

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

PESUKEI D'ZIMRAH: HODU

Ready To Pray

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

Give thanks to Hashem declare His name...

הודו לה' קראו בשמו...

NOTE: Nusach Ashkenaz and Nusach Sephard differ in the placement of Hodu in the davening. In a Nusach Ashkenaz siddur, Hodu is found after Baruch She'amar, while in a Nusach Sefard siddur- Hodu is recited first as part of Pesukei D'Zimrah.

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the meaning



The word Hodu comes from the word Hoda'a, which means an admission. In thanking HaKadosh Baruch Hu, we "admit" that we could never possibly repay Him for all of His benevolence to us. The idea of Hodu LaHashem is that we are constantly to remind ourselves not to take life, or anything that we receive, for granted. **We attach ourselves to HaKadosh Baruch Hu by acknowledging that we are indebted to Him for our lives, and that He is the source of everything we have** (Rabbi Schwab on Prayer, ArtScroll).

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Preparing Your Heart

The purpose of *Pesukei D'Zimrah* is to fill an individual's heart with praises of G-d as a preparation to coming before Him in the Shemoneh Esrei.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Delighting In Everyday Miracles

It would seem that praising Hashem with Hallel is something so inspiring that a person should do it every day. However, the prayers known as *Hallel*, the lavish Psalms of praise which are recited on Festivals are specifically not to be recited in the daily prayers. In fact, the Gemara decries a person who says *Hallel* every day as one who "scorns and blasphemes G-d." On the other hand, *Pesukei D'Zimrah* – also a group of prayers of praise – is an indispensable part of the daily prayer service. What is the difference between the two, and how can one who says *Hallel* be thought to be a blasphemer?

The difference is in the nature of the praises. *Hallel* recounts miracles. *Pesukei D'Zimrah* recalls the glories of nature. Miracles are not meant to be a Jew's daily focus; rather, the ongoing miracle of G-d's creation and running of the universe is our constant reminder of His benevolent presence. The miracles are there to flash a momentary, powerful light on G-d's daily, hidden miracles. For instance, a person who survives a dangerous surgical operation is overwhelmed with gratitude for the miracle of his survival. From that experience, he is more likely to appreciate the miracle inherent in the human body's normal, healthy functioning.

The *Maharsha* explains that if one recites Hallel

every day, even on days which commemorate no open miracle, then the prayers will lose their unique impact — the power to focus our attention on G-d's handiwork. Therefore, the person reciting such prayers is guilty of diminishing G-d's name.

The psalms of *Pesukei D'Zimrah*, however, are general praises of Hashem which do not specifically refer to miracles. Saying them daily expresses thanks to G-d for His constant sustenance of the natural world.

For some, however, *Pesukei D'Zimrah* seems to fail at this task. Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus acknowledges that there are those who find it lengthy and redundant. A more careful focus on the meaning of each prayer, however, reveals that each is indeed highlighting a different nuance of G-d's goodness, love and power. Rav Pincus promises that a person who spends a little time pondering these nuances will find that: "...Quickly he will be able to absorb each idea with its detail. He will then see wonderful new insights in his *tefillah* each day. **The time that he prays will be a delight and he will come to cleave to G-d with great happiness.** A wonderful service to G-d will open up before him."

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

A Spiritual De-icer

You find a treasure chest buried deep in a bed of ice. You carve it out with a pick and axe, carefully avoiding any trauma to the gem-encrusted lid. You bring it to a quiet, private place and say a prayer. One layer of ice melts away into a glistening puddle. You say another prayer and another



layer melts. You keep adding new prayers – each of them a praise to G-d for some aspect of His kindness to you – and with each new praise, another layer melts. At last, the treasure chest is laid bare, its lid ready to open

and reveal the precious contents within.

Like the treasure chest, a person's heart is sometimes coated with layer upon layer of obstruction – random thoughts, worries, sleepiness, stress. *Pesukei D'Zimrah*, said with understanding and feeling, melt the obstruction away, allowing us to open up and reveal to G-d all the love and awe in our souls.

Try This! ►

This week as I begin *Pesukei D'Zimrah*, I will imagine an obstruction – a locked door, a stone wall or block of ice — which each of my *tefillas* will help to remove.

Did You Know

► Back To The Temple

The first twenty-nine verses of הודו form a jubilant song that King David taught Assaf, who was a musician, and his colleagues. This song was intended by King David to be sung when the Holy Ark was brought to Jerusalem.

The first fifteen verses (הודו לה' קראו בשמו - אל תגעו במשיחי ובנביאי אל תרעו) put in correct word order refer to past miracles of salvation and the complete faith of the Patriarchs. The fourteen verses that follow (שירו לה' כל הארץ - ויאמרו כל העם אמן והלל לה') refer to the song of gratitude that everyone will sing in Messianic times. The last section (רוממו ה' - ואני בחסדך בטחתי. יגל לבי בישועתך. אשירה לה' כי גמל עלי various verses.