



**Partners In Torah**

**San Diego-Los Angeles-Venutra**

**Take home Dvar Torah**

**תשפ"ד Parshat Tzav**

**March 26, 2024**

**By: Rabbi Avi Cohen**

*Hello, Welcome!*

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.**

*Partners in Torah  
has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.*

***Thank you for joining us!***

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.**

This week's portion, Tzav, details the different types of animal or grain sacrifices that one may need to bring. A sacrifice is called a קרבן (*korban*), the root of which is קרב - which means *to bring close*. A sacrifice's purpose is to bring a person close to Hashem. If a person has sinned, the sin creates a barrier between him and Hashem, and the sacrifice removes that barrier allowing him to once again to return to that special closeness.

One of the listed sacrifices, however, does not bring atonement for a sin, yet has the potential to bring a person much closer to Hashem, namely, the קרבן תודה "*The Todah (thanksgiving) offering.*" For this sacrifice a person could bring either a male or female lamb, goat, or cow or bull, and most of the meat was eaten by its owner. A person would bring this sacrifice when he needed to thank Hashem for a kindness that Hashem did for him. This *Todah* offering, moreover, was unique in that it was brought with 40 loaves of bread, which was not burned on the altar, but rather had to be completely consumed along with all the meat.

The Torah determined how much flour needed to be used for the 40 loaves, which, in today's measurements, comes to about 88 pounds of flour. After being divided into two equal parts, one half of the flour was used for ten leavened loaves (each loaf took at least four and a half pounds. The standard loaf at Zemans Bakery weighs about one pound), and the other 44 pounds of flour were used to bake the remaining 30 unleavened (*matzah*) loaves that weren't given time to rise. Of these 30 matzah loaves, ten were scalded (the dough was immersed in boiling water before it was baked), ten were baked as wafers (probably like our matzas, only much thicker), and ten loaves had their flour first mingled with oil before being mixed with water and then baked. Each of these matzah loaves weighed about a pound and a half.

The Torah also set a strict time-limit on how quickly all of the bread and meat had to be consumed: before midnight of the day that the sacrifice was brought, an impossible feat for the person bringing the offering. The Torah therefore clearly intends for him to invite family, friends, and anyone who wishes to participate, to his feast, to help consume the huge amounts of bread and meat. Indeed, when someone came to Yerushalayim with a *Todah* offering, it was a holiday for the widows, the orphans, and the needy. They could come and eat to their hearts' content of the bread, and expect some meat to go with it, just to finish in the allotted time. The reason for this was so that when people would come to eat, they would inquire, "What's the party about? What happened?" This would allow the person who brought the sacrifice the opportunity to tell his story - the reason for his thanksgiving, and thereby exalt Hashem and His name in the eyes of all.

From the *Todah's* requirements, it seems clear that a major event in the bringer's life triggers it. What, then, would qualify as a reason for a *Todah* offering?

Psalm 107 lists four situations, which when a person is saved from them, he must express his thanks to Hashem for the salvation. These four situations translate into the four events for which one would need to bring a Thanksgiving sacrifice. They are (1) A prisoner who gained his freedom; (2) A person who was very ill and recovered; (3) One who traveled across a sea and arrived safely at his destination; and (4) One who completed a journey through a desert.

(A cute Hebrew acronym to remember the four who need to bring a *Korban Todah* is a line from the daily prayer, **וְכָל הַחַיִּים יוֹדוּךָ סֵלָה**)

"All the **חַבּוּשׁ** – **יָם** – **יְסוּרִים** – **יְסוּרִים** – **יְסוּרִים** – **יְסוּרִים** living, will praise You forever.")

Although surviving any of these four circumstances does not constitute an open miracle, each is nevertheless fraught with danger and prone to unhappy endings, so when a person is saved from them, he must offer a special thank you to Hashem for His kindness.

A person in prison may languish there for the rest of his life. To whom is he important? Why should anybody take up his cause? Who even knew where he was? When in days of old a ruler or governor had complete control over his subjects and could condemn any of them to prison on a whim without end, there was little hope of being rescued. But even today, a person may be sent to prison for a crime that he did not commit. So, when a person makes it out of prison, he in great thanks and would bring a *Korban Todah*.

A person who recovered from an illness that could have been fatal, or a person involved in an accident that could have resulted in his death, must also bring a *Todah* offering. Even in today's world with all its medical advances, many maladies can be life threatening, and surviving them is not guaranteed. Think about how many people lost their lives to Covid. In days of old, most sicknesses were probably like this. (The Black Plague in the 14th century in Europe took some 50 million lives.) There were no sure cures. Imagine the feeling of one who was very ill or who had the virus, yet survived. A major thanksgiving feast is in order.

Travel across the sea is fraught with danger. On a ship in the middle of an ocean, there are very limited options should something go wrong. Weather can do a ship in, and pirates and hijackers who would attack ships, killing and plundering the travelers, is another. There was no Coast Guard, no SOS, no help from anyone but Hashem. One likely only made a sea journey if he had no other option. And when he completed his journey successfully, there was great reason to celebrate.

The same is the case for crossing a desert. It is indeed hard to understand how one did it. There were no maps, no GPS, and no rest areas or food stores along the way. Instead, there were many undesirables waiting to plunder the wary traveler and relieve him of his money or valuables, snakes were plentiful, water and food were not, and the weather would only get hotter. Does our traveler have control over any of these things? What are his options? There is only one, to put his trust in Hashem and pray to Him for mercy and deliverance. Again, it would seem that one would make such a trip only under the most difficult of circumstance, and, when all went well and he reached his destination in peace, a major celebration was called for.

It is easy to imagine the elation and exhilaration that one would feel upon reaching safety in any of these four situations. He would want to broadcast his thankfulness to Hashem as loud as he possibly could and to share it with all who would listen! He would find his outlet through the *Todah* offering with its bread and meat that needed to be consumed in such a short time. The sumptuous repast would be enjoyed by many who would all rejoice in his miracle from Hashem.

Yet, when someone recovers from a serious illness or a life-threatening situation today, how does he express his gratitude to Hashem? With no Holy Temple, there can be no *Todah* offering.

There is a special blessing called *ברכת בגומל* *The Gomer blessing*, which expresses this concept and substitutes for the *Todah* offering. Ten men, two of whom are learned in Torah, must be present when the blessing is recited:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. הַגּוֹמֵל לְחַיִּיבִים טוֹבוֹת. שְׂגַמְלֵנִי כָּל טוֹב

*You are the source of all blessing Hashem our G-d king of the universe, who bestows goodness (even) to the guilty, Who has bestowed upon me all that is good.*

Upon hearing this blessing, the congregation responds with:

אָמֵן. מִי שֶׁגָּמְלָךְ כָּל טוֹב. הוּא יְגַמְלֶךָ כָּל טוֹב סְלָה

*Amen (to the bracha). Who has bestowed upon you all that is good, may He continue to grant you only good.*

Usually, this blessing is recited in shul after an *aliya* when the Sefer Torah is read, but it needn't be said only then, as long as it is recited in the presence of a minyan.

One morning, a member of a local minyan came to shul with cake and liquor for a mini celebration after prayers. When asked what this was for, he answered that the previous day he had a near-miss that could have been catastrophic, and he wanted to express his thanks to Hashem for it.

The next day, a second member of that minyan brought in liquor and cake for a mini celebration. His cohorts asked him, "What, you had a near miss yesterday also?" He answered, "No, I didn't; my travels were uneventful, and I arrived without even a near miss. However, that is also a reason for a celebration. Hashem is constantly watching out for me and saving me from near miss situations!"

In other words, Hashem is watching over us every second of every day and protecting us from all kinds of difficult and dangerous situations. Not only that, He supplies us with all of our needs. Our bodies are functioning properly, we have food to eat, friends and family, the list goes on. Why should we wait for a near miss or a life-threatening situation to express our heartfelt thanks to Hashem for all the goodness that He bestows upon us each moment of every day?

The correct answer to that question is, we don't! Our daily routine provides a myriad opportunities to thank Hashem.

Before partaking of any food, for example, we thank Hashem for it by reciting a blessing on it, and after we have eaten it, we recite a blessing of thanks for having enjoyed it.

After using the bathroom, we recite a blessing thanking Hashem for the miraculous proper functioning of our bodies. We ate and we drank, and now our bodies proceed to extract the vital vitamins and nutrients from the food we have eaten and distribute them into our bloodstream where they will be deposited into our cells to keep us satisfied, alive and well. The body will also eliminate elements of the food that we ate that are not beneficial to our health, and, indeed, if such substances remain in our bodies, will turn into poison that will cause us great harm. That's why we need to go to the bathroom, and it is very dangerous and painful when one cannot perform that seemingly unpleasant, yet necessary, act.

Two other places in our daily prayers provide us with the opportunity to express our thanks to Hashem for the daily miracles that He does for us.

The first appears in the morning service, which incorporates Psalm 100, "A Psalm of Thanksgiving." In it we say, "*For Hashem is good, His kindness endures forever.*" With just a little thought, we can see how we are all the recipients of Hashem's endless kindness.

The other place in our daily prayers where we have the opportunity to thank Hashem for the constant goodness that He bestows upon us is in the "*Modim*" – *Thank you!* -section of the *Shmoneh Esreh* prayer recited thrice daily. The entire blessing is replete with reasons to be thankful to Hashem, and a careful review of the meanings of the holy words of our Sages will surely bring a person to appreciate Hashem's goodness to him.



During these difficult and trying times, we have to be ever so much more grateful for every little (though, really, quite big!) thing that we have. The greatest of them all is that we have to be so thankful that we have Hashem! We Jews know that life is not random and that things are not the product of coincidence and chance. Hashem is loving and merciful, and He has nothing but our best interest in mind in every decision that He makes. Although we are unable to understand Hashem's Divine plan and why things are the way they are, we are sure that Hashem is doing what He is doing in the kindest and most sensitive way possible.

This is the lesson of the Purim holiday that we just celebrated: Hashem, hidden, pulls all the strings and makes things good for us. Although we cannot see it right now, all will become clear and understood when Mashiach comes, may he come speedily in our time.

Someone was once brought before the great Rosh Yeshiva of Aish Hatorah, Rabbi Noach Weinberg ל"צ, with the hope of convincing the young man to enter the Yeshiva to learn Torah. The young man said to the esteemed Rosh Yeshiva, "You don't have to convince me that there is G-d! I know there is a G-d, and I have a great relationship with Him!" "Really?" replied the rabbi. "Tell me about it! Perhaps you will teach me something about G-d!" The young man explained, "You see, I ride my bike (motorcycle) across the Swiss Alps, and one time as I came around a turn high on a mountain pass, a truck was bearing down on me. I had to either go off the cliff or collide with the truck. I chose to go off the cliff, and, after falling many stories, I landed on my bike without a scratch. My bike was completely mangled, but I was okay. So, I know there is G-d! He saved my life!" Reb Noach then pointedly asked him, "And who do you think sent the truck?"

In a way, we can ask this very question about the *Todah* offering. Indeed, *who* brought the prison sentence, the illness, the need for the trip across the sea or the desert? Of course, it was Hashem, Who controls all events. So, while we are happy to be out of the difficult situation, when we consider that Hashem brought the whole thing about to begin with, maybe such a major thanks isn't in order. Imagine someone played a joke on you, locking you up in a room without food or drink when you were very hungry. After a few hours he came back and let you out. Would you be eternally thankful to him for letting you out, or would you be eternally upset at him for having put you through those hours of hunger and discomfort?

The Ktav Sofer (d. 1871) explains that this is really part of the thanks that we are giving through the *Todah* offering.

R' Noach then asked the young man, "If Hashem sent the truck, what was His point?" by noting, "How else would Hashem have gotten your attention? *The truck woke you up!*"

When life carries on as "*normal*," it is easy to forget the Great Hashem Who, behind the scenes, calls all the shots and gives us a *normal* life. Sometimes we need a wakeup call to shock us back to the reality that Hashem is running the world, and we need to recognize Him and turn to Him for our salvation. When indeed Hashem sends the salvation, we owe Him *double* thanks: One for awaking us from our stupor, and the other for saving us from the difficult situation.

Psalm 107 cited above is the source for those who need to bring a *Todah* offering. A reading of the Psalm understands it as describing the events that the Jewish People experienced as they left Egypt. (1) They were released from bondage – Egyptian slavery, (2) they were recuperating from an illness - they had just undergone a Brit Milah, (3) they went through a sea - the Reed Sea, and (4) they had just crossed

safely over a desert as they made their way to Mount Sinai, in the Sinai Desert. So, the Jewish people had all four reasons to bring a *Todah* offering.

This notion also explains the four cups of wine at the Pesach Seder. Each cup is raised in thanks to Hashem for one of the four situations requiring a “thank you,” and we are offering it at the Seder when we acknowledge all the kindnesses that Hashem did for us during the Exodus.

The Midrash Rabbah (9:7) in this week’s portion says,

רבי פנחס ורבי לוי ורבי יוחנן בשם ר' מנחם דגליא : לעתיד לבא, כל הקרבנות בטלין וקרבתן תודה אינו בטל ; כל התפלות בטלות ההודאה אינה בטלה

*Rabbi Pinchas and Rabbi Levi and Rabbi Yochanan in the name of Rabbi Menachem from Galia said, In the future, all sacrifices will become obsolete except the Todah offering, and all prayers will become obsolete except the thanksgiving prayer.*

What is it about the *Todah* and thanksgiving prayers that will not become obsolete? It would seem to be the opposite. In future times when there will be neither sin nor sin offerings, everything will be perfect! There will be no circumstances requiring a *Todah* offering.

The answer is that in the future we will still bring a *Todah* offering to thank Hashem for all the suffering and hardship that he put us through! Because only then will we be able to see how each hardship and difficulty was really good for us, and how it brought about the ultimate redemption. At the time, we perceived them as a plague and suffered from them thinking they were not something for which to thank Hashem. However, in retrospect, we will see how they were actually good for us, and we will offer a *Todah* offering in thanks to Hashem.

May we all merit to bring a *Todah* offering to Hashem when He brings the complete redemption, speedily in our day, and we see in retrospect how all of this was for the good.