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In discussing the Jewish meaning of gratitude, we must at once understand that gratitude, thankfulness, is a good thing. That might sound terribly simple to many of you. However, is it not really plain. It was a great French philosopher, Diderot, who like others of his age was a great cynic, who said that, "Gratitude is a burden, and every burden is made to be shaken off". There is, of course, something to this. Many people have observed that "do a man a favor and he becomes your greatest enemy". I am sure that every one of us, at one time or another, felt resentful when required to feel grateful to some individual. You feel that it binds you in a certain way, and no man wants to feel bound and obligated. So that gratitude can very well be a burden, and burdens, according to our French philosopher, were made to be shaken off.

The Jew, however, took the opposite point of view. To him gratitude was a wonderful thing, a very human expression, and, in a way, one of the pillars of society. TOV LEHODOS LASHEM says King David, that sweet singer of Israel, "It is good to thank G-d". KI LECHAH TOV LEHODOS, says the same author of the Psalms, "It is so good to give thanks unto You". Obviously, the Psalmist had already heard in his age the same cynical rumblings against gratitude that we hear in our own. And he therefore gave concrete expression to the Jewish attitude that gratitude is a wonderful thing. More than that, it is also a duty. And our Rabbis maintained that there are times when a man must give thanks. Just look at the Bible. Not only is gratitude to be expressed by Man to his G-d, not only by Man to his fellow Man, but even to animals. LA'KELEV TASHLICHUN OSO. We are bidden to award meats that have become non-Kosher to the dog. And the reason? Because the dogs refrained from barking at our ancestors when they left Egypt. It was quite a thing for dogs who had been trained to guard the slave from escape, to allow over a half a million Jews

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to leave their cells and not bark. We therefore express our gratitude to them by feeding them. Or, take parents who have children who are just learning how to talk. The very first civilized expression they are taught is; "Thank you". Or take some of our modern Israelis. Just after the recent war of Independence one of them, who was decidedly left of center, was heard to remark, "I don't know if there is a G-d, but I thank Him for the miracles He performs" <sup>every day</sup>. So that people in our modern day and age have come to prefer David over Diderot, and the Psalms over the French Encyclopedia. Yes, gratitude is good, and for this reason: that is the cement which binds together man with his fellow man, and which keeps standing the structure of society. Without the gratitude that one man feels for another, without the good will and closeness which it engenders, the world becomes merely a vast ocean in which there float about just so many droplets of humanity, unrelated to each other, unbound to each other, ungrateful to each other, and unconcerned over one another. HODU LASHEM KI TOV, "Give thanks unto the Lord", not only because "He is good", but also because, "It is good". that is, because it is good for Man to give thanks.

Granted, then, that gratitude is a good thing, we must now proceed to a second thought which is, perhaps, more basic and profoundly Jewish. Let me introduce you to this idea by way of one of the interesting comments our Rabbis had to make on this week's Portion. You will recall that Jacob was on his death-bed and to each son he gave a parting message - to some a rebuke, to others a blessing. His first three sons he reproached and he openly expressed his displeasure at their behavior. But when he came to Judah, he had nothing but unmitigated praise. YEHUDA, he told him, ATAH YODUCHA ACHECHA, "Judah, your brothers will be grateful to you". - so much so, that they will declare you their leader and King. And the innocent student of this week's parsha is rather amazed. It was quite a gift which that old Patriarch bequeathed to his son. And we wonder what it was about Judah

that made him so deserving of his brother's gratitude. On the contrary, just last week the Torah spoke in no uncertain terms of Judah's moral weakness in his dealings with his daughter-in-law Tamar. And the Rabbis are severe in their reproach of Judah in his behavior towards Joseph when he suggested selling the young dreamer into slavery. But if Jacob, who did not pull any punches even on his death bed, observed the deep gratitude of his other sons toward Judah, then obviously Judah must have had a very special kind of deserving personality. He must have been himself a very grateful person, a person to whom gratitude was not "a burden to be shaken off", but a very good thing. Only a person who himself can be grateful, can ever hope to receive the gratitude of his fellows. BEMIDAH SHE'ADOM MODED, MODDIDIN LO, As a person acts towards others, so do others act to him. Now, where do we find gratitude on the part of Judah; or better, where do we find that he had a capacity for gratitude? On what, in other words, is the Jewish meaning of gratitude based?

Our Rabbis of the Midrash suggest an answer to that question when they elaborate upon Jacob's statement and say: AMAR LO, ATAH HODAISAH BE'MAASEH TAMAR, YODUCHAH ACHECHAH LI'HCYOS ALEHAM MELECH. "Said Jacob to Judah, 'My son, you sincerely confessed your sin in your affair with Tamar, let your brothers be grateful to you by making you their King'. How cleverly our Sages understood human nature! You see, we must at once decide upon the exact implications and consequences of that word "Gratitude". For "YODUCHAH" means not "they will be thankful to you" but "they will be grateful to you". There is a very real difference between thankfulness and gratitude. Thankfulness is the courteous expression of recognition for a convenience rendered. Gratitude is a sentiment which strikes deep into the soul of he who is grateful. Thankfulness is superficial; gratitude - profound. Thankfulness is lip-service; gratitude - soul-service. Thankfulness is touching; gratitude - stirring. Thankfulness means appreciation

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for a favor which you yourself could not do immediately but which you could do later; gratitude means recognition of a favor which you could never accomplish by yourself. You are thankful to a person who has supplied you with a three cents stamp when you were in a hurry to mail an important letter. You are grateful to a person who has saved your life.

In short, gratitude involves a confession of inadequacy or dependency. You have done something for me which I could never attain by myself. I am inadequate; you have fulfilled me. I am lacking, imperfect, incompetent, deficient, powerless; you have provided me with what I so need and cannot supply by myself. It is a confession which comes from humility. How interesting that the Hebrew expression for "I am grateful" - MODEH ANI - also means "I confess". And similarly "HODAYAH" means both gratitude and confession.

And what a great religious principle lies in this idea! Man cannot express his gratitude to G-d unless he acknowledges his dependency upon G-d. Take , for example, the first words a Jew says upon arising every morning: <sup>BEHEMLAH</sup> MODEH ANI LEFANECHAH MELECH CHAI VEKAYAM, SHEHECHEZARTA BI NISHMASI. "I thank You, O Great and living G-d, that you have returned to me my soul with mercy". Mercy indeed ! For here is the acknowledgement that without G-d there is no life, a confession that Man is not independent, that by himself he is nothing. This is more than thankfulness. This is gratitude. Or take the MODIM blessing of the SHMONEH ESRAH which we recite three times daily. Part of that blessing is: NODEH LECHA UNESAPER TEHILOSECHAH AL CHAYENU HAMESOORIM BEYADECHAH VEAL NISHMOSEINU HA'PEKUDOS IACH. - "We shall thank You and relate our praise of You because of our lives which are in Your hands, and our souls which are hidden with You". Here is the epitome of our gratitude to the Ribono Shel Olam; we acknowledge that our lives are in His hands, as clay in the hands of the potter. His to shorten

or to lengthen, to destroy or create. And if G-d has chosen to be good to us, then His is our praise and gratitude. Without that confession, our prayers are merely a platitudinous and empty "Thank you". With it, they become a KARBAN TODAH, a sacrificial offering of gratitude, the offering of the soul. And take that same KARBAN TODAH - the "Todah" offering. Some Rabbis maintain that it means a confessional offering, a confession of sins and shortcomings as in the word VIDUI. Others believe that it represents TODAH AL HANES - gratitude to G-d for some special favor. According to what we have said, however, both are right. It is an expression of thanks, of gratitude, which is based upon a feeling of confession and inadequacy.

And if the capacity for gratitude means the ability to confess a personal inadequacy and imperfection, then indeed Judah is the model of the grateful man. For Judah, above all others, knew the secret of confessing imperfection. And it was for this reason that Judah deserved the gratitude of his brothers and, therefore, the privilege of leadership.

יְהוּדָה יְהוָה יִשְׁכַּח לְךָ, "Judah, your brothers will be grateful to you".

וְיָדָעְתָּ בְּלִבְּךָ כִּי חָטָאתָ לַיהוָה וְשָׁמַח לְךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַח לְךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַח לְךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ

"My son, you so readily and so sincerely confessed your sin with Tamar; you so unequivocally announced 'הִנֵּנִי נֹכַח וְהִיא צְדִיקָה', 'she is right and I am wrong'; you were big enough to see how small you were; you proved that you have that material of which gratitude is made; let; therefore, your brothers be forever grateful to you, and let these bonds of gratitude be the source and the sanction of your government and jurisdiction over them". It is not boasting and a lust for power which qualifies the Jewish prince. Rather - humility and the ability to confess a wrongdoing.

And, in fact, the entire biography of Judah, after whom we are known as יְהוּדִים, reflects this sterling aspect of his character.

(Judah - what a man he must have been!) You will recall that his

birth was accompanied by an expression of gratitude.

וְיָדָעְתָּ בְּלִבְּךָ כִּי חָטָאתָ לַיהוָה וְשָׁמַח לְךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַח לְךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַח לְךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ



"And Leah said, this time will I thank the Lord, and therefore she called him Judah". What an inferiority complex Leah must have borne until she gave birth to Judah. אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ. Her eyes were dull. She was shy and withdrawn. She was an older sister who was overshadowed by a younger sister, and probably the type of girl whose elders predicted she would be barren. Drab, colorless and hopelessly introverted, she got a husband only through her father's ruse. All her life she played second-fiddle to her sister Rachel who was וְרַחֵל הָיְתָה יְסֻס לְבָתָּא beautiful, brilliant, dazzling, a girl for whom Leah was no match. And here they find themselves married to the same man, Jacob, who openly loves Rachel more than her timid sister. How painfully Leah must have borne her lot. Silently she prays to G-d to put her in her husband's good graces. And then, when she bears her fourth son, she finds that she has won Jacob's admiration and love. In a society in which fertility is of primary importance, she gained her husband's respect and affections. וְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ How grateful I am to you, O G-d, for with the birth of Judah I have that which I could never have received without you - my husband's love. And it is thus that she named the child Judah, and it is thus that he lived. \* ~~And, in fact, the entire biography of Judah, after whom we are known as "Yehudim", reflects this sterling aspect of his character.~~

And if, my friends, gratitude is a good thing and it is based upon the humble feeling of inadequacy, then there follows from this, our third, and final, insight into the Jewish Meaning of Gratitude. And that is, particularly in the gratitude Man feels for G-d, a feeling that the favors that G-d has bestowed upon me, and for which I feel grateful, are undeserved by me. When somebody does for me a service which I justly deserve, then my "thank you" is merely a courtesy, it is not gratitude. When I acknowledge, therefore, G-d's gifts, and I express my thanks to Him for sustaining me, then I also imply that I am, in all

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justice, underserving of His favors, It must be a blow to the bloated pride of modern Man to hear that he is undeserving. Yet such is the genuine Jewish attitude. TSADKAH MEMENAI, said Judah of Tamar, "She is more right than I am" - and with this he indicated not only confession but also the acknowledgement that he was undeserving of her patience and sympathy. And how meaningful, therefore, are the words of the special blessing which our Rabbis formulated and which are recited over the Torah when a man has been cured of a critical illness or has been safely delivered from any condition of danger. I refer to the GOMEL BENCHIN. "Blessed art thou, O our G-d, Lord of the Universe, HAGOMEL LECHAYAVIM TOIVOS, Who repays in kindness those who are undeserving". G-d I confess that I am among the Chayavim, the undeserving. I did not merit the good You have done for me. All the more reason, O G-d, for me to offer to You my eternal gratitude.

Perhaps the most eloquent and most beautiful expressions of gratitude contain the 3 ideas we have mentioned which indirectly are the following lines of religious or devotional poetry:

"To Thee alone we give thanks. Tho our mouths were full of song as the sea, and our tongues full of exaltation as the number of its waves, and our lips full of praise as the great heavens above; Though our eyes shone with light like the sun and the moon, and our hands were spread forth like the eagles of the skies, and our feet were swift as deer, we should still be unable to thank Thee and to bless Thy name, O Lord our G-d and G-d of our fathers, for one thousandth of one ten thousandth part of the bounties which Thou hast bestowed upon our fathers and upon us. Thou didst redeem us from Egypt, O Lord our G-d, and didst release us from the house of bondage; during famine Thou didst feed us, and didst sustain us in plenty; from the sword Thou didst rescue us, from plagues Thou didst save us, and from sore and lasting diseases Thou didst deliver us. Therefore the limbs with which Thou hast endowed us, and the spirit and

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Breath which Thou hast breathed into our nostrils, and the tongue which Thou hast set in our mouths, lo, they shall thank, bless, praise, glorify, extoll, reverence, hallow and assign kingship to Thy name, O our King". Do these sublime words strike a chord in your memories, my friends? Certainly they do! You will find those words on pages 170 & 171 in your Siddurim. This poem is the English translation of part of that lofty and holy prayer, NISHMAS.

Through it and through our other prayers, through our actions and through our way of life, we shall ever express our deepest gratitude to G-d Almighty. For we acknowledge our inadequacies; we know that are undeserving; and we know therefore, that it is good indeed to give thanks to our good G-d.

## Benediction

O g-d:

We have seen the Beauty of Thy works & deeds.  
Help us, therefore, to subdue the Pride that plagues  
us & endow us with humility, so that we may  
know how to express <sup>to Thee</sup> our undying Gratitude.