

Thanksgiving and Gratitude

Modeh Ani I am grateful to You, living, enduring Sovereign, for restoring my soul to me in compassion. You are faithful beyond measure	מודה אני מודה אֲנִי לְפָנֵידּ, מֶלֶדְּ חַי וְקַיֶּם, שֶׁהֶחֱזָרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחֶמְלָה, רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתָדְ.	(1)
Comment by R. Hammer:		(2)
I am grateful. To wake in the morning is to be reborn. Nothing is to be taken for granted, certainly not life itself. The first word of prayer, is perhaps the most important מודה, I am thankful. The essence of prayer is the grateful acknowledgment of the gifts we have been given. (Or Hadash)		

Modeh/ah Ani is said first thing in the morning. It implies that the simple act of waking up is cause for thanking God.

• Does this idea resonate with you? Why or why not?

From Nishmat Kol Hai	נשמת כל חי	(3)
Could song fill our mouth as water fills the sea	וְאָלוּ פִינוּ מָלֵא שִׁירָה כַּיָּם,	
And could joy flood our tongue like countless waves-	וּלְשׁוֹנָנוּ רָנָּה כַּהֲמוֹן גַּלָּיו,	
Could our lips utter praise as limitless as the sky	וְשִׂפְתוֹתָינוּ שָׁבַח כְּמֶרְחֲבֵי רָקִיעַ,	
And could our eyes match the splendor of the sun-	וְעֵינֵינוּ מְאִירוֹת כַּשָּׁמֶשׁ וְכַיָּרֵחַ,	
Could we soar with arms like an eagle's wings	ְוָיָדֵינוּ פְרוּשׁוֹת כְּנִשְׁרֵי שָׁמָיִם,	
And run with gentle grace as the swiftest deer-	וְרַגְלֶינוּ קַלוֹת כָּאַיָּלוֹת,	
Never could we fully state our gratitude to you	אֵין אֲנָחְנוּ מַסְפִּיקִים לְהוֹדוֹת לְדּ,	
Our God and the God of our ancestors.	ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתָינוּ	

This poetic passage describes the extent of our gratitude to God.

- Why does the text use these images?
- What occasions cause us to feel extreme gratitude?

Talmud Bavli Brakhot 35b Rabbi Haninia Bar Papa said: Anyone who enjoys anything from this world without a blessing, it is as if they have stolen from God and the community of Israel.	תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף לה:ב אמר רבי חנינא בר פפא: כל הנהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה כאילו גוזל להקדוש ברוך הוא וכנסת ישראל	(4)
Tosefta Brachot 4:1 One should not taste anything until s/he has blessed as it says: "The Earth, and all it contains, is God's"	תוספתא מסכת ברכות (ליברמן) פרק ד: א לא יטעום אדם כלום עד שיברך שנ' לה' הארץ ומלואה	(5)

- According to these two texts, why must we say blessings before enjoying?
- What can we do to cultivate our personal sense of appreciation for that which we enjoy?

Talmud Bavli Brakhot 58a

Ben Zoma saw many people on the steps of the Temple mount. He said: "Blessed is One who knows secrets, and blessed is the One who created all these to serve me."

He would say: "How many labors did primordial Adam have to work at until he found bread to eat?! He plowed, planted, harvested and stacked the sheaves. He threshed, winnowed, sorted, ground, and sifted, kneaded, baked and after all this he ate. And I wake up and find all these done before me.

"And how many labors did primordial Adam have to work at until he found clothes to wear?! He sheared, cleaned, combed, spun, weaved, and then he had clothing to wear. And I wake up and find all these prepared for me."

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף נח עמוד א

בן זומא ראה אוכלוסא על גב מעלה בהר הבית, אמר: ברוך חכם הרזים, וברוך שברא כל אלו לשמשני.

הוא היה אומר: כמה יגיעות יגע אדם הראשון עד שמצא פת לאכול: חרש, וזרע, וקצר, ועמר, ודש, וזרה, וברר, וטחן, והרקיד, ולש, ואפה, ואחר כך אכל, ואני משכים ומוצא כל אלו מתוקנין לפני.

וכמה יגיעות יגע אדם הראשון עד שמצא בגד ללבוש: גזז ולבן ונפץ וטוה וארג, ואחר כך מצא בגד ללבוש, ואני משכים ומוצא כל אלה מתוקנים לפני.

- To whom is Ben Zoma grateful? How does this compare to sources 1-5?
- How often do you think of the types of labor that are required for your food or clothing?
- What processes and people are involved in production of food, clothing, or other items that we use daily?

From Birkat Hamazon

We thank You, Lord our God, for the pleasing, good and spacious land which you gave to our ancestors and for liberating us from Egyptian bondage. We thank You for the covenant sealed in our flesh, for teaching us Your Torah and Your precepts, for the gift of life and compassion graciously granted us, for the food we have eaten, for the nourishment You provide us all of our days, whatever the season, whatever the time.

ברכת המזון

(7)

יְוֹדֶה לְּדְּ, הֹ׳ אֱלֹקינוּ, עַל שֶׁהְנְחֶלְתָּ לַאֲבוֹתָינוּ אֶבֶץ חֶמְדָּה טוֹבָה וּרְחָבָה, וְעַל שֶׁהוֹצֵאתָנוּ, הֹ׳ אֱלֹקינוּ, מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרִים, וּפְדִיתָנוּ מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים, וְעַל בְּרִיתְךְּ שֶׁחָמְתְּ בִּבְשֶׁרֵנוּ, וְעַל תּוֹרָתְךְּ שֶׁלְמַּדְתָנוּ, וְעַל חַיִּים חֵן וְחָפֶד שֶׁהוֹדַעְתָּנוּ, וְעַל אֲכִילַת מָזוֹן שָׁאַתָּה שֶׁחוֹנַגְתָנוּ, וְעַל אֲכִילַת מָזוֹן שָׁאַתָּה זון וּמְפַרְנֵס אוֹתָנוּ תָּמִיד, בְּכָל יוֹם וּבַכל עַת וּבַכַל שַׁעָה.

- What are we thanking God for in this paragraph?
- What is the connection between this paragraph and eating? Why is this part of *birkat hamazon*?
- What are you grateful for?
- How do you express your gratitude to God? To others?

by Rabbi Ashira Kongisburg for the Rabbinical Assembly Thanksgiving 5772