



TOWARDS MEANINGFUL TEFILLA

REBBETZIN ZEMIRA OZAROWSKI
DIRECTOR OF OU ISRAEL WOMEN'S DIVISION



Modeh Ani: The Mantra That Shapes the Day

Whether we realize it or not, each of us lives with an internal mantra, a recurring message that quietly plays in the background of our minds throughout the day. For some, it is hopeful: *Things will work out.* For others, it is discouraging: *This is too hard. I can't do it.* Most of the time, we aren't even aware that these thoughts are shaping our perspective, our decisions, and ultimately, our lives.

But what if we could consciously choose the message that would define our day? Chazal gave us exactly that opportunity every morning. Before we check our phones, before we get dressed, before we even wash Netilat Yadayim, they instructed us to say six simple words:

מודה אני לפניך מלך חי וקים – *I acknowledge and am grateful before You, living and eternal King.*

Modeh Ani

Six Words: Our Daily Mission Statement

מודה אני לפניך מלך חי וקים

I acknowledge and am grateful before You,
living and eternal King.

| | | |
|----------|--------------------|---|
| 1 | מודה | I begin with gratitude. My life is a gift. |
| 2 | אני | I bring my true self into my relationship with Hashem. |
| 3 | לפניך | I live before Hashem in every moment. |
| 4 | מלך חי וקים | He is my living and eternal King. He is actively involved in every detail of my life, always. |

These six words set the direction of my day.

✂ Cut out and keep in your siddur as a daily reminder.

Modeh Ani is not simply the first Tefillah of the morning. It is the first thought we are meant to place into our minds. Chazal intentionally omitted Hashem's Name so that these words could be recited the very moment we awaken, even before going to the bathroom or washing our hands. If there is one idea that should become our daily mantra, it is this one.

That idea became especially real for me this week. A family member was involved in a serious car accident. Baruch Hashem, she walked away completely unharmed. But after hearing what happened and seeing the pictures, it was impossible not to think how differently the story

could have ended. All week, I kept thinking about how fragile life really is. We live with an incredible sense of security, assuming that tomorrow will come, that our loved ones will return home safely, that life will simply continue as it always has. Yet the truth is that every breath we take, every heartbeat, every ordinary day, exists only because Hashem continually wills it to be so.

If we were truly aware of how many dangers Hashem saves us from every single day, or how completely dependent we are on Him for every moment of our existence, we would probably find it impossible to function. Perhaps that is why Hashem allows us to live with the comforting illusion of independence. We are meant to build our lives, make plans, go to work, raise families, and move forward without constantly feeling overwhelmed by our vulnerability.

That being said, Chazal taught us to acknowledge that reality once each morning and to let it shape the way we approach the rest of the day. The goal is not to fill us with fear, but with gratitude. By recognizing our dependence on Hashem at the very beginning of the day, we can spend the hours that follow with greater purpose.

For just a few moments, before the emails, the errands, the responsibilities, and before yesterday's worries have a chance to return, we recite these words. These six words are not merely a Tefillah. They are our daily mission statement, the lens through which we are meant to experience the entire day. The mindset with which we begin our morning has the power to shape everything that follows. In fact, **Rav Chaim of Volozhin** writes that one who begins the day by reciting Modeh Ani with proper awareness and intention is granted the merit and ability to serve Hashem throughout the day. Our first

thoughts do not simply begin the day, they set its direction.

Rav Shimshon Pincus in his book *Nefesh Shimshon* explains that every word of Modeh Ani is carefully chosen to build the proper worldview. Let us look at the first half of this remarkable Tefillah.

מוֹדֵה – The Tefillah does not begin with “אני”. It begins with “מודה.” That is no accident. We live in a culture where everything revolves around the self. Even our spiritual lives can become centered on *my* inspiration, *my* growth, *my* experience, and *my* connection. Modeh Ani teaches us to begin somewhere else. Before I think about myself, I acknowledge Hashem. Before I focus on what I want or what I need, I recognize that my entire existence is a gift. Gratitude is not merely something I express from time to time; it is meant to define the way I live. My entire existence is one continuous expression of מודה, of recognition, appreciation, and humble acknowledgment that everything I have comes from Him.

אני – Only after beginning with Hashem do we return to “אני.” Judaism does not ask us to erase our individuality. On the contrary, Hashem wants each of us to serve Him with our unique personality, talents, struggles, and strengths. A relationship cannot exist

SUNDAYS
Live on Zoom
9 PM IL / 2 PM EDT

28 minutes
of *tachlis* tips
for olim.

OLIM PAVEWAY
TOOLBOX TALKS
LIVE
paveway

Toolbox Archives: <https://www.youtube.com/@OlimPavewayVideo>

Register here: <https://olimpaveway.com/all-events/>

Olim Paveway: <https://olimpaveway.com>

without two participants. If we serve Hashem mechanically, without bringing our authentic selves into the relationship, our Avodat Hashem becomes dry and routine. The goal is not to eliminate the “אני,” but to place it in its proper position, after מודה.

לִפְנֵי – The essence of Jewish living is contained in this one word: לפניך. My life is lived before Hashem - not only in shul and not only while learning Torah or doing mitzvot, but in every conversation, every business decision, every interaction with family, and every private thought. Hashem is always present, and spiritual growth begins when we train ourselves to live with that awareness.

מִלְפָּנֵי חַי וְקַיִם – Before whom do I stand? Not an abstract Creator who fashioned the world long ago and stepped back. I stand before a מִלְפָּנֵי חַי וְקַיִם, a living, eternal King who is actively sustaining every moment of creation and intimately involved in every detail of my life.

This is the mindset Chazal wanted to become our daily perspective.

A few days ago, I had the opportunity to learn Modeh Ani together with my 12-year-old son. To my great surprise, the next morning when I went to wake him for school, instead of the usual groaning and complaining, he immediately jumped up and, with a

big smile, recited the words of Modeh Ani.

I'm not sure this will continue to happen every morning (wishful thinking!) but it taught me something important. When these words are not only said, but understood, they begin to shape the way a person wakes up, and by extension, the way a person lives. The internal mantra we begin our day with is not theoretical, it becomes the lens through which reality is experienced. This is exactly what Chazal gave us. Before anything else can define us, we are given six words to define ourselves with: gratitude, awareness, and the recognition that our lives are a gift from Hashem.

May we be zocheh to approach Modeh Ani not as routine, but as a daily renewal of perspective, so that the very first words of our day will continue to shape everything that follows. ■

THE APPLIANCE DOCTOR
SHLOMO ROSHGADOL
 058-558-2630
 All brands, all models
 In Jerusalem, Gush Etzion, Bet Shemesh
 and everywhere in between.
 Service within 24 hours.

Netanel Shimoff
Injury & Health Claims
 Car Accidents | Medical Malpractice
 Work Accidents | Negligence &
 Insurance | Bituach Leumi

SHIMOFF AZOULAY
 Law Firm

Avia Azoulay
Civil & Commercial
 Corporate | NGO's | Contracts
 Dispute Resolution & Litigation
 Wills & Estates

📞 02-5660002 📍 King George 16 A Jerusalem 📧 Office@aslegal.co.il 🌐 aslegal.co.il
Serving clients across Israel – professionally and personally