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Why Is It So Hard To Say “Thank You”?

As a homework assignment, a teacher asked his sixth graders to write an essay on the subject: "What does it mean to say thank you?"

Each of the students tried, to the best of his capabilities, to express himself and his opinions in the essay.

Out of all the essays that were submitted to the teacher, Shimmy's stood out the most.

It was a one-line essay saying: "Saying thank you is like doing homework!"

Before we continue our story, let us tell you a bit about Shimmy. Shimmy is a lively and playful boy, full of energy and ideas. Sitting in a classroom and listening to the teacher is not exactly what he enjoys doing, to put it mildly...

The teacher was very curious to know what exactly Shimmy meant with his one-line essay. "Did he mean to say that, like homework, it's very important to say thank you? Or perhaps does it mean that thanking someone demands attention and thought, like doing homework?"

The teacher decided to ask Shimmy himself. "Shimmy, what did you mean by this deep sentence?"

"Very simple," Shimmy answered. "Saying thank you is just like homework; I do neither of them."

This week we read Parashas Tzav, which teaches us about the daily *required* work in the Mishkan and Mikdash along with some additional *Korbanos* that can be sacrificed voluntarily. The parsha ends with a description of the "*yemei ha'milu'im*" — the seven days of the Mishkan's inauguration (which began on the 23rd of Adar).

One of the *Korbanos* mentioned in our parsha is the *Korban Toda* — an offering of gratitude. The Torah teaches us that when a Jew wishes to thank Hashem for a miracle He performed for him, he should do so with a Korban.

Thanking Hashem (or anyone for that matter) is a difficult task for many of us. We feel entitled for many things, and it is quite difficult for us to acknowledge our faults which might render us undeserving, thereby obligating us to express thanks when kindness is bestowed on us anyway. As hard as it is, saying thank you or bringing a *Korban Toda* is essential.

We can learn the importance of expressing gratitude by looking at the words of the Midrash:

"לעתיד לבא כל הקורבנות בטלין, וקרבת תודה אינו בטל. כל התפילות בטלות, וההודאה אינה בטלה."

"In the future all *Korbanos* will be nullified, while the *Korban Toda* will not, all the prayers will be nullified, while the prayer of *Hoda'ah* (the *modim* prayer, said near the end of the Amidah) will not." (Vayikra Rabba 9: 7)

Why?

The answer lies in a deeper understanding of the Hebrew word for thanks. The Alter Rebbe (in Igeres HaKodesh, epistle 15) explains that aside from the simple explanation of the word — to thank — the word *modim* has a profound inner meaning.

Imagine a Talmudic argument between Rabbi Meir and the other Tanaim.

It was said of Rabbi Meir that "his contemporaries could not understand the depth of his logic." The depth of Rabbi Meir's words always remained unknown, hidden and concealed.

And yet, his contemporaries knew that he was right, but they were unable to understand and internalize it. This brought about the Talmudic expression: "*Modim Chachomim l'Rabbi Meir*" — the sages acknowledge that Rabbi Meir is right!" They actually understood things differently, and yet they agreed with Rabbi Meir's ruling! They admitted he was right, even if they didn't or see things eye to eye!

To admit the means to accept; to accept the truth even if it does not "fit" into my head, even if I have questions or doubts. "Accept the truth from whoever said it," writes the Rambam. Even if he is not exactly your type, your friend or your colleague. Accept the truth because it is the truth.

It's easy for us to accept and admit to things we understand. It is difficult for us to agree with something (or someone) that says things that are "above" our heads, even though we sense those ideas are indeed right!

To admit means to nullify one's self, to nullify our intellect and emotions to the Divine truth as it is, and to surrender our will to understand.

As the Alter Rebbe writes:

"Although we cannot perceive just how everything is truly null before him, we nevertheless acknowledge, with a sincere admission, that this indeed is the absolute truth."

In light of the above, it is understandable why the *Korban Toda* — the offering of gratitude and the Modim prayer will remain forever.

All other *Korbanos*, such as a *Chatas* or an *Asham*, come to atone for the sinner. Even the voluntary *Korban Olah* (burnt offering) or *Shelamim* (peace offering) come to atone; they atone for wrongful thoughts and desires.

In the era of Moshiach "the spirit of impurity will pass from the earth," and there will be no more sins; therefore all these *Korbanos* will be nullified!

The same applies to our davening. The meaning of davening is to request man's needs from Hashem. We ask Hashem for success, wealth, health and more. But that's only currently.

When Moshiach comes, ultimate success will be granted to all -- Money will be growing on trees, and all the sick will be healed. We will have nothing to ask for, and therefore "all the prayers Will be nullified! "

Everything but ... *Modim*!

In the Messianic era, the world will experience a revelation of G-dliness. The infinite manifestation of the Creator in the world will make everything absolutely nullified to Hashem. If today, when Hashem's existence is hidden, we understand that we must subdue ourselves to something higher, how much more so in the messianic era! Our *Bittul*, self-nullification, will only grow stronger. The feeling of the human's insignificance in the face of Hashem's great power holiness will be at its highest level -- and that is precisely what the *Korban Toda* and the Modim prayer express!

In light of the above, it is right to say that not only will the "*Korban Toda* not be nullified," but that then, in the future, we will be able to bring the ultimate *Korban Toda*! A *Korban* expressing the ultimate level of submission and self-nullification to Hashem!

As the Rebbe said on Shabbos Chazon 5751 (1991), that when "the Geulah comes, we will celebrate the greatest joy ... and we will bring a *Korban Toda* in appreciation for being released from the "prison" of Galus!

To conclude with a story:

A Jew came to the Rebbe asking for a *bracha* for a complete recovery for his wife who was not in good health. The Rebbe blessed his wife and gave him a dollar for her. After thanking the Rebbe for his *bracha*, the Rebbe thanked *him* with a warm smile, saying, "Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to bless a Jew!"

If the Rebbe is thanking us for the possibility of blessing a Jew, how much more so we should thank the Rebbe for the incredible privilege that he made us Chassidim in the *Dor HaShvi'i* (the seventh generation) — the last of exile and the first generation of Redemption!

Even if we don't understand precisely how and why, we must acknowledge and submit to the Divine truth, and do all we can (and more) to bring Moshiach Now!

Gut Shabbos!

Based on: ד"ה מזמור לתודה תשי"ז, שיחת ש"פ דברים ה'תנש"א