finished, the audience came to their feet and cheered him excitedly. They realized that they had been privy to a stroke of brilliance, an extraordinary demonstration of human skill and genius.

When the crowd quieted down, the master spoke, "You know," he began, "I could have changed the string, but it is the artist's task to make beautiful music with what he has left."

We all lack something. Instead of focusing on our deficiencies, we should train ourselves to contemplate all of the positive things that we have been granted. We would be so much happier and more complete people.