

PARASHAT TZAV-SHABBAT HAGADOL 5773

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Of the many Korbanot that are discussed in our Parasha, one of them is the Korban Todah [7:11-15], a thanksgiving-offering. Basically it's a Korban that one brought during the days of the Beit HaMikdash, after having survived a life-threatening crisis. He/she brings this special Korban to express gratitude to HaShem – and his recognition that it was G-d Who saved him.

From Tehilim (100), David's psalm of gratitude (Mizmor LeTodah), our Sages in Gemara Berachot [54b] derive that four categories of people are required to bring this Korban; those who survived a desert (or other hazardous journey), dangerous imprisonment, serious illness, or a sea voyage. [incidentally, this Korban was never brought on Erev Pesach or on Chol HaMo'ed Pesach because it was the only Korban that contained Chametz.-and therefore, we, the Ashkenazim today, omit Mizmor LeTodah on those days. However, the Sefaradim, as per Rav Ovadya Yosef, do say it.]

In our days, until the Beit HaMikdash will be rebuilt, the obligation to thank HaShem is discharged by reciting a Beracha called Birkat HaGomel. This Beracha is generally recited during the Torah reading, within three days of the event, if possible. It is a minhag, but not mandatory that the person reciting the Beracha be called for an Aliyah.

What is most interesting is that the people who hear the Beracha must respond with a phrase beyond the usual "Amein". They must respond with Amein and also "*Mi She'ge'ma'lecha Kol Tov, Hu Yigma'lecha Kol Tov, Selah*", "May He Who has bestowed goodness upon you continue to bestow every goodness upon you forever".

What is this all about and why is the additional phrase necessary? Why is the ordinary response of Amein insufficient?

We find by Yaakov Avinu, when he was about to confront his brother Eisav and four hundred armed men (Bereishit 32:7-11) Yaakov was understandably distressed and frightened. In spite of the fact that HaShem had promised to be with him and to bring him home safely (ibid. 28:15). So why was Yaakov so frightened? The answer is that Yaakov said (ibid, 32:11) "I have been diminished by all the kindness that You have done for Your servant". Rashi explains that Yaakov was saying, my merits have been diminished by all the kindness You have shown me, and that is why I am afraid for I may not have any merits to my credit for the future.

Each of us does many good deeds that build up our Zechutim [merits] with G-d Above. These merits are possibly what saved us after a life threatening situation and we are now able to recite Birkat HaGomel. However, just like one takes medication against a disease, there come a time when the body becomes immune to this vaccine and the patient now stands in danger of being unable to continue fighting the disease. So too with our merits. After using them to save us from

danger there comes a time when we exhaust our supply and we will not have them if a future danger confronts us. For this the people who hear the Beracha of HaGomel, respond- with their own Beracha to him and say: May G-d continue to bestow goodness upon you forever, that you do not run out of merits when they are needed.

What we learn from this is that it is certainly advisable for the individual who survived a dangerous situation to do redouble his efforts in doing more acts of kindness, compassion and consideration to others and give more Tzeddakah than ever before, so as to replenish his supply of merits for the future.

Taking this one step further, I would suggest that the individual become more pro-active in doing acts of kindness. Meaning, don't wait until you are approached for help, but when you see someone looking upset or distress, go over and offer to help in any way possible, even before being asked. True story that happened tonight. My wife and I had dinner in a restaurant when we saw a young mother with young children seemingly very upset. We approached her and asked if there is anything we can do for her. She sobbed and told us "I arrived today from abroad and my pocket book with my cell phone was stolen. I have no way of contacting my husband who is still in the U.S., due to arrive tomorrow, and he is desperately trying to reach us but unable to do so. I immediately dialed her long distant number on my cell and she made contact with her husband. That smile of relief on her face was more than enough pleasure to us for the rest of the evening. Who knows, perhaps we were destined to be at that place and time, to meet this woman, in order to build up our chesed points. It made our entire day worthwhile.