

living a life of exile and hardship. Thousands of our brethren forfeited their Judaism this way. Unfortunately, those Jews lived “for naught.” However, the myriads of *acheinu Bnei Yisrael* who gave up their lives *al kiddush Hashem* proved thereby that their *emunah* was indeed שלם בלבב.

על שאנחנו מודים לך is, as we said, the refrain that is common to all of the above expressions of *hoda'ah*, and was originally added to each one of them.

After quoting the aforementioned five expressions of *hoda'ah*, the Gemara concludes by saying, אמר רב פפא: הילכך גימדינהו לכולהו, *Rav Pappa said: We say them all (Sotah 40a)*. Therefore, our present-day version of this communal מודים includes, with slight textual variations, all five of these expressions of *hoda'ah*. And since this מודים consists of various expressions of *hoda'ah* which were composed by different *rabbanan*, as set forth in the Gemara, it is commonly known as מודים דרבנן, *Modim d'Rabbanan*.

We conclude מודים דרבנן with ברוך אל ההודאות. We call *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* the God of Thanksgiving, because, as we explained earlier, He instilled in us the entire concept of thanksgiving, על שנתת בלבנו להיות דבוקים בך ומודים לך.

In the opinion of the Vilna Gaon, this מודים should conclude with the full *berachah*, ברוך אתה ה' אל ההודאות. However, we follow the opinion of *Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 127)* that it should end with only אל ההודאות. The difference of these two opinions is based on a dispute among the *Rishonim*, and therefore, in practice, as it is a *safek berachah*, we conclude with only ברוך אל ההודאות.

על הנסים / Al HaNissim

A D'var Torah on Purim

[Ed. note: This *shiur* was given just before Purim, so the Rav included the following remarks regarding Purim, following his custom of talking about current Yamim Tovim in his lectures and speeches.]

On Purim, in על הנסים, we add the piece מרדכי ואסתר as our *hoda'ah* for the *nissim* that occurred at that time. A brief synopsis of the historical events surrounding Purim is included there, and it ends with the death of Haman: ותלו אותו ואת בניו על העץ, *They hanged him and his sons on a tree*. This “tree” gives us no rest; it is mentioned in the *Megillah* several times. Let us try to find its underlying significance in the story of Purim.

The tree on which Haman was hanged was actually a gallows, and it is described in the *Megillah* as being fifty *amos* high (*Esther* 7:9), which was the Persian custom for executions of important people.

According to the *Megillah*, only Haman died by hanging, and his execution took place approximately on the sixteenth of Nissan. His sons, however, were killed by the sword in the capital city of Shushan one year later on the thirteenth of Adar, when the Jews rose up and killed their enemies. And on the next day, the fourteenth of Adar, in accordance with the request of Esther, the bodies of the ten sons of Haman were hanged from the tree (see *Esther* 9:6-14). Our *Chachamim* make a point of telling us that their dead bodies were hanged on the same tree, one underneath the other, together with the body of Haman (see *Targum, Megillas Esther* 9:14; *Megillah* 16b). This, despite the fact that Haman had died nearly one year earlier! We even mention this tree on Chanukah in *Maoz Tzur*: רב בָּנִי וְקִנְיָיו עַל הָעֵץ תְּלִיתִי. It remains for us to understand why our *Chachamim* placed such importance on this tree.

I would like to suggest that it has its origin in the statement: הָמֵן מִן הַתּוֹרָה: מֵהָמֵן, *Where does Haman appear in the Torah* (*Chullin* 139b). And the answer given there is that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* asked Adam *HaRishon* after he had eaten of the *eitz hadaas*, when he realized that he was naked, הָמֵן הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר, *Did you eat of the tree which I commanded you not to eat?* (*Bereishis* 3:11). Taken simply, this means that in this narrative, the letters of הָמֵן are identical with הָמֵן, and this is the source of הָמֵן מִן הַתּוֹרָה. It is obvious, however, that this statement of our *Chachamim* has a much deeper meaning.

The most heinous crime imaginable is genocide, the murder of an entire class or race of people — men, women, and children. And the most egregious form of genocide is when it is practiced against *Klal Yisrael*, as was attempted by Haman. This is the most profound *aveirah* that anyone could ever contemplate, as was done by Hitler, ימ"ש, in his "Final Solution of the Jewish Problem."

And conversely, the smallest, slightest *aveirah* — which is almost no *aveirah* — is that which was done when Adam and Chavah ate of the *eitz hadaas*. In enticing them to eat of the forbidden tree, the serpent told them that if they would eat it, they would "become like God": וְהִייתֶם כְּאֱלֹהִים יֹדְעֵי: טוב וְרָע, *And you will be like God, knowing good and bad* (*ibid.* v. 5). The desire of Adam and Chavah to eat the fruit of this tree was not one of simple animal lust — as sensual *aveiros* usually are — but rather, it was a desire to raise themselves up toward the level of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. Nevertheless, it was an *aveirah* because *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* forbade them to eat the fruit of this tree, and they did not use their moral freedom of choice to decide to abide by the will of God. Rather, they succumbed to the appeal which the

