

It's All About Perspective

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“Now with this quarantine, I understand what you went through a little bit”. The global crisis that we are each facing allowed this individual to tap into the pain of the challenges that I had encountered and I am still currently facing. I would like to respond to this text with a blunt thought; a thought that I would like to share with you, as well. The Coronavirus’ effects on our life is nothing compared to what I have been through.

I certainly understand the challenges that faces most of the *hamon am*, who are all currently affected by the coronavirus. Whether it is kids complaining they can't play with their friends. Or parents are trying to manage schooling their children at home and their respective schedules. *Ba'alei simchas* have to make alternate plans. *Bochurim* want to be reunited with their *chavrusos*, to learn the *gemora* together in the *Beis Medrash*. Young boys wish they could see their Rebbe in the classroom instead of via a kosher device. *Rabbanim* hope that they can be reunited with their *misspallelim* to *daven* together once again. All these challenges are tremendous. They can easily take a toll on our emotions and psyche.

I would like to offer a different perspective. One which I feel equipped to give because of the challenges that I have faced. Instead of being despondent about this abnormal situation, we can choose to take a step back and widen our perspective and open our eyes to that which we may often take for granted. We are in the comfort of our own home. We are able to walk in our homes. We are able to walk not only in our homes but we can walk outside to get fresh air. We are able to walk up and down the steps in our home without thinking twice about it. We are able to walk and use the bathroom when we need to. The Coronavirus has not impeded these abilities.

This past summer, I was not able to complete any of these simple tasks that we so often take for granted. It all started with a concern that I thought would prove to be benign. However, when my symptoms impacted my ability to lift my foot, I became increasingly concerned. I scheduled an appointment with my doctor and he then sent me to the emergency room to get a full body MRI scan. What the MRI revealed indicated a need for immediate medical intervention. I had a 10 ½ hour surgery on July 3rd to remove a tumor in my spine. While the recovery road is long, what is harder than recovering physically, is recovering mentally. Imagine going from running around, playing basketball, with no limitations to being tied down to a hospital bed with invisible shackles. After the surgery, many bodily functions were affected. The most painful one by far, without a close running mate, was the loss of the ability to go to the bathroom independently. I had to have a foley catheter placed inside my body which was constantly painful. All medical interventions to try to numb the pain were unsuccessful. While the physical pain was unbearable, the emotional pain was worse. I had a constant reminder that I was unable to complete a basic function, one that I always had taken for granted.

On Motzei Shabbos July 6th, I begged my Rebbe to please do something that will storm the heavens

to allow me to regain my ability to use to the bathroom once again. Rabbi Dov Keilson, Mashgiach of Yeshiva Darchei Torah, immediately got to work to try and do something to help me. Two hundred *bochurim* were *mekabel* that for two weeks they would stand in place for the *bracha* of Asher Yatzar. One day later, I was able to use the bathroom on my own. It was a miracle to say the least. The following Monday, I was given the chance to once again use the bathroom on my own. Something that defied the laws of science occurred. It is inconceivable that less than a week after an extensive spinal cord surgery, a person would be able to complete this function on his own. But to me it's very simple. The power of the *bracha* of Asher Yatzar was able to break barriers that normally would be impossible to shatter.

Before I left the hospital, I asked my Rebbe for a suggestion of something that I can take upon myself so that I wouldn't forget the miracle that occurred for me. After some thought, it was suggested that I should try to strengthen others in that which helped me, namely the *bracha* of Asher Yatzar. I was motivated to do something, but I was unsure of how to proceed.

After recuperating from my surgery, I got transferred to Mount Sinai which has a unit that specializes in Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) rehabilitation. There, I was taught and learned all the basics of rehabilitation for a SCI. I had to relearn how to get dressed, transfer in and out of bed, the basics of wheelchair mobility, and so much more. Additionally, I had to relearn how to walk again! When the spinal cord gets injured-in this case via a surgery it stops sending the messages from the brain to the muscles that it used to. So imagine, I totally forgot how to walk. I had to retrain my brain as to what it means to walk again! There are so many different components that goes into walking. Whether it be first shifting to the opposite side, then lifting the foot through the hips, extending the knee or finally picking up the ankle to achieve a heel strike with the right amount of force, it is something that I took for granted. And of course, once we've done each of those movements, our brain knows to lock the knee in order to take the next step. Do we understand what it means to walk? Do we realize how lucky we are that Hashem gave us billions of nerves that run as messengers between our brains and muscles, allowing us to make movements effortlessly and fluidly? I must confess, I too was guilty of this unawareness before my surgery took place.

Instead of focusing on the difficulty of staying at home during this pandemic, maybe we can take the added time during our day to thank Hashem that we can walk. I am deeply troubled that dozens of people don't know what *bracha* that we make for walking. We have been saying this *bracha* hundreds if not thousands of times since we were little children. The *brachah* of *hameichn mitzadei gaver* means “who prepares the footsteps of man”. Perhaps we can take the time at home to focus on this *bracha*.

Unfortunately, I had to undergo two additional washout surgeries due to an infection in my spine.



One of the effects of the infection was that I was not able to use the bathroom once again. I needed to do something fast to get my most coveted function back. After some thought and advice from some people, it was suggested that we make a video for Klal Yisrael to be *mechazeik* in the *bracha* of Asher Yatzar.

I was up for that challenge. I worked hard, practicing and perfecting the video until it was to my liking. As we were getting ready to release it, I got another infection! This time it was an infection directly related to the fact that I needed to get catheterized. Luckily, we hadn't sent out the video because it became known to me that Rabbi Keilson's cousin is a professional filmmaker. Moshe Bree of “Ingenious productions” came to the hospital and filmed me. I tried encouraging people to stand in place by the *bracha* of Asher Yatzar even just once a day. Hence, the campaign Asher to the Yatzar (which is play on words for “Praise to the Creator”) was born. Since we released the video, I have not had to get catheterized even once! Something I was told may take numerous months to return, I regained in a mere 6 weeks!

BH in the summer the videos that we put out went viral and we have gotten great feedback. Until today, people come over to me and express how they were inspired by my videos and try to stand in place when reciting Asher Yatzar. Recently, we just released a follow up video and it went viral as well. Due to a very generous sponsor we made 5,000 magnets to distribute. It reads; “I TAKE UPON MYSELF TO STOP & STAND IN ONE PLACE WHILE MAKING THE BRACHA OF ASHER YATZAR THANKING HASHEM AND APPRECIATING ALL OF THE ENDLESS MIRACLES THAT I RECEIVE DAILY.” Hence the motto, STOP, STAND & APPRECIATE. We have depleted our inventory and we now received a shipment of 7,000 more magnets!

When we find ourselves complaining about the petty little things in life, it behooves us to take a step back and ask, are we looking at the whole picture? Do we have the priceless ability to go to the bathroom? Do we feel the pain that there are people



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that need assistance to complete this most basic task? Are we really going to equate the ability to spend time at home with our families to that of someone in the hospital? To give you an example, imagine that you were stuck to your bed and there was no option to go to the living room. Imagine that you were stuck inside a body whose feet are not able to function as they once had. It's all about perspective.

As my one-year anniversary since my surgery approaches, I am very

thankful that this occurred last year as opposed to this year. It would've been very difficult if I was all alone. My family was there nonstop, especially my mother, who did not miss one day of being there for me for the three months that I was in the hospital and rehab combined. Additionally, not a day went by that I did not have a visitor! In the span of three months I must've had hundreds of visitors. On a lighter note, LIJ has a policy that every visitor must get a visitor badge with their picture on it. It was not uncommon for the security guard to say "you must be for Yosef

Hecht in room 414, right?" *Mi kamcha Yisroel*. Perhaps we should feel for all of our brothers and sisters who are in the hospital all by themselves. They cannot even get the *bikkur cholim* packages that I used to get every day. Nor can they see a smile from their spouse. Or a hug from their nieces and nephews that I was privy to see numerous times in the duration of my stay.

I would be remiss if I didn't thank Hashem for all of the unbelievable gains that I have made in the past number of months. I went from barely able to move my legs to now B"H walking 1 mph on a treadmill, using a harness to hold me up for safety. But above all, the fact that I am able to go to the bathroom on my own is truly spectacular. I have no words to thank all those who have taken upon themselves to accept this powerful *kabbala*. However, now more than ever, in this unprecedented time of the coronavirus pandemic, it is incumbent upon us to be extra vigilant to appreciate what we have! What better way to express this appreciation than to stand in place by the *bracha* of Asher Yatzar. Instead of focusing on all the negativity, let us be thankful that we are well enough to be in the comforts of our homes.



That we can breathe independently, without the need for outside intervention. That we can walk with ease. That all our bodily functions are intact. It's all about perspective. In the merit of our awareness and appreciation may things *not* go back to normal but that we should be greeted with a *new* normal that will be with the coming of *mashiach* speedily in our days!

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For more information please visit ashertotheyatzar.com



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