



Bet Horach

בית הוראה

Shaare Ezra

עברי עזרא

Parshat Shemot
Zmanim for New York:
Candle Lighting: 4:38pm
Shabbat ends: 5:42pm
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PRAYERS THAT POUR: THE POWER OF GRATITUDE AND ASKING FOR MORE
 WRITTEN BY **RABBI SHAY TAHAN**
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A few weeks ago, we wrote about the new song that has become almost a Jewish anthem, proclaiming that Hashem loves me and that I will always have only good, and more good, and more good.

Following the many comments we received on that article—despite not taking a side but merely presenting the two opinions—some expressed hurt over the Rambam’s statement that Hashem despises the wicked. Others were upset by the challenge to the positive notion that we should feel we will only experience good, while others emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance between optimism and realism, arguing that overly simplistic interpretations could lead to disappointment or confusion when challenges arise. Still, others appreciated the discussion, feeling it highlighted the depth and nuance of Jewish faith and trust in Hashem.

The article discussed the significant controversy surrounding these lyrics, as some rabbis felt they were not aligned with our *mesorah* for several reasons. One of the main concerns is the claim that a person cannot assert with certainty that they will experience only good. The *Chazon Ish* explains that the true meaning of *bitachon*—trust in Hashem—is not the belief that we are guaranteed to receive what we desire, as we do not know the future and are not prophets. Rather, *bitachon* means trusting that everything that happens is from Hashem and is ultimately for the best.

We also explained that we believe whatever Hashem does for us is ultimately what is best at any given moment, even if we don’t fully understand it. Therefore, saying "we will only have good" may seem to contradict this notion, as the good we desire might not align with the true good that Hashem has intended for us. Thus, one must trust that whatever Hashem brings their way is the ultimate good.

On the surface, this understanding—rooted in the

writings of many *Rishonim* who explain the concept of *bitachon*—seems to contrast with the famous words of the Tzemach Tzedek, who popularized the saying, "Think good, and it will be good." This phrase suggests that our mindset has the power to influence and



shape our destiny toward the good we desire. In contrast, the *Rishonim* explained that it is our *mitzvot* and *aveirot* that determine our future outcomes. While there is also a concept known as the *obligations of the heart*, which means that feelings and mindset do play a role, their influence is similar to performing the physical *mitzvot*. In other words, fulfilling the *obligations of the heart* may impact our future, but it does

not guarantee that our desires will be fulfilled. In that article, we briefly outlined various points, each of which requires further exploration and detailed explanation. Today, we would like to delve deeper into the question: Is it correct to say, "I will have better and better," if I don’t know the future?

One could argue that the song is not suggesting certainty about the future but rather expressing a plea to Hashem for things to improve. The issue with this is that the words seem to suggest not a prayer, but rather a statement of fact that things will be good.

Chabad Chassidim have uncovered a fascinating letter from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, emphasizing that one should always ask Hashem for more and more good. However, this differs from the song, as we explained, because the song declares that we will only have good as a statement of fact, not as a request.

However, even if we interpret the lyrics as a form of prayer, this raises another question: If Hashem always provides what is best for us, how can we ask for "better"? If something "better" were truly good for us, wouldn’t Hashem have already given it?

The answer lies in the essence of *tefila* (prayer). Hashem wants us to ask for improvements and the things we desire, such as health, success, liveli-

THE HALACHIC PERSPECTIVE ON NON-JEWISH HOLIDAYS

hood, a good match, righteous children, and more. Hashem waits for us to express our requests in prayer as a way to connect with Him, and it is through this connection that He grants us blessings. Thus, when we say, "I will have more good," we are not negating the belief that our current situation is good. Rather, we are expressing our hope and request that the future will be even better. For example, the Patriarchs and Matriarchs were initially childless because Hashem desired their heartfelt prayers for children. Their prayers became a source of merit, deepening their connection to Hashem and paving the way for blessings to flow. Without asking for good, Hashem may hold it back, even if we deserve it. When Hashem created the trees, they were initially fruitless because humans had not yet been created to pray for rain to make them grow. This principle extends even further (Rashi Bereshit 2; 5).

The *mefarshim* explain that when one receives abundant good from Hashem, they should ask for more. Without asking, the flow of blessing may cease. We learn this from Leah, who, after giving birth to her fourth son, Yehudah, thanked Hashem (Bereshit 29; 35). The following words in the pasuk state that she stopped having children.

The *Ibn Ezra* seems to wonder why she stopped having children and why she would be "punished" for expressing gratitude to Hashem. He answers that because Leah thanked Hashem without simultaneously asking for more, the abundance stopped. When one thanks Hashem without asking for more, it indicates a sense of satisfaction, as if they don't need or want anything more. In this way, it's as though one is telling Hashem to stop pouring additional blessings.

This highlights the importance of not only expressing gratitude but

also continuing to pray for ongoing blessings. We say *Birkat HaGomel* to thank Hashem for being saved from danger or distress, such as recovering from illness, traveling safely, or recovering from a sickness. It is a public acknowledgment of gratitude to Hashem for His kindness.

The crowd responds, "*Mi shegemalcha kol tov hu yigmalcha kol tov selah*"—"May He who has bestowed good upon you continue to bestow good upon you forever." Rav Baruch Epstein (author of *Torah Tmima* in Baruch Sheamar) explains this response in line with the principle we discussed above. It not only expresses gratitude on behalf of the congregation but also includes a request for continued blessings, emphasizing the idea that thanking Hashem should be accompanied by asking for more good.

Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak of Lublin derived this insight from the story of Choni HaMe'agel (Ta'anit 23). In the story, Choni prayed for rain, resulting in an overabundance, far more than necessary. When the people pleaded with him to pray for the rain to stop, he instructed them to bring a bull for thanksgiving (*Par Hoda'ah*). As the narrative recounts, they brought the bull, Choni offered it, and the rain ceased.

The Rebbe of Lublin explained that Choni's act carried a profound message: by offering the *Par Hoda'ah*, he signified that the community had fully emerged from their distress and no longer needed the additional blessings of rain. This acknowledgment itself naturally brought the rainfall to an end.

To summarize, it is recommended that while singing, one should have the intention of asking Hashem for more good. However, if one simply has in mind the assurance that only good will come, it is highly controversial, as we cannot know the future.

THE HALACHIC LESSONS OF A RAGING FIRE

As wildfires rage across Los Angeles, leaving destruction in their wake, the raw power and unpredictability of fire come to the forefront of our minds. Fire, while a source of life and warmth has the potential to become a devastating force when it escapes control. This dual nature of fire—both beneficial and destructive—has long been a focus of halachic analysis.

As we'll see, the obligation for the damages caused by fire lies upon the arsonist, as well as the office of the LA governor, which failed to make sure that measures were in place to prevent and control the fire.

The Torah's treatment of fire emphasizes the responsibility of individuals to ensure that their actions, even when seemingly minor, do not lead to catastrophic harm. Beyond its physical impact, fire serves as a poignant metaphor for human accountability: when kindled carelessly, even the smallest spark can spiral into a blaze of damage.

In halachic discussions, *esh* (fire) is categorized as one of the primary forms of *mazik*. The unique nature of *esh* lies in its ability to spread and cause harm through an external force, such as wind, while originating from human action. The Torah establishes liability for damages caused by fire, as seen in the pasuk,



"When a fire goes out and finds thorns, consuming stacked grain... the one who kindled the fire shall make restitution" (*Shemot 22:5*).

This reflects the general principle that a person bears responsibility for controlling their fire and preventing it from causing harm.

The Gemara explains that the *chidush* (novelty) in obligating the arsonist is that fire does not have the ability to spread on its own; rather, it requires a medium, such as wind. One might think that merely lighting a match in my house, which then spreads to a neighbor's house due to the wind, would be beyond my responsibility. However, the Gemara teaches that the individual is still held

accountable.

A significant debate regarding the nature of liability for *esh* occurs between Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish (Baba Kama 22a).

Rabbi Yochanan views *esh* as an extension of the person who kindled it, based on the concept of *kocho* (one's force). According to this perspective, the damage caused by fire is directly attributed to the individual, as though the fire acts as their agent. This framework emphasizes personal responsibility for initiating and managing the fire.

Reish Lakish, however, understands *esh* through the lens of

SUFGANIYOT: A STICKY AND SWEET HALACHIC TREAT

mammono (one's property). He argues that fire is akin to one's possessions, such as an animal or object that causes damage. The liability stems from the person's failure to properly guard or control their "property," in this case, the fire.

This *machloket* has far-reaching implications for the halachic parameters of liability in cases where fire causes damage indirectly or unintentionally. For example, according to Rabbi Yochanan, liability might extend further due to the personal nature of *kocho*. In contrast, Reish Lakish's view, which ties liability to the fire as property, may limit responsibility to situations where negligence in guarding the "property" can be proven.

In the discussion in the Gemara, Rabbi Yochanan appears to agree with Reish Lakish that *esh* (fire) can also be considered a liability as one's property. Consequently, Rabbi Yochanan holds that there are two distinct reasons to obligate the individual: one based on their personal act (*kocho*), and the other as their property (*mammono*). The *psak halacha* in the Shulchan Aruch (C.M. siman 418; 17) follows Rabbi Yochanan's view, establishing liability for both reasons. This conclusion implies that one who sets a fire is obligated to pay not only for property damage but also for injuries caused to individuals.

When a person (Adam HaMazik) causes injury to another, the Torah obligates them to compensate the victim through five categories of payment (*Chamisha Dvarim*):

1. **Nezek (Damage):** Compensation for the reduction in the victim's physical ability or value (e.g., loss of earning potential).
2. **Tza'ar (Pain):** Payment for the physical pain endured by the

victim, even if no financial loss occurred.

3. **Ripui (Medical Expenses):** Reimbursement for the cost of medical treatment required due to the injury.

4. **Shevet (Lost Wages):** Compensation for income lost while the victim is unable to work during recovery.

5. **Boshet (Embarrassment):** Payment for the humiliation caused to the victim, evaluated based on the circumstances and societal norms.

These categories reflect the multifaceted nature of liability, addressing both tangible and intangible harms. They apply to arson as well, as arson is viewed as an extension of the person's actions, placing it under the category of *Adam HaMazik*. Thus, according to Rabbi Yochanan, the arsonist is obligated to pay. However, according to Reish Lakish, who holds that liability for fire damages is based on *mamon haMazik* (the person's property that caused the damage), only the first category, *nezek* (damage), is applicable.

Even more severe, if a person dies as a result of the fire, the arsonist is considered a murderer and is subject to capital punishment if the fire was set intentionally.

Due to the severity of the harm fire can cause, the Gemara discusses at length the precautions one must take, such as ensuring that an oven is placed in a safe and secure location to prevent a fire from starting. The *Aruch HaShulchan* (C.M. siman 155; 2) further emphasizes that the government has an obligation to implement necessary measures to prevent fires, making government officials accountable if they fail to fulfill their responsibilities in this regard.

JOURNEYS AND BLESSINGS: HALACHOT OF RECITING HAGOMEL AFTER TRAVEL

As people return from winter vacation, they should remember to recite the *Hagomel* blessing, as most have traveled to distant locations, which typically require this bracha. We'll touch upon three common modes of travel: ship, car, and plane.

But first, let's categorize the four types of people whom Chazal obligated to say the *Hagomel* blessing.

Four Categories of People Who Must Recite Hagomel:

1. **Yordei HaYam**- those who sailed on the sea: When a person has safely completed a sea voyage, they must thank Hashem by reciting *Hagomel*.
2. **Holchei Midbarot**- those who journeyed through deserts: Those who traveled through dangerous, desolate areas where they could face significant threats must also recite *Hagomel* upon reaching safety.
3. **Choleh**- one who was ill and recovered: Someone who was dangerously ill and has now recovered expresses gratitude by reciting the blessing.
4. **Chavush Beit HaAsurim**- one who was imprisoned and was freed: If a person was in captivity or imprisoned and has been released, they are obligated to recite the *Hagomel* blessing.

Let's delve into the details of two of the four categories mentioned above, specifically those relevant to returning from a winter

vacation.

The first category is **Yam** (the sea), meaning anyone who has traveled on the sea, such as on a cruise. Some poskim (Chacham Ovaida) even obligate those who went swimming in the sea to recite *Hagomel*, although the majority of poskim require that the person must have been in a boat or ship for at least 72 minutes or more in order to be obligated to say the blessing. If the travel by sea was shorter than that, no blessing is required.

Secondly, there is traveling by car from city to city, a distance of 72 minutes from the outskirts of the city.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (219; 7) writes that Ashkenazim do not recite the blessing for traveling from one city to another, as this type of travel does not fall under any of the four categories mentioned above. However, Sephardim do recite the blessing, as they consider traveling between cities to be dangerous. Still, some Sephardic poskim argue that today's roads are considered safe and do not require the blessing, unless one is traveling on unsafe or deserted roads.

Finally, there is traveling by airplane, which, according to the majority of opinions, requires the *Hagomel* blessing due to the inherent danger of being in the air and not on the safety of the ground. Some opinions, however, stipulate that the plane must fly over water to classify the journey as akin to crossing the sea.



THE HALACHOT OF POST-CHANUKAH PRACTICES

The Blessing Itself:

• The person reciting the blessing says: *"HaGomel LeChayavim Tovot, SheGamalani Kol Tov."* ("Blessed are You, Hashem, Who bestows kindness upon the guilty, Who has shown me all goodness.")

The congregation responds: *"Mi SheGamalcha Kol Tov, Hu Yigmalcha Kol Tov, Selah."* ("May He Who has bestowed upon you all goodness; continue to bestow upon you all goodness, forever.")

Halachic Requirements:

• **In the Presence of a Minyan:** The blessing must be recited in

front of a minyan (ten men). This is based on the verse: *"Ve'romemuhu Be'kahal Am, U'v'mishpat Zekanim Yahaleluhu"* ("And He will be praised in the assembly of the people, and in the council of the elders, He will be exalted").

• **If a Minyan is Not Present:** If there is no congregation of ten men, it is still recommended to say the blessing, but it is considered ideal to do so in the presence of a minyan.

When to Recite: The custom is to say *Hagomel* after the reading of the Torah, when a minyan is generally present, though the blessing may be recited at other appropriate times as well.

לא יעיין בטלפון של חברו ללא רשות.

ידוע שרבינו גרשום המכונה מאור הגולה (חי במאה ה 11 והיה מגדולי טעם שני הנסמך על הפסוק 'לא תלך רכיל בעמיר' הוא שיש איסור לבקש ולחפש מסתוריו של חברו. לפי טעם זה ודאי שאין לך רכילות וביקוש מסתוריו של חברו גדול מלהתבונן בסתר בתיקו ולעיין בדברים הפרטיים שלו. גניבת דעתו שמגלה מצפוני לבו, דהיינו סודותיו, וודאי שזה ששייך גם כאן.



ומכאן למדנו דרך אגב שאסור להתבונן בטלפון של אחרים בלא רשותם, ואפילו אם הם נותנים לנו רשות עדיין אסור להתבונן ולראות הודעות שהגיעו להם מאחרים, כיון שאז אנו עוברים על כל האיסורים דלעיל כלפי שולחי הודעות.

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טעם ראשון הוא משום ואהבת לרעך כמוך, וכן מה ששנא לך על תעשה לחברך. וגם כאן כיון שאם היו תיקנו מגיעים לידיהם של אחרים לא היינו רוצים שיפתחו ויתבוננו בתכולתם, אם כן גם לנו יש להימנע מלעשות כן לאחרים.

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