

## SPOTLIGHT

# O

a Community

Coverage by  
Devorah Klein

## Asher to the Yatzar:

### Learning to Appreciate the Miracles of the Human Body

“*Asher to the Yatzar*” is a campaign founded by *habachur* Yossi Hecht in the summer of 2019 with the guidance of Rabbi Dov Keilson, *Mashgiach* of Yeshiva Darchei Torah in Far Rockaway, designed to inspire *Klal Yisrael* to appreciate the wonders and inner workings of the human body.

The core message is to be mindful of all the good that we have, primarily the fact that we have functioning and healthy bodies that can serve the Creator. The campaign encourages participants to be mindful while saying the *brachah* of *Asher Yatzar* and, specifically, to stand in one place while making the *brachah*.

*Hamodia* spoke to Yossi to hear his remarkable story.

I grew up in Far Rockaway and attended Yeshiva Darchei Torah from kindergarten through third year *beis medrash*. In the summer of 2019, I had booked tickets to go Eretz Yisrael, where I planned to attend yeshiva, and was arranging to go to Camp Oraysa (the camp associated with Darchei) that summer.

However, before leaving for camp, I began experiencing leg pain. I went to the orthopedist, and he told me to wear an orthopedic boot, and everything would be okay. I was anxious to go to camp, so I tied the boot very tight, and then noticed that I had lost all feeling in my leg and could not move it at all.

This was the day before I was scheduled to go to camp. I went to my regular internist, and he told me that it seemed like something very serious and sent me to the emergency room. I had never been to the hospital before in my life. I thought I would be out quickly, but went home to get my *tefillin*, just in case I had to be there overnight. Little did I know that it would be three months before I left!

In the emergency room, the doctors ordered an MRI from my brain all the way down my spinal cord to the lum-

bar region. (That was the first of about 20 MRIs that I have had over the past three years!) I had no idea what was going on. The exam took a long time, and when they were finished, I was ready to go home. But they told me, “You are not leaving! You will probably need surgery. The doctor will see you in the morning.”

I didn’t know what to think — I have seven sisters, and many of them are in medical fields, but I had never heard of neurosurgery before. But the doctors told me that the situation was very urgent, and the longer I waited, the worse off I would be.

The next day, on Wednesday, July 3, Rosh Chodesh Tammuz, I had surgery to remove a tumor from my spinal cord. That morning, I woke up early to *daven* and say *Hallel* before the surgery, and then was off to the operating room.

After the surgery, I was not able to use the bathroom, and the staff had to insert a catheter. However, the pain from the catheter was unfathomable, certainly nothing like anything I had ever experienced before.

I called my *Rebbi*, Rabbi Dov Keilson, who was always involved in suggesting *kabbalos* in yeshiva. He told



Yossi Hecht speaking at Torah Academy of Boca Raton.

Yossi Hecht speaking at Cincinnati Hebrew Day School.



me, “I have an idea. It says in *sefarim* that if one says *Asher Yatzar* with *kavanah*, he won’t get sick.” He advised me to start a program to encourage others to say *Asher Yatzar* with proper concentration and specifically, to stand in one place while saying the *brachah*. I liked

the idea and was very touched by his suggestion.

The idea was discussed with my *Rosh Yeshiva*, Harav Shlomo Avigdor Altusky. The next day, Rav Altusky introduced the idea in Camp Oraysa. Cards were printed, encouraging everyone in yeshiva to take on this

## Rabbi Nachum Scheiner

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initiative for the next two weeks as a *zechus* for a *refuah shleimah* for Yosef Chaim ben Dvora Leah.

Just a day later, on Monday, the doctors gave me another chance. They removed the catheter and did not have to replace it. It was truly a miracle!

For the next three months, I had several ups and downs, including a spinal infection and two subsequent surgeries to wash out the infection. My ability to relieve myself was once again affected. I was encouraged to continue inspiring *Klal Yisrael* to say the *brachah* of *Asher Yatzar* properly, with focus and alacrity, and each time, I saw amazing results.

We decided to create a video encouraging the proper saying of *Asher Yatzar*. On the video, I commented that even just once a day, a person should make sure to thank Hashem properly that he can use the restroom normally and not take that for granted. I spoke from my heart, asking people to do it for me and our entire nation.

The day that we released that video, I was able to relieve myself again. It was a tremendous *nes*; the doctors thought I would need the catheter for several months. I told them, "We don't go by your rules; we go by different rules!"

After all the surgeries, I had to learn to walk again, and I was doing therapy every day. Finally, I was able to return home before Sukkos 5780. I was mostly in a wheelchair but could walk with a walker. Eventually, I progressed and was able to go 1.5 mph on the treadmill!

While I was in the hospital, my parents were amazingly devoted to me. They spent every Shabbos in the hospital with me for three months. The day before I went into the hospital was my birthday, and they made a barbeque dinner for me at home. When I came home three months later, the blue tablecloth from the party was still on the table — they had not made Shabbos once in those three months! Unfortunately, my mother, who had not missed even one day with me in the hospital, was *niftar* a year and a half ago, right before Rosh Hashanah.

A few months after I came home, I had a follow-up MRI and was told that the tumor had grown back. I flew to Florida to have surgery on February 9, 2021, because of the specialists there. That surgery was successful, and once again, I saw the power of *Asher Yatzar* in full force. However, a few months later, the tumor was back yet again.

After another surgery, on May 25, 2021, followed by chemo and radiation, *baruch Hashem*, the MRI results were clear. However, since this last surgery, I have been completely unable to move my legs due to trauma to the nerves. My *Rebbi* pointed out to me that until now, I was not really

relying on Hashem; rather, I was leaning on the doctors for their solutions. Now, with the nerve trauma, there is nothing for the doctors to do. Now, I realize that Hashem is the only one that can heal me and make me able to walk again, because He is the Ultimate Healer.

I still hope that I will be able to walk again, but at this point, I depend on my wheelchair to get around. This past winter, I got a new car equipped with hand controls, as well as a special claw which loads the wheelchair into the car. It is really amazing and enables me to be more independent.

Just one point: There are many laws to benefit disabled people that many people are not aware of. It really presents a problem for disabled people when others park in their designated spots or don't leave enough room to get out the wheelchair. I would like to encourage people to be more aware and sensitive in these areas; as I have said, you don't appreciate what you have until you lose it.

I continue trying to encourage others to appreciate their healthy bodily functions through the "*Asher to the Yatzar*" program. We have produced around a dozen videos and to date, *baruch Hashem*, we have distributed close to 20,000 cards, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi versions. I had the *zechus* to speak in Los Angeles, Cincinnati, Passaic, Boca Raton, Miami, Baltimore, and most recently, Houston.

Additionally, we created a music video with Joey Newcomb and Moshe Avigdor, singing "*Borei Refuos*," emphasizing that Hashem is the Only One in charge of everything. We are also planning a new song with Avraham Fried, to be released soon, *b'ezras Hashem*.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that we must appreciate our bodies, appreciate all the gifts that we have, and appreciate the ability to relieve ourselves properly. One of greatest conduits to achieving this is through the *brachah* of *Asher Yatzar*.

I have seen both sides of the coin. I had been going about my life, not paying too much attention to how my body was working. Now, I see the difference between a body that is functioning properly and one that is not, and it is the difference between night and day. I try to paint that picture for others; *chas v'shalom*, I don't want it to happen to them. I want to show them how to appreciate what they have while they have it.

My vision is to continue trying to be aware of Hashem in my life, and to keep on talking about the importance of appreciating what we have.

For more information about this campaign, please visit [ashertotheyatzar.com](http://ashertotheyatzar.com). To contact Yossi, you can email him at [ashertotheyatzar@gmail.com](mailto:ashertotheyatzar@gmail.com).

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