

בס"ד

THANKING HASHEM

WITH RABBI MILLER

A practical guide to the wonderful joy
of gratitude to Hashem

Shining pearls of inspiration from the teachings of

= Rav Avigdor Miller ZT"L =

For Everyone

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THE FOUNDATIONS OF GRATITUDE TO *HASHEM*:

~ From the teachings of Rav Avigdor Miller ZT"L ~

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= Preface =

Any thinking person who opens his eyes and looks around him will see that the world we live in is proclaiming avidly and articulately the wonderful goodness of *Hashem*. He will see the striking beauty of the flowers that *Hashem* put in the world, - each one a masterpiece of artistic design - with their amazing variety of shapes, colors and fragrances. He will see the many different types of fruits with their array of shapes, tastes and nutritional benefits. He will feel the pleasant, beneficial light and warmth of the sun, and the pleasurable light of the moon. He will be struck speechless before the awesome intelligence evident in the efficiency of the structure of the human body, and from the ingenious design of the human family, with all the considerate thoughtfulness manifest in all of these and throughout creation to make our life pleasant and joyous. He will discern that *Hashem* did not make us unfeeling robots, but placed within us a large variety of pleasurable feelings of joy, and together with them designed and filled the world with innumerable innovations to arouse in us these pleasant sensations. From all of these, he will come to the realisation that there is a Creator of the world who loves us and wants our good and our happiness. Someone who perceives this will wonder how it is possible that so many people do not see all of this. They have eyes, yet they do not see the wonders of The Creator, they have a heart, yet they do not feel His great love for them.

We are fortunate to be living in a generation that has made extensive progress in keeping *Mitzvos* meticulously, and in learning Torah, yet there still is one field where there is much neglect - the *Mitzvos* in the Torah relating to feelings and emotions ("*Mitzvos Halev*") and specifically the *Mitzvah* of "*Ahavas Hashem*". Even though these *Mitzvos* are the main objective of the Torah as *Chazal* emphasized¹ and is elaborated on by the *Rishonim*², nevertheless people view these *Mitzvos* as "*Mussar*" and "*Chassidus*" not as crucial fundamental *Mitzvos* that are the life purpose of every Jew. Everyone reads *Krias Shma* every day in which it is written וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ - "You should love *Hashem* your G-d", yet only very few people ask themselves if they actually fulfil this *Mitzvah* adequately and make an effort to investigate the means to implement it in practice. This casual attitude with respect to one of the 613 *Mitzvos* that we were given on *Har Sinai* is quite surprising. In order to implement the *Mitzvos* we are obliged to make use of all the intelligence that *Hashem* granted us to try to determine the way to fulfil them appropriately.

Hashem, in His great kindness and concern for our welfare, sent us a *Tzadik* and true servant of *Hashem*, Harav Avigdor Miller ZTL, who made it his lifework to reawaken awareness of the significance of the *Mitzvos Halev* of the Torah, and especially the *Mitzvah* of appreciation and gratitude to *Hashem*. He expended much energy in his *shiurim* and the books he wrote to bring these important *Mitzvos* to the forefront of our attention. Yet even after a successful lifetime of effort in this field, the work still remains unfinished and it is up to us to take the project from where he left it and continue his inspired initiative. This is the purpose of this present compilation of his teachings, to arouse with *Hashem's* help awareness of the exceptional importance for everyone to open their eyes and heart to see the wonderful gifts of *Hashem* that fill the whole of creation and to feel sincere gratitude towards *Him* for all that He created for our benefit and enjoyment.

¹ Sanhedrin 106b

² Chovos Halevovos (General introduction, Introduction to Sha'ar Ahavas Hashem), Sefer Haikarim (sec.3 ch.37), Drashos Haran (ch.6), Iban Ezra (Shemos 20:1, 18:20).

"Enter His gates with gratitude"

One of the primary ways that a person can attain the fulfilment of the prominent and vital *Mitzvah* of *Ahavas Hashem* is through appreciation of all the wonderful kindnesses of *Hashem* to him personally. This is what Dovid Hamelech said in *Tehillim* (100:4) בואו שערי בתודה - "Enter His gates with gratitude", the gateway through which a person can achieve an emotive relationship with *Hashem*, is gratitude for all the personal kindnesses that *Hashem* bestows on him.

The feelings behind gratitude

People often make a mistake in this issue. They view gratitude as a verbal courtesy. In fact gratitude is an elevated altruistic feeling - closely akin to selfless affection, a deep instinctive reaction that is one of the fundamental characteristics of the *neshomoh*. Expressions of gratitude are a means of conveying to the benefactor that these emotions are being actively felt. Hence if someone expresses words of gratitude in an emotionless monotonic voice, and does not even look at the benefactor while he says "thank you", his gratitude is not considered genuine. The emotions felt are conveyed in the tone of voice employed, in the smile of appreciation and in the eye contact, which demonstrate the added respect and affection the recipient feels toward the benefactor as a result of his generosity. These feelings are the components of true gratitude.

Similarly with gratitude to *Hashem* the main objective of gratitude is to feel the wonderful goodness of *Hashem* that is behind all the beneficial and pleasant things He put in creation. Hence the term "*Hakoras hatov*" means literally "appreciation of the good", where the allusion is to the good of the benefactor which is felt to have motivated the benevolence. This "goodness" is similar to the good we feel in a "good person" whose smile and shining countenance reflect the elevated altruistic joy that he feels in doing kindness and justice etc. This goodness, extrapolated to the maximum, is what we should feel when we express gratitude to *Hashem*.

Feelings of gratitude should also include an appreciation of the feelings of empathy and love which were recognized as the motivation behind the benefaction. The recipient conveys in his expression of gratitude that he feels the love behind the generosity and intimates that he feels similar reciprocate emotions in reaction to those directed towards him.

Gratitude to Hashem is a major fundamental obligation

We say in the Sabbath prayers " It is the **obligation** of all creatures to thank, laud, praise, glorify, exalt, ... and sing praises before You our G-d ...". The obligation referred to here, in addition to being a derivative of the *Mitzvah* of *Ahavas Hashem*, is in fact the purpose of the whole of creation, as is brought in *Pirkei Avos* (ch. 6) כָּל מֵה שֶׁבְּרָא הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּעוֹלָמוֹ, לֹא בְּרָאוּ אֵלָּא - לְכַבוֹדוֹ - "All that *Hashem* created in the world, He created to be used to come to an appreciation of His honor". Hence the life purpose of "all creatures" obligates them to open their eyes and hearts and come to a passionate recognition of the goodness of *Hashem*.

The lack of feelings of appreciation and gratitude to *Hashem* is the cause of all the problems existing in creation since - and including - the major sin of Adam Harishon at the very beginning of history. *Chazal* tell us that the root of the sin of Adam Harishon was ingratitude to *Hashem* for the wonderful world He created for him, and in particular for the phenomenal gift, the innovation and

creation of his helpmate *Chavoh*.

If Adam Harishon would have opened his eyes on his first day, and looked at the heaven and earth the sun and the trees ... the stunning beauty and efficiency of the whole of the elaborate intricate creation that Hashem designed and created for him ... and together with this he would have realized the wonderful kindness of Hashem who took the trouble to prepare all of this for his benefit;

If, after this he would have approached the fruits of the trees and start tasting them as Hashem instructed him (see Rabeinu Bachyah and Vilna Gaon that this was a positive commandment "From all the trees of the garden you shall eat") and he would have felt their exquisite beauty, their delightful scent and their appetizing tastes ... and together with this he would have realized the wonderful thoughtfulness and goodness of Hashem who devised all these for him;

If afterwards, Hashem would have presented him with the wonderful gift, a pinnacle of ingenious design, an attractive and functional helpmate, purpose designed to make his stay in the world both more productive, efficient and pleasurable ... and together with this he would have reflected on what this discloses of the One who innovated and created this wonderful being with such thoughtfulness and loving consideration;

If Adam Harishon would have felt all of this, his feelings of appreciation for the exceptional kindness and goodness of Hashem would have reached such an intense and elated level that it would not have come into question for him to transgress the will of Hashem and sin by eating from the Eitz Hada'as.

This is stated clearly in the *Midrash Mishnas Rabbi Eliezer* (ch. 7):

"Adam Harishon was only expelled from *Gan Eden* because of ingratitude, as it is written "And Adam said the woman whom you put with me ...". Hashem said to him "a helpmate I designed for you, and you say 'the woman whom you put with me ...'?"!

This lack of appreciation for the prodigious kindness of *Hashem* that is behind all the wonderful blessings that *Hashem* bestows on the world, which should arouse people to serve *Hashem* willingly and joyfully, was the root of the decadence of the generation of the Flood (*Sanhedrin* 108:A) and of Sodom (*Rashi Shabbos* 10:B) and also the cause of all of the *Galus* (*Tanah Dvei Eliyohu Rabah* ch. 14, *Kuzari* sect.3).

The sin of Adam Harishon was the root of all sins, and it is our life's purpose to rectify this failing in order to bring the world to its ultimate objective. For this reason *Chazal* instituted the *Brachos* we make on food and all of the various *Brachos* we make throughout the day, that we should appreciate the wonderful goodness of *Hashem* that surrounds us, and through this come to wholeheartedly accept His will, and thus remedy the sin of Adam Harishon. The purpose of the *Brachos* on food is not just to say the *Brachos* before eating and then afterwards forget about them; rather, by means of the *Brachah* we should feel continuously during the course of our eating the

goodness and kindness of *Hashem* and His special love towards us, evident in the pleasurable form of the design of our food, and this appreciation should accompany us throughout the day.

The wonderful joy of feelings of gratitude

Feeling gratitude and expressing it should be a joyous and pleasurable activity. As we say in the *Brachah* following *Hallel* לזמר (נאה³) - "To You it is good to thank and to Your name it is **pleasant (beautiful)** to sing". Also in *Tehillim* (157) Dovid Hamelech expressed with elation תהלה כי טוב זמרה אלוקינו כי נעים נאווה תהלה - "It is good to sing to our G-d ... **it is pleasant and beautiful** to praise". The *neshomoh* enjoys seeing and focusing on the goodness of *Hashem* wherever it is revealed. Its joy is like that of a person who meets in a distant country, far from family and friends, an old friend from his youth. So too is the joy of the *neshomoh*, when it meets in this world a manifestation of the goodness of *Hashem* and His great love for His creatures, that it knew and cherished before it came down to this world. When the *neshomoh* sees the wonderful kindness of *Hashem* reflected within the darkness of the concealment of this world, it feels like someone who after being in darkness for a lengthy period of time, meets a refreshing source of light.

Fortunate is the person who succeeds to arouse within himself the joy of these pleasurable emotions. This joy is a major aspect of the goal and plan of *Hashem* in creation. Like a merciful father who loves his children exceedingly and rejoices with their happiness, so does *Hashem* have exceptional *nachas ruach* to see us attaining the wonderful pleasure and joy for which He created the world.

Someone who feels the pleasure of seeing the goodness of *Hashem* in the world will notice it instinctively everywhere. Somebody who comes into a room where various different songs are being sung by various people at the same time, will generally just hear a loud cacophony of noise. Yet if there is one song that he has an especial preference towards, he will hear it despite the loud noise drowning the music (see *Gemora Megilla* 21b⁴). Similarly, within creation there exists a most delightful "music" - the "music of creation" - the harmonious symphony of the goodness and love of *Hashem* that is broadcasted by means of all the wonderful innovations that He put into the world for our joy and benefit. Someone who has refined his senses sufficiently to hear this most exquisite and beautiful music, will hear it constantly wherever he turns.

"Yedias Hashem"

Each time a person views the world around him and feels the remarkable benevolence of *Hashem* and His love, he is adding to his emotional recognition of *Hashem*. This emotional recognition is referred to by the *Reshonim* as "*Yedias Hashem*". The Rambam elaborates on this concept in the fifth chapter of his *Sh'moneh Perokim*, where he establishes that the attainment of "*Yedias Hashem*" is the goal of all creation and of all the *Mitzvos* of the Torah. This means that the plan of creation is that we have been placed in a world that has been purposely designed to hide the Creator and His goodness from us. Our task is to see through this camouflage and come to recognize *Hashem* and His true attributes despite the concealment. Even after a person comes to a realization that there is a

³ "Nusach Eidot Hamizrach" is "נעים לזמר" and "Nusach Ashkenaz" is "נאה לזמר".

⁴ The Gemara there describes that when there is one voice that someone has a special interest to hear, he will hear it despite all other competing noises "אידי דחביבא עליה משתמעיל".

Creator, there is still a lifetime of work before him to build a personal perspective of who *Hashem* is. Is *Hashem* really good - despite all that appears to us to be so negative in the world? The sincerely felt answer that a person arrives at on this issue will affect his whole outlook on life. *Hashem* left sufficient revelation within the concealment of the world for someone who wants to perceive the truth to do so. "Knowing *Hashem*" is not only an academic recognition that *Hashem* is good, and wants only the very best for all His creatures, but it is to actively feel this truth continuously throughout ones daily activities.

Unfortunately, most people only focus on *Hashem* and who He really is (i.e. His attributes) when, G-d forbid, tragedies occur. Then people are aware that what happened was "an act of G-d" directed exclusively by Him. Whereas, when pleasant and joyous events occur, people do not consciously think of *Hashem* with the same intensity. Hence the emotional perception of *Hashem*, that most people have, is generally the negative emotions of fear, and an instinctive wish to be distanced from this awful and frightening Power. The definition of "love" is the desire to be close to the object of one's love, whereas the definition of "hate" is the wish to be distanced from something or someone. Hence the *Mitzvah* of *Ahavas Hashem* requires us to develop a positive and attractive perception of *Hashem*⁵. Someone who constantly thinks of the goodness, kindness and love of *Hashem* when he encounters pleasant situations, gradually changes his actively felt perspective of *Hashem* from one of fear alone, to appreciation of The One who created the beautiful flowers, delectable foods, the joy of family and all the many things we love in life. The composite emotional recognition of *Hashem* that a person develops during the course of his life, by his appreciation - or lack of it - for everything that he sees and occurs to him during his lifetime, is the true "sum-total" of his life's achievement.

Conclusion

Regarding a person's relationship with *Hashem* the Torah writes *לשכנו תדרשו ובאת שמה* - "If you seek the *Shechinah* you will attain it" (*Devarim* 12: 5). Only someone who deeply and sincerely seeks closeness to *Hashem* will merit the Divine assistance needed to achieve it (see *Sifri* *ibid*). It is therefore of prime importance for us to examine carefully our attitude towards the *Mitzvos* of the heart "between man and G-d" and especially the *Mitzvah* of *Ahavas Hashem*.

Hashem is waiting eagerly for His beloved bride to awaken from her slumber of apathy and indifference and reawaken her feelings of love towards Him, so that He can bring about the ultimate reunion that the whole of creation is looking forward to with eager anticipation.

May *Hashem* grant that the following excerpts expounded eloquently and emotively by Rabbi Miller ZTL will touch the heart of the reader and arouse a renewed interest in fulfilling the important *Mitzvah* of appreciation of *Hashem* and *Ahavas Hashem*, and then we will merit that *Hashem* will reciprocate by unveiling his wonderful love towards us, soon in our days!

⁵ This can often be detected by the spontaneous reaction of the person to the letters of *Hashem*'s Name. Does focusing on them cause a reaction purely of fear or also a pleasurable reaction?

NOTE:

Most of the material brought here was originally conveyed in verbal *shiurim*. Only the main principles of the ideas developed are retained and not literal quotes.

The notes brought after each section are additions of the compiler and are not based on the sources.

Chapter 1

The Importance of the Mitzvah of Thanking Hashem

- The foundation of true service of *Hashem* is gratitude.
- The severity of failure to recognize *Hashem's* kindnesses.
- The gravity of resentment and grievances.
- The obligation to feel gratitude is proportional to the good received.

= Gratitude is the foundation of true service of *Hashem* =

The basis of all true *Avodas Hashem* is gratitude to *Hashem*. The *Chovos Halevavos* writes that the correct and proper motivation of a person to serve *Hashem* is feeling of gratitude towards Him for all of His countless kindnesses to him (*Shaar Avodas HaElokim* Chapter 3).

- The importance of this issue is evident from the manner in which *Hashem* began the *Aseres Hadibros*: "I am *Hashem* your G-d Who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery". Before He conveyed the *mitzvos* to *Am Yisrael*, He introduced Himself as the One Who granted them the great kindness of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* which they had just experienced.⁶
- It is written in Mishlei (Chapter 27) רֵעֶךָ וְרֵעֶךָ אֲבִיךָ אֶל תַּעֲזֹב - "Your friend and the friend of your father do not abandon". *Rashi* (ibid and *Maseches Shabbos* 31a) explains that the "friend" mentioned here, refers to *Hashem*. According to this, the meaning of the sentence is that *Hashem*, who is your personal friend and was also a close friend of your father, such a faithful friend, you should not neglect or abandon without striving to accommodate yourself to Him, and to endeavor to cause him *nachas ruach* to the maximum of your capability (*Chovos Halevavos Shaar Cheshbon Hanefesh* Chapter 3, *Cheshbon* #14).
- The Creator put us in a wondrous world bathed in sunlight; He spread a light-giving sky above us and twinkling stars; He gave us organs that are constructed in the best-designed, intelligent way in order to serve us; He gave us a home and family; and countless other kindnesses and benefits. What does He ask in exchange for all this? Only that we feel gratitude towards Him and conduct ourselves accordingly. It is therefore essential for us to express our gratitude to Him - in speech and action - for all the good things that He bestows on us. Our *mitzvah* observance should be an expression of the extreme gratitude we feel towards Him for all the many kindnesses which He incessantly showers on us every day.
- Dovid Hamelech said (*Tehillim* 92:2) טוֹב לְהַדוֹת לָהּ - "It is good to be grateful to *Hashem*". These words do not only mean that it is good and praiseworthy to thank *Hashem*, but rather that if a person wants to

⁶ Ibn Ezra writes that this is why He began the commandments with *Yetzias Mitzrayim* and not with "I am *Hashem* Who created the world", because the experience of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* - and the feelings of gratitude it evoked - were still fresh in the emotions of those being addressed.

know what is the "good" that he is required to attain in his life, the answer is "Good – is to thank *Hashem*", this is what your G-d requests from you, because this is what you were created for. Gratitude is the virtuous way that a person should follow in order to attain his life's goal. Consequently, someone who wants to serve *Hashem* should work on paying attention to and recognizing *Hashem's* goodness which fills the world and also arouse others to be aware of them. This reflection on all the details of life, in order to discover and appreciate the many kindnesses of *Hashem* that are hidden within them, is a task that should occupy man continuously all his life. Tangible recognition of His goodness and His love for us, and thanking Him, are not only desirable qualities for people on elevated spiritual levels, but rather we were *all* created in order to attain these wonderful emotions.

- In order to arouse these sentiments, it is not necessary to interrupt one's occupations and learning Torah, but in everything a person sees (and also in the Torah that he learns) he should discern *Hashem's* kindnesses and be aware of his obligation to thank *Hashem*.
- The *posuk* (*Tehillim* 116:12) *מָה אֶשְׁיב לַה' כָּל תַּגְמוּלוֹתַי עָלַי* - "With what am I able to repay *Hashem* for all His benefaction to me" is not just intended to be exalted words of praise to *Hashem* to be expressed on special occasions, but is the sentiment that should accompany every Jew constantly every day of his life.

These feelings are so significant and such a pleasure to experience - it is a shame that so few people are aware of their exceptional importance.

= The severity of failure to recognize and appreciate *Hashem's* kindnesses =

In order to perceive how good this world is and how good *Hashem* is to us, a person has to devote thought and reflection to this objective. Did we ever stop our rush of attainment in life to reflect on and appreciate the abundance of kindnesses that are showered upon us? Let's imagine that someone entreated us for an extremely valuable gift – for example, a furnished apartment equipped with all necessary accessories. The supplicant of the gift knows he has no real merit or justification to ask for such an exaggerated gift, but his tears and entreaties melt our heart and we acquiesce to his request and arrange all his desires in the best manner possible. Time passes, and every day we convey to him more items of this big gift. We see him every day, but he doesn't trouble himself to express gratitude even once. How would we feel ...?

Our situation is exactly like that of this person. In our prayers we entreat *Hashem* for life, health, sustenance, success, all free gifts which we do not deserve. Every day we benefit from *Hashem's* gifts of health, sustenance and everything good. Every day the sun shines upon us and we eat, drink and sleep. Did we even once stop to say "thank you" with full emotion? Did we try to feel the depth of *Hashem's* kindnesses toward us? To implement this is the foundation of all of the Torah.

*Without doubt, we would never dream of treating a human benefactor this way - why are we so frivolous with regard to *Hashem*?!*

= **The gravity of resentment and grievances** =

During the course of the episode of the *Misonenim* (the Complainers who grumbled about their situation during the travels in the wilderness) (*Bamidbar* 11:11), Moshe spoke harshly to *Hashem* about his despair and severe disappointment with the Jews, to a degree unparalleled on any other occasion. He said; לָמָּה הִרְעִיתָ - "Why did You do evil to your servant... if this is how You deal with me, kill me...and let me not see my evil". This severe reaction needs to be understood. Since the initial initiation of the manna, it was known that there was a difficult test inherent in it, as it is stated (*Devarim* 8:3,16) לְמַעַן עֲנֶתְךָ ... לְמַעַן אֲבִיתִיךָ וְלֹא יָדְעוּ אֲבֹתֶיךָ וְלֹא יָדְעוּ אֲבֹתֶיךָ וְלֹא יָדְעוּ אֲבֹתֶיךָ ... - "He afflicted you and let you hunger and fed you the manna that you did not know, nor did your fathers know ... in order to test you ..."

The understanding of *Moshe's* great disappointment and distress is that he saw a great danger developing here for *Am Yisrael's* entire future as servants of *Hashem* and as the nation destined to have *Hashem's Shechina* rest upon it. Feelings of resentment, grievance and dissatisfaction destroy all of the Jews' good qualities. All true service of *Hashem* is based on the foundation of gratitude to *Hashem* for His constant kindnesses - the feeling of gratitude is the prime motivator that leads to all aspects of *avodas Hashem*. Gratitude requires recognition of *Hashem's* goodness in life. When people value all the good that they have and are happy with it - when they are satisfied with *Hashem's* gifts of life, health, food and peace, and perceive *Hashem's* infinite kindnesses, only then is it possible for the *Shechina* to reside among them. The *Shechina* rests upon someone who constantly remembers *Hashem* through His many kindnesses, as *Chazal* said, "The *Shechina* only rests upon a person who is happy" (*Maseches Shabbos* 30b). Someone who complains is forgetting *Hashem* and His kindnesses and can't possibly have the *Shechina* rest upon him. This was *Moshe's* great fear. As the People of Israel's loyal shepherd, he was most alarmed and apprehensive as regards the future existence of the nation, and the special connection of the *Shechina* with them.

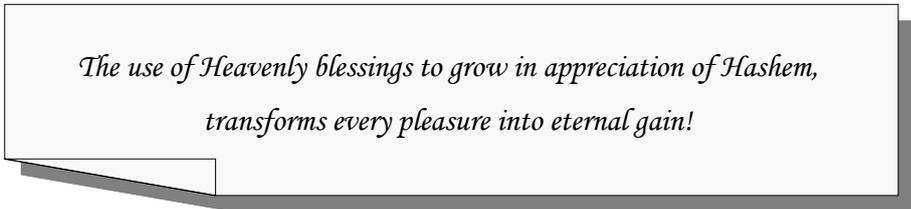
Rabbeinu Yona in *Shaarei Teshuva* (*Shaar* 3 sect. 231) in his definitions of the various categories of evil speech (*lashon hora*) describes the sixth category as "*nirgan*" a "grumbling - discontented" person, who incessantly complains and is resentful. *Shlomo Hamelech* said in *Mishlei* 16:28: וְנִרְגָן מִפְּרִיד אֱלוֹף - "The *nirgan* separates himself from his companions", meaning that he will become isolated from his friends and those who love him, because they won't be able to tolerate his friendship. ... The *nirgan* is often ungrateful...and views *Hashem's* kindnesses (when their benefit is not immediately understood) as revenge and payment for wrongdoings, as it says in *Devarim* 1:27 "and you were grumbling in your tents and you said that '*Hashem* brought us out of *Mitzrayim* because He hates us'". Therefore, distance yourself from the way of *nirganim*, because their ways are perverted, whoever walks in those ways will not know peace.

The *posuk* in *Mishlei* quoted by *Rabbeinu Yona* states that the *nirgan* separates himself from "*aluf*". This does not only mean only that his friends disaffiliate with him, but also that *Hashem* withdraws from him. In *Maseches Chagiga* (16a) it is brought that the word "*Aluf*" is used in reference to *Hashem*. *Hashem* also secedes from this type of person, G-d forbid. When a person constantly complains about everything, *Hashem* also does not wish to tolerate him. According to *Rabbeinu Yona*, one who acts with *nirganus* regarding his situation in life is essentially speaking *lashon hora* about *Hashem*. In essence, all feelings of depression are rooted in resentment and ingratitude toward *Hashem* for His wondrous benevolence in Creation.

It is not sufficient merely not to be a vocal complainer - but one must be cautious not even to be a complainer at heart! Even when there are difficulties in life we should continuously feel the good of Hashem, and not feel disposed to complain and thereby loose our special personal relationship with Him.

= The obligation to feel gratitude is proportional to the good received =

A person's obligation to feel gratitude is proportional to the good that he receives. For example, especially tasty food obligates more intense emotions of gratitude than plain food. A healthy person has to thank *Hashem* more than a sick person. A rich person has to have more gratitude than a poor person (this is one of the reasons that he is expected to give more *tzedaka* than others). The greater the benefits and pleasures that *Hashem* gives a true servant of *Hashem*, the more gratitude and subjugation he will feel towards *Hashem*, hence his good circumstances serves to bring him closer to perfection. Consequently the advantageous situation of a person who experiences proper gratitude, does not detract at all from his reward in *Olam Haba*; on the contrary, it increases it, because he makes use of his fortunate situation to help him grow in gratitude and love of *Hashem*.



*The use of Heavenly blessings to grow in appreciation of Hashem,
transforms every pleasure into eternal gain!*

Chapter 2

How to Attain Feelings of Gratitude to Hashem

- A person has to perceive fully the good of the Creation in order to feel gratitude to *Hashem* for it.
- The key to gratitude is the trait of "*Ayin Tova*"
- To be in a continuous state of instinctive feelings of gratitude.
- Refreshing and increasing appreciation each day anew.
- The reasons why people do not have gratitude to *Hashem* for all the many kindnesses which surround them.
- A person has to reflect on the fine details of the kindnesses of *Hashem*.
- The obligation is not fulfilled with emotionless words of gratitude said without feeling.
- The *brachos* composed by *Chazal* are designed to guide us towards attaining these feelings.

= A person has to perceive fully the good of the Creation in order to feel gratitude to *Hashem* for it =

There are several prerequisites for feeling gratitude toward *Hashem*. First, a person has to clearly recognize that everything he receives in life is from *Hashem*, and that everything is total kindness - free gifts from *Hashem*. A further most important prerequisite is to be consciously aware of the fact that he has received something beneficial. Someone who receives a gift will only feel emotions of gratitude toward the giver if he takes notice of the existence of the gift and its benefits. In order to have gratitude to *Hashem* for the many gifts he bestows, it is not enough to verbally express the good of the Creation, one has to feel the full benefit of all that *Hashem* put in the world for our benefit. Someone who does not focus on the pleasure that *Hashem* grants him, and does not feel the joy of life, is ungrateful for *Hashem's* goodness. Not taking the trouble to open a gift is a most extreme form of ingratitude. This means that a necessary condition to fulfill the obligation of gratitude to *Hashem* is that a person should consciously feel the goodness of all that *Hashem* bestows on him⁷

For example, in order to arouse within himself feelings of gratitude for the food that he eats, he should feel that food and satisfaction from eating are valuable, desirable entities and he should rejoice in them. This will

⁷ See *Sefer Zahav MiSheva*, Part 2, p. 147 : The Or Hachaim explains "*V'samachta b'chol hatov*" "And you should rejoice in all the good" brought in the *Parsha* of *Bikurim*, as referring to the Torah; that a person should feel the pleasantness and sweetness of the Torah to the extent that he is more enthusiastic about it than he is about all the silver and gold in the world, because Torah includes all the good in the world. This explanation requires understanding. What does rejoicing with the good have to do with *Bikurim* which is the *Mitzvah* of *Hakaras Hatov* for the good that Hashem gives us? The answer is that the obligation of gratitude is not only to thank for the good that he already feels, but also to feel and recognize that there is good. From this we learn that *Hakaras Hatov* obligates one to *recognize* that there is good, in order to be able to thank *Hashem* for it, and this recognition of the good is included in the *Mitzvah* of *Hakaras Hatov*. Thus, the obligation of *Hakaras Hatov* necessitates a person to feel the wonderful pleasantness and sweetness of the Torah, in order that he will thank *Hashem* for it befittingly.

make it possible for him to come to the recognition that everything is a gift from *Hashem*, and feel genuine feelings of gratitude.

It is human nature that a person doesn't appreciate the good he has until it is taken away from him. When a relative or friend dies, G-d forbid, only then do we feel how close we were to him and how much we loved him. The lack makes one aware of what was. A person doesn't appreciate his state of health until G-d forbid he hears the doctor tell him he is sick. If a person G-d forbid hears adverse news from his doctor regarding his health, when he afterwards goes out to the street, he sees with every footstep all the good that is in the world that he is at risk of losing. He suddenly discovers the sunlight; he hears the birds chirping; he reflects upon the beauty of Creation; and he starts to think how sweet life and all its events are. Fortunate is the person who feels gratitude for everything while it is still existent, without needing to be aroused to feel it from Above [through challenging circumstances].

- In *Pirkei Avos* Chapter 4 it is written "Who is rich? He who is happy with his portion". At first glance one may ask, "What is the *mishna* trying to teach us. What genuine value is there in being wealthy, that the *mishna* is teaching us how to attain wealth?" From here we see that this is indeed *Hashem's* will that we feel our wealth and realize how fortunate we are, and as a result of this feel gratitude to *Hashem*, our benefactor. This is true spiritual wealth.
- The importance of this trait is apparent from the fact that *Adam Harishon*, when he was first created, was placed in "*Gan Eden*", a place of "*Idun*" [same root as *Eden*] of pleasure and enjoyment. This needs explanation. This world is intended to be a place of doing and achieving, hence it would seem more appropriate to place Adam in a place of work, not pleasure. However this was in fact his "work" – to feel and recognize *Hashem's* goodness and demonstrate appreciation to Him for it. This remains the basis of our mission in this world, except that after Adam's sin, we have the added trial that the desire for forbidden things is inherent within us, and we have a tendency to feel the gratification of "stolen waters are sweet" [that which is forbidden is appealing]. After the sin of Adam, an additional task was added to our mission – to choose between prohibited pleasures vs. the enjoyment of true service of *Hashem*. This is the purpose of Creation that a person should choose to attain the true pleasure of appreciation of *Hashem*, from all of the many pleasures that *Hashem* placed within the world.
- It is written "And *Hashem* saw all that He made and behold it was very good" (*Bereshis* 1:31). What does the Torah want to convey to us with these words? Surely it is obvious that if *Hashem* made something it must be good? The Torah is teaching us that we also have to accustom ourselves to feel this truth, that everything in the Creation is "very good". The Rambam writes that everything that is described in the Torah as being of *Hashem's* ways, obligates a Jew to act likewise. Hence also with respect to this statement, *Hashem* wants us to follow in His ways, and take an example from Him and consciously perceive the good of everything he created. If *Hashem* had said that everything is "good", it would already be clear how precious the gift is of all that *Hashem* created for us. *Hashem* added significant emphasis to the issue by stating that the world is "**very** good", that the inherent good within Creation is exceptional. Therefore a person should look at everything and feel its goodness. For example, a healthy person should feel how wealthy he is that he has the gift of health. A person should consciously focus on appreciating his clothes, food, water, the air, the ability to see with his eyes, to hear with his ears, to sleep, to breathe, etc. He should sense all this and even make a point of expressing the words verbally, that everything is indeed very good. Appreciating everything that was given to us and recognizing the good in it, is the secret to success in life. Someone who relates in this way to life, *Hashem* relates to him as his authentic representative on earth. He publicizes the true perspective of the inherent good of everything. On the other hand, someone who incessantly complains and tells everyone how hard life is, his perception of life displeases *Hashem*. If someone wants to have a long, pleasant and good life, he should follow his Creator's example and feel and inform everyone, that everything *Hashem* does is "very good". This type of person will merit that *Hashem* will reveal to him openly the validity of his outlook on life.

- Rabbi Yehudah Halevi in *Sefer HaKuzari* (3:11) wrote that to feel joy in the gift of life and in all gifts that *Hashem* bestows is a serious obligation of the Torah, as it is written "And you should rejoice in all the good that *Hashem* gave you". The Torah stresses the severity of this mitzvah and states that the absence of this perspective on life is the reason for the exile and all of the *tochacha* [rebuke] brought in the Torah, as it is written (*Devarim* 28:46) "Because you did not serve *Hashem* your G-d with joy and with good-heartedness you will serve your enemies" The *Kuzari* elucidates, that the reason this is such a serious issue is because only through genuine joy can a person come to true appreciation and gratitude to *Hashem*⁸.

Thus we have two obligations:

1. To be aware of the extent of the pleasure that we have from all the good things that *Hashem* placed in the world for our sake.
2. To feel gratitude to *Hashem* for them.

Chazal explain (*Maseches Taanis* 11a and *Nazir* 19a) that a *nazir* [who accepts upon himself a vow of abstention from wine etc.] brings a sin offering [*korban chatas*] on the conclusion of his period of abstention, because he caused himself pain by depriving himself of wine. This means, that even though he accepted upon himself to be a *nazir* for a specific goal of personal self improvement, nevertheless he needs to atone for his failure to utilize the good of this world to heighten his appreciation of *Hashem*, and he has to bring a sin offering for this. His being a *nazir* reduced to some extent his feelings of gratitude to *Hashem*, since human nature is that only by consciously feeling pleasure are a person's expressions of appreciation backed by profound sincere feeling.

- *Hashem* wants a person to look at the sky and see the stars, sun and moon and look at everything in Creation, and sense how much pleasure he receives from it and be aroused to show gratitude for *Hashem's* goodness. Someone who fails to do this will be brought to judgment for this. Someone who does not feel joy in being alive is sinning, since he does not appreciate what his Creator has given him, and feel gratitude towards Him. A person has to do *teshuva* for this failure just as for other sins, because he is not fulfilling his task in the world.

Therefore, a person should pay attention to the great pleasure he receives; from the clear light of the sun, from the beauty of the moon, the grandeur of a tree and its shade, the goodness of the rains and the winds, from the sweetness of the air, the efficiency and pleasantness of water. He should be grateful for the fact that he has a place to live with rooms; a body with organs and limbs, clothing, mental and physical health. He should take note of the vast amount of additional non-vital extras that *Hashem* placed in the world for his pleasure, to make him happy. He should feel a thrill when reflecting on the thousands of kindnesses that *Hashem* surrounded him with from all sides, until he is filled with feelings of elation and gratitude to the Creator. Above all, a person should come to an exhilarated appreciation of the gift of life itself.

In order to arouse these wonderful feelings, a person has to remind himself constantly of all the details of the many kindnesses which surround him. Neglecting this, he will not feel anything. It is told about the Chofetz Chaim ZT"L that someone in his household once heard him enumerating each of the *sefarim* that he wrote, one by one, and thanking *Hashem* that he merited to write them and cause *nachas ruach* to Him through them. Similarly, each person should remind himself in a detailed manner of all of *Hashem's*

⁸ Kuzari, (3- 11): "Fear of Hashem should not bring a person to despair from attaining pardon and forgiveness for his sins, because this despair will make a person anxious all his life and transgress the commandment to be happy with his portion, as we are commanded to do by the statement "And you should rejoice with all the good that *Hashem* your G-d gave you". If he has this apprehension he will reduce the praise that he is supposed to give Hashem for His goodness, because praise is a consequence of joy – and then the statement "Because you did not serve *Hashem* your G-d with joy and good-heartedness, you will serve your enemy" will be fulfilled in him.

many kindnesses to him. Reflecting on the details of life in order to pay attention to the goodness and benevolence of *Hashem* evident from them, is one of the most important components of *avodas Hashem* that should occupy a person continuously all the days of his life.

- It is important to be aware that doing this is not a contradiction to the valued trait of *prishus* [asceticism]. *Prishus* means not to seek more than the vital pleasures that *Hashem* provides for him. This does not contradict the obligation to pay attention to the pleasure and enjoyment that *Hashem* placed in all the vital basic things that exist⁹.

In order to keep this mitzvah of feeling gratitude towards *Hashem* and thanking Him, a person does not have to pursue unnecessary pleasures. When someone is offered the choice of two different drinks, one expensive and luxurious and the other regular water, the *mitzvah* of having and showing gratitude does not obligate him to drink the expensive drink. On the contrary, it is preferable that he drink water and feel the kindness of this wondrous invention - the most pleasant, healthy drink in the world - the wonderful reality of water. Someone who appreciates the value and pleasure of drinking water, and feels the kindness of *Hashem* evident in it, is closer to feelings of gratitude than someone who is only capable of feeling gratitude when he drinks sophisticated, elaborate beverages.

- There are people who maintain that it is desirable not to feel any joy at all from physical things, because the purpose of our lives is spiritual attainments. They are erring, because feelings of joy are themselves a necessary spiritual means to fulfill the mitzvah of gratitude to *Hashem* and thanking Him, which is the purpose of our lives. There are people who mislead themselves and think that they do not feel worldly pleasure because they are spiritual and stripped of materialism, but the true reason that they do not feel pleasure is because they are so accustomed to the good things of life that they are not consciously aware of them at all. Many people do not understand this matter. When I mentioned it to one person, he answered me vehemently, "G-d forbid. I don't eat for the pleasure of it; I eat in order to serve my Creator". His words indicate that he [in his mind] does not feel obligated to *Hashem* at all for all the food he eats; on the contrary, he feels that *Hashem* is obligated to him for his eating, because he only eats to serve *Hashem*. He is making a mistake. Of course he has to do everything in order to serve *Hashem*, but included in this service is to pay attention to all the wonderful innovations of *Hashem* that are designed to give man innumerable pleasures, and to feel gratitude to *Hashem* for them. This is the foundation of all *avodas Hashem* – a person should feel an ever increasing desire to serve *Hashem* as a result of his overwhelming feelings of gratitude towards Him¹⁰.

Even people of the highest spiritual caliber who practice asceticism, are obligated to feel the pleasure of life, since they also have the obligation to recognize *Hashem's* kindnesses. *Hashem* receives *nachas ruach* when His creatures derive joy from His Creation and as a result of this, appreciate Him and come closer to Him and to loving Him.

When a person feels satisfaction with what he has and utilizes this joy to feel the good of Hashem, his joy elevates him and brings him closer to Hashem. Such a person merits joy in both worlds - the true joy of this world and the next. This goal is worth investing all our energy to achieve!

⁹ It would seem that the exact definition is that if a person increases physical pleasures without it leading to enhanced gratitude to *Hashem*, the pleasure will debase him and distance him from his connection to the feelings of his *neshama*. Therefore a person has to be careful that any additional pleasure that he engages in will cause him additional genuine *hakoras hatov*.

¹⁰Hence the answer is that, indeed, the reason we eat needs to be to serve *Hashem* and not to derive pleasure, but *avodas Hashem* also requires that we do not neglect to take notice of the pleasure that *Hashem* put into food, but feel it and serve *Hashem* with the appreciation of that pleasure.

= The key to gratitude is the trait of "Ayin Tova" =

The primary precondition to entering the world of recognizing the wondrous *chesed* that exists in Creation, is acquiring the trait of *ayin tova* (a good eye). *Ayin tova* means to see and focus constantly on the good side of everything. When a person looks at the world with *ayin tova*, he will feel joy and gratification all the time from seeing the good that is inherent in everything. He will always be suffused with feelings of hope and gladness which will enable him to recognize the great goodness of *Hashem*. The path to spiritual perfection begins with the trait of *ayin tova*.

One of the tasks of the *yetzer hora* - in which it invests extensive energy - is that people should not see or feel how much good and pleasure there is in life. The *yetzer hora* works hard to hide from people how wonderful it is to live. Depression is his great weapon, it is a sickness that the *yetzer hora* infects people with in order that they should not see the wonder of life. The *yetzer hora's* role is to make us sin. When we feel the joy in life, then we see that there is a Creator of the world Who is good, cares for us and is totally filled with infinite generosity. Yet we all walk around like sightless people, not seeing the good of the world, our consciousness overflowing with problems and anxieties only. If we would open our eyes and begin to see how many wonderful and pleasant things we receive from *Hashem*, we would see that the extent of our feelings of gratitude is barely a drop in the ocean relative to everything we receive. We would then also awaken to the recognition that we are not alone in the world and do not have to solve all our problems by ourselves. Only someone who appreciates the wonder and joy of life can recognize The Source of all this wondrous joy.

It is written in *Pirkei Avos* (5:22) "Whoever has these three character traits is among the students of Avraham Avinu – *ayin tova, ruach nemucha and nefesh shefeila*." The Rambam explains (brought also in *Bartenura*) that *ayin tova* means to feel contentment and satisfaction (*mistapek*) with what he has. The implication of the word "*mistapek*" is that he is content with what he has to the extent that he feels joy and derives pleasure from it. This is what it says in *Avos* (4:1) "Who is wealthy? He who is happy with his share." There also the Rambam explains that a wealthy person is one who takes pleasure, feels satisfaction (*mistapek*) and enjoyment from what he has. It should be emphasized that this does not mean that he has no desire to attain more than what he presently has. It is permitted for a person to aspire to improve his situation, but together with this, he should be careful to feel fully the joy of what he already possesses.

An interesting side note on this subject is, that one of *Hashem's* wondrous ways is that He incorporated within the laws of nature that they direct a person toward fulfilling *Hashem's* will. For example, the nature of the world is that jealousy, anger, hatred, panic and unbridled desire cause bad illnesses, and as a result of this many prudent people guide their conduct in these matters appropriately. Recently, medical experts have arrived at the understanding that a person's health depends to a large extent on his disposition (his good mood) and his joy of life. These are essential for comprehensive physical and emotional health. A good frame of mind and cheerfulness cause the body to manufacture all the essential acids and the body functions properly. *Hashem* made the world this way, because He wanted to direct man to fulfill the fundamental objective of his existence. By feeling joy in life and acquiring the trait of *ayin tova*, he will appreciate the goodness of *Hashem* and feel gratitude towards Him, and act accordingly. This is the purpose of man and the purpose of Creation.

A good person enjoys seeing the good he feels within - outside of himself. His joy to see good wherever it is to be found will make him notice and appreciate it. To spontaneously perceive constantly the goodness of Hashem in the world is the key to fulfilling the Mitzvah of Ahavas Hashem.

= To be in a continuous state of instinctive gratitude =

A person should thank *Hashem* constantly for all the details of his life, such as his *shidduch*, health, diseases from which he recovered, his successes, his livelihood, and all aspects of these blessings. A person should be constantly overflowing with feelings of gratitude, as it is written (*Tehillim* 145:7) זָכַר רַב טוֹבָהּ יִבְיְעוּ - "The recollection of Your abundant goodness they will express ("yabi'u"). The word "yabi'u" does not just mean ordinary verbal expression, but rather is derived from the root "נבע" - "flowing" as a river which is flowing. Their feelings of gratitude to *Hashem* for his kindness, pours forth from them like a river flowing incessantly. If people would remember all the many kindnesses that *Hashem* showers upon them, they would be in a constant state of "yabi'u", their thanks to *Hashem* would emanate from them continuously like an inexhaustible spring.

In order to attain this feeling, a person has to remember in a tangible way the many kindnesses that *Hashem* did for him in the past and does for him in the present; only then will he feel the remarkable accumulation of the kindnesses. בְּרַכֵּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת ה' וְאַל תִּשְׁכַּחַי כָּל גְּמוּלוֹי. - "My soul should bless *Hashem* and should not forget all His benefactions" (*Tehillim* 103:2). How distressful it is to see people embittered and constantly complaining against their Creator, forgetting how many times they were saved by Him from their troubles. They forget all the accidents they were involved in, yet emerged unharmed. They forget all the illnesses they contracted from which they recovered. They forget the kindnesses of *Hashem* which surrounds them every day. Dovid Hamelech said (*Tehillim* 23:5) "My cup overflows" ("*kosi revaya*"); the word "*revaya*" means that Dovid Hamelech felt that he was filled to such an extent with the innumerable kindnesses that he received from *Hashem*, that they "overflowed their banks" from the inability of the human heart to contain so much kindness. If a person does not feel that all his successes are from *Hashem*, or does not constantly remember and feel all the kindnesses which *Hashem* does for him, he will never be in a state of "*revaya*", - he is like a cup that has a hole, which prevents the cup from ever becoming filled. Therefore Dovid Hamelech urged himself (*Tehillim* 103:1) "בְּרַכֵּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת ה' וְאַל תִּשְׁכַּחַי כָּל גְּמוּלוֹי", that he should continuously bless *Hashem* and never forget all the good that *Hashem* does for him. When this type of person will thank *Hashem* for a particular benefit he received, the *chesed* will be added to all the previous acts of *chesed* he experienced whose intensity he still feels, and his heart will erupt with effusive feelings of gratitude for all the many kindnesses that *Hashem* did for him. This concept is demonstrated in *Birkas Hamazon* in the *brocha* of "נודה לך". We start *Birkas Hamazon* by thanking *Hashem* for the bread we have eaten, and then continue by thanking Him for many additional things *Eretz Yisrael*, *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, etc. This is an example of the eruption of gratitude of the nature of "זָכַר רַב טוֹבָהּ יִבְיְעוּ".

It is a good idea for everyone to make written lists of all that he has to be grateful for and to make use of these lists to thank Hashem regularly for everything.

= Refreshing and increasing appreciation each day anew =

Dovid Hamelech encourages us several times in *Tehillim* to "sing a **new** song" to *Hashem*. The intent is that there is a constant obligation to refresh and to feel anew *Hashem's* kindnesses. A person should always continue actively reflecting on the kindnesses of *Hashem*, in order to feel anew the many examples of them that *Hashem* bestows on him unceasingly. The author of *Chovos Halevavos* writes in *Shaar Habechina* in his

explanation of the words *Tehillim* (19:3) יוֹם לְיוֹם יִבְרַח אֱמֹר - "every day expresses (the praise of *Hashem*)", that every day a person should make an effort to recognize additional indications of *Hashem's* goodness, wisdom and benevolence.

Additionally, the *Chovos Halevavos* in the section on *Cheshbon Hanefesh* (*Cheshbon* #23), writes that it is important for a person to refresh his feelings of appreciation for all the kindnesses that he receives, in order not to stop feeling them even after he has become accustomed to them. If G-d forbid due to becoming accustomed to them, he will lose his sensation of the goodness he receives, he will fall into the quagmire of ingratitude toward *Hashem*. The way to be saved from this is to feel every day that the particular day and its many kindnesses are a new gift from *Hashem*, as it is written in *Tehillim* (96) בְּשֶׁרָר מִיוֹם לְיוֹם יְשׁוּעָתוֹ - "Make known from day to day His salvation", the gift of the day with its many multifarious goodness's. This outlook on life requires training oneself to take notice and to feel the enormous good and kindness that is in the world, and to awaken this feeling anew each day. Especially when the good is universal and others also share in it, there is more of a tendency to become indifferent to it. However, this is our life's work - succeeding in this is true success.

Apathy is the prime enemy who robs us of all feelings of Ahavas Hashem. It is up to us to lead a counter-offensive and use all means at our disposal to totally eliminate this brigand.

= The reasons for the widespread ingratitude to *Hashem* =

Chovos Halevavos Shaar Habechina, (introductory chapter) asks the question since *Hashem's* good to His creatures is so all encompassing, as it says in *Tehillim* (145:9) "*Hashem* is good to all", why are the majority of people so blind to all the many kindnesses that they receive? (It should be noted that also included in this "blind" majority are those who think that *hakaras hatov* is merely a praiseworthy quality, or relate to it as a halachic obligation without feeling the natural instinct of gratitude).

The *Chovos Halevavos* explains that there are three reasons for this:

- a. People are not satisfied with what they have. They are always trying to attain more and are perpetually worrying about the future. (Regarding this it is said, "עֵינֵי כְסִיל בְּקֶצֶה אֶרֶץ" - "The eyes of a stupid person are at the end of the earth" (*Mishlei* 17). The fool does not pause to appreciate the beauty existing in the present, but searches at the end of the earth for what he still lacks. Someone who has one hundred wants two hundred, and instead of rejoicing with what he has and thanking *Hashem* for it, he continues to seek more, like a young child who receives a present and instead of expressing thanks asks if there is more.)
- b. People are accustomed from birth to receiving unlimited gifts from *Hashem*. The kindnesses to a person start immediately when he is born, he is surrounded with good and grows up with it, to the point that he views them as a given, not worthy of consideration. When he is young, his intellect is not sufficiently developed to appreciate all that he is receiving. Most people even after they grow up do not change their outlook and do not pay attention at all to this issue. They do not wake up to the realization that they should be thanking *Hashem* for all the wonderful things He does for them and should be inspired to serve Him as a result of all these many kindnesses.
- c. Life experiences that are difficult for them to accept, and losses they have experienced, cause people to become angry at *Hashem* and ungrateful to Him. (Every person's life has some distress which gives him a pretext to feel dissatisfied and ignore all the many kindnesses that he receives).

The advice of the *Chovos Halevavos* as to how to remedy this grave malady, is that a person should focus constantly on the kindnesses that he receives continuously, acknowledge them and feel their pleasure and the goodness that motivated them, and thank and praise *Hashem* for all of them, without allowing other desires to weaken this recognition. A person has to thank *Hashem* even if it seems that some of his needs are lacking. If someone received a car as a gift, but it does not have automatic transmission, does this fact eradicate the value of the gift? Does this exempt him from thanking the benefactor? If *Hashem* gave a person wisdom, health, good children and generous livelihood, are all of these nullified because he is blind? We have to realize that *Hashem* gave us all our needs, and whatever He did not give us ... we do not need!

In order to eliminate the indifference that being accustomed to kindness causes, a person should look at all the details of life as if he is seeing them for the first time. Then he will be able to appreciate their worth and be aroused to feel the wondrous *chesed* within them. He should consciously observe and reflect upon the sun as if he is seeing it for the first time in his life, and similarly view the wind, the rain, the clouds, his house, the sources of his income, the intellect which *Hashem* granted him, all his natural senses, friends, relatives and colleagues... etc. ad infinitum Someone who is capable of looking at the world as if he is seeing it for the first time can attain a wondrous level of knowing and appreciating *Hashem*.

Happy is he who feels the wonderful pleasure and the elevated joy of this outlook on life. Such a person merits a life that is akin to the elevated joy of Gan Eden ("Me'en Gan Eden") in this world - yet his principle remains complete and undiminished for Olom Habo.

= The requisite to contemplate the details of the kindnesses of *Hashem* =

The *Sefer Chovos Halevavos* stresses that it is not sufficient for a person to say in a general way "Everything is *Chasdei Hashem*", without focusing on specifics. Saying this makes almost no impression on a person, and with this alone he does not fulfill his obligation of gratitude to *Hashem*. We have to contemplate and feel the subtle details and the sub-details of each kindness. The *Anshei Knesses Hagedola*, who established the format of our *brachos*, did this. Besides instituting the *brachos* on the general kindnesses such as "*Malbish Arumim*"- "Who clothes the naked", they did not suffice with this *brachah* alone, but added expressions of specific gratitude in the individual *brachos* for a hat, belt and shoes¹¹. We need to follow their example, and appreciate all the fine details of the kindnesses we receive and thank *Hashem* in an explicit way for all of their multifarious components.

We should view the world like a professional artist viewing a brilliant work of art of one of the leading artists. He notices all the skilful nuances of the artistry; the shade and the light, the delicate tones of the colours ... Only such a person appreciates the magnificent beauty that the artist worked so hard to achieve and derives full pleasure from the masterpiece.

¹¹See Alei Shur, p. 98 - therefore a specific *bracha* like "*Borei pri ha'etz*" comes before a more general *bracha* like "*Shehakol*".)

= The obligation is not fulfilled with words of gratitude said without feeling =

Many people believe that they fulfill their obligation of *hakaras hatov* to *Hashem* by expressing the fixed standard words of the regular *Tefilos*. Chazal teach us "רחמנא ליבא בעי" - *Hakodosh Boruch Hu* desires the heart - it is not sufficient to pay lip service only. A person can pray three times a day, yet if he does not experience feelings of sincere thanks to *Hashem*, he has missed the true objective.

We should remember that "Hashem sees the heart" - all our thoughts and feelings are revealed before Him no less than words. How contemptible it is to us when someone expresses gratitude towards us and we discern that his heart is not at all in to what he is saying ...

= Our brachos are designed to direct us toward attaining these feelings =

All the blessings we make during a day are designed to direct us towards feeling constant gratitude to *Hashem*, experiencing His presence and His love. It is written in the *Gemara* in *Maseches Menachos* (43b): a person should say 100 brachos every day, as it is written (*Devarim* 10;12) וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שְׂאֵל מֵעַמֶּךָ וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְלֶכֶת בְּכָל דְרָכָיו, וְלֵאמֹר אֲתוּ וְלַעֲבֹד אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ. - "And now, Yisrael, what does *Hashem* ask of you except to fear *Hashem* your G-d...and to love Him." Rashi explains that the derivation is from the word "מה" whose letters imply also the word "מאה" which means "100". From the *posuk* brought as the source, one can see that the purpose of the 100 brachos is to lead one to fulfill the *mitzvos* of the heart that are written at the end of the *posuk* - to fear and love *Hashem*. If so, these *mitzvos* obligate a person to reflect on *Hashem's* kindnesses in the Creation and to show gratitude to *Hashem* for them, for this is the way recommended by the Torah to arrive at the fulfillment of these *mitzvos* of the heart.

There is here useful advice on how to revitalize and elevate our relationship with Hashem; to work on improving our concentration and feelings when saying the Brachos we say every day.

Chapter 3

Examples of Recognizing the Wondrous Chesed of the Creation

A. Examples of material kindnesses:

- The kindness of all the "extras" in Creation that were created for our pleasure.
- The *chesed* of the variety in Creation.
- The wonders of fruits.
- The goodness of the form of foods.
- Gratitude to *Hashem* for all of the new inventions of our times.
- Gratitude for the vital and basic things without additions.
- Gratitude for life itself.
- Thanking *Hashem* that one does not have problems.
- The pleasantness of light.
- Thanks for the eyes and the sense of sight.
- The kindness of bread.
- The goodness of the rains and of water.
- To praise *Hashem* for every breath.
- The kindness of clothing – "Who clothes the unclothed".
- The wondrous kindness of appetite and thirst.
- The kindness of nighttime and winter.

B. Examples of spiritual kindnesses:

- The kindness of being a person and a Jew.
- The exceptional kindness of the Torah.
- The kindness of man's "deficiencies".
- The hidden *chesed* in the troubles that people encounter.
- The *chesed* of teshuva.

A. Examples of material kindnesses

= The non-essential "extras" in Creation that were created for our pleasure =

Hashem made many wonders in order for us to have all the things that we take pleasure from in life. The world could have existed in an excellent manner even without the pleasure and delightful beauty of fruits. But *Hashem* is not miserly. In addition to the pleasures of meat and poultry, produce, fish and vegetables, *Hashem* wanted us to have the pleasure of tasting the sweet and the sour - to experience the varied pleasures of cherries, grapes, bananas, oranges and pineapple. In order for us to be able to enjoy an apple dipped in honey, *Hashem* created an amazing chain of miracles composed of thousands of intricate components.

A person could attain many exalted achievements in life without pepper, ginger, cinnamon, turmeric, dill and endless other spices that *Hashem* put in His world. Their only purpose is our enjoyment! When a person passes by a store which sells soft drinks and sweets, he will encounter an amazing bounty of various tastes, all of which were designed in Heaven in order to increase our pleasure and joy in life.

"There is no artist like *Hashem*", *Hashem* "invented" for our pleasure the beauty of the blue skies, the green trees and bushes, the stunning variety of flowers, the glorious sunrise and sunset, and the enchanting light of the moon. All of these are only a small part of the beauty that *Hashem* put into the world for our sake. Also the pleasure of smell is a wondrous joy; the scent of foods, baked goods, spices, wines, fragrant gardens, fields and forests, the smell of the sea, the scent of spring and the exquisite perfume of flowers, are all brilliant "inventions" that were designed to increase our joy. In addition to all these, *Hashem* invented another wondrous thing – the entire system of musical notes, which can bring joy to the body together with the soul.

The world is like a large banquet hall, full of all types of foods and enjoyments for the pleasure of the guests – the "guest" is man, and the banquet hall "Owner" stands by His guests and good-heartedly watches over everything to ensure they are all cared for in the best possible way.

We make a Bracha after eating; "בורא נפשות רבות וחסרונם" - "Who created many souls and (provided them with) their requirements". This is an expression of gratitude for all the necessities of life. Afterwards, we add; "על כל מה שבראת להחיות בהם נפש כל חי" - "for all that you created to support all living creatures may You be blessed ..." this is referring to all the non essential "extras" that Hashem put in the world for our enjoyment (Tosafos, Mishnah Berurah).

The more unessential the pleasure of the present is, the more it reveals the joy of the giver in causing additional pleasure and happiness to the recipient.

[This is the reason for the widespread practice to give flowers as a present, and the value of wrapping gifts in an attractive gift wrapping.]

= The variety in Creation =

A person who has lost his appetite and has ceased to show an interest in eating, his wife who loves him and has concern for his welfare, will prepare for him a variety of menus in order to restore his appetite. In the same way, *Hashem* created a large variety of things that give us pleasure, giving us additional enjoyment by means of the broad range of the variety. *Hashem* not only created flowers, but He created hundreds of thousands of types of flowers in various colors, shapes and scents, in order to stimulate our attention to become aware of the Goodness behind everything. This extensive variety is intended to awaken us from our slumber, to thank and praise the Creator for everything.

Hashem is also "מְשַׁנֵּה עֵתִים וּמַחֲלִיף אֶת הַזְּמַנִּים" – He "changes the times" from day to night and from season to season. This too is an example of variety that was designed to awaken us from our slumber of habit and indifference to recognize *Hashem's* goodness.

Hashem invested so much in order to convey a message to us.

Are we making an effort to receive it?!

= The wonders of fruits =

When we set eyes on a fruit basket, we see a wonderful array of health-generating, pleasure-providing foods that are ready-to-eat, wrapped in pretty, colorful peels, with delectable tastes that are seasoned with expertise in a blend of sweetness and sour, and fragranced with an appetite arousing aroma. Every fruit has its own unique shape, color, and peel that are suitable for it. Everything is beautiful to look at; every fruit beckons us to eat it. The banana, the apple, the orange, the pear, the cherry, the grape, the pineapple and the melon are all nutritional miracles and luscious pleasures that proclaim the immense kindness and wisdom of their Great Designer.

Today, factories pack food in cartons that are coated in water-resistant wax to prevent spoiling. If these types of packages grew on trees, everyone would admit that this is an amazing miracle that shows the wisdom of the Creator and His benevolence. We should realize that a fruit's peel is considerably superior to this packaging. A fruit peel contains oil that makes it exceptionally resistant to water and air and all types of blemishes, and it is not at all affected by heavy rains during the months of growth and ripening. Additionally, this oil has a pleasant aroma that makes the fruit more pleasurable. Furthermore, the color of the fruit's peel testifies to its state of ripeness. As long as the peel is green, it informs us that it is not suitable to be used as food; and when the fruit is edible and ready to eat, the peel becomes a shiny color that attracts the eye and stimulates the appetite of the beholder. Also, as long as the fruit is not yet ready, its peel clings to it tightly and is hard to peel; when the ripening is finished, the peel comes off easily. So we see that we have a delectable food product here that is wrapped in; 1) a water-resistant wrapping that is exactly suitable to the fruit; 2) that informs when the fruit is ready to eat; 3) that has an aesthetic beauty of shape and colors that stimulate the appetite; 4) that are perfumed with a most pleasure-providing scent. *Hashem* incorporated another useful feature in many fruits that their peel may be eaten together with them. An additional remarkable refinement is that only those fruits that are suitable to be eaten immediately have a shiny color and attract attention when they are ripe; but vegetables that require cooking do not have an attracting color even when they are ripe – this also demonstrates wondrous kindness and thoughtful design in the organization of our needs.

One should also note that *Hashem* created various fruits for various purposes, designed appropriately for their function. For example, the walnut, which is rich in protein and fat, is a food which is suitable for hikers and travelers. They can equip themselves with this nutritious source of protein, without worrying about it

spoiling, as a result of its hard peel, which protects the contents as if they were in a purpose designed box. Some nut shells also demonstrate benevolent design by being divided in two halves which enable them to be easily opened in order to be eaten.

Every fruit has a stem by which it is attached to the tree and through which sustenance is conveyed to the fruit. There is in regard to this an interesting aspect of Hashem's thoughtfulness. The stalk holds onto the fruit by force as long as it is not ripe, to the extent that the winds and rain cannot fell it. As soon as the fruit does not need the tree anymore and is edible, the stalk releases its hold on the fruit, as if it has a built-in automatic release mechanism, and enables it to be picked easily. It is even possible that the fruit will fall off the tree on its own (since people cannot always climb up to take the fruit).

When we open the fruit, we see a food that is an ingenious invention. If there were just liquid juices within the fruit they would spill immediately upon opening the fruit; so *Hashem* made a skillful innovation in which the liquid fruit juice and solid are united in a erudite manner which allows one to open the fruit without its juice spilling out, and to quench one's thirst and also allay one's hunger in a food that has the traits of both a pleasurable food and a thirst-quenching drink. Everything is designed in a wondrous fashion of wisdom and *chesed*. It should also be noted with which artistry the sugars and acids are combined; how much a cook toils to balance the quantities of the substances and spices so that a pleasing taste will result. *Hashem* did all this labor for us, by creating each fruit in a way that it will add to our enjoyment. The fruit only receives this special taste when it is ripe and health-promoting. Prior to this, it has a bitter, sour taste that repels people from eating it.

In addition to all this, one should note how the seeds of all fruits are wrapped in a hard shell which protects them from many vicissitudes, including the possible journey through an animal's digestive organs. An apple's seeds are placed in a "cell" surrounded by hard walls that are made from a plastic-like material that protects the seeds from the acids which are in the fruit juice. It also prevents the seed from being eaten together with the fruit, because this hard material is difficult to chew. Plum and peach pits are made from such hard material that even most nutcrackers cannot break them apart. All this is in order for the pit to remain intact and not be eaten by animals. But as soon as the pit touches the earth, it splits on its own, strikes a root, and a new tree starts to be produced. Amazing!

We have here a juicy fruit which grows on the tree, which, after it is eaten and enjoyed, a "coupon" is found within it that presents its finder with an additional allocation of the same pleasure. After eating the fruit, he spits the seeds to the ground, and a new tree grows, and in this manner the future supply of fruits for generations to come is assured.

This seed contains millions of 'bits' of information necessary for the continuance of the species. The complexity of design of a skyscraper is nothing compared to this. The seed contains within it not only the blueprint of all the many intricate facets of the new tree which will emerge from it, but also all the necessary means to execute this task, in the designed, precise order to make a new tree with fruits - which also will have these incredible seeds within them.

Hashem did not create only one fruit in this wondrous manner, but a prodigious variety of fruits, each with its own shape, color, scent and taste, in order to arouse our attention and increase our opportunities to recognize *Hashem* and His kindness and His great love for us. This recognition is our purpose and the purpose of the entire Creation.

Even though all these fruits were created by One who has unlimited capabilities, and their innovation and production did not require exertion and toil as we know them; nevertheless the thoughtfulness that is evident from them – the extent that all the minute details of our benefit and pleasure were taken into account - is astonishing, and reveals much regarding the wondrous goodness and kindness of Hashem and His love and concern for us.

In *Birchas hamazon* we say; בָּחַן בְּחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים הוּא נוֹתֵן לָחֶם לְכֹל בְּשָׂר - "With grace, kindness and mercy he provides bread for all living creatures". *Hashem* does not just nourish us with a meager capsule or vitamin pill, but provides the world with foods that have luscious tastes, exquisite smells and delightful appearance. He does this so that people will derive pleasure from the food - this is the meaning of בָּחַן בְּחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים. Why does He do all this? בְּעֵבוֹר שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל - "for the sake of His great name" - so that we will appreciate Him and recognize that He is good and does good for us continuously. Everything that *Hashem* does for man, and all the pleasures that a person receives from the world, are for the purpose of him recognizing the great goodness of *Hashem*.

When a goose owner wants to fatten his goose, he opens its beak and pours in food even against the goose's will. He doesn't trouble to make sure that the food tastes good, since his only purpose is to fatten the goose. *Hashem* doesn't conduct Himself with us in this manner. "פּוֹתֵחַ אֶת יָדָךְ וּמְשַׁבֵּיעַ לְכֹל חַי רִצּוֹן" "You open your hand to satisfy the will of every living thing". *Hashem* feeds us in a way that our wills and desires are fulfilled.. *Hashem* created for us a beautiful world and wants us to rejoice in it, He therefore made the fruits with a variety of beautiful colors. He didn't give us fruits only to nourish us, but decorated them like the most skilled artist, for our gratification.

There is a lot to reflect on regarding *Hashem's* great kindness which is evident from the pleasant smell and taste of foods. Beyond the enjoyment caused by the pleasurable smell, there is additional kindness in the fact that whatever is healthful and beneficial has a good smell and taste; and what is putrid and could cause harm, has a bad smell. Furthermore, *Hashem* placed our nose close above our mouth so that before we eat, we automatically smell whether the food is good or bad. If we didn't discern this with our sense of smell, then we will sense it with our sense of taste through the taste buds on our tongue. If we still do not detect this, then our intestines will eject the spoiled food. This entire system is a wondrous kindness of *Hashem*. Additionally, the good smell and taste of foods adds enjoyment to the eater, and assists the digestive system. A person should reflect on the wondrous kindness of the varied range of delightful tastes and smells that *Hashem* put into our foods.

Hashem prepared for us such a wide variety of beautiful, pleasurable foods, such as succulent fruits, meat, fish and other appetizing things. The purpose of this magnificent abundance is to bring us close to Him and bring us to sense His love. If G-d forbid these things do not lead us to feel His closeness, then all of this bounty did not attain its purpose. Even so, *Hashem* continues to grant us His good day after day, year after year, with the hope that one day we will awaken to the truth that He is the giver; and will be aroused to love Him, and endeavor to be close to Him.

It is astounding how few people actually notice all this wonderful munificence!

= Gratitude for all of the new inventions of our times =

The *Chovos Halevavos* in *Shaar Habechina* writes that a person should include in his gratitude to *Hashem* appreciation for the ingenuity and initiative He placed in the hearts of people, to invent many beneficial innovations. These words open up a new world of *avodas Hashem* for us. According to this, we have many more obligations of gratitude to *Hashem* than earlier generations. Besides all the natural kindnesses which we have to thank *Hashem* for, we have an additional obligation of gratitude for all the numerous modern innovations. For example – we have running water that is ready for use whenever required, for drinking, cooking, cleaning and laundry and even abundant hot water. We have the washing machine, dishwasher, electric light that illuminates the darkness of night, air conditioning and heating in the home, electric refrigerators, telephones, the possibility to send letters easily all over the world, traffic lights, sidewalks, printing technology, comfortable shoes, plastics, medicines and cures, firefighters, policemen, ambulances,

elegant bathrooms, cars, jets ... how astonished and dumbfounded earlier generations would be if they would see all the wondrous things that we have.

All the amazing things that have recently been discovered were for thousands of years hidden in nature and only now revealed to us. This gives the impression that the world is coming close to a period of major revelations of the kindness of Hashem. It is reasonable to assume that only those who know how to relate to these revelations in a befitting manner will merit seeing them.

What about us?!

= Gratitude for basic necessities =

When a person feels the benefit and pleasure of all the basic gifts with which he has been endowed, such as: his eyesight, his sanity, and his daily bread, the wonderful blessing inherent in a cup of water, a night's sleep, his state of peace, the roof over his head, his garments, his household utensils; all of these, plus the many other innumerable good things that he has, should arouse him to thank *Hashem* and to sing *shira* to Him for all the good that He bestows on him.

Relating in this appreciative manner towards all the basic things in life was the test of the manna which *Am Yisrael* received during their travels in the wilderness. Its purpose was to test them if they would acknowledge the good inherent in their daily bread, or whether they would complain that they are lacking additional luxuries. In reference to the manna it is written "And He afflicted you and starved you" this means "He restricted you by limiting your luxuries". In the wilderness the manna was their exclusive source of nutrition "in order to test them whether they will go in the path of My Torah or not". The words "Going in the path of My Torah" do not only refer to fulfilling the practical commandments and refraining from sin, but particularly to fulfilling the main objective of *Hashem's* will, and the purpose of the Torah, to love *Hashem* and serve Him with emotions of gratitude, without grumbling and resentment. The test of the manna was whether *Hashem's* caring for their vital needs would suffice to arouse them to feel gratitude towards Him. In the desert, they had exactly what they needed and no more. To feel that this is sufficient, to be joyous and show gratitude for having this minimum without any additional luxuries, reflects a great level of perfection.

Indeed, we learn from this forty years test that one of man's important objectives in this world is to achieve feelings of gratitude to *Hashem* for basic vital things, such as life, health, bread and water. The feeling of appreciation for these basics will bring a person to feel gratitude for all the gifts that he receives. The Torah elaborates on this issue in order to teach us that this is also one of our own main tests in life – will we feel the joy and pleasure of the simple things that we have been granted. We need to sense *Hashem's* goodness that is evident in them, and when we have these minimal necessities, we should feel that we are fortunate and have already more than we deserve. This is the uplifting feeling of someone who truly recognizes *Hashem's* goodness and is aware of the extent to which everything is an undeserved gift from Him.

The basic enjoyment of life of a "Ba'al Ta'avah" (a pleasure-seeking person) is dependent on superficial pleasures over and above his basic necessities. Such a person, when he does not have these extras will be in a state of distress, and will not feel any gratitude for all that he has. Whereas someone who has merited experiencing the elevated joy of spirituality and closeness to Hashem, will feel gratitude for being granted the gift of life, and for all the basic necessities that enable him to achieve these wonderful attainments.

= Gratitude for life itself =

Our greatest obligation of gratitude is to acknowledge the goodness of life itself. Even though this is self evident, nevertheless it requires addressing, as is written in *Mesillas Yesharim* (introduction), the more something is obvious - and does not require any conscious thought - the more likely it is to be neglected and relegated to the realm of dormant knowledge. When we reflect on the gift of life, we see that this *chesed* includes all the other kindnesses (even the great *chesed* of the Torah). Therefore one who serves *Hashem* needs to constantly feel effusive gratitude for every day that he is alive. Immediately upon arising in the morning, he should feel elated with feelings of the good fortune to be alive - bearing in mind that there are many people who did not wake up in the morning. Indeed, the *Anshei Knesses Hagedola* established among the morning prayers a special *brachah* for the new life we are granted each day, the *brachah* of המַחְיֶה נְשָׁמוֹת לַפְּגָרִים מְתִים - "Who restores souls into lifeless bodies". This *brachah* teaches us that immediately in the morning a person should feel the *chesed* that *Hashem* has given him another day of life. A person should reflect when he says this *brachah* that if *Hashem* did not give him the gift of life today, he would be a lifeless body, and *Hashem* in His abundant kindness restored life to him. When he says "*Modeh ani*" he should say it with exhilaration and deliberation, feeling the superb kindness that he merited another day of life.

It is most important to stimulate enthusiasm also in our children regarding the importance of saying "*Modeh ani*" in an appropriate manner, so that when they grow older they will not say it just out of habit, but will relate to it as a pleasure and an uplifting experience. I still remember vividly from my childhood, when I was about six years old, we were taught the importance of saying "*Modeh ani*", in view of the fact that not everyone wakes up, and we have to thank and praise *Hashem* for restoring our *neshama* to us.

The obligation to feel gratitude starts with thankfulness for life itself - afterwards one will naturally feel additional appreciation for every added kindness that *Hashem* grants us. This basic gratitude is the key to the whole sphere of genuine emotions of gratitude.

The active heartfelt appreciation for the gift of life itself is an achievement that not many merit to attain.

There must be a very exclusive heavenly chamber in Olom Habo designated for people like this – shining with the wonderful light of their exalted connection with the Shechina.

... May our portion be with them!

= Gratitude for not having problems =

The situation of untroubled tranquility, when everything functions smoothly, makes us forget to thank *Hashem* for this gift itself. How much goodness and kindness there is in a quiet day, without panic or distress. It is a great gift when everything is as it should be, but specifically in this situation one has to be alert to the danger of becoming indifferent and apathetic. As the wisest of all men said in *Koheles* (7:14) בְּיוֹם טוֹבָה הָיָה בְּטוֹב - "On a good day be in a situation of good", i.e., on a day when everything is functioning well, and the person is healthy, he should take heed to consciously appreciate this good state and feel gratitude toward *Hashem* for it (See *Koheles Raba* 7:3). A person should be aware of the great kindness that there is in his trouble free situation. The fact that all his family members are healthy, that there is peace in his neighborhood, that he has eyes to see with, teeth with which to chew ... all these are great pleasures. It is possible that in the future he will not have all the blessings that he has now, and then he will regret that he failed to feel and appreciate how good things were when they were really good.

A person should consciously feel exhilaration and joy over the many kindnesses that *Hashem* grants him now - for free - in the present. There is an old saying, "Health is wealth". One should focus on this statement and feel the extent of its truth. A person should reflect on the innumerable components of his body, and notice how they all work together perfectly in a remarkable manner. The word "*Shalom*" (peace) does not mean only the absence of strife, but that everything is compatible and works together properly - this is true peace. One of a person's main obligations of gratitude is to be conscious of all the many kindnesses that combine to produce his state of peace and well-being. A thoughtful person never stops praising *Hashem* for the peaceful, trouble-free situation he is in. Someone who is physically healthy, mentally sane and has a livelihood has a great obligation to show gratitude to *Hashem*. Even if this is not common practice, we should not take this into account, but should do what the truth dictates.

In the *brachah* בְּנִיחָה לְאִנּוּשׁ וּמְלִמָּד לְאִנּוּשׁ בְּנִיחָה - "You grant knowledge to man etc.", we should pray and thank *Hashem* not only for great perceptions of knowledge that we merited to achieve or wish to achieve, but also for the fact that we have basic intelligence and are *Baruch Hashem* sane and we should with the help of *Hashem* remain so. Even someone who is gifted intellectually has to thank *Hashem* and *daven* for this. Similarly, someone who is healthy, young and at the height of his strength has to beseech *Hashem* for continued good health, and constantly thank Him for it. A rich person needs to *daven* אֵל הַלְוָאָתָם - "Please do not make us dependent on human generosity". Likewise, when someone is living peacefully, he should thank *Hashem* for this and feel that this is a gift from *Hashem* לְכָל הַשְּׁלוֹם - "Because You are the King, the Master of all Peace". To genuinely achieve this manner of prayer is a major accomplishment; through it the person tangibly recognizes that he has nothing without *Hashem's* mercy... . We pray; ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִהֲרָה מְכַל - "Give us relief, *Hashem* our G-d, from all our troubles" There are many troubles in the world and we pray that *Hashem* will save us from them. These words should be expressed on the basis of recognition of the truth that in an instant a person's entire situation can be transformed completely. It is very worthwhile to accustom oneself to this form of prayer. As a reward for this gratitude, *Hashem* will continue to bless him and he will be saved from many difficulties of life.

During the course of the *Tefillah*, when we say יְהִי שְׁמִיחָה רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ ... ("May *Hashem's* name be blessed...") and מוֹדִים אֲנִיחָנוּ לָךְ ... ("We are thankful to You ...") in order to arouse feelings of praise and thanks to *Hashem*, it is recommended to think of something specific for which we are thanking *Hashem*... the aching tooth which we were afraid would have to be extracted but the pain stopped and the tooth is *Baruch Hashem* functioning normally... that we merited to get married while many other people still have not found their match ... the gift of children - each child is a wondrous gift ... health – how many types of diseases exist and we are nevertheless *Baruch Hashem* healthy and well... When a person reaches the prayer of "מודים" he should think of specific things for which he feels thanks to *Hashem*, and there is indeed a Halachic opinion that if someone says "מודים" without feeling gratitude, he has not fulfilled his obligation. Also when the *Shaliach tzibur* starts *Kaddish*, a person should prepare himself to thank *Hashem* for a specific blessing he has received when he says " יְהִי שְׁמִיחָה רַבָּא ... ". Anyone who starts to reflect, will see that he has so many things for which to thank *Hashem*.

The *Chovos Halevavos* (*Shaar Hateshuva* Chapter 6) states that a person should take notice and be stimulated spiritually from seeing misfortune of others. From his words we can learn how to be released from the malady of indifference and acquire the perspective of gratitude to *Hashem*. If a person sees or hears about someone else's troubles, he should reflect on how fortunate he is that he does not suffer from the same problem. The reason *Hashem* makes him see someone else's trouble is so that he will be aroused and remember *Hashem*. The main aspect of this arousal is that he should recognize the kindness that *Hashem* is doing to him, that he preserved him from this particular misfortune, and from this perception to continue on to appreciate also the rest of the kindnesses of *Hashem* to him. Certainly, we are obligated to have compassion for every Jew and to *daven* for him, but on the other hand when we encounter someone else's misfortune we have also to be aroused to feel gratitude to *Hashem* that we do not suffer from the same

hardship. Especially if someone had personally a difficulty and was saved from it, he has to thank *Hashem* and increase his *avodas Hashem* as result of this; but no less so, someone who was saved completely from distress and suffering should rejoice and feel gratitude to *Hashem*.

For example, when someone passes by a building with doctor's offices and sees a list of doctors who are specialists in various illnesses, or when he sees various types of medications and devices for sick people in a display window of a pharmacy, he should take note and reflect on the great kindness that *Hashem* did to him by saving him from all of these situations. He should feel how fortunate he is, and how he is indebted to *Hashem* and incapable of paying back sufficiently. He should continue to reflect on all the additional things that *Hashem* provided him that contribute to his peace and comfort. Several weeks ago, when I was walking down the street, I heard a woman telling her friend that she had an operation on one of her eyes. Immediately I thought how great is *Hashem's* kindness that I never had to undergo an operation like this. The fact that I heard this was a gift from *Hashem* to arouse me to realize this *chesed*, and already during that evening's *Maariv* I thanked *Hashem* for this great kindness.

When we see disabled people sitting in wheelchairs, we should think how happy these people would be if they had the use of one leg – just one leg and crutches. They would be thrilled with joy! We should learn from these people how joyous and thankful we should be that we have two healthy legs. You may not have a penny in your pocket, but thank G-d you have two healthy legs and you can walk with both of them! Similarly, when a person suffers *chas veshalom* a misfortune and is lacking something that he previously had, he should use the opportunity to be aware of the blessing that he previously had and recognize that at that time he did not sufficiently appreciate it and show gratitude to *Hashem* for it. Now he can do *teshuva* for this failure and evoke feelings of gratitude for all the things that he still has.

In this way a person can convert hearing and reading about world events to purposeful activities. When we hear about someone G-d forbid beating up an innocent passerby, remember – this awful event could happen to anyone - only *Hashem* saved us from something like this happening to us. When we hear about a terrorist incident, G-d forbid, this too could happen to anyone, how great is the *chesed* of *Hashem* that I was not walking down the street at that moment. What great kindness there is in all the evil plots that our enemies wished to harm us with, and *Hashem* prevented them from actualizing their intentions - it could well be that we don't even know what we were saved from! Just as someone who was in the vicinity of a terrorist attack and was saved, says the *brachah* of "הגומל" with great emotion and joy that he was saved - this very same feeling should accompany each one of us, and we should constantly thank *Hashem*, הגומל חסדים טובים לעמו ישראל - "Who does good kindnesses for His nation Israel". Together with our *tefillah* for the injured and our request to *Hashem* that He watch over His nation, we have to be filled with joy that we were saved from all those challenging events that have happened all over the world. How many problems were we saved from; how many bad incidents didn't happen to us! So many people are no longer alive, and we were given the gift of life, how fortunate we are!

People generally feel that it is extremely unpleasant to focus on the difficulties and calamities that could befall them. There is even an instinctive psychological protection blocking such unpleasant scenarios from being vividly envisaged. Therefore, these thoughts and feelings of gratitude will not naturally occur to a person. Only someone who is aware of their exceptional spiritual value and the extent of the nachas ruach these emotions cause in Heaven, will arouse himself to meditate on them and their implications. He will achieve the elevated joy of appreciation of Hashem that lies behind these superficial barriers.

= The wonderful pleasantness of light =

It is written "And *Hashem* saw that the light was good": (*Bereishis* 1:4). As mentioned previously, the Torah informs us of this fact, in order to teach us that we also have to feel consciously the goodness of light. Indeed the *brachah* of יוצר אור - "Who Creates light" is the longest and most detailed *brachah* in our prayer book. We mention in this *brachah* that also the angels express *Shira* and *Kedusha* every day on the wonder of light, על מאורי אור שעשית? יפארוך סלה - "For the lights that You made, they glorify You continuously". The angels are incessantly inspired by the miracle of light to praise *Hashem*, and thereby bring pleasure to *Hashem*. We mention their song of praise with this *brachah* because we also have to take an example from them to recognize the greatness of *Hashem* and praise Him for the great kindness of the light. We also have to get used to contemplating the miracle of light and feeling its wondrous good, and the great kindness of *Hashem* that is revealed through it לעשה אורים גדלים כי לעולם חסדו - "The One Who creates the great lights - His kindness is forever".

The greatest benefit we receive from light is that it enables us to see all the other wonders of Creation (this includes also electric light which is also a wondrous invention whose source is *Hashem's* goodness). Besides this, seeing light gladdens people, as it says in *Koheles* (11:7) ומתוק האור וטוב לעינים לראות את השמש - "The light is sweet and it is good for the eyes to perceive the sun". Rashi writes in *Maseches Kesuvos* (10b) that noon, when the sun shines most strongly, is a time of light and joy since the sun causes people to be joyous. Also at night it says יפה כללנה - "beautiful like the moon" (*Shir Hashirim* 6:10), the quaint beauty of the moon can make a person feel joy. During the nighttime the moon is clear and its light illuminates and displays its beauty. There used to be an expression (in Yiddish) "as beautiful as the moon". It is important to feel the sweetness and pleasantness of the sunlight and moonlight, together with all the other wondrous kindnesses of Creation that surround us. In addition to all this, the light causes all life and growth in Creation; the sun heals and warms and ripens fruits and illuminates. Without it, all life systems would collapse. The sun causes photosynthesis¹², which brings about all of our food, supplies Vitamin D which is most vital for the welfare of living creatures, evaporates water from the seas and converts it to clouds and rain, and causes a process of winds which are necessary to make food. A person should feel fully the enormity of the kindness of light, since light is truly a very ingenious invention.

Most people are not aroused to feel gratitude to *Hashem* for things that are given to all people equally. The fact that the gift is given to everyone naturally decreases our being inspired by it. If a reality existed in which everyone would receive the same large sum of money, the receivers wouldn't be inspired to feel much excitement and gratitude for it. However if there was a situation in which everyone lived in darkness and only a few people had light, these fortunate individuals would certainly be effused with gratitude for the wonder of light. The author of *Chovos Halevavos* writes that our role in this world is to thank *Hashem* even for the universal good things. The fact that something good is given equally to everyone doesn't detract from its value and from the feeling of gratitude that each person should have. If you derived pleasure from light and did not actively feel how much pleasure you received, you have not fulfilled *Hashem's* will! *Hashem* granted us a wonderful gift, all present-givers hope that their gift will be appreciated and increase the feelings of affection between the recipient and the giver, so too, *kaveyachol*, *Hashem* anticipates hopefully our reaction.

On a clear day, as the sun emits its caressing rays, we should be enthused with joy and cry out קדוש קדוש! מלא כל הארץ כבודו! - "Holy, holy, holy *Hashem's* honor fills the entire earth!" ... with the same excited enthusiasm as the angels.

¹² The formation of organic substances in a plant, from water and carbon dioxide with the help of light energy.

There is more to the concept of "light" than meets the eye. The physical light with which we are familiar, is a minor derivative of the great Heavenly "Meor Ponim" ("Facial Radiance") of Hashem. Therefore, when we want to evoke the feeling of Hashem's presence (such as on Yom Kippur before the Chazzan in the Beit Haknesses, at a Chupah etc.) we use lights, as it is written "Then with lights give honour to Hashem" (Isaiah 24:15). When one sees light one should feel the shining radiance of the goodness of Hashem that is behind everything, and is the source of the whole of creation.

= Gratitude for the sense of sight =

Imagine a blind person whose eyes were healed and suddenly is able to benefit from the sights of the world around him, the sites, the colors, crossing the street without assistance... . How would this person say the *brachah* "Who opens the eyes of the blind"? He would be overflowing with gratitude and excitement. This is the way we should be saying the *brachah*.

During his present condition of blindness he has an important task. He is messenger of *Hashem*, to arouse us to feel the wondrous *chesed* of our eyes, so that next time we say this *brachah* we will do so with more feeling and with a heightened appreciation of *Hashem*. In fact, even before the morning *brachos* of the next day, immediately, upon seeing the blind person, we should have overflowing feelings of joy and gratitude to *Hashem* for the wonderful gift of our eyesight.

From "Three Days to See" by Helen Keller

I have often thought it would be a blessing if each human being were stricken blind and deaf for a few days at some time during his early adult life. Darkness would make him more appreciative of sight; silence would teach him the joys of sound. ... Oh, the things that I should see if I had the power of sight for just three days! ... I who am blind can give one hint to those who see: Use your eyes as if tomorrow you would be stricken blind. ... Hear the music of voices, the song of a bird, the mighty strains of an orchestra, as it you would be stricken deaf tomorrow. Touch each object as if tomorrow your tactile sense would fail. Smell the perfume of flowers, taste with relish each morsel, as if tomorrow you could never smell and taste again. Make the most of every sense; ... all the facets of pleasure and beauty which the world reveals to you But of all the senses, I am sure that sight must be the most delightful!

*How fortunate are we that we have been granted the wonderful pleasure of functioning eyes
– and can see all the phenomenal kindnesses of Hashem.*

Are we really appreciating our eyes and making use of them as we should ...?!

= The miracle of bread =

When you arrive home and see a loaf of bread on your table, you should be elated and excited as one who is witnessing one of the greatest of miracles. Inedible grains produced (by being planted within the ground) this delicious loaf of bread. The seeds which were sowed contained within their minute parts the amazing ability - incredible in its complexity - that enabled them to convert the inanimate earth into the delicious bread that nourishes us and becomes part of our cells and organs. The miracle of food proclaims the amazing wisdom and wondrous goodness of the Creator of the world in a manner that is no less stunning than the miracle of splitting of the *Yam Suf*. The process by which a seed converts the earth to food, is a system of miraculous processes even more elaborate than that of splitting of the *Yam Suf*.

A most sophisticated and complex organized system is necessary to produce this bread. As Rabbeinu Saadya Gaon wrote, the entire Creation participates in and is needed for the creation of food. The sun that shines is a sun of food; the air is air of food; the rains are rain of food; the earth is earth of food; the wind is for food, and the clouds are for food. The entire Creation is a prodigious mechanism that manufactures food for us. Bread testifies to the existence of the Creator and His kindness to the human race. People delude themselves, since they need to thresh, sow, grind, sift and bake the grain in order to make bread, they feel that they did everything, and forget the wondrous miracles behind it all.

One who reflects upon this system of kindness will understand the words of *Dovid Hamelech* in *Tehillim* (136) which concludes the list of great miracles through which *Hashem's* kindness was revealed to the world, with the miracle of bread that we eat every day and that supports our physical existence. The *posuk* "He provides bread for all flesh because His kindness is forever" (*Tehillim* 136) is brought as the climax of all the miracles that are described earlier in that chapter.

The fact that bread is produced by natural means and the splitting of the Yam Suf was supernatural, does not bear significance to someone who is aware that nature is the direct handiwork of Hashem to exactly the same extent as the supernatural.

= The goodness of the rains and of water =

Water is a wondrous blessing to the world which brings prosperity and happiness to all living beings. The entire concept of water is a wonderful miracle. All air is oxygen and hydrogen, yet it is impossible to drink air. People die of thirst in the desert while being surrounded on all sides with hydrogen and oxygen that does not help them at all to satisfy their thirst. *Hashem*, who joined these two elements and made water from them, performed a miracle! There is no liquid in the world that can replace it. Water is life. This liquid is the most beneficial of all life sustaining elixirs. It is the principal component of the human body and helps all of the human systems within the body to function properly. Without it, the digestive and numerous excretory systems would not function. Without water, blood would clot and would not be able to flow to all the cells of the body. Water is what causes a person's body to cool off through the sweating process. If it were possible to obtain water only in a pharmacy, water would be the most precious liquid, both because of its life-giving characteristics and because of the pleasure of drinking it. Water is the healthiest, best fluid, and it is worth one's while to drink more and more of it. All of our lives are dependent on water.

Water is one of the basic elements in the world. Most of the physical blessings of the world come by means of water. Water causes fruits and vegetables to grow and also fulfills man's other needs like bathing and laundry. *וַיִּסְדֹּךָ* - "He established the world on seas" *Tehillim* (24:2). *Hashem* endowed the world with seas, which are our source of water. Clouds are formed from the evaporated water of the sea that comes down as rain, which is the source of all human food and drink. The sea is also a sophisticated air conditioner that conditions the climate of the world, and from it we receive fish to eat. We should be grateful for *Hashem's* wondrous goodness evident from the fact that He designed all of this magnificent system for our benefit, and "went to all this trouble" for us. We should thank and praise *Hashem* continuously for this.

When we thank *Hashem* for the gift of rain, it is not enough to think only about the general blessing of rain, but we should reflect upon all the details of the kindness within it. For example, we should note the thoughtful benevolence behind the process that pure, clean drinkable water comes down as rain, even though the water originates from the salty sea water or previously used water - yet it comes down clean and pure. We should also take note of the marvel of this brilliantly ingenious program within Creation, that the water that comes down today is the very same water that was created in the six days of Creation. During the whole course of history since the beginning of the world, the cycle of water is one continuous cycle.

People complain and are depressed when it rains and view it as a nuisance. Rain produces all the fruits and vegetables we enjoy; the watermelon, melon, cherries, apples, plums, oranges and all other kinds of fruits and vegetables which are pleasurable and succulent. Rain enables the raising of cotton and other textiles, and grass, which becomes (via the animals that eat it) wool; leather, meat and milk products. If a grocery products company would deliver a full inventory of stock to our house free of charge, would we complain of the disorder created by all the cartons of merchandise piled up in his kitchen? The sun, the winds and mighty other natural forces were drafted to bring us wonderful gifts and blessings. To complain demonstrates lack of gratitude.

According to this, it is highly appropriate that the Torah is compared to water. In the same way as in the physical world, water is essential for the survival of the world, correspondingly the Torah in the spiritual world. Additionally, in the same way that water is both crucially indispensable and also the basis of pleasure and enjoyment – so too the Torah.

= To praise Hashem for every breath =

A person should contemplate and appreciate how much joy there is in breathing. If someone would force us to hold our head under water for several minutes, when we would take our head out we would feel the wondrous pleasure of breathing. *Chazal* say in *Bereshis Raba*: על כל נשימה ונשימה תהלל יה - "for every breath a person should praise Hashem." Rabbi Avraham Grodzinsky זצ"ל explained that the meaning of this is, that we should feel the wonder of breathing to such an extent that we feel inspired and obligated to express a full rendition of the *Hallel* for each breath, but since we cannot practically do this for every single breath, we should feel that we always remain owing Hashem a debt of gratitude. Even the poorest person in the street breathes in lungfuls of air, which are even more pleasurable than cupfuls of water. In a wondrous, precise way, oxygen and nitrogen are combined in exact proportions to provide us with air that is both pleasant to breath and also keeps us alive! Too much oxygen makes a person drunk, and too much nitrogen is strangling. Every breath transmits oxygen into the blood flow, which conveys this vital gas to all parts of the body. A thinking person inhales air into his lungs with joy and gratitude to Hashem.

A grandson of Rav Miller z"tl one day found him standing by a basin full of water, with his head submerged in the water. The grandson was most alarmed ... what happened to grandfather..?! After some time Rav Miller raised his head out of the water and took a deep breath. Upon seeing the shocked reaction of his grandson he disclosed the reason behind his strange behavior. He explained that he just heard someone complaining about the poor quality of the air in the area and the extent of its pollution. He felt that these words could affect his feelings of gratitude to Hashem for the wonderful gift of air – an innovation more precious than riches. He therefore put his head underwater until he felt distress from lack of air, and then, when he raised his head out of the water, he felt anew the great kindness of Hashem ... how beneficial and pleasurable is the air that Hashem designed and created for us.

= "Who clothes the unclothed" =

Before reciting the *brachah* of "מְלַבֵּשׁ עֲרֻמִּים" in the morning, we should think of all the many innovations that Hashem devised to provide for our comfort in the clothes we wear. Clothes that come in contact with our skin are made from soft, light material that feel pleasant on contact with skin; outer garments are made from heavy materials to preserve body heat and protect us from external harm; shoes are made from durable comfortable leather, each garment is made from a different material that is most suited to its task. Clothes have colors pleasing to the eye, and are cut out and sewn in a manner which arouses honor towards their wearer. Hashem arranged that all these materials exist in the world, each one in a different place that suits the needs of the development of that material. Hashem arranges for them to be gathered from distant places for us to be dressed appropriately in a pleasant and respectable manner. After these introductory thoughts, the feelings of appreciation for all that Hashem did for us in producing our clothes, will accompany the words of the *brachah* naturally.

In addition to this, it is important to feel when one says the Brachah that when Hashem presents us with our needs, He does not do so in a cold unemotional fashion, like an unfeeling machine, but with feelings of love and benevolence.

= The wonder of appetite and thirst =

A person once asked his doctor to prescribe for him the amount of water he should drink. The doctor responded that there should be no need to define this; a person's natural inclination to drink should alert him to how much fluid his body needs. We sense thirst so that we will desire to drink, and we feel pleasure from this type of drinking. If man had no sign that he has to replenish his energy through eating and drinking, and he would have to eat according to a chart of calories and fluids, he would often forget to fulfill his duty to his body, and his health would be endangered. Masses of people would fall down in the streets and die of hunger! Even if the brain would inform us that we have to eat and to drink, it would not suffice, we would say, "okay, we'll worry about eating and drinking when we have some free time, maybe in another hour, or perhaps tomorrow or in another week..." *Hashem* in His wisdom implanted within us the mechanism of hunger so that we remember to eat, and feel the urgency to do so and even feel pleasure in fulfilling this need. When noon arrives, everyone eats lunch; everyone is hungry and takes pleasure in eating. And wonder of wonders! When the meal is finished, the hunger disappears. In a similar manner, *Hashem* innovated the great blessing of feelings of fatigue so that a person is aware that he has to rest.

When you feel tired, thirsty or hungry you should feel *Hashem's* wisdom and love for you. Like a merciful father He takes care of our welfare in the most pleasant, beneficial manner and even provides us with pleasure in fulfilling our obligations towards our body.

In the same way that hunger and fatigue at first sight appear to be negative phenomenon, but one who investigates deeper discovers that they are really wonderful gifts, similarly the day will come when we will see that all things that appear to us to be to be negative in creation, are in fact most valuable gifts!

= The kindness of night and winter =

The existence of nighttime and winter are also evidence of the wondrous kindness of *Hashem*, recognizable to anyone who reflects upon them. The descent of night forces people to stop their physical toil. Without night, people would continue laboring until they collapse. The coming of winter delays the growth process and enables the land to replenish its strength and regain the chemicals it lost with the produce of the summer. The cessation of work outside their homes at night and during the winter (when agricultural work ceases), allow people time to connect with their families and their communities and enables them to occupy themselves with more spiritual activities. For the Jewish nation, the nighttime constitutes opportunity for Torah learning, and the winter is a season of heightened spiritual growth. Furthermore, by means of night a

person can appreciate the benefit of day, and through day a person can recognize the value of the nighttime. The transition from day to night and from summer to winter makes life more pleasurable, with the sensation of the diversity of purpose and pleasure that vary with the time. This perspective is the basis of feelings of gratitude we should feel towards the One "Who created day and night" and Who "changes the times with wisdom". Rav Yochanan said that it is commendable to pray with the twilight of the sun (*Brachos* 29b), meaning that the time of transition from night to day and from day to night are most appropriate times to express gratitude to the Creator.

Hashem designed the world in the best possible manner for our spiritual development. It is valuable to examine this plan and to try to understand it, as it is then possible to coordinate our actions to fit in with this plan and thus achieve the maximum benefit from it.

B. Examples of spiritual kindnesses:

= The gift of being a person and a Jew =

"Man is beloved because he was created in the image of *Hashem* – *Yisrael* is beloved because they are called the sons of *Hashem*" (*Avos* 3:14). Man is the choicest of all created beings. How beloved and dear is man to His Creator! This alone should suffice to arouse feelings of joy in a person - *Hashem*, Who created all the vast innumerable worlds, chose us and loves us. If we would appreciate even a tiny fraction of the exalted perception of what it means to be created in G-d's image, we would be the happiest people in the world. How exciting it is to think that all of *Hashem's* thoughts revolve around one being – man! A person should think about this and thank *Hashem* and say:

"*Hashem*, You created me from nothing. What am I? Dust from the earth, just like all other animals who are also composed of the same substance as I. However with Your great kindness You created me in Your image, as a person with the elevated *kedusha* of the *neschama*. In addition to this, You enhanced Your benevolence to me in a most wondrous way, and made me a Jew, the select of all beings, and relate to me as to a most beloved son as it is written; "You are sons to *Hashem* your G-d" (*Devarim* 14:1) [see *Avos* *ibid.*]".

אַשְׁרֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי כְמוֹךָ עַם נוֹשָׁע בְּה' - "Fortunate are you, *Yisrael* – who can compare with you, a nation saved by *Hashem*?!" (*Devarim* 33:29). The words "Fortunate are you" written in the Torah are in fact a directive to us to arouse ourselves to feel fortunate and happy with *Hashem's* special relationship towards us.

הוּא ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּכֹל הָאָרֶץ מִשְׁפָּטָיו - "He is *Hashem* our G-d, His judgments encompass the whole earth" (*Tehillim* 105:7).

This *posuk* describes the exceptional relationship between *Hashem* and *Am Yisrael*. The *posuk* starts with the words "He is *Hashem* our G-d", meaning that as a result of *Hashem's* great love for us, He allowed us to say that He is *kaveyachol* "ours", He is "*our* G-d".

The *posuk* continues; "His judgments encompass the whole earth". This is according to the *Gemara* (*Yevamos* 63a) an elaboration of the statement made at the beginning of the *posuk*, and the connotation of the words is that everything that happens in the world, without exception, only happens for the benefit of

Yisrael. "Even all the nations of the earth are not blessed except for *Yisrael's* sake... even ships that come from Galia to Aspamia are not blessed except for *Yisrael's* sake as it is written 'And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you'".

We have a Father Who loves us exceedingly; He is the King of Kings and everything He does in Creation – everything that happens in the entire world - is only done for our sake and for our good. We have to constantly feel *Hashem's* special love for us as is written; אהבת עולם בית ישראל עמך אהבת - "You loved with eternal love the house of *Yisrael* Your nation". We have to continuously thank *Hashem* for this, as we say in the Holiday prayers;

"You chose us from among all the nations; You loved us and desired us; You elevated us above all the languages; You sanctified us with your commandments; You brought us close, our King, to Your service, and Your great and holy name You proclaimed upon us".

The intention here is not to encourage "Jewish pride", but rather to promote the appreciation and love of Hashem that should be the natural spontaneous reaction to this wonderful love of Hashem towards us.

= The exceptional gift of the Torah =

The giving of the Torah to the Jewish nation was the greatest kindness that *Hashem* bestowed upon mankind, and the greatest expression of His special love towards *Am Yisrael*. As it is written in *Chovos Halevavos* (*Shaar Habechina Chapter 5*):

The greatest of all the good things that *Hashem* bequeathed to man...is the giving of the Torah through Moshe His intermediary.

The reason this gift is superior to all the other wonderful kindnesses that *Hashem* conferred on us, is that with the giving of the Torah, *Hashem* gave us the means of attaining the wondrous eternal objective that is the purpose of all of Creation – *Olam Haba*. We mention this exceptional importance of the Torah in the *brachah* that we say on the reading of the Torah, אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָנוּ תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת וְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם נָטַע בְּתוֹכֵנוּ - "Who gave us the Torah of truth, and planted eternal life within us".

In addition to this, the Torah is the primary source of knowledge of *Hashem*. "Knowing *Hashem*" is the only genuinely valuable attainment of a person in this world, as it is written in *Yirmiyohu* (9:23) כִּי אִם בְּזֵאת יִתְהַלֵּל - "Only with this should a person acclaim himself - contemplating and knowing Me". The Torah is the greatest source of this knowledge. How do we know who and what *Hashem* is? Even to *Moshe Rabbeinu* this was a mystery. The means through which a person can arrive at the highest level of recognition of his Creator is by studying the Torah. It is written in *Tehillim* "The Heavens tell the honor of *Hashem*..." and afterward it says "The Torah of *Hashem* is perfect" (*Tehillim* 19). This is to say that the honor of Heaven is revealed even more through the Torah than it is through Creation (see *Malbim* *ibid.*). This great importance of the Torah is described in *Chovos Halevavos* (*Shaar Cheshbon Hanefesh Chapter 3*):

A person should make an accounting with himself if he appreciates fully the enormity of the goodness of *Hashem* inherent in the giving of the Torah, by which He revealed to him on what his

life is dependent in the two worlds (*Olom Habah* and *Olam Hazeih*). The Torah enlightens a person's blindness, eliminates his foolishness and draws him towards accepting and fulfilling the will of His G-d. The Torah informs him of the truth of his Creator, and of his obligations toward Him, the observance of which will bring him to complete fulfillment and happiness in both worlds. As it is written in *Tehillim* (19:8-9), "The Torah of *Hashem* is perfect; it restores the soul. The testimony of *Hashem* is faithful; it makes the fool wise. The commands of *Hashem* are righteous; they gladden the heart."

A person should envisage to himself: If the Torah was taken away from him (after he was already introduced to it and its exceptional value), and then he met someone who helped return it to him. Would all of his ability suffice to express gratitude to this person and praise him sufficiently for the good that he did for him? How much more so, man cannot thank and praise *Hashem* sufficiently for giving him the Torah, helping him to understand it and aiding him to fulfill its instructions. The least expression of gratitude is to zealously cling to His Torah and enthusiastically accept His *mitzvos*, as Dovid Hamelech expressed (*Tehillim* 119) "I hurried and I did not delay to keep Your *mitzvos* ... How I loved Your Torah ... How Your words are sweeter to my palate than honey in my mouth."

An additional aspect of the special value of the Torah is that through occupying oneself with its study, a person can cause exceptional *nachas ruach* in heaven, and arouse special love of *Hashem* toward him. From the time that the *Bais Hasmikdosh* was destroyed, the *Shechina* is found only in the "four amos of halacha" where Torah is being studied. *Hashem's* "eyes" are, so to speak, turned towards one who learns Torah with a gaze full of love. One who sits and learns Torah and delves into it with sincerity, merits being elevated to a state of being a reflection of the "Divine image" and is considered a beloved son to *Hashem*. *Hashem* regards him with exceptional love, since he is at the centre of the plan of the Creation.

The great love of *Hashem* for us which is apparent from His giving the Torah to us, and from the many other wondrous kindnesses that He showers upon us, should motivate us to learn Torah with feelings of love and great joy, as we say in the *tefillah* "*Ahavas Olam*":

"You demonstrated Your eternal love for Your nation the House of Israel by teaching us Torah and *mitzvos*, statutes and judgments. Therefore, *Hashem* our G-d, when we lie down and when we get up we will speak about your statutes and rejoice in the words of Your Torah and in your *mitzvos* forever."

The Jew is instructed by the Torah to demonstrate his great love for *Hashem* by clinging to learning Torah constantly. This is what it says in the Torah (*Devarim* 6) "And you should love *Hashem* your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I am commanding you today should be on your heart. And you should teach them to your children and speak about them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the way and when you retire and when you arise." Our motivation to learn Torah should be the emotion of great love we feel towards *Hashem* as a reaction to His great love towards us, and also our gratitude to Him for all of His many kindnesses to us. These feelings should stimulate us to want to cause *nachas ruach* to *Hashem* by means of our attachment to Him through occupying ourselves with the holy words of the Torah, and through toiling to clarify His will as it appears in the Torah. When we learn Torah, the actual learning should be accompanied with feelings of praise and gratitude to *Hashem*, and therefore it is commendable for a person to learn with a pleasant inspiring *nigun* as is befitting words of honor and devotion. [Of course, it is impossible to think all the time, while one is learning, of gratitude to *Hashem*, as it is impossible to concentrate in this way on the learning material. However, before one begins to learn, the learner should contemplate and feel the great love of *Hashem* towards him and feel gratitude to *Hashem* for everything that he does for him, and thus be motivated to learn Torah]. Those who lack feelings of gratitude for all the many kindnesses of *Hashem* that exist within Creation, certainly will not attain the motivation of learning Torah which is the form of learning Torah that is stipulated by the Torah in these verses of the first *parshah* of *Kriyas Shma*.

People who ignore the great kindness of the sunlight and other natural phenomena, will not appreciate the most precious gift on earth – the Holy Torah. Only when a person learns to be thankful for the pleasures that *Hashem* prepared for us by means of the sun and all the other wonders of the Creation is he capable of recognizing the immensity of the kindness of *Matan Torah*. Therefore, the *Anshei Knesses Hagedola* (who designed the form of our daily prayers) instituted in the morning *Tefillah* the *brachah* of "*Yotzer Hame'oros*" "Who creates the illuminating celestial bodies" to precede the *brachah* on the Torah ("*Ahava Raba*"). They understood that a person has to first develop the ability to arouse feelings of gratitude to *Hashem* for the daily physical kindnesses before it is possible for him to feel the appropriate appreciation for the spiritual gift of the Torah.

According to this, a major question regarding *Chag Hashavuos* may be resolved. The holiday of *Shavuos*, that we are familiar with as the holiday of the giving of the Torah, is according to the Torah the festival of *Bikurim* (first fruits) and the festival of the reaping of the harvest. This means, that *Hashem* asks of the Jews, as the holiday of *Matan Torah* approaches, to appear before *Hashem* in the *Bais Hamikdosh* with a basket full with the first fruits of his trees, and he should bring a *Mincha* sacrifice of two breads from the new harvest. What is the connection between this aspect of the holiday and *Matan Torah*?

"The wisdom of the Torah is deeper than the sea and wider than the land"! When a Jew enters his vineyard or orchard and discovers the first fruits on the tree, the feelings of gratitude which fill his heart are precisely the appropriate preparation for the festival of receiving the Torah. In order to receive wholeheartedly the Torah, and say with genuine enthusiasm "נעשה ונשמע" - "We will do and we will hear", a Jew has to feel overflowing feelings of gratitude to *Hashem* with every part of his being¹³.

This elevated motivation for studying the Torah is described explicitly in the Brachah before Krias Shema:

*"With an eternal love have You loved the House of Israel,
(this love was revealed when) the Torah and Mitzvos statutes and laws You taught us
= **Therefore** =
Hashem our G-d upon our retiring and when we arise we speak of Your statutes
and rejoice in the words of your Torah and Your Mitzvos"*

May we merit always to say these words with appropriate awareness and feel their wonderful content ... and implement them in practice ...

¹³The purpose of learning Torah is, as we say in the morning davening; "To thank You and to accept your unity with love" [According to the simple meaning of the bracha, it is in fact the entire purpose of the Jew and of the Torah] (Or Olam Part 5 p. 350).

= **The blessing of man's "deficiencies"** =

In the Blessing after food we say: בִּרְאָה נִפְשוֹת רַבּוֹת וְחִסְרוֹן - "*Hashem* creates many souls and their deficiencies". *Hashem* created man in a way that he has many more vital needs than animals. Man has to prepare his food before he is able to eat it. He needs clothing, shoes, and even heating for his house in the wintertime. Animals do not have ambitions and aspirations and do not distress one another in the pursuit of honor and praise. *Hashem* in His wisdom created people with many things that they lack so that they will turn to Him and appeal for everything that they require. When it will be difficult for a person to pay his rent, and he will not find a remedy for his son's illness, he will turn to His G-d with *Tefillah* from the depths of his heart, thanking Him for what is and entreat Him for what he is lacking. *Hashem*, Who created man lacking, truly gave him *all* his needs, since the deficiencies are also something man needs. Therefore we should bless *Hashem* with a full heart every day when we say the *brachah* "שְׁעֵשָׂה לִי כָּל צְרָכָי" ... בְּרַחֵם: "Blessed is the One...who provided **all** of my needs"!

*It is important to remember that **all** our problems come from One who loves us much more than is humanly imaginable and only wants the very best for each and everyone. Hence, one can be sure that the good that all the troubles lead to, is so exceptionally good, that it is well worth enduring all of the difficulties that this world can produce.*

= **The hidden *chesed* within troubles** =

All the troubles that a person encounters originate from the very great *midas hachessed* of *Hashem*:

- They help him to feel the extent of his dependency on *Hashem*. The problems that occur to him make him realize that he is incapable of controlling his own destiny, and that he requires *Hashem's* caring assistance to succeed in all of his endeavors. The genuine recognition of this truth is a great attainment in *avodas Hashem*.
- People learn from their troubles that it is not worth investing all of their effort in this life, but rather in the World to Come. Their troubles arouse them to prepare themselves for their true purpose in *Olam Haba*.
- Suffering maneuvers a person in the direction of *teshuva* and exertion in *avodas Hashem*, as a means of evoking *Hashem's* mercy.
- Suffering leads a person to humility and to subjugate himself to the will of *Hashem*. It is therefore possible to utilize suffering to grow in what is really valuable to achieve in this world.

*In the end we will thank *Hashem* for not listening to our complaints and for not fulfilling all the prayers that we thought remained "unanswered"!*

= **The Chesed of Teshuva** =

טוב וְיָשָׁר ה' עַל כֵּן יוֹרָה חַטָּאִים בְּדַרְךְ - "Hashem is good and upright – therefore He instructs the sinners on the way (to do *teshuva*)" (*Tehillim* 25:8). In order to understand the magnitude of the kindness inherent in the possibility that *Hashem* gave us to do *teshuva*, imagine the following scenario. There is an area in the town center where parking is forbidden, and there are signs all over informing that violators will be fined. A good-hearted policeman comes along and instead of fining the offenders, searches for them and warns all those who parked in the illegal parking spaces to return to their cars and remove them before they will be fined. In a similar way, *Hashem*, in his kindness allowed for people - even after they have maliciously transgressed his ordinances and are already deserving of punishment - to do *teshuva* and be saved from sin and its punishment. Just as *Hashem* created a defense system for the body, antibodies which fight against disease, even those that have already penetrated the body, and innovated the mechanism of vomiting, for the body to reject harmful foods that were eaten; so too, *Hashem* in His compassion, gave us a way to fight against spiritual bacteria that the person G-d forbid infected himself with by willingly absorbing the impurity of sin. This is the wonderful kindness of *teshuva*.

One can compare the great kindness of Teshuvah to a person who as a result of disobeying the royal ordinance not to rummage in public garbage disposal areas becomes extremely dirty, until it is most difficult to tolerate his presence in close proximity. He requires urgent assistance to wash himself, but no one is prepared to help. Seeing his predicament, the great and powerful king himself - motivated by feelings of sympathy and compassion - volunteers himself enthusiastically for the task,

Chapter 4

The Ramifications of Gratitude and Ingratitude to Hashem

- Someone who does not take note of and appreciate Hashem's kindnesses will inevitably have complaints against Hashem.
- If the blessings do not lead to gratitude, there is a high probability that Hashem will take them away.
- Eliminating ingratitude leads to love of Hashem.
- Emotional recognition of Hashem in this world is the key to *Olam Haba*.

= Lack of appreciation leads to complaints =

Experience shows that someone who does not rouse himself to recognize *Hashem's* kindnesses, not only will he not be aware of them, but without noticing, he will inevitably fall into the trap of being full of complaints against *Hashem*.

Feeling the good of Hashem is a most pleasant occupation through which one can achieve unlimited spiritual attainments. On the other hand refraining from this conscious relationship with Hashem brings the person to the extremes of the nether world.

On which side are we ...?!

= If blessings do not lead to gratitude their continuance is endangered =

In the rebuke brought in Parshas Ki Savo, it is written; תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא עַבַדְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב מְרַב - "Because you didn't serve *Hashem* your G-d with joy and good heartedness from having everything (in abundance) you will serve your enemies ... " (*Devarim* 28:47). *Hashem* wants us to serve Him with joy and enthusiasm from appreciation of what He granted us. This obligation is so serious that the punishment for not doing so is the terrible rebuke described in the Torah (the exile, etc.) (see Kuzari 3:11). The extreme significance that the Torah attaches to this issue requires explanation. Why does the Torah view with such great severity the attainment of this joy?

The answer is learned from the wording of the Torah itself. The word "תַּחַת" is used, which means "in substitute" i.e. one instead of the other. From this we see that the Torah is not only stating the reason for the punishment, but is teaching us that the desired purpose of serving *Hashem* with joy shares the same purpose as rebuke, and therefore since the purpose was not achieved through joy it must be attained through rebuke. So in order to understand the importance and objective of *simcha*, we have to understand the purpose of rebuke (*tochacha*).

The purpose of punishment is to bring a person to entreat *Hashem*, to subjugate himself to Him and to feel his total dependency on Him. A person should beseech *Hashem* for everything he is lacking¹⁴. The *Gemarah Pesachim* (56a) relates that King Chizkiyahu hid the book of cures (written by King Solomon that described remedies for all illnesses) and was praised for his deed. Rashi explains that the reason behind this surprising action was that people were not subjugating themselves to *Hashem* when they became sick, but rather cured themselves immediately with the aid of this book. In *Brachos* (10b) Rashi wrote that Chizkiyahu hid the book so that they would pray to *Hashem* and ask for mercy. Combining both commentaries of Rashi we see that the purpose of all illness is to rouse a person from his slumber of indifference, to remember his Creator, ask for mercy and subjugate himself before Him. This is also evident from what is related in the Torah in relation to *Yetzias Mitzrayim* that even though *Hashem* promised the forefathers to redeem *Am Yisrael*, nevertheless *Hashem* waited until He heard their cries, because prayer - and the connection it creates with *Hashem* - is the real purpose and goal of all trouble. This is the meaning of what is written in *Tehillim* (20) "*Hashem* will answer you on the day of trouble", a day of trouble brings a person to call out to *Hashem*, and through this calling out - His help will come to him.

Having understood the purpose of punishment, which is "תרת" - in place of the joy, we can now understand the objective of *simcha* and its significance. If this connection to *Hashem* is the purpose of the trouble which is "תרת", in place of the joy, from this we learn that also the purpose of joy is to bring the person to connect to *Hashem*. When *Hashem* bestows *simcha*, good heartedness and abundance on a person, the purpose is that he should feel subjugated to *Hashem* in the same measure as through trouble. Instead of the subjugation coming through problems, he will attain the same level of subjugation to *Hashem* by thanking Him for all the good, with the gratitude being expressed with as much heartfelt emotion as when he cries out in a time of trouble. This emotional gratitude which comes with feelings of subjugation to *Hashem* in the manner of the words of the *possuk* "What can I repay to *Hashem* for all that His benevolence to me", is the purpose of man. It is so vital that a person attain this connection with *Hashem*, that if he does not accomplish it through his own choice, in the manner that *Hashem* wants, through happiness and gratitude for all the good, then it is very likely that *Hashem* will take away the good things from him for a limited period in order to rouse him to remember and feel *Hashem*. The restricting of the abundance leads a person to pray to *Hashem* for the future, and also to acknowledge retroactively how much good there was when he still had it. Unfortunately most people do not recognize the good that they have until they lose it. Few people make use of their state of tranquility and contentment to elevate their recognition of *Hashem* through true heartfelt gratitude to *Hashem*. For most people, unfortunately the path of troubles is the only path which leads to their welfare. Only during times of trial do they work in a comprehensive manner on their feelings of faith and emotional perception of *Hashem*.

Man has a choice between thanking *Hashem* for the wonderful gifts that he receives, or G-d forbid needing to cry out to *Hashem* in prayer because of their absence. This is what happened to *Adam Harishon*. If, even with all the good and pleasures that he had, he sinned with "stolen waters" [feeling a special affinity towards what was forbidden – the fruit of the *Eitz Hada'as*], he certainly did not feel full appreciation for all the wondrous good that *Hashem* prepared for him - the beauty and goodness of *Gan Eden*. This ingratitude was the root of his sin and as a result of this he was expelled from *Gan Eden*.

From this plan of *Hashem's* administration of the world, we see the extent to which gratitude and expressing thanks to *Hashem* in a complete manner are a major principle of the plan of creation. When someone is continuously conscious and remembers *Hashem's* kindnesses to him, and shows gratitude to *Hashem* for them, *Hashem* will maintain and increase the person's fortunate situation in order that he will be able to serve *Hashem* in this manner, from joy. Thus, when G-d forbid troubles come to a person, he should ask *Hashem*

¹⁴ The continuation of the words of the sefer Shaarei Orah – "ani" (with an ayin) is from the lashon of "oneh" - "answer" [as we found in Maseches Pesachim 36a, "lechem oni, the bread of affliction – that we relate a lot of words regarding it], that the poor person calls out and cries out to *Hashem*, and this is his success.

to change the "reminder of distress" to a "reminder of blessing". He should accept upon himself that from now on he will remember *Hashem* in gratitude for his blessings and tranquility and will pay heed to thank Him for all the thousands of kindnesses that He incessantly bestows on him.

Hashem wants to bestow good on all of us, and being provided with the opportunity to do so causes Him "nachas ruach". On the other hand, to bring troubles to the world causes the opposite of "nachas ruach". Therefore, someone who knows how to make use of the good he receives to grow in his appreciation of Hashem and in his functional relationship towards Him - thereby opening the gates of blessing to himself and to the world - causes great pleasure to Hashem. This person merits a "double Gan Eden". His life in Olom Hazeh is full of the pleasant elevated feelings of Ahavas Hashem and the physical blessings that accompany them. And in the next world he will receive true Gan Eden for the "nachas ruach" he caused by these accomplishments.

Fortunate is he, how wonderful is his merit!

= Eliminating ingratitude leads to love of Hashem =

If not for the dense "camouflaging smoke-screen" hiding the good of Hashem, which the *yetzer hora* infiltrates into our heart, we would naturally come to love Hashem. Hashem showers upon us infinite, unceasing pleasures and benefits of every type, grants us the opportunity of attaining perfection in this world, and above all has designated for us the infinite eternal joy of *Olam Haba*. The *yetzer hora* misleads a person to ignore the phenomena of the world that proclaim Hashem's wondrous kindness, and deludes a person into a mood of misery and being ungrateful for all the miracles of life. Someone who succeeds to remove this iniquitous fog from his inner recesses will see that the entire world is full of Hashem's wondrous kindness toward him.

All that is necessary to acquire the elevated feelings of Ahavas Hashem, is to remove the false delusions that confuse a person's outlook on life. Of this it is said: "G-d created man upright, yet they sought numerous complications" (Koheles 7:28).

= Emotional recognition of Hashem in this world is the key to Olam Haba =

The Rambam writes in *Yad Hachazaka* (Laws of *Teshuva* 8:2):

The early sages said; "There is no eating or drinking in *Olam Haba* ... just the righteous sit with 'their crowns on their heads' and derive pleasure from the splendor of the *Shechina*". The words "with their crowns in their heads" denotes the knowledge that they acquired (in *Olam Haze*) of Hashem, for which they merited *Olam Haba*. This knowledge accompanies them to *Olam Haba*, and is their "crown"... The meaning of the words "they derive pleasure from the splendor of the *Shechina*" is that they attain there true appreciation of *Hashem* to an extent that they were not capable of achieving while still connected to their body in this world".

Everything that a person neglected in his service of *Hashem* in his lifetime, through the misuse of his freewill, in *Olam Haba* he will feel the full magnitude of this awful loss. Regarding that time it is written in Malachi 3:18 "And you will return and see...the difference between someone who serves *Hashem* and someone who did not serve Him."

The great joy of the revelation of *Hashem* in full illuminated clarity is the reward of *Olam Haba*. Only to the extent that a person toiled to know and revere *Hashem* in this world will he merit this reward in *Olam Haba*. This is the meaning of the *Gemara* in *Maseches Sanhedrin* (91b) "Whoever says *shira* in this world will merit saying it in *Olam Haba*". The more we develop our recognition of *Hashem's* greatness in this world and praise and sing before Him, in *Olam Haba* this ability will be strengthened, and there we will merit praising *Hashem* with elevated exhilaration and pleasure.

*May Hashem grant us
that our portion be with those who utilize their life
to achieve the wonderful goals that Hashem prepared for us.
Amen!*

**Concluded with gratitude to the One
Who provides us with life vitality and intelligence
to know and appreciate Him by means of the wonderful world He created**

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