



## TOWARDS MEANINGFUL TEFILLA

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# Asher Yatzar: A Moment to Stop and Focus

When my seven year old daughter Ayelet walks out of the bathroom, she doesn't rush back to what she was doing. Instead, she stops, stands completely still, and recites Asher Yatzar slowly and with complete concentration. She does this numerous times a day and has been doing it ever since she was three! .

Watching her always gives me pause. Here is a little girl who instinctively understands that this bracha deserves her full attention. Every time I see her, I ask myself: *When was the last time I truly stopped to appreciate the incredible miracle my body has just performed?*

Not long ago, I was reminded of this lesson in a very different way. As I sat writing this article, sipping a cup of coffee, a large gulp somehow went down the wrong pipe. What should have happened? The coffee should have continued into my airway, interfered with my breathing, and sent me rushing to

the emergency room. Instead, before I even had time to realize what was happening, my body sprang into action. Instinctively, I began coughing, expelling the coffee and protecting me from serious harm.

Is that unusual? Not at all. In fact, it's so ordinary that I didn't even think to mention it to anyone afterwards. I certainly wasn't going to recite *Birkat HaGomel*. It was simply one of the countless miracles our bodies perform every single day—miracles we rarely stop to notice.

That, in essence, is what the bracha of Asher Yatzar is all about: recognizing and appreciating the extraordinary miracles hidden within the ordinary functioning of our bodies.

We recite Asher Yatzar each time we use the bathroom (**Gemara Berachot 60b**). In addition, the **Rama** writes that it is considered one of the morning blessings and should be recited first thing in the morning, beginning our day by acknowledging these remarkable, often-overlooked miracles.

The **Mashgiach of Ponevezh** used to say that the functioning of all of the body's systems is an even greater miracle than *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. The more one studies medicine and learns anatomy, the more one comes to appreciate the incredible wisdom reflected in the human body. Examining the digestive

*Beyond Tisha B'av*

### **Live Kiddush Hashem**

*Greet everyone with a smile.*

*Judge others favorably.*

*Forgive a friend, spouse, relative,  
neighbor, or co-worker.*

**Together we can bring the Geulah**

system, the reproductive system, or any other aspect of the body's design should naturally lead us to a profound recognition of, gratitude to, and love for Hashem.

Let's take a closer look at some of the phrases in this beautiful bracha.

**האדם בחכמה** – *Who formed man with wisdom.* Hashem created the human body with infinite wisdom, providing every detail necessary for it to function properly. This phrase can also be understood another way: Hashem created man with the innate instincts that keep us away from danger—for example, avoiding rotten food or blinking when something approaches the eye.

**וברא בו נקבים נקבים חלולים חלולים** – *He created within him many openings and many hollow spaces.* **Rashi** (Gemara Brachot) explains that if one of the body's openings, such as the mouth or nose, were completely blocked, or if one of its enclosed organs, such as the heart or intestines, were to rupture, life itself would be impossible.

**גלוי וידוע לפני כסא כבוד** – *It is revealed and known before Your Throne of Glory.* **Rav Shaul Rubin**, author of *Tziyunei Derech*, explains that there is still so much we do not know about the human body. For many years, doctors believed that the appendix served no purpose and routinely removed it during other abdominal surgeries. Only later did researchers discover that it plays an important role in maintaining healthy gut bacteria.

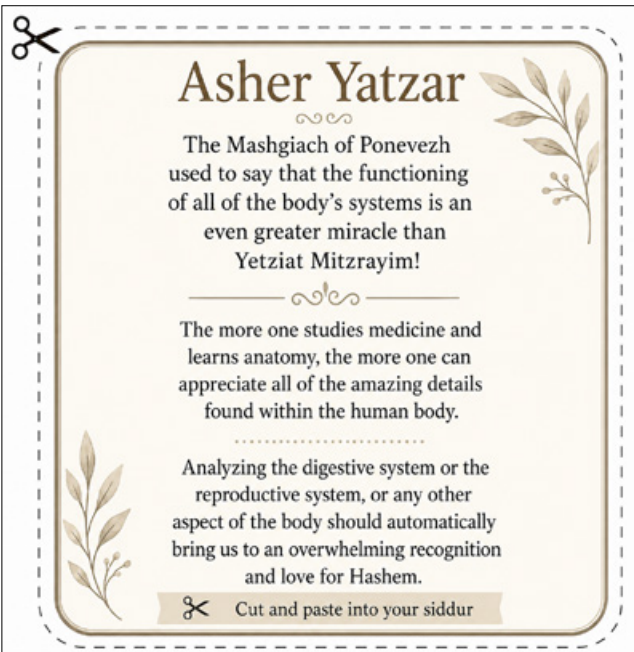
This reminds us that even with all the advances of modern medicine, we understand only

a fraction of the body's incredible complexity. When we praise Hashem for creating the human body, we acknowledge that although we may not understand the purpose of every organ and every system, He knows precisely why each one was created.

The mention of **לפני כסא כבוד** is particularly striking. One might have thought that it is inappropriate to mention the *Kisei HaKavod* in a blessing associated with the bathroom. More broadly, many people feel uncomfortable making a bracha about something as mundane as bodily functions.

The **Gra** teaches the opposite. This bracha reminds us that Hashem's involvement extends to every aspect of our lives. Not only is the creation of the body itself guided by Divine wisdom, but every one of its daily functions, even the body's elimination of waste, is carried out under Hashem's constant supervision and Divine Providence.

**שאם יפתח אחד מהם או יסתם אחד מהם אי**



**Asher Yatzar**

The Mashgiach of Ponevezh used to say that the functioning of all of the body's systems is an even greater miracle than Yetziat Mitzrayim!

The more one studies medicine and learns anatomy, the more one can appreciate all of the amazing details found within the human body.

Analyzing the digestive system or the reproductive system, or any other aspect of the body should automatically bring us to an overwhelming recognition and love for Hashem.

✂ Cut and paste into your siddur

*If one of them were to be opened when it should be closed, or closed when it should be open, it would be impossible to survive and stand before You.*

The continued functioning of our bodies depends on countless delicate systems working together in perfect harmony. The slightest malfunction can have devastating consequences, reminding us how completely dependent we are upon Hashem every moment.

**ברוך אתה ה' רופא כל בשר ומפליא לעשות** – *Blessed are You, Hashem, Who heals all flesh and performs wonders.*

Here we acknowledge not only the extraordinary design of the human body, but also its remarkable ability to heal itself. Cuts close, bones mend, infections are fought, and countless repairs take place every day without our even being aware of them. The combined operation of all these intricate systems truly is מפליא לעשות, nothing short of wondrous.

The **Chofetz Chaim** taught that reciting Asher Yatzar with concentration is a *segulah* for good health, and many inspiring stories have been shared illustrating this idea. One such story involves a twenty-year-old yeshiva student, Yossi Hecht, who underwent a ten-hour surgery to remove a spinal tumour. Following the operation, he was unable to relieve himself without the aid of a catheter.

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Two hundred of his friends accepted upon themselves to stand still while reciting Asher Yatzar, saying every word with complete concentration. Two days later, the catheter was removed, and he was able to function independently.

Let's try and follow the lead of these 200 Yeshiva students and of my 7 year old daughter Ayelet to stop, stand still, and give this bracha the attention it deserves. Even if we begin with just one Asher Yatzar each day, perhaps the first one we recite in the morning, and say it slowly and with genuine concentration, it can transform the way we view our bodies and our relationship with Hashem. ■



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