

Shabbat 12 March 2016

The importance of thanksgiving Page 444 Chief Rabbi's Siddur

In this article I am going to look at *Modim Derabanan* one of our prayers included in the Repetition of the *Amidah*.

There is a famous story told about Rav Eliashuv Z'L. A few years ago he was unwell and had to utilise the services of a medical expert who came all the way from the United States to perform a tricky procedure on the Rabbi. After finishing, the Rabbi called over his personal aide and asked him how to say thank you properly in English. After he was told how to say thank you, the Rabbi went to the expert and gave his thanks. The Rabbi's aide asked; "Why did you not just send me to say thank you on your behalf?"

Answered Rav Eliashuv:

"When you want to say thank you it has to be done by the person himself, you cannot send an emissary to show your gratitude to someone who has done you a good deed"

I think these words encapsulate the reasoning behind why, when the *chazan* repeats the *Amidah* and he reaches *Modim Anachnu Lach*; we thank You; that instead of listening intently to the prayer of the *chazan*, we actually say our own thank you to G-d.

In the words of Rabbi David Abudraham (13th Century) when it comes to thanksgiving, a servant cannot send an emissary to his master, but has to go in person.

This is really the idea behind *Modim Derabanan*- the Rabbis thanksgiving prayer which is recited by the congregation at the time that the *Chazan* says *Modim*.

The Talmud in Sotah (40a) discusses the various views of what should be said by the congregation. The perspectives of Rav and Shmuel, Rav Acha and Rav Simai are all considered. Finally, Rav Pappa says ; " I think all their points of view are good- let's say all of them." We have therefore incorporated all of their opinions in the *Modim*. That is why it is called the Rabbis thanksgiving prayer.

When the *Chazan* reaches *Modim*, the congregation stand and bow at the words *Modim anachnu lach she-ata hu*; we give thanks that You are. When we reach the name of G-d we stand upright.

Note the words of the Chazan in his thanksgiving he says; we give thanks to You, for your everyday miracles with us, and for your wonders and goodness with us all the time.

I think these words are wonderful. We have every reason to thank Hashem for the everyday marvels of creation. We get up in the morning, we witness the sun rise and the blossoms in the trees we behold the everyday as the miraculous. We see behind the mundane, the Hand of Hashem in everything that happens.

Read carefully the first few words of *Modim*.
We give thanks to You, that You are He.

When I think of Hashem, I recognise all the goodness that He has done for me. He seems close; we therefore address G-d in the second person as You. However, when I contemplate further, I think about how He sustains all mankind, I suddenly realise His greatness, so G-d becomes further away, He becomes transcendent. Therefore we refer to G-d in the third person (He).

In the Rabbis thanksgiving we say the words acknowledging that He gives us life and sustains us. These words remind us of the *Shehechyanu* blessing recited on special occasions. But every day is special. He sustains us; He gives us life continuously.

Finally, toward the end, we request of G-d to bring us back to your holy temple where we may serve You and keep Your commandments with a complete heart.

We say *Modim* every day, three times a day. How many of us really take the time to truly acknowledge G-d with this wonderful prayer?

Shabbat Shalom