

PRAYING with Fire

PRAYER POINTS

ACKNOWLEDGING GOOD



Prayer #11 - Acknowledging Good

In Hebrew, the word for gratitude can mean "thanks", "praise" and "confession."

The prayer called the *Shemoneh Esrai* "The Eighteen Blessings" is divided into three sections:

- praise
- requests
- thanks

The *Shemoneh Esrai* begins with praises of God and His greatness. Then, follow the blessings each asking God for understanding, forgiveness, redemption, healing and so forth. The final section acknowledges that God is the Source of all life and good that comes our way.

It is this final section called *Modim* that we will explore now.

Most people will acknowledge the importance of showing appreciation for what they have, and openly admit how good they feel when people say, "thank you" to them for doing a favor. They will also agree that saying "thank you" for receiving good makes the receiving of that good even sweeter. However, most people are unaware of just how important *hakores hatov* - "recognition of the good" -- really is.

According to Rashi, the 11th century commentator on the Torah, it was Adam's failure to acknowledge the good that God gave him, that helped guarantee his expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

According to tradition, when God questioned Adam about his eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, against the direct command of God, Adam pushed the blame off himself back onto God. Adam said, "The woman that You gave to be with me - she gave me of the tree and I ate." Thereby implying: "If you hadn't given me a wife, God, I wouldn't have eaten from the tree in the first place!"

However, that's like buying your child a hammer to play with, with which he breaks a window. After being scolded for his carelessness, the child says to his angry parent: "What do you want from me? If you hadn't bought me the hammer, I wouldn't have broken the window!"

Not only has the child failed to show appreciation but he blamed his parent for the gift.

That's called adding insult to injury. Not only has the child failed to show appreciation to his benefactor for the gift he received, but, he turned the gift into a liability for which he had blamed his parent! How much of this can a parent handle?!

Had Adam only taken the blame on himself, say the rabbis, which would have stemmed from an appreciation of the gift of life and the gift of a wife, we'd all still be in the Garden of Eden!

Often, it is not much different with us.

Here God goes and gives us the gift of life, and, all the various different aspects that enhance our lives and those of others, and we barely feel appreciative; indeed, we often feel down and blame God for it -- even criticizing Him. We use our bodies for sin and illicit pleasures, and then turn our backs on God. Many even go so far as to ignore His existence!

Thus, the *Modim* section of the *Shemoneh Esrai* focuses on the need to show appreciation for all the good in life, starting with the words:

We are thankful to you, for it is You, God our God, and God of our Forefathers, for all eternity; Rock of our lives, Shield of our salvation are You from generation to generation. We shall thank You, and relate Your praise -- for our lives, which are in Your hand, and, for our souls which are entrusted to You, for Your miracles that are with us every day, and Your wonders and favors in every season, evening, morning, and afternoon.

When we say these words, we should focus our intention and imbue the words with a strong sense of gratitude.

Because she was grateful to God, Leah, the wife of Jacob, merited to have a son like Judah, whose Hebrew name, *Yehudah*, is based on the same Hebrew root as "praise," *l'hodot*, and "thanks," *modeh*.

Thus, the Torah writes, "She became pregnant again, and gave birth to a son. She said, 'This time I will thank God.' Therefore, she called him 'Yehudah' ..." (Genesis 29:35)

Not only did Leah name him this way, but, in doing so, she imbued him with the ability to be *modeh* as well, which not only saved Tamar's life, but earned him the right to be king of the Jewish people. For, the word *modeh* can mean either "thanks" or confession/admission," and it was Judah's admission in the incident with Tamar (Genesis 38:26) that Jacob, his father, praised on his deathbed when confirming his son's right to the throne (Genesis 49:8).

1 Chronicles 29:11 Yours, LORD, are greatness, might, splendor, triumph, and majesty -- yes, all that is in heaven and on earth; to You, LORD, belong kingship and preeminence above all. ¹² Riches and honor are Yours to dispense; You have dominion over all; with You are strength and might, and it is in Your power to make anyone great and strong. ¹³ Now, God, we praise You and extol Your glorious name. (1Ch 29:11 TNK)