

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

MODEH ANI

"It's Great To Be Alive"

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

I gratefully thank You, O living and eternal King, for You have returned my soul within me with compassion—abundant is your faithfulness.

מודה אני לפניך
מלך חי וקים שהחזרת
בי נשמתי בחמלה—
רבה אמונתך.

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the meaning



Rav Hutner points out that the Hebrew word for “admitting” and the Hebrew word for “giving thanks” are the same - *Hoda'ah*.

Rav Hutner explains that the reason these two words are identical in Hebrew is because a person's ability to give thanks is based on his ability to admit that he is incomplete. When a person gives thanks to someone, he is admitting that he needed that person's favors and kindness. **A person who has difficulty admitting that he can't succeed on his own has difficulty saying “thank you.”** On the other hand, someone who is keenly aware of how others help him is naturally appreciative, and therefore feels more positive toward others and toward Hashem, the greatest Giver of all.

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Gratitude For G-d's Good

Gratitude arises when a person **acknowledges the good** that has been done for him. The word “מודה” contains a Jew's acknowledgement that it is Hashem who gives him a new lease on life every morning, and our gratitude for this magnificent daily gift.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

It's Good For You

One may wonder, **does G-d need our gratitude?** If G-d gives to and withholds from Man according to His calculations of what is best in the overall scheme, why should a person be grateful? The answer to these questions is that **we, not G-d, benefit from our sense of gratitude.** Appreciation of what one is given is the key to finding happiness and satisfaction. One who has no appreciation can never feel satisfied. The Torah is the source from which we learn that gratitude is good for the one who is grateful -- so much so that he should nurture this feeling even if the recipient of his gratitude cannot perceive it. This is illustrated when G-d told Moshe *Rabbeinu* to command his brother Aharon to initiate the plague of blood in the waters of Egypt. Why is this command to be executed through

Aharon rather than directly by Moshe? Rashi explains this is because the river protected Moshe *Rabbeinu* when he was cast into it as an infant. Because it had benefitted him, he was not asked to personally cast a plague upon the river. **G-d considered Moshe's debt of gratitude to the river to be of such great value that He shifted the mantel of leadership** for this epic demonstration of Divine power. Even if doing so would make Moshe appear weaker in his position, the risk was worth the price, just so that the primacy of the trait of gratitude would be illustrated for all time. Obviously, this display of gratitude was not for the river's sake. **The river would never know. It was for the sake of Moshe,** and all of us who are his students, to inculcate into our hearts.

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

The Miracle Of The Day

“Alive!” the man thought as he rubbed his eyes and shook the cloudiness out of his head. “Alive!” he acknowledged as he listened to the ‘whoosh’ of his own breath rushing in and out of his nostrils, and felt the strong, steady pounding of the heart in his chest.

He sat up in bed, marveling at the mobility of his legs as they swung around to the floor, and the strength of his back as he pulled up to a sitting position. He heard the birds chirping loudly on the tree branch outside his window. The sun's early morning rays illuminated the drawn shades.



“I'm alive in the world, a part of the living world!” the man exulted. “Today I'll have another day to hug my children, to make my wife smile, to pray to G-d and greet my neighbors and run my business and learn Torah and enjoy a good cup of coffee!”

He knew that maybe it would be a difficult day filled with set-backs and obstacles, or maybe it would be a great day, or a little of both. No matter what the day would bring, however, he was thrilled to be a part of it, to have yet another chance to try his best to make his mark on the world.

Before getting out of bed all these thoughts shot through his mind in a few brief seconds. With a heart bursting with gratitude, he spoke his first words of the day: “מודה אני לפניך מלך חי וקים”.

One might read this description and assume that this man had just recovered from a terrible illness or narrowly escaped death in a near-accident. But why would one assume that? **The gift of life** is not only precious when it is seen in contrast to the threat of injury or death. It is precious all on its own, every single day; with a few moments of thought, each of us can begin our day filled with the true, all-encompassing happiness that only *Hakoros Hatov* can bring.

Try This!

This week, upon waking up each day, focus briefly but closely on some aspect of **your body's healthy functioning** – make note of the images that greet your eye or the sounds that greet your ears, or the movement of your limbs, and imagine how it would be if it were not so. Then say מודה אני.

Did You Know

► *A Holy Beginning*

Before getting out of bed (even while still lying down) or starting any other conversation or activity, including washing hands, **we declare our gratitude to Hashem for returning us to life.** Thinking of and thanking Hashem immediately upon awakening helps ensure that one's day begin with holiness and sanctity.