

And you shall say to him, “I declare today to Hashem, your G-d, that I have come to the Land that Hashem swore to our forefathers to give to us.” (26:3)

The landowner brings his fruits to Yerushalayim, to the *Kohen*, and makes his declaration acknowledging that whatever material bounty he has been fortunate to attain is due solely to Hashem's beneficence. Thus, concerning the words, “And you shall say to him,” *Rashi* comments, “To show that you are not unappreciative.” The *Sifri* explains the need to direct this declaration to the *Kohen*, for it is only by acknowledging to another that Hashem has fulfilled His promise that one expresses his gratitude. Furthermore, as noted by the *Bais Yisrael*, *zl*, the *pasuk* begins, *V'amarta*, “You shall say” and follows in *pasuk 5*, *V'anisa v'amarto*, “And you shall call out and say,” which *Rashi* interprets as a requirement to raise his voice. The *Rebbe* explains that human nature dictates that when one is up against the wall in need of salvation – be it health, economic, troubles of any sort – he has no qualms about raising his voice, screaming out his needs for all to hear. When he is blessed with a positive Heavenly response to his request, however, he quietly mutters his gratitude. The Torah admonishes us to pay gratitude in the same manner that one makes his request: loudly and passionately.

A distinguished *Rav* was observed praying fervently at the *Kosel* for a period of eighty days. When asked why he *davened* for such a long period of time, he explained, “I prayed for forty days for a *yeshuah*, salvation. Hashem heard my pleas and blessed me with a gracious response. Now I must thank Him for forty days. My expression of gratitude must be commensurate with my petition.”

Our primary source of good fortune is Hashem, without Whom we have nothing. He employs various “agencies” as His emissaries to provide us with our needs (*Harbei shluchim la'Makom*). How does one thank Hashem? How do we even begin to address our overwhelming debt of gratitude to Him? Veritably, David *HaMelech* alludes to this in his closing verse of *Sefer Tehillim* (150:6): *Kol ha'neshamah t'hallel Kah*, “Every soul should praise Hashem.” *Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 14:9) interpret this *pasuk*: *Al kol neshimah u'neshimah t'hallel Kah*; “For each and every breath, praise Hashem.” I think *Chazal* are teaching us a powerful lesson: indeed, the prescription for living a meaningful, purposeful life. The way to express our gratitude to Hashem is to live a life of constant gratitude, a life in which a moment does not pass that we do not recognize, acknowledge and express our awareness that, without Hashem, we literally would not even be able to live (*neshimah*, breath). We live by the *ratzon*, will, of Hashem. Everything that occurs in our lives, both good and (what appears to be) bad, emanates from Hashem. The “why” is beyond our grasp. All we know is that Hashem is the essence of good, and only good comes from Him. Our lack of comprehension does not define Hashem's actions – only our human limitations do.

In days of old, when our *Bais Hamikdash* functioned in all its glory, if a Jew wanted to express his profound gratitude to Hashem for favors granted, he would offer a *Korban Todah*, Thanksgiving-offering. What do we do now that we no longer have the gift of our *Bais Hamikdash*?

How do we express our gratitude to the Almighty for the myriad favors that He grants us as a nation – in general – and as individuals – in particular? The *Kav HaYashar* writes that one should “Do something good, or perform an act of kindness where it will be evident that it is in lieu of a *korban* to Hashem. He adds that this applies to everyone, because who can say that he has never been saved from something?”

Hashem grants many of us reprieves and second chances at life. Do we understand the meaning, value and ramifications of these supplemental opportunities? Some of us do – for a while – until we return to business as usual, almost as if nothing had happened. I recently read a letter posted by an observant Jewish woman who had been at death’s door, until she was the fortunate recipient of an organ from someone who had not been so fortunate. When we hear of the tremendous *mazel* of the recipient, we tend to minimize/ignore the fact that someone had to die in order for this transplant to take place. While the recipient’s family is celebrating ecstatically, another family is lamenting the death of a loved one.

The woman wrote a loving, poignant letter to the family of the organ donor. She expressed her gratitude to them and to their tragically-mourned daughter whose lung now breathed in her body. She described how her life had been at its end. She had been unable to go on. Even the most elementary and simplest tasks had become impossible for her to perform. Then she received the call: “A lung is available.” As she rode to the hospital with her own twenty-year-old daughter, she realized that someone else’s daughter had just died, and she was receiving her lung. So many ideas ran through her mind as the doctors and the nurses were prepping her for surgery and giving her anesthesia. The next thing she knew, she was awake and breathing on her own! A miracle had occurred.

How much she thanked Hashem! All this is no surprise. We all thank Hashem – initially – but does it continue? Do we remember that we have been given a second chance? I, therefore, close with the sentence in this woman’s letter which was most moving and should be most memorable to all of us: “My promise to you is that I will never waste one moment of my life.”

I conclude with a powerful statement from the *Nesivos Shalom, zl*. A *chassid* came to the *Rebbe* with a request. He had endured a period of serious adversity, and after much supplication, Hashem listened to his pleas, and he perceived the *yeshua*. Now, he wanted to do something special as an expression of gratitude to the Almighty. He came to discuss and seek the *Rebbe*’s counsel concerning this. He then went on to propose a number of wonderful acts of *chesed*, lovingkindness, that would benefit others. The *Rebbe* listened and replied, “If you listen to me, you will do nothing. You should continue throughout your life knowing and acknowledging that you are in Hashem’s debt, that every moment of your life is attributed to Hashem’s lovingkindness. Do not absolve your debt with a check – but rather, carry it on your shoulders as a lifelong debt, so that you will always realize, concede and proclaim your gratitude to Hashem.”