

Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Tzav
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פרשת צו
ח' בניסן תשע"ח

Torah Reading: *Vayikra* (Leviticus) 6:1-8:36

In this *parasha*, Hashem tells Moshe to describe to the *cohanim* (priests) the rituals for some of the offerings; the *cohanim* then undergo the process of ordination.

Chapter 7, verses 11-13, discuss the thanksgiving offering:

וְזֹאת תֹּרַת, זֶבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים, אֲשֶׁר יִקְרִיב, לַה'. אִם עַל-תְּנוּחָה, יִקְרִיבֶנּוּ--
וְהִקְרִיב עַל-זֶבַח הַתְּנוּחָה חֲלוֹת מִצּוֹת בָּלוּלֹת בַּשֶּׁמֶן, וִירְקִיקֵי מִצּוֹת מִשְׁחִים
בַּשֶּׁמֶן ; וְסֹלֶת מִרְבֶּכֶת, חֲלֹת בָּלוּלֹת בַּשֶּׁמֶן. עַל-חֲלֹת לֶחֶם חֲמֵץ, יִקְרִיב קֶרֶבֶנוּ,
עַל-זֶבַח, תְּנוּחַת שְׁלָמֵיו.

And this is the law of the sacrifice of peace-offerings, which one may offer to Hashem. If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unleavened cakes mingled with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes mingled with oil, of fine flour soaked. With cakes of leavened bread he shall present his offering with the sacrifice of his peace-offerings for thanksgiving.

We have lost touch with the idea that sacrificial offerings were part of the day-in and day-out life of the ancient Jews. When they sinned, they brought an offering. When they completed something, they brought an offering. When something good happened, they brought an offering. Of course, the sacrificial offerings ceased with the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, and the majority of the Rabbis in the Talmud agree that they will never return, even if and when a Third Temple is erected. One of the few exceptions is זֶבַח הַתְּנוּחָה, the thanksgiving offering. Expressing gratitude is such a fundamental principle of Judaism that the rabbis believe that this sacrifice will be reinstated one day.

In the meantime, the words of our lips have replaced sacrifices, and, aside from the בְּרָכוֹת הַזֵּדִיחַ, blessings of thanksgiving, that many Jews recite three times a day in the *Amidah*, we have the *Gomel* blessing, a specific blessing that we say in front of the community when we have recovered from a serious illness, have survived a harrowing experience, or have encountered a real or perceived threat to our lives. Below is a summary of this blessing of gratitude.

The *Gomel* blessing is said in the presence of a *minyan*. Ideally it should be said within three days after the incident that requires the blessing. It is preferable that the blessing be said in the presence of a Torah scroll, and if possible the one saying the blessing should also receive an *aliyah* (be called up to the Torah). When the person saying the blessing is called up to the Torah, the blessing should be recited immediately subsequent to the blessing after the Torah of "*Asher Natan*" that follows the *aliyah*. One can say the blessing even without receiving an *aliyah* by being in proximity to where the Torah is being read and reciting it at the point mentioned above. The *Gomel* blessing should be recited while standing if at all possible. Likewise, it should be said during the daytime, since זֶבַח הַתּוֹדָה, the thanksgiving offering, was given during the day.

The text of the blessing reads “אֵלֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַגּוֹמֵל לְחַיִּיבִים ה' – Blessed are You, Hashem our God, Ruler of the universe, Who bestows kindness upon the culpable, Who has bestowed much goodness on me.” The idea is that God, who deals kindly even with those that are not deserving, has also dealt kindly with us, even if we are really not worthy of God's kindness.

Those who hear the blessing should answer *Amen* followed by “מִי שֶׁגָּמְלָךְ כָּל טוֹב – הוּא יִגְמְלָךְ כָּל טוֹב סָלָה – May the One who has bestowed kindness upon you always bestow every kindness upon you.”

I have my own theory as to why this blessing is done in the presence of a *minyan*. I think the *Gomel* blessing not only serves to reinforce the attribute of gratitude in us, but also to publicize God's graciousness towards us to the whole community and to ritualize the opportunity for other members of the community to check in with us, make sure everything is okay, and ask what they can do to help.

As with so many other aspects of Jewish life, this blessing is a beautiful and meaningful part of our liturgical practices.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Name three specific things in your life that you are grateful for.
- Traditionally, a woman recites *Gomel* after giving birth. Why do you think that is so?
- Why do you think people answer the *Gomel* blessing with their own response? This is quite an unusual practice compared to most blessings in Jewish life.