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## Tefillah - 148 How to Survive the End of Days

### ***The First Thing You Should Thank Hashem About Is...***

שאתה הוא ה' אלוקינו ואלוקי אבותינו "מודים אנחנו לך, שאתה הוא ה' אלוקינו ואלוקי אבותינו" We are thankful to You, that You are Hashem, our G-d, and the G-d of our forefathers."

In this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, the blessing of *Modim*, we first use our power of gratitude; then, we describe Whom we give gratitude to (Hashem), and then, we describe what we are giving gratitude about.

The first thing we thank Hashem for is: the fact that He is Hashem, "our G-d". After that, we describe how Hashem is also G-d of our forefathers and about all the great things He does for us, but first, we thank Hashem for the fact that He is "*Elokeinu*", our G-d.

There is nothing in Creation which we do not have to be thankful for. We need to thank Hashem for everything we have. But the root of all our gratitude is to be able to admit that there is a Creator and to be thankful to Hashem for this. Upon that, we can be grateful for everything else. But it all begins with being thankful that we have a Creator.

In the blessing of *Modim*, we express gratitude for the fact that Hashem is "our G-d". Although Hashem is G-d to the other nations as well, it is only the Jewish people which can have a unique declaration of Hashem as being "our G-d", because the belief of the Jewish people in G-d is far greater than that of other nations. A gentile can also believe in G-d, but a Jew can believe in G-d in a much more real and penetrating way.

In *Shema*, we say "*Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad*", ("Hear, O Israel, that Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One") - we declare that Hashem is one, which implies that Hashem is G-d to the whole world, not just to the Jewish people. This will be fully revealed in the future, when all will recognize Hashem as G-d who rules the world. But in the blessing of *Modim*, we focus on the fact that Hashem is our G-d, the G-d of the Jewish people, because there is something unique about our belief in G-d that other nations cannot attain.

Our belief in G-d is more real to us. We see this from the fact that the first thing which we express gratitude about is the very fact that we have a G-d.

A Jew's belief in G-d is not limited to just some kind of intellectual knowledge. It is much more absolute and ingrained in a Jew. The fact that we have a G-d is a fact that must fill our entire life. Faith in the Creator is an all-encompassing concept to the life of a Jew. It is the root of all that we must be

thankful about.

The fact that we thank Hashem for being our G-d implies that Hashem's existence must be a reality to us that fills our entire life – we need to always be cognizant of Hashem's existence, all the time, and more importantly, to let it fill our entire existence.

Chazal refer to this concept as “There is no place that is empty from Him.” The fact that Hashem is “Our G-d” is a consistent fact; it must fill us entirely and on a constant basis.

To know that Hashem exists is the most important thing possible for you to know and ingrain in yourself. Anything else you know of are all but tools to help you get to that knowledge.

Anything in Creation which helps you live comfortably was only created as a means to help you get to the goal of knowing Hashem. In fact, even our Torah learning and performance of mitzvos are meant entirely to bring us to that goal; they are all but tools to help us reach a complete recognition of the reality of the Creator.

A person might recognize Hashem intellectually and he can even feel it, but this is not enough – even if he has succeeded in internalizing in his heart the knowledge that there is a Creator. Why isn't it enough? It's because it's a fact that has to fill your entire life – it has to be the main aspect of your life.

If your belief in the existence of Hashem is not the most important fact of your life, then when you say *Modim* and you're thanking Hashem for being our G-d, it's not coming from your heart; it's just being utterly superficially from your lips. You have to express it from your heart when you say these words in *Shemoneh Esrei*.

### ***Make A List Of What You're Thankful For***

Every person can write a list of things he is thankful to Hashem for. We thank Hashem for the various things He gives us. But what is the very first thing that we thank Him for? Is it the fact that we have a G-d? If Chazal established in *Shemoneh Esrei* that the first thing we thank Hashem for is over the fact that He is our G-d, then that is what should be the first thing on our list!

So a person has to write down a list of all that he's thankful for, and realize that the first thing on his list should be over the fact that Hashem exists. Although we must certainly thank Hashem for all the other things in our life – what we have physically as well as what we have gained spiritually – the very first thing we must thank Him for is: that He is our G-d! That's what we learn from the blessing of *Modim*, which was composed by the Men of Great Assembly: the very first thing you need to thank Hashem for is over the fact that He exists and is our G-d.

The more a person lives a more inner and truthful life, the more he is in touch with the reality of Hashem's existence and he knows that it's the main aspect of life. It's not enough to know that Hashem exists and even to believe very strongly in the words of our Sages about belief in G-d; although we need that too, the knowledge that Hashem exists must be more to us than that. It must be felt clearly in our lives. To know that there is a Creator is what life is all about!

To illustrate, imagine if that knowledge would be taken away from you. Would that kind of a life be a life? You should know that such a life would be meaningless and tasteless.

When a person who understands that, he will find it natural that the very first thing to be thankful for is the fact that there is a Creator. Such a person's priorities in gratitude will be aligned with the way that the Men of Great Assembly established the blessing of *Modim*.

## **Prioritizing**

If one doesn't agree that this is the first thing we need to thank Hashem for, then it must be that he does not really know about the reality of the Creator, because if he would, he would realize that it's the root of that we have to be thankful for. Or, it could mean that he knows about the reality of the Creator, but he doesn't feel it clearly in his life, and thus it's not the main aspect of his life. To him, the more important things will be his financial situation, his health, his marital peace, and his other needs...

We must realize that the most important thing life is to know and feel that the Creator exists! That is what should be the most important thing in our life.

If we don't feel the reality of Hashem and we only know of it intellectually, then it's still possible to be thankful to Hashem over the fact that He is our G-d, but it will be a superficial kind of knowledge to us and nothing more than that.

### **Clarifying It To Yourself**

Thus, when we say *Modim* in *Shemoneh Esrei*, we are not merely thanking Hashem superficially over the fact that He is our G-d. It's much more than that. It's a time to ask ourselves if we are living according to this fundamental fact of life. It is to ask myself: "Do I really feel palpably the mere fact that Hashem exists?"

The fact that Hashem exists is so vital to our life that it's the source of all our vitality. We must ask ourselves, as we say the words of *Modim*, if we really feel what we are saying.

Surely, there are other things as well we need to thank Hashem for. But the most important thing possible to be thankful for to Hashem is: the fact that He exists. The recognition of Hashem must increase in you with each passing day. All of the world will eventually recognize Hashem, but the Jewish people especially are charged with the duty of recognizing Hashem.

### **Surviving The End of Days**

The Chazon Ish wrote in the beginning of *sefer 'Emunah U'Bitachon'* that a person needs to have quiet time every day ("*shaas sheket*") for reflection on matters of *emunah* and *bitachon* (belief and faith) in Hashem. When the soul is silenced and calmed, a person will be able to feel yearnings for the World To Come, like a magnetic pull.

In order for a person to really feel *emunah* in Hashem, he needs to reflect on it every day, and he needs to have quiet time every day for this. This was always applicable, even in the previous generations, but it is especially necessary in the current times we live in. Unfortunately, having quiet time every day to reflect is an almost unheard of concept in this generation, and many people think that it is a bizarre behavior in the current "lifestyle" that we live in.

We have five physical senses. Ever since the sin of Adam, our senses were damaged, and they become louder and more superficial. In this generation, which is loud and noisy, our senses have become further impaired. All of this greatly distances us from having any internal quiet within ourselves. It is then very difficult for a person to truly feel and recognize the reality of Hashem.

Of course, it's still possible to recognize Hashem even amidst noise, but the more inner and preferred way is to find Hashem amidst an internal kind of quietness.

In the generation we live in, which is the End of Days, there is much suffering in the world. It's a very

“loud” situation; it is not a quiet one.

All of the suffering and all of the tragedies are indeed here to awaken us to *teshuvah*, which brings us closer to Hashem. Our Rabbis already wrote many years ago that we will go through mind-boggling suffering and tragedies in the End of Days, and that the purpose of it all is to get us to do *teshuvah*. Indeed, Hashem is calling out to us, more than ever before; He’s screaming out to us to return to Him, in the form of all the suffering we see going on.

But alas, due to that fact, most people only find Hashem in their life only as a result of contemplating the meaning of suffering.

The suffering of the End of Days is what causes most people to become closer to Hashem; it is indeed written, *“In your suffering, you shall find Him.”* This is especially true about the suffering which the Jewish people experiences in the End of Days: the purpose of all our suffering is to bring us closer to Hashem.

But although it is certainly lofty when a person connects to Hashem from all the suffering, such a mindset comes from a feeling of lowliness towards oneself! There is so much more to our relationship with Hashem than that of finding Him amidst all the suffering. Becoming close to Hashem does not have to be based entirely on connecting to Him through all our suffering – we can find Him even amidst calmness and quietness.

There is a more inner way to become close to Hashem: One does not have to wait to find Hashem amidst all the suffering. He can find Hashem even when he’s in a perfectly quiet and calm place. When one is in a quiet place, he can choose to reflect and concentrate on the fact that Hashem is our G-d, which is the greatest thing to be thankful for. He can focus on all of the goodness that Hashem does. In this way, a person connects to Hashem mainly from finding the “good” points of life and focusing on those good points [which often go ignored].

Of course, our suffering also must be used a way to find Hashem through it all and get closer to Him. We need to find Hashem in our life both through the suffering and through the good times; each of these aspects affords us a different degree of closeness to Hashem. However: finding Hashem in our life due to suffering and tragedy should not be the main part of life! The main part of our life should be spent on reflecting on all the goodness that Hashem does for us (and the root of all that we are thankful for is the fact that we have Hashem as our G-d) - and that is how we are supposed to mainly connect with Hashem.

### ***Disconnecting***

However, it is practically impossible for one to focus on what to be thankful for to Hashem if he is too attached to what goes on in This World. In order for a Jew to live properly these days, he must live an inner kind of life, which requires one to disassociate himself from the superficial kind of life that exists these days. As long as Moshiach hasn’t come yet, the spiritual level of the world continues to decline rapidly, more and more; and as time goes on, it is becoming increasingly rarer for one to have any time of quiet in his life, which he so desperately needs.

It’s ironic that it has become so much harder in this generation to find quiet time these days, when we need it so much. There is rarely any calmness in the world today; fear grips the world all the time. Any sensible person knows that we cannot survive and be stable unless we have some calmness and quiet in our life.

There is much suffering in the End of Days, and Hashem is calling out to us through it to come closer to it; but why must we choose to focus on that alone? That would be such a negative kind of life! With

the more you are involved with “the world”, you get more and more confused and bewildered.

### ***The Damage That New Devices Have Caused Us***

Woe is to the eyes that have seen what goes on in this world, and woe is to the ears that hears what goes on in the world now. Think about how much damage has happened to our *ruchniyus* with the recent advances in technology, which allow a person to hear anything a person wants – in which the ‘permissible’ and ‘forbidden’ are mixed together; it’s all a mixture of *daas tov v’ra* (good and evil knowledge).

All of the recent gadgets scatter a person’s mind, day and night; one cannot have a life of calm quietness with any of these gadgets, even if they are “kosher.” It pulls our senses after them and dulls the mind.

It captures one’s sense of sight to look all day at visuals. Unfortunately, even the Torah world has been negatively affected by it; a large amount of Bnei Torah has already seen images which have brought their eyes into the *Shaar HaNun* (the 50<sup>th</sup> level of impurity).

When a person’s senses are so captured by technology, it is not possible for him to have any inner calm, and that means that it is impossible for him to develop a bond with Hashem, which requires a person to have some calmness in his life.

So if we want to find the good points of life to thank Hashem about - the only way to do is to give a *get* (‘divorce document’) to the external and superficial life of This World!

### ***Discovering A Good Kind Of Life - Within Yourself***

The foundation of our life should be based on the words מודים אנחנו לך, שאתה הוא ה' אלוקינו. Not only that, but when you get up in the morning and you say *Modeh Ani*, you should also realize that your life is really one big story of giving thanks to Hashem. What do we thank Hashem about in the morning? That He returns to us our *neshamah*. “That you returned to Me my *neshamah*.” We have a *neshamah* in us, not just a *nefesh habehaimis* (the animalistic layer of the soul).

We need to separate and disconnect from This World, and then we’ll be able to discover a life that is good. If a person doesn’t do that, all he will be left with is the pain and the suffering and the crying of the End of Days; he will only have sparks of closeness with Hashem, and he won’t have the ultimate closeness with Hashem that can be achieved through experiencing an inner kind of life, which is good and allows a person to focus on the goodness that Hashem does for us.

### ***Become Like Avraham Avinu***

Most of the world right now is like sheep being led to slaughter. There is a genocide being declared on our entire nation. But we do not have to become bewildered and terrified from what is going on in the world right now. Chazal say of Avraham Avinu, “*Echad hayah Avraham*” – Avraham Avinu was an individual on this world, the only one in the world to choose a true life, while everyone else around him did not. We can be like that too; we can be individuals who will not live like the rest of the world, and choose a true life.

Chazal predicted a long time that darkness will befall the world during the End of Days. “*And darkness shall cover the earth.*” But there is light to be found by those who live an inner kind of life. In the external dimension of This World, there is only *daas tov v’ra* (a mixture of good and evil knowledge), and much darkness. But if we discover our inner world that is within ourselves, we will find there a light that will help us make our way through the darkness.

Our senses must once again become sanctified. Our sight, our hearing, our smell, our taste, our touch – all our five senses need to become holy again. The way to purify our senses is by finding quiet time each day in which we disconnect from This World, and we reflect during that time on recognizing the Creator, on the good that He does in Creation (which we later describe in the blessing of *Modim*). On a deeper note, we need to reflect on just His existence alone, more importantly than on the goodness He does.

### ***In Conclusion***

מודים אנחנו לך שאתה הוא ה' אלוקינו The most important thing in our life is that the fact that Hashem is our G-d. All of the other things which we are grateful for are secondary to this.

The main time in which we thank Hashem is precisely through all the confusion around us, which is all a result of this dark exile we are in; it's mind-boggling pain which nobody can bear anymore.

We can choose a truthful and inner kind of life and recognize Hashem from that inner calmness, and then we'll be able to connect ourselves to all of the good that Hashem does in Creation. And from recognizing all the goodness that goes on, that's how we'll connect to the One who bestows it all. Through that, we will merit to have a constant *d'veykus* with Hashem.

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