

Asher Yatzar – The Key To A Better Elul!

Many of you might still be in the mountains or on vacation, so the word Elul may sound a little foreign. That is precisely why *Shabbos Mevorchim Elul* is so important, as it ensures we will not just fall unthinkingly into this special month. The more we prepare for the *Yamim Noraim*, the greater will be the closeness we feel on those *heilegeh* days.

Elul is referred to as “*Yemei Ratzon*” – days of goodwill (see *Chayei Adam Klal* 138), which helps us do teshuva. However, it is important to know that the *teshuva* of Elul is not primarily fixing up our past – that is the purpose of *Aseres Yemei Teshuva*. The literal translation of the word *teshuva* is “to return.” Throughout the year we may have drifted away from Hashem, and forgotten about Him. During Elul we lift ourselves up and strive to get back on course. The idea is to look forward – not backwards at our underperformance!

Saying Asher Yatzar properly is the perfect way to reconnect to Hashem. Why? Asher Yatzar is a *berachah* which is said throughout the day! Whether we are in middle of learning or working, traveling or on vacation – we stop everything and reconnect to Hashem for twenty seconds! What greater way is there to remember, at all times, that our lives are in Hashem’s hands, and how grateful we must be for good health! If we strengthen the way we say this *berachah* – especially now in Elul – it will change our entire day, and our entire month! It will remind us that this is the month to lift ourselves up in everything we do and thus come in to Rosh Hashana prepared!

May the *chizuk* from this monthly leaflet bring a *refuah sheleimah* to my daughter (Esther bas Sara Miriam), who is a young mother undergoing treatment for the *machalah*, and to R’ Yossi Hecht (Yosef Chaim ben Devorah Leah), founder of *ashertotheyatzar.com*. (Please take a moment to say a short *tefillah* for them.)

B’virchas kesiva ve’chasima tovah,

Eliezer M. Niehaus
Editor

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Message from the Founder

“Is the glass half full or half empty?”

This famous saying describes the difference between the outlook of a pessimist versus an optimist. However, Rabbi Avigdor Miller says we have it all wrong! A person can last a few days without water, but can survive without breathing for only 3 to 5 minutes. That being said, the question as to whether the glass is half full or half empty is irrelevant. The glass is completely full! The upper half of the glass is filled with air, which is so vital to our existence, and the bottom half is full of water. Looking this way at the “half full/empty cup” paints a totally different picture and trains our eyes to see everything in a positive light.

The above was said by the very same Rav Avigdor Miller whose grandson found him with his head immersed in a kitchen sink full of water. When asked the reason for such unusual behavior, the Rav explained that someone had made a disparaging comment about the air in New York, so he simply wanted to appreciate every breath of New York air!

May we always recognize all the positive we have.

-Yossi Hecht

THE HALACHA CORNER

Q: : If one uses the facilities before washing for bread, when should he say Asher Yatzar?

A: The Mishnah Berurah writes (Siman 165 s”k 1) that it is proper to check if you need the facilities before you wash for a meal. It is brought in the name of Rav Chaim Kanievsky that you don’t have to actually try to use the facilities – it is enough to take a moment to think if you need them.

The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 165:1) writes that one who uses the restroom before a meal should wash his hands once, say Asher Yatzar, and then wash again and say “*al netilas yadayim*.” The Mishnah Berurah (s”k 2) cites Achronim who say that you must be careful that the first washing should be done in a way that **will not** make your hands pure for eating bread. Otherwise, you won’t be able to say “*al netilas yadayim*” on the second washing, as it would be an unnecessary washing. This means that although we mentioned (see issue #2) that it is ideal to use a cup when washing your hands before Asher Yatzar, **here the first washing should be done without a cup**. If you did use a cup to wash for Asher Yatzar, before washing a second time you should touch a part of your body that is normally covered and then wash again.

Alternatively, some have the custom that if they use the restroom before a meal they simply wash once, recite “*al netilas yadayim*,” dry their hands, recite Asher Yatzar and then Hamotzi
(See Aruch Hashulchan seif 2).

STORIES THAT INSPIRE



R’ Shmuel Schottenstein stopped me on the street and said, “I saw you are looking for stories for your leaflet. Do I have a story for you!” In case you don’t know, R’ Shmuel is a living miracle. He was a regular, healthy, 47-year-old when he caught a bad case of Covid; it was so severe, he needed to be put on an ECMO life support system. He was unconscious for 2 months until Hashem answered the world-wide *tefillas* on his behalf and he was miraculously able to be weaned off the machine.

“At that point my body was still being manually operated,” he recalls. “I was breathing through a respirator, eating through a feeding tube, and using the facilities through a catheter. I couldn’t talk, my mind was unclear, and my muscles had lost most of their strength. When the nurse sat me upright, my entire body started falling over. You can’t imagine the feeling of not knowing if your body will ever function normally again!” His wife relates that once he was off the respirator (still on oxygen) he would say *Birchos Hashachar* each morning as if it was *ne’ilah*, with tears streaming down his cheeks. He said each *berachah* slowly with tremendous feeling, as he thanked Hashem for the ability to walk, to see, to stand etc.

R’ Shmuel went through a long and painful process of learning from scratch how to perform **all** the basic functions of life. It is absolutely amazing to see that Baruch Hashem he is mostly back to normal! “Please share my story!” he says passionately. “People must realize how all the “simple” functions of our body are not simple at all. My Asher Yatzar has changed forever, and I hope theirs will as well!”

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

How many words are there in the *berachah* of Asher Yatzar and what does it represent?

(Hint - this only applies to *nusach sefard*.)

Email your answers to ashertotheyatzar@gmail.com to enter a raffle to win our Asher Yatzar book, delivered to your home for free!

Wonders of Digestion



PART IV— THE FABULOUS FOOD PIPE

Last month we learned that we swallow about 600 times a day, and that every time we swallow, we are in mortal danger. If the food would go down our windpipe, we could *chas v'shalom* choke. Therefore, Hashem created a special flap which automatically covers the entrance to the windpipe so that the food will go straight down our esophagus – the food pipe.

Let us continue to follow the journey of our food and examine the food pipe. The truth is that the food pipe does not have a part in the actual digestion. Digestion begins in the mouth and continues in the stomach. The food pipe is just the passage way, the road the food traverses to reach the stomach.

However, it is not like a chute, with food in a freefall until it reaches its destination; rather, there is an ingenious process occurring. The food pipe is extremely narrow and its walls are made of muscles which contract and push the food along. These contractions only move the food in one direction - down towards the stomach. This is important, because otherwise we would not be able to eat or drink when lying down. Due to the fact that the food is pushed along through muscle contractions, we can even defy gravity, and amazingly eat even while standing on our head. (Our younger readers might want to experiment. Try sipping water from a water bottle while standing on your head! Well, maybe only do this with your parent's permission...)

The pathway of the food pipe is specially prepared for its job. The walls are lined with mucus which makes the movement of the food easy and smooth, even if we are swallowing food that still has some rough edges.

What would happen if these muscles worked slowly, and it took just a bit more time, maybe even half of a minute, for the food to go down the food pipe? Such a delay could be disastrous, we would most likely quickly suffer a backup while eating, turning a pleasurable affair into trauma.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu in His kindness arranged that it just takes a few seconds for the food to get pushed down. When we are ready to swallow the next bite of food, the previous bite has already finished its journey! We cannot stop or slow down the process even if we want to. Once we have swallowed, the body takes over with the necessary steps and at the perfect speed to process the food.

Amazing! *Kulam b'chochma asisa!*



To receive a daily 2-minute audio shiur by phone about the wonders of the human body please text 313-NIFLAOS (313-643-5267). Also available through WhatsApp.

A DOSE OF CHIZUK

Two Minutes a Day Keeps the Doctor Away!



The *Seder Hayom* (a *mekubal* in *Tzfas* at the time of the *Arizal*) writes: "One should say Asher Yatzar with great *kavana*, word after word, and think about the great kindness Hashem does with us each time we use the facilities... If a person does so he will never get sick throughout his entire life, and will never need a doctor or his cures." Perhaps the reason this is so is because when Hashem sees we appreciate our healthy bodies, He has no need to remind us through sicknesses.

Rav Shimshon Pincus once asked: "Why is it that we hear about so many people who unfortunately are suffering from difficult sicknesses and ailments? It could be because we are not careful with the *berachah* of Asher Yatzar." Then he added, "I don't mean that we say it mindlessly – I mean we don't say it!! Because it is a long *berachah* we don't have patience for it. We mumble. We skip words."

This story got me thinking: How long does it take to say Asher Yatzar properly? I venture to say approximately 20 seconds. This means we need to spend **no more than 2 minutes a day on this berachah**. That equals 14 minutes a week, one hour a month, and just 12 hours over an entire year. Who wouldn't spend **a half a day each year** to save himself from doctor visits, hospitalizations, operations, medications, physical and emotional pain and suffering!?

It is well known that Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski (the leading *posek* and spiritual guide of the Jewish nation during the pre-WWII era) was able to hold a pen in each hand and write two different complicated halachic responsa, all while answering questions orally. Although we know we cannot do anything like that, many people are certain that they can think about the significance and meaning of this *berachah* while doing something else simultaneously. Really, it can't be done. Let us make sure to stop everything we are doing (**including drying our hands**) for 20 seconds and say Asher Yatzar while **standing in one place**. This small stratagem can make a world of difference!

----- INTERNALIZE IT! -----

Before you say Asher Yatzar, stop everything, stand in one place and think to yourself, "Even though I am in middle of "x, y and/or z", I just received a reminder from Hashem that He is with me at all moments. Now, in the month of Elul, I will reconnect to Him through thanking Him for that!" (See editor's message above.)

WE LOVE FEEDBACK!

To receive this leaflet in your Shul or by email or if you have any comments or personal stories we can share with our readers please email us or visit: www.ashertotheyatzar.org
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