



REBBETZIN ZEMIRA

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Towards Meaningful Tefilla: Modeh Ani

Karen was so excited! She had just been offered a dream job to “house-sit” a beautiful mansion. She would get to live in the house for free and all she had to do was keep it clean and functional. If she did a good job, she would be paid well. But if the house got damaged in any way, she would be held responsible. At first, Karen tiptoed around the house, making sure to keep everything in tip-top shape. But as time went on, she got lazy and began to let things slide. Soon the beautiful mansion looked like a dump. There was garbage everywhere and everything was falling apart. One day, the owners of the house informed her that they needed use of the house for the weekend. Karen, barely remembering the fact that the house did not actually belong to her, left them the house for the weekend and didn’t even bother trying to clean up. Imagine the reaction of the owners! How appalled they must have been to see their beautiful home

completely trashed! One would surely expect them to never allow Karen back and to charge her for all of the damage. But in fact, when Karen returned after the weekend, she found the mansion in pristine order. The owners had cleaned up everything and had left her a note – “Karen, here’s a second chance! We know you can do it!!”

Instead, He lovingly cleans it, He removes all of our exhaustion and stress and gives us new kochot

This seems like a very unexpected ending, but this is in fact what we experience every single morning. The Chatam Sofer writes that Hashem has entrusted each one of us with a neshama. If one takes good care of it, he will be amply rewarded in the World to Come. If he damages it, though, he will be severely punished in the next world. Every night, we temporarily give back

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our neshamot to Hashem. We should be completely ashamed to let Him see how we have been treating our neshamot, but we somehow forget. Hashem sees our neshamot every night and He should be disgusted – this is how you treat the holy neshama I entrusted to you?! He should refuse to give our neshamot back to us, since we obviously don't know how to take care of them properly. But instead, He lovingly cleans it, He removes all of our exhaustion and stress and gives us new kochot, new energy so that we are recharged for a new day, sending us a very special message that He is giving us a second chance and He knows we can do it! The Midrash Tehillim writes that at the end of the day, נפשו יגעה עליו שחוקה - one's neshama is completely weary and worn-out, but when it is returned to him, it is like a בריאה חדשה – a completely new creation.

We need to believe and to trust that whatever Hashem decrees for the coming day will be for the good

With this background, let's take a look at the text of Modeh Ani.

מודה אני לפניך מלך חי וקיים - We start off our day by jumping out of bed and exclaiming - I am so thankful to you Hashem. Not only thankful, but I am מודה, I acknowledge and admit that this is לא מובן מאליי, this is not to be expected.

שהחזרת בי נשמת - The fact that You gave me back my neshama is completely unbelievable, given the circumstances!

בחמלה - Why do we use the word חמלה here and not חסד or רחמים? The א"ת writes that the word חמלה is always used after there was cause for anger. Hashem should have been furious at us after seeing the state of our neshamot, but instead He reacts with חמלה, with compassion.

The Mishna Berura writes that the halacha is that one must be careful to pause in between the words חמלה and רבה. The word רבה (great) is not describing the חמלה, the compassion, but rather it is describing the word אמונתך, your belief.

רבה אמונתך - Great is your belief. This



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phrase is a bit ambiguous. Whose belief is great?

The Netziv writes that the words רבה אמונתך mean that **our belief** is great. This is based on a pasuk in Eicha (3:23) which says חדשים לבקרים רבה אמונתך, Your kindness is new every morning, great is our belief. He explains that every morning Hashem decrees what will take place throughout the day around the entire world. We need to believe and to trust that whatever Hashem decrees for the coming day will be for the good. He suggests that the morning is the most important time to daven. As Hashem is decreeing the events of the day, we need to daven that the coming day's events will be for the good. It's an important time to take a moment, to think about all of the world events and the personal events that may occur today, and to send up a silent prayer to Hashem to make everything work out well.

On the other hand, the Chatham Sofer claims that the word אמונתך is referring to **Hashem's belief**. I get up and proclaim to Hashem – How great is Your belief in me! You should have given up on me, You should have said, forget it, you're worthless! But instead, every single morning, You re-affirm Your belief in me and my ability to change! What a great way to start out the day, with a vote of confidence, with the understanding that no matter what happens, and no matter how much I stray, I always have Someone there for me, backing me up, supporting me, and believing in me. With that sentiment, I can jump out of bed, despite what happened yesterday, and surge forward. What a powerful lesson for us as parents and friends in understanding how much our belief in others can give them the confidence they need to move forward! ■

Cut and paste into your siddur — — — — —



Every night, we temporarily give back our neshamot to Hashem. We should be completely ashamed to let Him see how we have been treating our neshamot, but we somehow forget. Hashem sees our neshamot every night and He should be disgusted – this is how you treat the holy neshama I entrusted to you?! He should refuse to give our neshamot back to us, since we obviously don't know how to take care of them properly. But instead, He lovingly cleans it, He removes all of our exhaustion and stress and gives us new kochot, new energy so that we are recharged for a new day, sending us a very special message that He is giving us a second chance and He knows we can do it!