



TOWARDS MEANINGFUL TEFILLA

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Modeh Ani Part II: A Second Chance Every Morning

Karen could hardly believe her luck. She had just been offered the opportunity of a lifetime: to house-sit a magnificent mansion. She would live there rent-free, and all she had to do was keep the house clean and in good condition. If she took proper care of it, she would be generously rewarded. But if the house was damaged through her negligence, she would be held responsible. At first, Karen was extremely careful. She tiptoed through the house, making sure everything stayed spotless. But as the weeks turned into months, she became comfortable, and then careless. Little by little, she stopped cleaning up after herself. Clutter accumulated, garbage piled up, and before long the once-beautiful mansion looked neglected and run-down. One day, the owners informed her that they needed the house for the weekend. Karen, having long forgotten

that the mansion wasn't really hers, simply packed up and left without making any effort to clean it.

Imagine the owners' reaction. They opened the door to find their beautiful home in shambles. Surely, they would never let Karen return. Surely, they would charge her for the damage she had caused. But that's not what happened. When Karen returned after the weekend, she was stunned. The mansion was immaculate. Every room sparkled. Everything had been repaired and restored. Sitting on the kitchen counter was a simple note: "Karen, here's a second chance. We know you can do it."

It sounds like an impossible ending. Yet, in many ways, it is the story of every single morning of our lives. The Chatam Sofer explains that Hashem has entrusted each of us with something infinitely more precious than a mansion—our neshama. If we care for it properly, we will receive immeasurable reward in the World to Come. If we damage it, we will ultimately be held accountable.

Every night, we temporarily return our neshamot to Hashem. If we truly stopped to think about it, we should feel embarrassed. Hashem sees exactly how we have treated the holy Neshama that He entrusted to us. He could justifiably say, "This is how you cared



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for My precious gift? Clearly you are not taking proper care of it. Why should I return it to you?"

Yet He doesn't. Instead, He lovingly cleans our neshamot. He removes the weariness, the stress, and the spiritual exhaustion that have accumulated throughout the day. He fills us with fresh kochot, renewed energy, and another opportunity to become who we were meant to be. Every morning, He sends us the same message: "Here's a second chance. I know you can do it."

The Midrash Tehillim beautifully describes this process: נפשו יגעה עליו ושחוקה — by the end of the day, a person's neshama is weary and worn out. But when Hashem returns it the next morning, it is like a בריה חדשה—an entirely new creation.

With this background, we can better appreciate the second half of Modeh Ani.

That You returned my soul to me. - שהחזרת בי נשמתי - Considering the condition in which I returned it, the fact that You gave it back to me at all is astounding.

Why do we use the word חמלה here? Why not use the words ברחס or ברחם? The Vilna Gaon explains that the word חמלה is specifically used when there was legitimate reason for anger. Hashem had every reason to be upset after seeing the condition of our neshamot. Yet instead of responding with anger, He responds with compassion.

The Mishnah Berura notes

that one should be careful to pause between the words רבה and בחמלה. The word רבה (great) is not describing Hashem's חמלה. Rather, it introduces the next phrase:

רבה אמונתך - Great is your faith. But whose faith is being described? It's a bit ambiguous.

The Netziv understands these words as referring to our faith in Hashem. Each morning, Hashem determines the events that will unfold throughout the world that day. We begin the day by expressing our trust that whatever He decrees is ultimately for the good. The Netziv therefore writes that the morning is an especially significant time for Tefillah. As the day's events are being determined, we should pause to daven that Hashem guide everything that will take place that day, both in our personal lives

שהחזרת בי נשמתי בחמלה

Every night, we temporarily return our neshamot to Hashem. If we truly stopped to think about it, we should feel embarrassed. Hashem sees exactly how we have treated the holy Neshama He entrusted to us. He could justifiably say, "This is how you cared for My precious gift? Clearly you are not taking proper care of it. Why should I return it to you?"

Yet He doesn't. Instead, He lovingly cleans our neshamot. He removes the weariness, the stress, and the spiritual exhaustion that have accumulated throughout the day. He fills us with fresh kochot, renewed energy, and another opportunity to become who we were meant to be.



Every morning, He sends us the same beautiful message: "Here's a second chance. I know you can do it."

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and throughout the world, in the best way possible.

The Chatam Sofer, however, offers a completely different interpretation. He explains that אמונתך refers to Hashem's faith in us. Every morning we proclaim: "How great is Your belief in me!" After everything You saw yesterday, You still returned my neshama. You still believe that I can become better. Every single morning, You renew Your confidence in me and give me another opportunity to succeed. What a powerful way to begin the day. No matter what happened yesterday, no matter how many mistakes I made or how far I may have strayed, I wake up knowing that Hashem still believes in me. He is rooting for me, supporting me, and giving me another chance. With that realization, I can get out of bed with confidence and face a brand-new day.

Perhaps this is also one of the greatest lessons we can learn as parents, teachers, spouses, and friends. Sometimes the greatest gift we can give another person is not advice or criticism, but our belief in them. When someone knows that we truly believe in their potential, it gives them the strength and confidence to believe in themselves and to keep moving forward. ■



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