



For crying out loud

Good MORNING!

Starting the day off right

BY ROBERT SUSSMAN



"I OPEN ONE EYE AND I OPEN TWO; I SAY THE modeh ani, which means thank you..."

The words of the well-known children's song are certainly true, but *modeh ani* means so much more than just *thank you*.

Prayer doesn't begin, or, for that matter, end, in shul. For Jews, prayer begins while we're lying in bed – from the very moment that we open our eyes. And, it continues throughout our day, until we find ourselves, once again, in our beds – ending, literally, just before we close our eyes to sleep again for the night.

Before doing anything else, we start our day by saying the words of *modeh ani*. This declaration – these twelve Hebrew words – serve to set the tone for our entire day, loosely translated as:

"Thanks/acknowledgment I (give) to you, King, (who) lives and exists, that You have returned my soul within me with compassion; great is Your faithfulness."

REBIRTH

Mindfulness is all the rage now, as people strive to unplug, relax, let go, and live in the moment – to be attuned to the world around them, paying more attention to their senses, being aware and alert, feeling time, yet stepping outside of it.

But, our Sages required us to be mindful long before it was fashionable to be. They wanted us to see each day for what it truly is: a rebirth.

Just imagine for a moment finding yourself on the ground after you've stumbled and fallen, a car speeding towards you, and you're simply unable to get yourself out of harm's way fast enough. And then, suddenly, from out of nowhere, you feel someone grab you and pull you to safety. Is it even possible to thank this person sufficiently for having just saved your life?

Our Sages wanted us to see ourselves each morning as though we rose from death to life, as though Hashem had just

pulled us out of the way of a car barreling towards us. This is the sense and degree of gratitude that a person needs to feel towards Hashem each and every morning upon waking: thank you G-d for giving me the gift of another day on this earth.

WHO'S THE BOSS

And every day – at the very start of each day – we're meant to remind ourselves, as we express our gratitude for being alive, that Hashem is the King of the world, a living King who is intimately and personally involved with His world and His creations. We have a Father in Heaven who loves us very much and who cares about our needs. He is always there – not just when we choose to pay attention to Him or when we're awake, but even when we try our best to hide from Him and even when we're sleeping.

What's the first thing that a person encounters when he opens his eyes – the first thing he sees and feels? Himself, of course – *ani*, I. Am I tired or did I sleep enough? Did I or didn't I sleep well? Does my head hurt? Etc. Therefore, the first word out of a person's mouth must not be *I*, but *modeh* in order to give this moment over to Hashem – to set our focus on what should be at the centre and forefront of our thoughts during our every waking moment.

NOT JUST THANK YOU

Although ordinarily translated as "thanks" the word *modeh* means so much more than that.

In Hebrew, the word *hoda'ah* can also mean an "admission", like when a person admits or acknowledges something that has legal implications. For example, when someone admits that he owes a certain amount of money to another person, that admission makes him responsible for returning the sum that's owed. In this case,

when we declare *modeh ani*, we're admitting to the existence of G-d – acknowledging Him from the first moment that we open our eyes. A person who starts his day with the words *modeh ani* admits that his entire existence, his life, his very being – that all of it is from Hashem, that we belong to Him and not to ourselves. And we immediately follow the word *modeh* with the word *ani* – because we make that admission with our entire being.

What we're saying is, "I recognise that I am Yours (ie. Hashem's)" – and implicit in this statement is a very profound admission: I am not mine; I am not the boss. I answer to someone. I have obligations and responsibilities for which I will be held accountable. We acknowledge that there is a G-d and that we answer to Him, and, in so doing, we immediately define ourselves vis-a-vis our Creator, thereby im-

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buing our entire day and our entire existence with meaning and purpose.

OBLIGATIONS, NOT RIGHTS

We live in a world that has been turned on its head. The founding fathers of America used the idea of a creator, of god, to redefine it, endowing men with these things called “rights”, which have, over time, morphed into entitlements. No longer would the focus be, as it had been until then, on what I owed to others, but now the focus would be on what others owed me, on what I had coming to me. Our Sages recognised millennia ago the importance of a person starting each and every day with the recognition of his

place in the world: I am not mine. I am not the *ba'al habayis*, the master of the house. I answer to someone. There's a hierarchy and, as much as I like to think that I'm in charge, that I'm the boss, there's someone above me. I answer to a King, and not just any king, but the King of Kings, a King who breathes life into me and that gift of life comes with strings attached, with obligations. No one owes me anything. I'm not entitled to anything.

We need to always remember why we're here, what our purpose is on this earth. And, we need to carry this thought with us throughout our entire day. When we start off each day on the right foot, everything else falls in line. **IL**

Some ideas adapted from Sefer Nefesh Shimshon al Siddur HaTefillah

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