

This is the law of the feast Peace-offering... if he shall offer it for a Thanksgiving-offering. (7:11,12)

One who has survived a life-threatening crisis brings a *Korban Todah*, thanksgiving-offering: first, to demonstrate that he acknowledges that it was Hashem Who saved him; second, to pay gratitude to Hashem. David *Hamelech* says (*Tehillim* 107:21,22) *Yodu la'Hashem chasdo, v'niflaosav livnei adam. V'yizbechu zivchei Todah v'yisapru maasav b'rinah*. "Let them acknowledge to Hashem His kindness, and to the children of man His wonders. And let them sacrifice thanksgiving-offerings and relate His works with joyful song." We derive from here that the offering of a *Korban Todah* is of overriding significance and is an integral part of the process of expressing gratitude.

The *Acharonim* debate whether the *Todah*-offering is a Biblically – mandated sacrifice which is brought by a person who acknowledges his debt of gratitude to Hashem, or is it simply common sense and human decency to say "thank you" for favors received. The fact that it is a *Korban Shelamim*, peace-offering, which is discretionary (except for festivals when it is mandated), implies that it is a free-will offering of gratitude.

In reference to the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* previously cited, the *Sefas Emes* derives that actually there is a process of thanksgiving whereby one first thanks Hashem for the individual, specific favor that he has just received. This is then followed by a more encompassing, general statement of gratitude for all favors received. All too often we are very "stingy" with our gratitude, almost begrudgingly rendering our appreciation for specifics without acknowledging all of the good we have benefited from Hashem. The *pasuk* teaches us that first we should acknowledge the specific favor/miracle and then relate all of Hashem's wonders. We should not scrimp on our gratitude.

One of our primary issues with rendering gratitude is that we are under the misconception that gratitude is given only following an incident during which we have suffered – or almost suffered – and were spared, emerging healthy with our material assets intact. What about one who enjoys sustained good fortune, who has not been ill? Is he to bring a *Korban Todah*? The *Gerrer Rebbe, zl*, the *Bais Yisrael*, related that his father, the *Imrei Emes*, showed him a letter that he had received from a prominent *chasid*, follower, in Warsaw, who writes: "*Baruch Hashem*, I am doing well: more than enough livelihood, good health; I learn every day and *daven* well. Do I really need to be *mazkir* (literally have my name mentioned to the *Rebbe*, to petition his blessing)? After all (the letter implied), does one petition (or pay gratitude) when life is good and things are going well?"

The *Imrei Emes* quoted from the *Chovos HaLevavos*, (*Shaar Avodas Elokim* 6) "And (commensurate) with all that Hashem adds on good (with the more one receives) he is obligated to serve Him." In other words – the more one receives from Hashem, the greater is his obligation to pay gratitude. It is not about "being saved"; it is about being the beneficiary of Hashem's goodness. Hashem gives; we must say thank you. Gratitude is not about what we might have lost; it is about what we have!

I recently came across a deeper understanding of Hashem's beneficence, and how it is that much greater than the good that we receive from human beings. In our daily prayer, we recite *Shemoneh Esrai* thrice. The blessing of *Modim*, thanksgiving, in which we pay gratitude for all that we receive from Hashem, concludes with two compelling statements: *HaTov ki lo chalu Rachamecha; v'Ha'meracheim ki lo samu chasadecha*. "The Beneficent One, for Your compassions were never exhausted"; and "The Compassionate One, for Your Kindness never ended." In his *Kochvei Ohr*, *Horav Yitzchak Blazer, zl*, distinguishes between human characteristics and those same characteristics when they were attributed to Hashem.

Human characteristics have limitations. For example, human compassion is limited. Not all people are the same; some exhibit greater feelings of compassion than others. Nonetheless, if a poor man were to petition a wealthy, kind, compassionate, G-d-fearing man for material assistance, the kind man would happily contribute in accordance with his personal degree of *rachamim*. If the poor man asks for an increase, if he feels that what he has received (despite its generous amount) is still insufficient – will the benefactor add to his donation? No! His limits of *rachamim* go just so far.

On the other hand, there is no end to *rachamei Shomayim*, Heavenly compassion. Hashem graces a person's life commensurate to the person's relationship with Hashem. Additionally, if one is sincere in his tearful petition, Hashem will give more. Hashem is the "Giver Who keeps on giving."

Second is the human being who is an incredible *ba'al chesed*. He helps whenever he can. As inexhaustible as he may appear, he, too, has limits. When he runs out of strength, he no longer can perform acts of *chesed*. Hashem, however, has no limit; He continues doing forever. So, we have two wonderful men. One has incredible compassion – which is limited. One works day and night to carry out acts of kindness. He, too, has his limitations. When Hashem takes pity upon a person, His pity is endless. When He performs *chesed* for people, it is limitless. When we thank Hashem (in *Tefillas Modim*, and essentially whenever), we should keep in mind that the characteristics of His compassion and acts of kindness are extraordinary in the sense that they are unbounded, incessant and perpetual. This is why our gratitude to Him must, likewise, be constant and continuous.