



RABBI SHALOM

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Personalizing Our Practice

וְאֶעֱשֶׂךָ לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְאֶבְרַכְךָ וְאֶגְדְּלָהּ שְׁמֶךָ וְהָיָה
בְּרַכָּה (בראשית יב:ב)

And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will aggrandize your name, and [you shall] be a blessing. (Bereshit 12:2).

In the *amida* (*shmona esre*) we bow on four occasions. At the end of the *amida* we bow as we recite מודים אנחנו לך (**modim anachenu lach**) as well as during the bracha of להודות נאה (Hatov Shimcha uLecha na'eh **P'hodot**). Both relate to **hoda'ah**.

We also bow twice at the beginning of the *amida*. When we recite the opening bracha of אלוקי אברהם, אלוקי יצחק ואלוקי יעקב as well as at the end of that bracha when we recite אברהם מגן.

Given that we are expressing our appreciation or admission (הודאה) to Hashem when we bow at the end of the *shmona esre*, it makes sense to bow.¹ **However, why**

1. As we mentioned in the past, the word להודות – can be interpreted in two ways. It can refer to an expression of gratitude, or to an admission. Rav Hutner explains that in order to thank someone, one needs to admit that they cannot manage alone. Given that the word has two meanings, how can you know which meaning of “*modeh*” is being referred to in a given context? Rav Hutner explains that the answer depends on the preposition that follows “*modeh*.” If one is “*modeh al*,” then he offers thanks **for** something. If he is “*modeh she-*,”

do we bow twice at the beginning of the amida? Rav Shwab (Ma'ayan Beit Hasho-eva) offers an intriguing explanation.

The gemara in Pesachim 117b citing a pasuk from our parsha states as follows: ואעשך לגוי גדול זהו שאומרים אלהי אברהם, ואברכך זהו שאומרים אלהי יצחק, ואגדלה שמך זהו שאומרים אלהי יעקב. יכול יהו חותמין בכולן? ת"ל והיה ברכה, בך חותמין ואין חותמין בכולן.

“And I will make of you a great nation”; this is why we say: God of Abraham. “And I will bless you”; this is fulfilled when we say: God of Isaac. “And I will make your name great”; this is fulfilled when we say: God of Jacob. One might have thought that we ought to conclude with all the forefathers; yet the verse states: “And you will be a blessing” i.e., with you, Avraham, we will conclude the blessing, rather than mention all of the forefathers.”

The opening paragraph of the *shmona esre* contains two parts. First we mention the God of each of our *avot*- highlighting the *masoret* (tradition) that is passed on from generation to generation. Without

then he admits to something. In *Shmona Esre*, the bracha of *hoda'a* (“*Modim*”) contains both meanings. First, we say “*Modim anachnu lach sha'ata...*” – we “admit to” God’s omnipotence. Later, we say: “*nodeh lecha...al hayeinu*,” – “thanking” Hashem **for** our lives.

the transmission of Torah through the generations, we would not know how to worship Hashem. Yet, we conclude the blessing with a reference to Avraham alone - מגן אברהם. Each of us is to serve Hashem like Avraham. Someone who had no role model to follow. Avraham had to establish a personal relationship with Hashem. Although we have the privilege of receiving our tradition from past generations, each of us needs to develop an intimate relationship with Hashem.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik expressed a similar idea when explaining the text of מה קלי ואנוהו אלוקי אבי וארוממנהו - Although our tradition is passed to us from our forefathers, we ought to develop our own unique bond with Hashem.

That is why we bow twice at the beginning of the *shmona esre*. First to highlight that we appreciate the tradition that we have received from our ancestors. Then we bow again when we include the bracha with reference only to Avraham, to reflect that we value our personal connection to Hashem, similar in nature to Avraham who was able to deduce on his own the existence of Hashem.

When we recite the *amida*, may we keep in mind how we value our tradition, as well as our unique personal relationship with Hashem. This intimate connection is established through the study of Torah and tefilla. Perhaps that is why the brachot in *shmona esre* do not include the term מלך העולם which is prevalent in most other brachot that we recite throughout the day. *Shmona esre* is a more intimate prayer, where we are not relating to God as a distant “king” (מלך), but rather as a close family member אלוקי אברהם

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– the father of our forefathers. May we build upon our direct and unique relationship with our Creator! ■