

**PARASHAS TZAV**

# Gratitude Unlimited

What do released prisoners, recovering patients, seafarers and caravan travelers all have in common? These people have all been in perilous situations, their very lives endangered, and having come through safely, they are required to express their gratitude to Hashem by bringing a thanksgiving sacrifice to the Temple in Jerusalem. The procedure for the thanksgiving offering, the *korban todah*, is described in this week's portion.

The Midrash provides us with a rather surprising bit of information about the thanksgiving offering. In the End of Days, when the Presence of the Creator will fill the world with holiness and people will live in eternal bliss and serenity, all sacrifices will be discontinued - except for the thanksgiving sacrifice. This immediately leads us to ask: How can this be? If, as the prophets repeatedly assure us, people will be safe and secure, protected from all physical harm and danger, from sickness and imprisonment, how will it be possible for a thanksgiving sacrifice to be brought? The conditions that necessitate such an offering will simply not exist!

Let us think for a moment about a phrase most polite people use very often and very casually. What exactly do we mean when we say "thank you" to someone who has done us a good turn? What have we actually given him by thanking him? And why is he gratified? The answers lie in a deeper understanding of gratitude and thanksgiving. In essence, an expression of gratitude is an acknowledgment. By saying "thank you," we declare that we recognize what the other person has done for us, that we value it and that we do not take him for granted. This is all he needs in return for what he has done - recognition, no more, no less. But a sincere expression of gratitude can only result from a genuine appreciation of the value of what we have received. Without this appreciation, the words "thank you" are but an empty, meaningless formality.

If this holds true in our relationships with other human beings, how much more so in our relationship with our Creator. We are endlessly beholden to Him for all the good He does for us, and as a result, we should be endlessly grateful. Unfortunately, however, we live in a benighted world of illusions and delusions, and we often fail to recognize the innumerable gifts and bounty that flow to us from Hashem's generous hand. And even when we pay lip service to it, how

deeply do we actually feel it? How real is it to us? The only things we face with stark reality are life-threatening situations. In the face of danger, our affectations and pretensions quickly dissipate, and we realize how dependent we are on our Creator for our safety. As the old adage goes, "There are no atheists in a foxhole." It is only when we are ultimately delivered from danger that we are capable of expressing genuine gratitude.

In the End of Days, however, the Presence of the Creator will illuminate the entire world and dispel all the foolish delusions which so becloud our vision and befuddle our minds. Then we will see Hashem's hand with perfect clarity, and our acknowledgments of His guidance and benevolence will carry the ring of true conviction. At that point, we will no longer have to face life-threatening situation to inspire genuine gratitude in our hearts. We will thank Him endlessly for every minute detail of our lives and bring thanksgiving sacrifices to give expression to the transcendent feelings of gratitude that will permeate our souls.

*A great sage once ordered a cup of coffee in an elegant restaurant. When the bill came, he saw he had been charged an exorbitant sum.*

*"So much for a cup of coffee?" he asked the waiter.*

*"Oh no, sir," the waiter replied. "The coffee cost only a few cents. But the paintings and tapestries on the walls, the crystal chandeliers, the Persian carpets, the luxurious gardens, the marble fountain, these cost a lot of money, and every patron must pay his share."*

*"Aha!" said the sage. "You have taught me an important lesson. When I recite a blessing over a glass of water, I must thank the Creator for the ground on which I stand, the air I breathe, the blue sky over my head, the beauty and scent of the flowers, the twittering of birds, the company of other people. Thank you."*

In our own lives, we all too often take for granted all the blessings we enjoy, and we forget to express our gratitude to our Creator, the Source of all this bounty. Indeed, when we experience hardship, we are inclined to confront Hashem, saying, Oh, why do we deserve this? But when we experience good fortune, are we as inclined to thank Him? Common courtesy, of course, requires that we acknowledge Hashem's bounty, but if we offer words of gratitude to Hashem in all situations, we will also discover a deeper dimension to our appreciation and enjoyment of the blessings of life.