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## Publicizing's God's Miracles

This week's Torah portion discusses various types of sacrifices that were brought in the *Mishkan*, the holy Tabernacle, in the desert. One such sacrifice was the Thanksgiving offering someone who survived a life-threatening crisis would bring to express gratitude to God. Unlike the other sacrifices, the Thanksgiving offering required the person bring 40 loaves of bread. Four of those loaves went to the *Kohanim*, the priestly caste, but there were 36 loaves of bread left over that had to be eaten that day. Why would God mandate that just for the Thanksgiving offering, 40 loaves be brought and eaten in one day?

Lesson:

Of course, the person who brought the sacrifice couldn't eat all 36 loaves by himself! Instead, he would invite his community, friends and family to a party and together they would eat everything by the end of the day such that none remained. They would ask the host of the get-together what the occasion was, and he would publicize that God had saved him and he brought a special Thanksgiving offering as a token of gratitude.

God loves us and wants nothing but the best for us. Sometimes He gets our attention in ways that make us realize that God and God alone saved us. For that, we celebrate and publicize the miracle with friends and family.

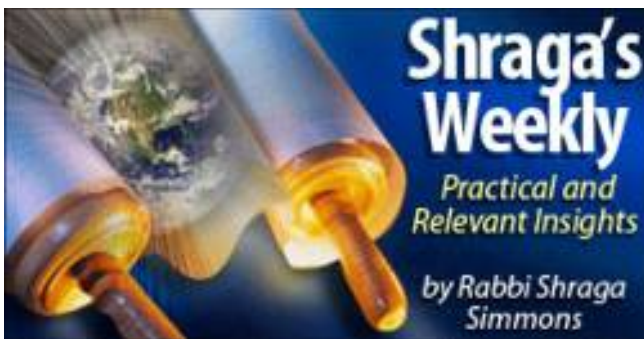
Interestingly, a famous Torah commentary, the *Imrei Emes* suggests that every moment, whether we are aware of it or not, God is always saving us. The fact that you can read this means that millions of things are working properly: eyesight, heartbeat, blood flow, digestion, etc. Millions of different things are working together harmoniously and seamlessly such that we can function properly. Our bodies are comprised of various systems of which are comprised of various organs of which are comprised of billions of cells of which are comprised of sub-compartments of cells of which are comprised of billions of atoms. And they are all functioning in a harmonious symphony that makes up our bodies such that we can survive, please God until 120 years old.

This is nothing short of a miracle. However, we take this for granted. Therefore, when someone becomes aware that God saved them, they have a heightened awareness of God's kindness and love

for them. They thank God from the depths of their heart and bring that heightened awareness to their community, friends and family. Because it is not just that God saved that individual who brought that sacrifice, but rather, God is saving all of us, on a moment-to-moment basis, and we publicize and celebrate that miracle together.

Not coincidentally, the word for Jew in Hebrew is *Yehudi* from the root word *hoda'ah*, which means 'to thank'. The essence of a Jew is to express gratitude, to understand that God loves us, sustains us and cares about us. When we publicize this with the world, we express our true essence as a Jew – to acknowledge our Creator – and bring our own Thanksgiving-offering to God.

Exercise: Publicize in your own way a miracle that God did or does for you. It could be as simple as acknowledging that everything is from God when someone asks how you are or sharing a story with those around you about a time that you feel God saved you. Truly feel God's love for you and feel gratitude towards God and thank Him.



## To Pray or Not to Pray

Harold is walking down a darkened alley, when he's suddenly confronted by two masked men carrying guns.

Fearing for his life, Harold throws his hands heavenward and begins to pray, "God, save me, please save me! I'll do anything, God – I'll go to synagogue every day, I'll take that long-overdue trip to Israel, and I'll even give half my income to charity!"

At that moment, a police car pulls into the alley, and the thugs flee. Harold looks heavenward and says, "Never mind, God, I took care of it myself!"

### Essence of Prayer

This week's parsha describes how offerings brought to the Temple in Jerusalem were a primary means of connecting with God. Today however, our primary connection is through the medium of prayer. (For example, the Shacharit and Mincha services correspond to the morning and afternoon "*Tamid*" offerings.) Every Jew is his own miniature "Temple." No intermediary necessary.

And while God answers all prayers, sometimes the answer is "No." We may be asking for the wrong thing without realizing it. A good parent will not lend the car keys to a teenager who is not yet responsible enough to handle it. All the begging in the world will not get a good parent to change his mind.

But prayer is our opportunity to move beyond these limitations. The Hebrew word for prayer, "*li-heet-pallel*," comes from the root "*pallel*," which means to inspect. The prefix "*li-heet*" is the reflexive form – denoting an action that one does to oneself. *Li-heet-pallel*, therefore, is an act of personal introspection. When we pray, we look

inside and ask, "What do I need to change about myself in order to get what I really want out of life?"

This process of self-transformation means that today I may no longer be the same person who God said "no" to yesterday.

Sometimes we only appreciate something when it's taken away. When we've had the flu and then recover, we appreciate what it means to be healthy. But we shouldn't have to get sick in order to appreciate our health!

Blessings are the Jewish version of "Stop and smell the roses." The Sages say that one way to guarantee good health is to say "*Asher Yatzar*" with sincerity. "*Asher Yatzar*" is the blessing that Jews say, believe it or not, after using the bathroom. We thank God for creating our bodies with a wondrously complex system of ducts and tubes. And we acknowledge that if any one of them were improperly ruptured or blocked, we could no longer stay alive. Saying this blessing with sincerity affirms our gratitude for good health.

We can learn our lesson without the experience of having it taken away.

### **Appreciate the Gifts**

If prayer is solely for our benefit, then why does Jewish prayer always begin with praise of God?

One purpose of this praise is to sensitize us to God's awesome capacity to help. We take the time to recognize and appreciate all that He does for us.

And He does so much! We know that our parents love us because of all they've given us, yet God has given us gifts that are infinitely more valuable. If a human being would restore your eyesight, imagine the gratitude you'd feel? Yet God has given us eyes, ears, intelligence – life itself. This knowledge that the Almighty can do anything is what ultimately gives us the strength and resolve to push beyond our limits.

That's why when a Jew prays in the morning, he begins with blessings that acknowledge our eyesight, mobility, consciousness and freedom. These awaken our appreciation for all the gifts God has bestowed upon us and remind us of how much God loves us. When we appreciate what we have, God will want to give us more.

It's the same with a parent and child. If I give my daughter a new toy, and she grabs it without any appreciation, then I as a good parent should not give her any more toys until she appreciates what she already has! We can understand that the son of a billionaire would be spoiled if his parents gave him everything he needed without having to work for it.

The same is true of our relationship with God. Certainly He can give us whatever we need; God is infinitely richer and more powerful than the biggest billionaire. But since God has our best interests at heart, He wants us to grow, to earn it – and to become great.

### **So Much Food, So Little Time**

This week's parsha (Vayikra 7:11-15) discusses the *Korbon Todah*, the thanksgiving offering brought to Jerusalem by anyone who survives a

dangerous situation – e.g. recovering from a bad illness, or arriving safely from an overseas journey. This thanksgiving offering consists of 40 loaves of bread, which the person then eats as a festive meal in commemoration of having been saved.

The Talmud notes two unusual characteristics of the thanksgiving offering that distinguishes it from other, similar offerings: (1) It involves an enormous quantity of food – 40 loaves, and (2) All the loaves must be consumed within an exceptionally short amount of time – less than 24 hours. Obviously, the person who brings this thanksgiving offering could never eat that much food in such a short time! So why would the Torah prescribe such parameters?

The answer is that the Torah wants to create a situation whereby someone will not only appreciate his good fortune, but will share that appreciation with others. With all this food to eat, he will be compelled to invite family and friends to share the story of how he was saved from danger.

Today, without our Holy Temple, we recite the thanksgiving blessing (*Birkat HaGomel*) in the synagogue during the Torah reading service.

Publicizing God's protection is us how we strengthen our connection and belief. This is the essence of *Kiddush Hashem*, the public sanctification of God's Name. After the coming of the Messiah and the perfection of the world, there will be no further need for offerings of atonement, because people will no longer sin. But there will always be thanksgiving offerings, because the human need to express gratitude is eternal.

### **Tune Out the Static**

If you want to build a relationship with God, you'll need a framework for the relationship. Friday evening is a good time to reduce the outside static and get in touch with your inner self. Don't watch any TV or listen to the radio. (And if you're really bold, unplug the phone.) You could invite some friends over, prepare a nice meal, light the Shabbat candles, and enjoy the solitude.

As for the prayer aspect: Any relationship is built on communication, and communication has to come from the heart. God yearns to give us the pleasure of connection. The Talmud says that God made Sarah, Rivka and Rachel barren, so that they would turn to Him in prayer. You can pray in any language. Aloud.

To help you start, here's an opening line, written by my cousin, Leibel Rudolph o.b.m.:

*Dear God  
Give me the courage to let go,  
And let you in.  
I know you love me.  
And with your help,  
I will find all the purpose, joy, and  
happiness  
You want me to have.*

If anything starts happening, or if you want to talk more about prayer, feel free to contact me.



## Would God Approve?

The last chapter of this *parashah* contains a puzzling passage, "This is the thing that God commanded to be done...",<sup>1</sup> which refers to the commandment to inaugurate the Tabernacle. We suggest that the previous verse sheds light on what is needed to sanctify the Tabernacle and Jewish life in general. God instructed Moses to gather the entire assembly of the Jewish people "to the entrance to the Tent of the Meeting," and herein lies the explanation, which, in and of itself, is paradoxical. Although the area at the entrance was very small and could not contain many people, nevertheless, miraculously, there was ample room for everyone.

Through this phenomenon, the Torah teaches us a lesson that speaks for all time: When true love prevails among people, no room, no place is too small. On the other hand, when contention and animosity fill hearts, then no space is big enough. The most majestic palace cannot accommodate those who are not at peace with one another. Thus, the meaning of the passage becomes clear: "This is the thing that God commanded to be done" – *to reach out with love, kindness, and understanding. If we do so, then even the smallest, most limited space will miraculously*

*expand. That is the power of love. But where love is missing, even a palatial villa will not suffice.*

### WOULD GOD APPROVE?

Later in the *parashah*, we find yet another dimension to this concept of fulfilling the will of God that we would all do well to remember and act upon. Aaron asks a question that it behooves us all to ask: "Would God approve?"<sup>2</sup>

Normally, when performing a mitzvah, the paramount question to ask is, "Am I performing this mitzvah in accordance with *halachah*, according to the letter of the law?" But Aaron, the High Priest, went yet a step further. He understood that not only must we fulfill the mitzvah according to God's Law, but we must do so in a manner that will be pleasing to our Creator. This teaching applies to every aspect of our lives. Before making decisions, before taking any steps, ask yourself that simple, but piercing question, *Would God approve?* Is this the way God would want me to live? Would He be pleased with my actions? Would He approve of my words?

If we learn to do this, then our relationship with God will not be based strictly on obligation, but rather, on love. A child who truly loves his parents desires to please them and give them *nachas*. Should we not desire to give our Heavenly Father *nachas*? Should we not express our love for Him?

So if we wish to connect with God, if we wish to download miracles and have His glory bless us, we need only follow His commandments, fulfill them as He proscribed, go the extra mile and ask,

*"Is the manner in which I am performing the mitzvos pleasing to my Creator, my God?"*

### THREE LITTLE WORDS

Our mother, Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis, often relates the story of the *Maggid* of Kelm – the electrifying inspirational preacher of the *shtetl* of Kelm who lived in Lithuania in the 19th century. One day he challenged his congregation with amazing questions. "If, by some miracle, God allowed all those who are buried in the cemetery of Kelm to get up for half an hour, what do you think they would do? Where would they go? What would they say?"

Consider these questions, ponder them, and ask yourself, *What would I do? Where would I go? What would I say if I had just half an hour in this world? And what if, instead of half an hour, you were told that your wife or your husband had just six months to live. How would you relate to her or him?*

On 9/11 we found out. For perhaps the first time in history, we have audio messages from multitudes of people who were trapped in the Twin Towers and knew that their last moments were near. Miraculously, these tragic victims were able to get through on their cell phones and call their families. What do you think they said? What was their last will and testament?

Amazingly, not one of them spoke about business, money, or any other such matters ... but they each said three little words: "I love you." "I love you, my husband"; "I love you, my wife"; "I love you, my children"; "I love you, Mom"; "I love you,

Dad"; "I love you, Grandma"; "I love you, Grandpa" ... "I love you."

So, if we have more than half an hour on this planet, should we not say *I love you* before it's too late?

When you study Torah, you learn to value the preciousness of time and try to live each day as if it was your last. You learn to appreciate and safeguard the simple gifts with which God has endowed you, gifts like love, gifts that you come to realize are not so simple after all.

1. Leviticus 8:5.
2. Ibid. 10:14.

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