



The Day of Thanks

Rav Shalom Baum

Expressing gratitude to Hashem for our national and personal existence is central to Jewish philosophy, liturgy and law. The *Metzudat David* (*Tehillim* 92:2) says that there is an ethical component to showing our appreciation to Hashem for everything that we have been given:

טוב וישר לנו להודות לה' ולומר לשמך העליון על כל.

However, Chazal acknowledge that finding the time and focus to properly thank Hashem is a great challenge in our busy lives. Therefore, we have special days set aside for this goal. The *Redak* (*Tehillim* 92:2) contends that Shabbat is the day set aside for thanking Hashem because on this day we are both physically and spiritually available for this purpose.

כי האדם פנוי בו מעסקי העולם ונשמתו זכה מטרדות הגוף ומתעסקת בחכמה ובעבודת האלהים. וטוב לומר לשמך עליון, כי הנשמה העליונה תמצא מקום לשפך לך אתה שאתה עלי.

The *Shibolei Haleket* (*Inyan Shabbat* 76) conveys a practice to recite *Mizmor Latoda* only on Shabbat and not during the week, because it is the day that we can properly focus on our dependence on Hashem and for our gratitude for His providence upon us.

ובמקומנו מנהג לאומרו בשבת ולא בחול וכתב אחי ר' בנימין נר"ו
הטעם לפי מנהגינו לפי שהשבת היא יום הודאה

The Holiday of Gratitude

The Holiday of Chanuka presents an additional opportunity and responsibility to emphasize our gratitude towards Hashem. A practical application of this idea is that the addition of *Al Hanisim* is placed

in the “thank you section” of *Birchat Hamazon*. In explaining the inclusion and location of *Al Hansim* in *Birchat Hamazon* the *Mishna Berura* (*Hilchot Chanuka* 682:2) emphasizes gratitude as the essential theme of Chanuka.

דכולה מילתא דחנוכה עיקרה הודאה היא.

In fact, Rav Saadia Gaon had a slightly different version of *Haneirot Halalu* in his siddur than the one that we say. He included a section of thankfulness to Hashem not only for miracles in the past but for gratitude for the ongoing miracles in our own time.

יש אומרים כי בנוסח “על הנסים” יש לגרוס: “שעשית עמנו ועם אבותינו בימים ההם ובזמן הזה.”

This is especially meaningful in our time, considering the miracle of the modern State of Israel, in addition to the private manifestations of Hashem’s active engagement in our lives.

The Absence of Gratitude in Al Hamichya

Considering the role that showing gratitude to Hashem has as a fundamental component of Chanuka, it is surprising that no mention of Chanuka can be found in the *Al Hamicha* prayer which is recited following the eating of many food items, including *Sufganiyot*. While there are inclusions for Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and most other *Chagim*, there is no mention of Chanuka in this bracha. This is in contradistinction to the *Birchat Hamazon*, where *Al Hanisim* is inserted. While in general the seasonal inclusions of the *Birchat Hamazon* that are found in *Ya'ale Veyavo* find some

Rav Shalom Baum is the Rav of Congregation Keter Torah in Teaneck. He learned in the Sha'alvim Kollel and served as Sha'alvim American representative for two years. Rav Baum received semicha from RIETS where he learned under Rav Parnes. He is a past President of the RCBC and immediate past president of the RCA.



form in *Al Hamichya*, the *Mishna Berura* (*Hilchot Chanuka* 682:2) stresses the necessity to omit any such inclusion for Chanuka.

ובברכה מעין שלש בחנוכה ופורים אין מזכירין של חנוכה ופורי.

There are several approaches to addressing the omission of Chanuka in the *Al Hamichya* and this apparent inconsistency within our liturgy. Rav Soloveitchik zt"l (*Iggrot HaGrid Berachot* 3:13) has an important approach to this dilemma. He sees the mentioning of the Shabbat & the other seasonal additions as tied into the *kedushat hayom* of those days, an element lacking on Chanuka and Purim.

Rav Eliezer Waldenberg zt"l (*Tzitz Eliezer* 9:33:2) has an extensive discussion of this issue with an alternative solution relating to abridged tefillot on other occasions.

No Shortcuts for Thank You

I want to offer another possible reason for not including any mention of Chanuka, when reciting the same *bracha acharona* of *Al Hamichya* that on Shabbat Chanuka has an insertion for Shabbat. This idea is consistent with the nature of Chanuka being centered on expressing gratitude to Hashem for miracles of the past and for the current gifts of this world. Several years ago, I was present at a talk given by Rav Noach Oelbaum of Queens, New York where he suggested that expressing gratefulness to Hashem cannot be formulated with a shortcut, but requires complete articulation and communication of the content and details of the basis

of our thankfulness. The *Al Hanisim* prayer is the manifestation of this ideal expression of gratitude to Hashem. This answer is apparently based on the fact that the *al hamichya* is called (*Berachot* 37a) the ברכה שלש מעין שלש - an abridged version of the longer typical *Birchat Hamazon*. As such, the additions we make to the *Al Hamichya* are also shorter, abridged versions from the *Ya'ale Veyavo* insertion.

However, Chanuka, the holiday of gratitude demands extensive thanks and in a situation where only an abridged bracha is offered, it is preferable to remain silent than to offer a shortcut thank you. When

we thank Hashem for miracles or gifts we spell out the reasons for our gratitude. God doesn't need our gratitude, but we need to appreciate the gifts that we have been given. If one skips *Yaaleh Veyavo* during *Birchat Hamazon* and remembers before the end, there is a one line *Harachaman* that is added. If one skips *Al Hanisim* and remembers before *Birchat Hamazon* is concluded, the Rema (*Hilchot Chanukah* 682:1) determines that there is

a one-line *Harachaman* that is added, but then the entire *Al Hanisim* unique to Chanuka is added.

כששכח על הניסים בברכות המזון כשמגיע להרחמיאמר: הרחמן יעשה לנו נסים ונפלאות כשם שעשית לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה בימי מתתיהו כו.

A similar application of the uniqueness of gratitude within our liturgy relates to the communal recitation of *Modim Derabanan*. The *Abudraham* (ספר (אבודרהם שמונה עשרה

Expressing gratefulness to Hashem cannot be formulated with a shortcut, but requires complete articulation and communication of the content and details of the basis of our thankfulness.



Chazarat Hashatz, the *Tzibbur* is relatively passive, just answering *Amen* to the Brachot offered by the Chazzan. However, at *Modim*, the *Tzibur* is active with their own expression of thank you as formulated in the *Modim Derabanan*. He explains this aberration being based on the concept that a slave would not express gratitude to his master that he depends on through a messenger. This reflects a lack of respect and awareness of his dependence on his master. This is even more obvious for us as the servants of Hashem.

וכשיגיע ש"ץ למודים וכורע כל העם שוחין ואומרין הודאה קטנה המתחלת כמו כן במודים שאין דרך העבד להודות לרבו ולומר לו אדוני אתה על ידי שליח אלא כל אדם צריך לקבל בפיו עול מלכות שמים ואם יקבל על ידי שליח אינה קבלה גמורה שיוכל להכחיש ולומר לא שלחתי.

The Moral Message in Interpersonal Relationships

The unique nature of the Halachot of gratitude can manifest themselves in human relationships as well. All of us have been and continue to be impacted by individuals who provide us with physical, emotional and spiritual support. Many of us were greatly impacted by the time that we spent at Yeshivat Shaalvim and other great Torah institutions. It is a moral imperative to properly communicate our gratitude for these accomplishments. This should be done directly, consistently and without shortcuts. The Chanuka season gives us an incredible opportunity to evaluate our relationship with Hashem, with *Klal Yisrael* and with our family and friends. Part of proper *halachic* and ethical character is knowing how to say thank you!

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